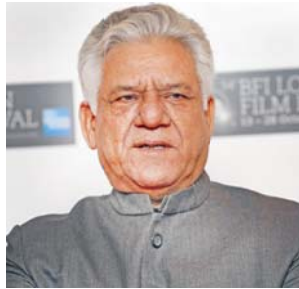


**Kuwait Airways:
Sit-in goes against
development**



**Om Puri, star in
Bollywood and
West, dies at 66**



**Mahrez named
African Footballer
of the Year**



EYE-WATERING NEW HEALTH SERVICE CHARGES FOR EXPATS

VISITORS MOST AFFECTED BY INCREASED FEES



150 Fils



Min 06°

Max 21°



DOUMA, Syria: A father mourns over the body of his 11-year-old son Ahmad, who was killed along with a friend when a cluster bomb exploded in his backyard, at a makeshift morgue in this rebel-held town on the eastern outskirts of the capital Damascus yesterday. — AFP

RUSSIA STARTS SYRIA DRAWDOWN

BEIRUT: Russia's military said yesterday it has begun scaling down its deployment to Syria, as the regime intensified its bombardment of a rebel-held district home to the capital's main water source. Moscow's intervention in Sept 2015 helped turn the tide in favor of President Bashar Al-Assad, whose forces scored a major victory last month with the recapture of opposition stronghold east Aleppo. Russia, along with fellow regime ally Iran and rebel backer Turkey, is pushing for peace talks to be held later this month in Kazakhstan.

But escalating fighting hit Damascus, including reported barrel bombings, has undermined a fragile week-old nationwide ceasefire and left the talks in doubt. The planned negotiations are the latest diplomatic initiative aimed at ending a nearly six-year conflict that has killed more than 310,000 people and forced millions to flee their homes. Turkey, which has worked closely with Russia to broker the ceasefire, has warned that the fighting is jeopardizing the planned talks in Kazakhstan.

Russia's military said a naval group headed by aircraft carrier Admiral Kuznetsov would leave the conflict zone under a drawdown ordered by President Vladimir Putin on Dec 29. Aircraft from the carrier hit 1,252 "terrorist" targets during a two month mission, said Russia's main commander in Syria, Andrei Kartapolov, quoted by Russian news agencies. The Kuznetsov arrived off Syria in November as Russia boosted its firepower on land and in the Mediterranean to support regime

forces targeting Aleppo. The fall of the rebel-held east of the city was the regime's biggest victory in more than five years of fighting. Thousands of civilians and rebels left the besieged opposition enclave last month under a deal brokered by Moscow and Ankara. Moscow had already announced a partial withdrawal of Russian forces in March 2016, but ramped up its presence again as fighting increased.

Putin's latest announced drawdown coincided with the declaration of a ceasefire between government and rebel forces that has led to sharp drop in fighting.

A major exception has been the rebel-held area of Wadi Barada near Damascus where the regime has stepped up air strikes as the rival sides trade blame over a cut to mains supplies to the capital. Government aircraft yesterday dropped at least 10 barrel bombs, crude munitions notorious for the indiscriminate casualties they cause, on Wadi Barada, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. A child was killed as clashes resumed in the area between pro-government forces and rebel fighters led by the Fateh al-Sham Front, the British-based monitor said.

Damascus has been without water from Wadi Barada since Dec 22. The United Nations said Thursday that 5.5 million people had been affected, warning that sabotaging water supplies was a war crime. The World Health Organization said yesterday that even after fighting finished it could take days to restore the supply. — AFP

KUWAIT: After Health Minister Dr Jamal Al-Harbi announced an increase in health service fees for expats by mid-February, the new price list prepared by the health ministry reveals increases that reach nearly 500 percent for residents and much more for visitors. The new fees aim to shut the door on those who visit Kuwait to take advantage of low healthcare charges, according to Al-Rai daily.

The new charges reach a peak in the treatment of tumors with TheraSphere, at KD 5,000 for visitors compared to KD 500 for expat residents, while the previous charge was KD 100 only. Treatment of bone cancer with isotopes will now cost KD 1,000 for visitors and KD 500 for expats, while the previous price was a mere KD 50.

Charges for x-rays and laboratory tests were also increased, such as thyroid gland testing, from KD 15 to KD 40 for expats and KD 90 for visitors. Thyrogen injection charges have risen to KD 500 for residents and KD 790 for visitors. The charges for tests for esophagus and gastric reflux, stomach, liver, spleen, gall bladder and blood vessels range from KD 10 to KD 50 for expats and KD 100 for visitors.

Cardiac test fees have increased from KD 10 to KD 50 for expats and KD 100 for visitors, while ischemic heart testing charges increased from KD 30 to KD 50 for expats and KD 100 for visitors. Charges for blood plasma tests will go up from KD 20 to KD 250 for expats and KD 470 for visitors. Mammography charges increase from KD 20 to KD 50 for expats and KD 100 for visitors. Testicular test fees have increased from KD 10 to KD 40 for expats and KD 90 for visitors, while that of vein tests have risen from KD 15 to KD 40 for expats and KD 90 for visitors.

Lung aeration test fees have increased to KD 50 for expats and KD 110 for visitors. Kidney tests with DMSA and MAG 3 increased from KD 10 to KD 40 for expats and KD 90 for visitors, while spinal cord test fees increased from KD 20 to KD 50 for expats and KD 100 for visitors. Pregnancy ultrasound charges increased from KD 10 to KD 30, while CT scans will now cost KD 80, and MRI scans KD 120.

KUWAIT CUTS OUTPUT

DUBAI: Gulf OPEC member Kuwait has reduced oil production in January to around 2.707 million barrels per day, meeting its output target under an OPEC supply cut agreement, a Kuwaiti oil official said yesterday. The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries in November agreed to implement output reductions this year as part of a global pact to limit supplies to support prices. Kuwait agreed to reduce output by 131,000 bpd starting Jan 1, from its October baseline production of 2.838 million bpd. — Reuters

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Crime

Report

POLICE TO QUESTION 'HALF-NAKED GIRL' IN SOCIAL MEDIA PHOTO

KUWAIT: A half-naked girl posed next to a car with Kuwaiti license plates near the beach, and that for a picture that went viral on social media and promoted detectives to initiate a search to identify her. A security source said it will be difficult to find all the necessary information, but legal procedures will be taken against all suspects.

Fatal accident

Forensics experts are working on identifying a person who was burnt beyond recognition after his vehicle flipped over on King Faisal Road.

Alcohol possession

Two Indians, one wanted on a financial case, and another, who had an expired residency permit, were arrested with nine imported liquor bottles, in addition to 14 homebrewed ones. Farwaniya police made the arrest in Omariya following an escape attempt.

Children kidnapped

A Russian woman accused her Jordanian husband of kidnapping her three children in a complaint she lodged at the Salwa police station. The woman was hysterical when she spoke to police and told them she does not know his civil ID number. Police are working on the case.

Secured facility

A female citizen was arrested near a secured facility, and was found wanted on a financial case. A security source said the woman was roaming around the premises in a suspicious fashion, then when asked for her ID, she said she did not have one. So her fingerprints were checked and she was found to be wanted. She was sent to concerned authorities. —Al-Rai

ASSEMBLY PANEL VISITS EX-MP BARRAK AT JAIL

NO QUICK SOLUTION FOR SPORTS DILEMMA

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: National Assembly human rights committee yesterday visited leading opposition figure and former MP Mussallam Al-Barrak at the central jail where he is spending a two-year jail term for insulting the Amir. The meeting with Barrak was part of a visit by the committee members to inspect the situation prisoners at the jail and examine if there were any human rights violations. Member of the committee MP Waleed Al-Tabtabaei said he and others met with Barrak for 90 minutes and he posted a selfie photo with him on Tabtabaei's Twitter account.

Barrak has already served most of the jail term and is due to be freed in April. He was jailed after he was convicted for undermining the authority of the Amir during a speech at a public rally in October 2012. In that speech, Barrak rejected attempts by the government to amend the voting system and insisted that the amendment would result in electing a rubber stamp assembly. Several other opposition activists are also serving jail terms for violating the law and undermining the authority of the Amir through comments on Twitter and other social media. Member of the panel MP Jamaan Al-Harbash said the visit was very important and revealed a number of facts. He did not elaborate.

Opposition figures

In another development, MP Harbash charged in a press conference a number of pro-government lawmakers of attempting to prevent opposition figures from contesting the election by opposing the amendment of a controversial law passed by the previous assembly.

The lawmaker said that a clause barring people convicted of "honor and honesty" crimes is so loose that can deprive a group of politicians from public office and was already used to exclude former MP Bader Al-Dahoum from contesting the November polls.

Harbash said that those who think that former MPs like Barrak and Faisal Al-Muslim will be politically finished if they



MP Waleed Al-Tabtabaei



Former MP Mussallam Al-Barrak

were banned from contesting the polls are mistaken and they will see the impact of Barrak after he leaves jail.

He said the proposed amendment to the law does not mean that all those convicted in those crimes should be allowed to run for public office, but at the same time it is not acceptable to bar Dahoum from polls while those who accepted bribes are described as honest people. The lawmaker specifically targeted MP Saadoun Hammad for opposing the amendment, adding that Hammad will not be able to exclude ex-MP Muslim whatever he did.

Kuwait's suspension

In another development, head of the assembly sports and youth committee MP Saadoun Hammad said yesterday that the panel has agreed to send a letter to the International Olympic Committee and football controlling body FIFA to ask them to lift the suspension on Kuwait until the panel has studied a new sports law.

The statement appears to be falling well short of the demands made by the IOC earlier this week that Kuwait must amend its sport law, re-instate dissolved sports federation and withdraw cases against international sport bodies in courts to be able to consider lifting the suspension.

Hammad told reporters after a meeting for the committee that the government submitted a 74-article draft sports law and the committee will start debating it on January 9. The committee yesterday heard the opinions of a number of sports figures who support or oppose the Minister of Information and Youth Sheikh Salman Al-Humoud Al-Sabah.

Former head of Al-Tadamun sports club Yousef Al-Baidan, who attended the meeting, told reporters that the new government's draft sports law will not lead to lifting the suspension and has to be studied by the IOC first to take its opinion.

He accused the minister of worsening the situation by dissolving the Kuwait Olympic Committee and several sports federations which the IOC and FIFA have strongly criticized. In the meantime, reports said that MP Waleed Al-Tabtabaei is already preparing to file to grill Sheikh Salman and he is expected to file the request next week.

MP Majed Al-Mutairi meanwhile submitted a proposal calling on authorities to allow Syrians living in Kuwait to bring their families into Kuwait because of the deteriorating situation in Syria. The lawmaker said that the Syrian people have been subjected to a terrorist destructive war by the regime and Kuwait should help them.

DOCTOR SUSPENDED FOR PRESCRIBING RESTRICTED DRUG

KUWAIT: The health ministry suspended an Arab doctor at the Chest Hospital for three months and referred him to the public prosecution for allegedly discharging medicine without authority. The interior ministry also placed him on the travel ban list. The doctor is accused of smuggling large quantities of Tramal, which is considered a narcotic. He used to open files for cardiac patients, who were actually healthy, to make use of the medicine dispensed to them.

Health ministry sources said workers at the hospital noticed large quantities of Tramal being dispensed lately, adding that this drug is

not prescribed to heart patients, but to those who suffer from severe pain, like cancer patients. Sources added that concerned authorities at the ministry were informed, and a special technical committee was formed and questioned several doctors and pharmacists. They found the medicine was prescribed by an Arab doctor to "non-existent" patients.

The sources added the said doctor prescribed more than 3,000 Tramal tablets last year alone, and the committee discovered his involvement in prescribing these pills since 2014. Sources said Health Ministry Undersecretary Dr Khalid

Al-Sahlawi issued an administrative decision to suspend the doctor for investigation, starting from Dec 25, for three months, and he will only receive half his salary from the date of his suspension.

Tramal is a medicine used to reduce severe pain and is available under several commercial names. Its effective ingredient is tramadol, which works by activating the opiate receptors located in the brain. When activated these receptors produce endorphins that lead to sensations of both pleasure and pain relief. —Al-Qabas

KUWAIT AIRWAYS: SIT-IN GOES AGAINST DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

WORKERS PROTEST ALLEGED VIOLATION OF RIGHTS

KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways Company's (KAC) management condemned a call by its workers union's board of directors for a sit-in protest on Monday, adding that accusations against the management mentioned in the union's statement are untrue. "The human element is the foundation of success and is sustainably changing for the better," it said.

The carrier said accusations directed against the company's management are wrong, adding that procedures followed by the company are in the interest of the employees, as it aims at increasing productivity and face current and future challenges. The statement said KAC follows best practices in managing human resources as far as planning and execution are concerned, to match accelerated developments in the aviation sector by placing occupational plans and create a suitable environment that "takes our working partners to self-development, which contributes to achieving future goals of the company".

Clear standards

"As the case is with any airline in the world, it is necessary to set clear standards about working hours and the available incentives in the work system to boost the operational efficiency of the company," it said. The company confirms that organizing the employment situation of those transferred to the government is actually done with the direction of the National Assembly and concerned government departments. The work contract with its general definition is the relationship between the employer (KAC) and those working for it, and that the existing relation between the two sides is based on a foundation of understanding between the parties within the framework of laws and legislations the company is committed to implement.

Deciding the value and relative importance of each job in the company, and deciding the salary grades of jobs through the development of a sound management of the wage system and guarantee various values of jobs and identifying activities and duties that form the job and decide the responsibilities, and design the job in suitable way along with deciding the specifications of these jobs are among the priorities of a wise management.

This does not mean undercutting employee's rights - rather it is to the contrary, as it guarantees them legitimate working rights and more stability in a way that agrees with strategic plans related to change. KAC is working on achieving future gains for employees, it added. KAC, as a company owned in full by the government, is concerned with reaching a clear financial balance that commits it to follow a financial method aimed at reducing spending and increasing company revenues.

The strategic change related to reducing expenses and boosting operational and financial performance and competitiveness had started through the implementation of reducing spending and save on additional expenses, and one of these policies is to stop issuing tickets to retirees and employees who served for more than 24 years, bearing in mind that there is no airline that provides this service.

Free tickets

KAC conducted a comprehensive study on free tickets and found there is a clear cost of occupying economy, business and first class seats, and the cost of this program is estimated at KD 8 million per year due to missed opportunities. With this new mechanism, Kuwait Airways will rationalize spending by 50 percent

of the total free tickets that are issued every year.

Many decisions taken by KAC management are part of a necessary package to boost the effectiveness of Kuwait's national airline's operations. Through deep reviews of company performance and commitment of strategic plans, the company plans to achieve during



the next five years according to the best international standards and restore KAC's status to become the preferred airline to link Kuwait with the world.

The company always works towards contributing to develop Kuwaiti skills, and will spare no effort in presenting sustainable options to raise the efficiency of human resources in it within the professional standards of the sector, which agrees with boosting the effectiveness and competitiveness of the company to achieve its future goals. KAC confirms its commitment to communicate with company employees and union mem-

bers to make sure the accuracy of directed information, which was noticed to be repeatedly inaccurate, and to present the full situation to all transparently.

The statement said Kuwait Airways reserves all its legal rights with regards to publishing any inaccurate information that may affect its commercial image. KAC is proud of having an elite group of youth as part of its team and by working as a team with its employees at KAC's international stations and departments in its headquarters.

Sit-in

The union of KAC workers had called for the sit-in in front of the KAC headquarters to protest KAC's lack of cooperation and ignoring law 6/2008 and its amendments, as it said in its statement, and undermining workers' rights and squandering their professional goals, in addition to marginalizing their roles.

The union mentioned several violations by KAC in a statement released yesterday, as follows:

1. Changing official working hours of employees working in morning hours.
2. Forcing employees to sign new contracts without involvement of the strategic investor.
3. Random appointments without complying with known contractual procedures.
4. Depriving employees from financial and material rights, or reducing them.
5. Stalling over returning 37 pilots to their jobs.
6. Maliciousness in transferring workers to the government sector, and not granting them the agreed upon promotions after starting their government jobs.
7. Failure to appoint engineers who remain with the company in supervisory jobs permanently.

—Al-Anbaa



KUWAIT: Gulf Bank's Public Relations Director Salma Al-Hajaj receives a certificate from Guinness World Records arbiter Hoda Khashab. —KUNA

GULF BANK SETS GUINNESS RECORD FOR CASH AWARD

KUWAIT: The Guinness World Records cited Dana cash prize, offered by the Gulf Bank of Kuwait, as the world's largest award for a bank account. The award, valued at KD 1 million (nearly \$3.259 million), is far bigger than the world's previous

largest cash prize of \$2 million, Guinness World Records arbiter Hoda Khashab said on Thursday. Gulf Bank has met all requirements needed for citation as record breaker, she said, noting that Kuwait set 35-40 Guinness records so far. —KUNA



KHARTOUM: Pictures for some of the Kuwaiti investment projects in Sudan. — KUNA

KUWAITI INVESTMENTS IN SUDAN AT \$2.9 BILLION: SUDANESE MINISTER

KHARTOUM: There are around 57 Kuwaiti investment projects, worth \$2.9 billion, running in Sudan until 2016, a Sudanese Ministerial official said yesterday. Minister of State at Sudan's Ministry of Investment Osama Faisal said that most Kuwaiti ventures were focused within the agricultural domain with over \$1 billion being pumped into this sector.

The official affirmed that the Sudanese people were grateful for the Kuwaiti keenness to invest in Sudan, revealing that around \$1.8 billion and \$105 million were being invested in the services and infrastructure sectors respectively.

Faisal affirmed that Sudan was eager to expand the scope of cooperation, revealing that his country will address the problems facing the development of business and commerce to attract more Arab and foreign investments.

There is a specific agreement with GCC countries to open new windows of opportunities for commerce and investments, said the official, affirming that the presence of more business in the country will help Sudan to further develop. Sudan's priorities include achieving food security and developing the energy and industrial sectors, said Faisal who welcomed Kuwait and other countries to further invest in his nation. — KUNA



MINISTER WARNS AGAINST TRADING IN UNFIT FOOD PRODUCTS

KUWAIT: Minister of State for Municipal Affairs Mohammad Al-Jabri yesterday warned promoters of food unfit for human consumption would face firm punitive action. Manipulators with food supplies, during a recent campaign, have been referred to the public prosecution, pending further legal action, said the minister while honoring a number of Kuwait Municipality's personnel. He praised the municipality's staff in the capital branch for their efforts that led to arrest of a number of merchants selling food products unfit for human consumption. A recent campaign in Shuwaikh and Al-Rai resulted in confiscating and destroying 34.5 tons of bad food products. Eight grocery stores were shut down and 68 others received penalties. Minister Jabri, also Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, is the sole legislator in the cabinet. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Minister of State for Municipal Affairs Mohammad Al-Jabri is pictured with Kuwait Municipality's personnel. — KUNA



Minister Al-Jabri honors a number of Kuwait Municipality's personnel.



Photo

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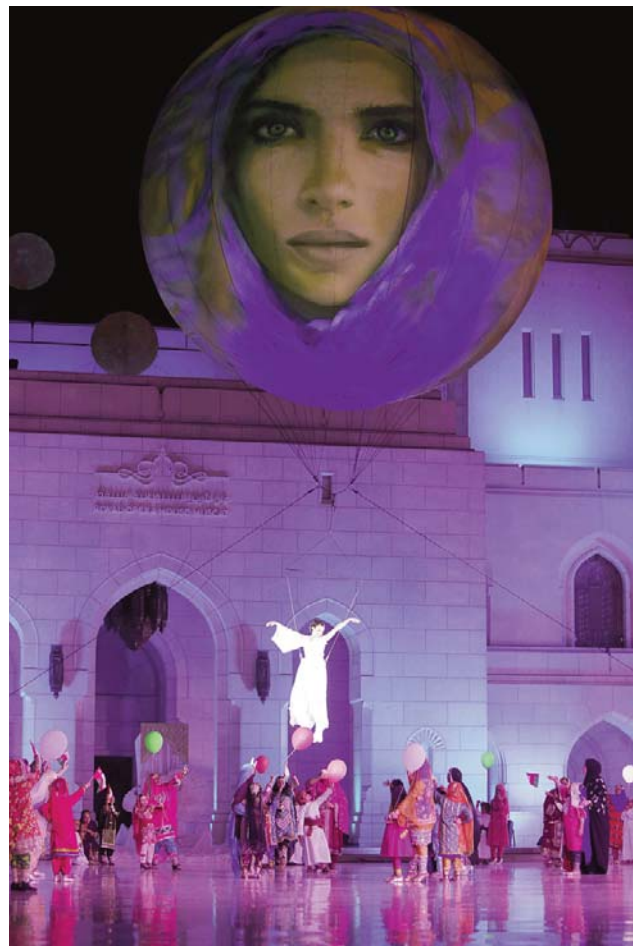


KUWAIT: A cat on a footbridge near a beach in Kuwait. — KUNA

'The Great Journey' at Oman Opera House



MUSCAT: Artists perform 'The Great Journey' at the Royal Opera House in Muscat on January 5, 2017. —AFP



International

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IZMIR: Family members accompany police officers carrying the coffin of police officer Fethi Sekin, who was killed in a car bomb attack Thursday, in the Aegean city of Izmir yesterday. —AP

18 ARRESTED OVER IZMIR BOMB ATTACK

SLAIN TURKISH POLICEMAN HAILED FOR PREVENTING BLOODBATH

ISTANBUL: Police detained 18 people yesterday in connection with an attack near a courthouse in the western city of Izmir that killed a policeman and a courthouse employee. Justice Minister Bekir Bozdag said yesterday that Turkish authorities had no doubt that the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, "gave the orders" for the attack.

The two assailants were killed in a shootout with police in Thursday's incident in Izmir, Turkey's third-largest city, after they detonated an explosives-laden vehicle at a roadblock. The attackers were armed with automatic rifles, rocket launchers and hand grenades, officials said. Bozdag spoke before thousands of people at a memorial service for the slain police officer, Fethi Sekin, who authorities say thwarted a larger attack. He said 18 suspects were rounded up, but did not provide details. There was no immediate responsibility claim.

The attack was the latest in a string of assaults carried out by Kurdish militants or the Islamic State group that have hit Turkey as it is still grappling with the aftermath of a failed coup in July that has been blamed on a movement led by US-based Muslim cleric, Fethullah Gulen.

It came just days after 39 people were killed in a nightclub in Istanbul during New Year's celebrations. The IS group claimed

that attack which it said was a reprisal for Turkey's military operations in Syria. Turkey gave a hero's funeral yesterday to a policeman praised for preventing a massacre in the latest attack to shake the country, as reports suggested the Istanbul nightclub gunman may still be in the city. Turkey was shaken just 75 minutes into the New Year by the gun attack on the Reina nightclub in Istanbul that killed 39 people, including 27 foreigners.

Then four days later on Thursday, militants detonated an explosives-packed car in front of the main courthouse in the western city of Izmir and engaged in gun battles with police.

A policeman and a court worker were killed, as well as two attackers. Another was still on the run. Nine people were wounded but their lives are not believed to be in danger. Whereas Islamic State (IS) jihadists had claimed the Istanbul nightclub attack—the group's first ever claim of a major attack in Turkey—the government blamed the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) for the Izmir bloodshed.

Turkish officials led by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan hailed the heroism of slain Izmir policeman Fethi Sekin, who prevented even greater loss of life by stopping the car and then seeking to chase down the militants. "Did you not see yesterday in Izmir our police officer who jumped like a

lion to neutralise the terrorist and was martyred?" Erdogan asked during a rally Friday in Sanliurfa, southeastern Turkey.

Prime Minister Binali Yildirim paid tribute late Thursday to the officer who "prevented a greater disaster by ignoring his own life and by giving his life."

Turkish football team Galatasaray, which Sekin supported, said it would offer an educational scholarship to his son and other opportunities at the club.

'Carry on as normal'

Justice Minister Bekir Bozdag, who attended the ceremony, said 18 people were detained in connection with the Izmir blast and the identity established of the "terrorists", whom he said had planned to wreak havoc inside the court. Police seized two Kalashnikovs, seven rockets and eight grenades, which Erdogan said proved they had come to commit a "massive massacre".

Thousands applauded in emotional scenes as Sekin's coffin was brought out of the Izmir courthouse before being given the rare honour of a funeral ceremony in the city's famous Konak Square. His body was then to be taken to his home region of Elazig in the east for burial. The PKK-proscribed as a terror organisation by Ankara, the United States and European Union has been waging an insurgency against Turkey since 1984. —Agencies

4 YEMENIS FREED FROM GITMO ARRIVE IN SAUDI

RIYADH: Four Yemenis released from the US prison at Guantanamo Bay arrived Thursday in Saudi Arabia to a tearful reunion with relatives, after the White House rejected Donald Trump's call for a freeze on transfers. The Pentagon confirmed the detainee transfers, and said there are now 55 inmates still being held in the military detention centre in Cuba. In the Saudi capital, an AFP reporter saw the four prisoners after they landed at a terminal normally reserved for royals at the Riyadh international airport. Prisoners and family members wept as they saw each other for the first time in years. One of the released inmates, Salim Ahmed bin Kanad, told reporters he felt "born again" after seeing his relatives.

Another, Mohammed Bawazir, said he hoped to move on and forget the past. "I want to give back to my family the 15 years I lost," he said. Officials identified the other former prisoners as Mohammed Rajab Abu Ghanim and Abdullah Yahya Al-Shalabi. "The United States is grateful to the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for its humanitarian gesture and willingness to support ongoing US efforts to close the Guantanamo Bay detention facility," the Pentagon said. Outgoing US President Barack Obama's pledge to close the Guantanamo Bay facility has been met with legal and political hurdles for years, and on Tuesday, his successor jumped into the fray. "There should be no further releases from Gitmo. These are extremely dangerous people and should not be allowed back onto the battlefield," Trump tweeted. —AFP



MOSUL: Displaced Iraqis prepare bread at the Hasan Sham camp for people who fled the violence in the Islamic State (IS) group stronghold of Mosul yesterday. —AFP

IN NEW PUSH, IRAQI FORCES ENTER MOSUL FROM NORTH

US TROOPS PLAY MORE VISIBLE SUPPORT ROLE

NORTH OF MOSUL, Iraq/BAGHDAD: Iraqi troops entered Mosul from the north for the first time yesterday, part of a new phase in the battle for the city that also saw elite forces bridge a river under cover of darkness in an unprecedented night raid. The operations were part of a major new push launched last week to seize ground in the city, after progress in the nearly three-month-old operation had stalled for weeks because of a need to slow the advance to protect civilians.

Troops would soon "cut the head of the snake" and drive the ultra-hardline group from its largest urban stronghold, Prime Minister Haidar Al-Abadi said yesterday.

The battle for Mosul is the biggest ground operation in Iraq since the 2003 US-led invasion. A victory by the 100,000-strong US-backed pro-government force would probably spell the end for Islamic State's self-styled caliphate that has ruled over millions of people in Iraq and Syria since 2014.

But the militants, who are thought to number several thousand in Mosul, continue to put up fierce resistance using suicide car bombs and snipers. They carried out more attacks against security forces some 200 km south of Mosul on Friday, killing at least four soldiers, and are expected to pose a guerrilla threat to Iraq and Syria, and to plot attacks on the West, even if their caliphate falls.

A spokesman for Iraq's elite Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS), which has taken the lead in much of the assault on the city, said troops had taken territory in an overnight raid across a Tigris River tributary in east Mosul. "We used special equipment and had the element of

surprise - the enemy did not expect us to mount a night offensive because all previous offensives were during the day," Sabah al-Numan told Reuters.

Iraqi army units later breached the city from the north for the first time since the offensive began on Oct. 17, entering the residential al-Hadba apartments complex, officers at a nearby command post told Reuters. It was not immediately clear how much of the area they controlled amid resistance from Islamic State.

Iraqi forces have so far recaptured more than half of eastern Mosul, but they have yet to cross the Tigris to face insurgents who are still firmly in control of the western half of the city. More than 100,000 civilians have fled, but 1.5 million people have stayed behind in the city, which commanders say forced the government troops to slow their advance.

The new phase in the battle has put US troops in a more visible role than at any point since they withdrew from the country in 2011. President Barack Obama, who pulled all U.S. forces out of the country, has sent thousands back as advisers since Islamic State swept through the north in 2014.

In the latest phase of the operation, US forces deploying more extensively in support of the Iraqi army, federal police and CTS can now be seen very close to the front lines.

US forces located south of Mosul fired HIMARS vehicle-mounted rockets at Islamic State targets in a northern district yesterday. The commander of the US-led coalition backing Iraqi troops said this week the army and security forces had recently improved their coordination and were gaining

momentum after advances had slowed in some areas in the first two months.

Islamic State forces swept into control of a third of Iraq when the army abandoned its positions and fled two years ago. But the Iraqi government says its security forces have since been rebuilt and have proven themselves in battles to recapture the lost ground. Prime Minister Abadi praised the Iraqi army on the anniversary of its establishment. "The Iraqi army today has combat experience it has won in the war against terrorism ... and is achieving victories and is clearing cities and villages," he said in a statement.

'HEAD OF THE SNAKE'

"The fight against terrorism is in its final round. Our forces ... will cut off the head of the snake and clear all of Mosul soon, with God's help," Abadi said. Abadi initially pledged the northern city would be retaken by the end of 2016, but after the offensive slowed he said last month it would take three more months to drive Islamic State from Iraq.

The fighters retreated from villages and towns around Mosul in the early stages of the campaign, but put up fierce resistance inside the city itself, deploying suicide car bombs and snipers, and avoiding retaliation by hiding among civilians, a tactic Baghdad says amounts to using them as human shields.

One resident in the recently recaptured Mithaq district said life was slowly beginning to return, with traders selling food and other supplies on the streets, but that mortar shells fired by Islamic State militants were falling at an increasing rate in the area, and killed several people on Thursday. — Reuters

US-BACKED FORCE SEIZES SYRIA CITADEL FROM IS

BEIRUT: US-backed militias in Syria have captured an ancient citadel from Islamic State (IS) in a strategically significant advance against the jihadist group in its stronghold of Raqqa province, a spokesman said yesterday.

The Jabar citadel on the banks of Lake Assad was taken by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) alliance on Thursday, militia spokesman Talal Silo said. It is located near a dam on the Euphrates River that the US-backed alliance also aims to capture in the current phase of its campaign.

Maamoun Abdulkarim, the Syrian government's antiquities chief, told Reuters in Damascus the SDF's capture of the castle represented a "victory for the Syrian people because liberating the citadel from Daesh (IS) is saving Syrian heritage". The SDF, which includes the powerful Kurdish YPG militia, is the main partner for the United States in the campaign it is leading against Islamic State in Syria. SDF forces are just a few kilometres (miles) from a major dam also held by IS.

Islamic State is also being fought in separate campaigns by the Russian-backed Syrian army in Deir al-Zor province and near the ancient town of Palmyra, which IS seized for a second time in December, and by Turkish-backed Syrian rebels in Aleppo province near the Syrian-Turkish border. — Reuters

EGYPT ARRESTS CAIRO CHECKPOINT ATTACKERS

CAIRO: Egyptian authorities have detained three people suspected of planning and carrying out a Cairo police checkpoint bombing that killed six policemen last month, the interior ministry said Thursday.

In footage published by the interior ministry, one of the suspects, Mahmoud Ahmed Mohamed Ahmed, confessed he planted an explosive device at the checkpoint on December 9 in Cairo's Al-Haram street. Investigations showed the perpetrators belonged to the newly-emerged Hassam Movement, the ministry said. Hassam had claimed responsibility for the attack. The two others arrested are members of the group operating its hideouts and handling its logistics, the ministry said. Authorities located hideouts for the group in Cairo's October 6 district, the ministry added.

During raids by security forces on these hideouts, another suspect was killed in a gunfight, while police found items including footage recorded while the attackers were monitoring the checkpoint ahead of the bombing, according to the ministry.

In the video confession, the suspect Ahmed said he joined the Muslim Brotherhood in 2015, and in mid-2016 he was told his subgroup had joined Hassam. After monitoring policemen's homes and security convoys, the group scouted out the Al-Haram street checkpoint before planning their attack. On the day of the explosion, the attackers moved close to the checkpoint and pretended their car had broken down. Ahmed placed an explosive device shaped like a rock near the checkpoint before another attacker set it off as they left in their car, he said in the video confession. —AFP



NIMRUD: An Iraqi Army general stands near a stone slab depicting a winged genie at the entrance to the Northwest Palace at the ancient site of Nimrud, Iraq. —AP

UKRAINE'S MILITARY DENIES RUSSIAN HACK ATTACK

KIEV: Ukraine's military yesterday denied a report claiming Russia may have hacked targeting software for its heavy artillery in a breach that could have helped Moscow track Kiev's big guns.

The cybersecurity firm CrowdStrike—the same one that discovered the Kremlin's alleged interference in the US election—said in December it had evidence Russian hackers might have bolstered Moscow's spying on Ukraine's forces in the eastern war zone. CrowdStrike said the malware was installed on software used to aim Ukraine's D-30 howitzer guns that were the backbone of the government's forces fighting Russian-backed insurgents for 31 months.

The conflict has claimed the lives of nearly 10,000 people and was one of

the main factors why Moscow's relations with the West are at a post-Cold War low. Ukraine's defence ministry blasted the claims and rejected any allegations that it led to a majority of its howitzers being destroyed during the conflict.

It stressed that "artillery losses were many times smaller and not caused by the reason" given by CrowdStrike. Ukraine's rebuttal came a day after high-profile US Senate hearings in which the heads of three intelligence agencies all pointed the blame at Russia's most senior officials for hacking into the Democratic National Committee during the presidential campaign.

Democrat Hillary Clinton said the leaked information was one of the rea-

sons for which she lost to Donald Trump—the president-elect who has publically praised Russian leader President Vladimir Putin.

Fears of Russia also trying to influence upcoming European elections have put a new focus on cybersecurity firms. But Ukraine was adamant that CrowdStrike was wrong on this occasion.

"The spread of false information leads to a heightening of social tensions and undermines people's trust in Ukraine's armed forces," the defence ministry said.

The December CrowdStrike report said that "from late 2014 and through 2016, FANCY BEAR X-Agent implant was covertly distributed on Ukrainian military forums within a legitimate

Android application." Fancy Bear is a code name for a group of Russian hackers that CrowdStrike has linked to the country's secretive military intelligence.

"Successful deployment of the FANCY BEAR malware within this application may have facilitated reconnaissance against Ukrainian troops," the report said.

It added said some 80 percent of Ukraine's howitzers were destroyed during the war—a vast figure that had never been reported before and would mean nearly the entire arsenal of Ukraine's biggest guns being erased.

The targeting program was provided to Ukraine's under-funded army by volunteers and not developed by the defense ministry itself. — AFP



ALEPPO: Aram I, Armenian Catholicos of the Holy See of Cilicia, leads the Armenian Christmas Day service at the Saint Mary Armenian Apostolic church in Aleppo yesterday. — AFP

EASTERN CHRISTIANS CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS IN BETHLEHEM

BETHLEHEM: Thousands of Christians from the eastern tradition gathered in Bethlehem yesterday for Christmas Eve celebrations, with a procession to the site where Jesus is believed to have been born.

A few thousand people, including the Greek Orthodox Patriarch Theophilos III, attended the celebrations in the occupied West Bank at the Church of the Nativity—built on the site where Christians believe Jesus Christ was born. On a crisp sunny morning, Palestinian scout groups performed bagpipe and brass versions of Jingle Bells and other Christmas songs, while residents and foreign tourists lined the streets.

After entering the church, priests addressed the congregation ahead of a major mass planned for yesterday evening. Eastern Christians celebrate Christmas on January 7, while those in the West observe it on December 25 due to differences between the Julian and Gregorian calendars. The celebrations for Western Christmas two weeks before were larger in scale with many more pilgrims, but the majority of Palestinian Christians come from churches that celebrate on January 7.

John Mawal, an Australian Orthodox priest of Lebanese descent visiting for the holiday period, said the morning was "very special" for him. "Here you see a few of the patriarchs coming in from the different denominations coming through and the last of them being the Jerusalem Patriarch Theophilos," he said.

"Being from Australia it is something we would probably never get to see in our lifetime."

The day is due to conclude with thousands packed into the church for midnight mass, before Christmas celebrations today. Mariana Thaljieh, an Orthodox Christian from Bethlehem, said she was there to welcome Theophilos but would come back later for mass.

"The atmosphere is lovely. I feel safe today. The weather is very beautiful and that is helping the people to come." "The atmosphere is very beautiful in the city of his birth." — AFP

POWER STRUGGLE MAY PUSH LIBYA DEEPER INTO CRISIS

HARDLINERS GAIN AMID FEARS OF IS REGROUPING

TRIPOLI: Escalating tensions between rival Libyan armed forces threaten to plunge the North African country deeper into turmoil only weeks after the fall of the Islamic State group's bastion Sirte. The deeply tribal nation has been sharply divided since the 2011 ouster of longtime dictator Muammar Gaddafi, with rival militias vying for influence and control of oil resources.

The power struggle pits an administration based in eastern Libya, backed by military strongman Khalifa Haftar, against a UN-brokered unity government in Tripoli supported by militias from the western city of Misrata. "The situation is most likely going to escalate further given that the voices of war are now the loudest" after an air strike by

Haftar's forces against the Misrata militias, analyst Mohamed Eljarh of the Atlantic Council said.

The Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA) is the centrepiece of Western hopes to stem an upsurge of jihadism in Libya, but it has failed to assert its authority across the country. The rival authority in the east has refused to cede power and has its own armed forces, which call themselves the Libyan National Army (LNA) and are led by Haftar. Pro-GNA fighters mainly from the Western town of Misrata drove IS from Sirte in December, capping a deadly months-long campaign for Gaddafi's hometown.

The Misrata militias include hardliners determined to fight Haftar's army.

The LNA has battled jihadists in second city Benghazi for more than two years and blames Misrata militias of backing diehard extremists. On December 7, two days after Sirte's liberation, tensions flared when hardline Misrata militias joined an attack against Haftar's forces launched by an alliance of Islamist and tribal fighters.

Regrouping

The assault on a town near Libya's "oil crescent"—where Haftar had seized four export terminals from pro-GNA forces in September—was launched from Al-Jufra air base in southern Libya. The LNA repelled it and since then has frequently bombarded the base, calling it a den of "terrorists". — AFP

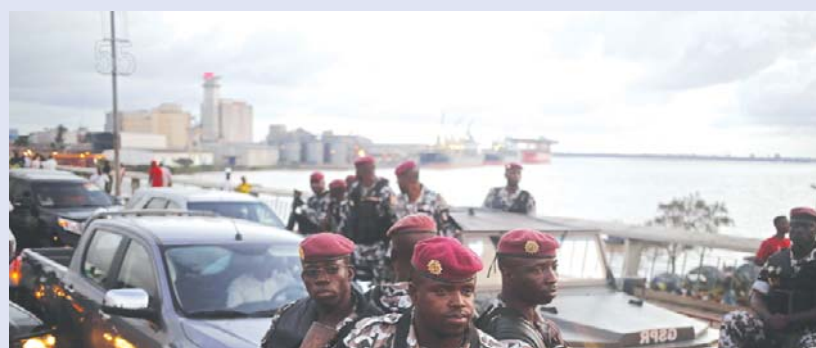
IVORY COAST TROOPS RISE UP IN MUTINY

BOUAKE, Ivory Coast: Soldiers demanding more pay and housing rose up in several cities around Ivory Coast yesterday, raiding arms depots and taking control of streets, residents and officials said.

The uprising began in Bouake, the country's second city and onetime rebel stronghold, where heavy weapons fire was heard in the streets, before spreading to two other major urban centres. In Bouake, soldiers "broke into the armoury of the 3rd Battalion", arming themselves with rocket-launchers and other weapons mounted on pickup trucks, a military source said.

Troops also took to the streets in the large western town of Daloa and at Korhogo in the north of Ivory Coast, Africa's leading cocoa-producing nation, according to residents and army sources.

"It's a mutiny by former (rebel) fighters integrated into the army who are demanding bonuses of five million CFA francs (\$8,000 / 7,600 euros) each plus a house," an officer in Bouake told AFP, asking to remain anonymous. But



ABIDJAN: Ivory Coast troops provide security during an election rally of Ivory Coast incumbent President Alassane Ouattara in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. Some unidentified soldiers have launched mutinies in three cities across this West African country yesterday. — AP

one of the soldiers said the demands were even higher.

"We're not asking for five million CFA francs, but rather for 10 million each and a villa," the soldier said. "If necessary, we will not return to the barracks." An AFP journalist in Bouake, where ex-rebels have been integrated into military ranks, said troops attacked all seven police posts, manned strategic junctions and put up

barricades in the town centre. "There is no more traffic. The firing of Kalashnikovs can be heard near the 3rd Battalion" camp, the journalist added. The troops "have taken up positions at different sections of the city. They can be seen parading around in police vehicles." A police source said the soldiers arrived at one police station at about 3 am (0300 GMT) and took away their Kalashnikov rifles. — Reuters

POLL: MOST GERMANS FEEL SAFE DESPITE BERLIN ATTACK

BERLIN: Most Germans say they think their country is a safe place despite the recent truck attack in Berlin that claimed 12 lives shortly before Christmas, according to a new poll.

The poll published late Thursday by public broadcaster ARD found that 73 percent of respondents said they felt secure in Germany, compared with 26 percent who didn't. One percent of those surveyed declined to state an opinion. The sentiment held true for supporters of all major political parties except those backing the nationalist Alternative for Germany, where 66 percent said they feared for their safety. The party, known by its acronym AfD, has tried to blame Chancellor Angela Merkel's government for a series of attacks committed by asylum seekers last year.

New Year's Eve robberies and sexual assaults in

Cologne, a stabbing and a bombing in Bavaria in July, and the truck attack last month have fed tensions about Merkel's immigration policy, which saw Germany take in hundreds of thousands of migrants over the last two years.

Investigators say a 24-year-old Tunisian man steered the truck that ploughed into a busy Christmas market in the heart of Berlin on Dec. 19. Anis Amri, who had been rejected for asylum, was killed days later by Italian police after evading a Europe-wide manhunt despite crossing four borders on his way from Berlin to Milan.

The survey for the broadcaster also asked respondents whether they believe Germany is "well protected from terrorist attacks." Some 57 percent said it was. The figure has fluctuated by only a few points since December 2015, when it stood at 54 percent.

Pollsters at Infratest Dimap questioned 1,005 people by phone on Jan. 2-3 and said the poll had a margin of error of up to 3.1 percent.

Using a larger sample of 1,505 respondents, the company also asked Germans about their voting intentions for this year's general election. Support for AfD grew two points from a month earlier to 15 percent. Chancellor Angela Merkel's Union bloc also saw its support rise two points to 37 percent. The center-left Social Democrats, who polled two points lower this month with 20 percent, sought to reclaim ground Friday by suggesting that Germany should engage in a "cultural battle" with extreme forms of Islam.

Party leader Sigmar Gabriel told weekly Der Spiegel that he favors banning Salafist mosques and deporting preachers who advocate violence. —AP

US TANKS ROLL INTO GERMANY TO BOLSTER NATO DETERRENT

GAME OF CAT AND MOUSE IN BALTIC SKIES

BERLIN: Ships loaded with US tanks, self-propelled howitzers and hundreds of other fighting vehicles have arrived in a northern German port en route to Eastern Europe to bolster NATO's deterrent to possible Russian aggression.

Some 3,500 troops from the 4th Infantry Division in Fort Carson, Colorado, will join up with the equipment that arrived in port yesterday over the next two weeks. The deployment marks the start of a new phase of Operation Atlantic Resolve, which foresees the continuous presence of an American armored brigade combat team in Europe on a nine-month rotational basis.

It will consolidate first in Poland, then fan out across seven countries from Estonia to Bulgaria, where there has been unease about increased Russian military operations in the region. A headquarters unit will be stationed in Germany. Meanwhile, French jets have been engaged in a game of cat and mouse with Russian fighters in the skies above the Baltic states, as NATO keeps a close eye on Russia's ambitions.

Four French Mirage jets this week completed a four-month tour of duty in Lithuania and their crews were busy, engaging with Russian planes on 23 occasions. "We use the term 'intercept' but it is better to say 'identify' and 'observe'," Lieutenant Colonel Isaac Diakite told AFP at the base in the freezing surroundings of Siauliai in northern Lithuania.

"The Russians take care to remain in international airspace, flying along the Baltic area without going into it. They have a right to be there, but so do we," he said. "So we take off to have a look, identify the plane and photograph it, to show we're there."

Russian planes have been flying close to NATO's northern border for several years now, and the number of flights increased after the Ukrainian crisis started in 2014.

"It's a little game, a demonstration of strength to show that they are back after their fleet underwent large-scale modernisation," said General Olivier Taprest, commander of France's aerial defence,



BREMERHAVEN: German Force commander General Major Josef Dieter Blotz (right) talks to a US military service personnel as US military vehicles are unloaded from a carrier ship in the harbor in Bremerhaven yesterday. — AFP

who took part in a ceremony in Siauliai to mark the end of the deployment.

NATO radars regularly pick up Russian Sukhoi fighter-bombers, Antonov transport planes and strategic long-range Tupolev bombers crossing the so-called Omega Line, NATO's self-imposed line that runs from the north of Norway. Crossing it triggers alerts at NATO bases and planes are scrambled.

Tupolev bombers were spotted three times in the final months of 2016, flying over the Baltic states and to the west of the British Isles. A year earlier, in November 2015, Tupolevs were even recorded flying around Ireland and across the Mediterranean to drop bombs in Syria before heading back to Russia through Iranian airspace.

It was done, the French officers said, merely as a show of force to the Americans. "It was completely useless from a tactical point of view, but it sent a message: if you calculate the distance flown, it shows you could reach New York," General Taprest said.

Guard dogs

NATO's jets are rather like guard dogs kept behind a fence, without ever actually biting or even barking—their presence is to show Moscow that the transatlantic alliance will defend its members' skies and approaching the limits of that will provoke a reaction.

The procedure is strictly ordered. The two "intercept" jets first fly to within a kilometre (half a mile) behind the "bogey", as an unidentified plane is called. Then one of them moves next to the wing of the target at a distance of between 300 metres (yards) and 50 metres. The aim, clearly, is to let the pilot know he is being watched.

"If it's night-time, we shine a light into their cockpit," one of the French pilots, who wanted to be identified only by his nickname "Rom's", said. "Sometimes they respond with their decoy flare, sometimes they don't. Then we switch to autopilot to allow us to take photographs which are then sent to the military command." — Agencies

LE PEN TO PUSH FOR FREXIT IF EU REFUSES TO RETURN KEY POWERS

PARIS: French far-right leader Marine Le Pen pledged yesterday if elected president she would campaign for France to leave the EU if Brussels fails to surrender control over national borders, law-making and economic and monetary policy. Le Pen, who has promised to dump the euro and organise a Brexit-style referendum on France's membership of the European Union, has recently appeared to soften her stance, saying she is open to a "common currency" co-existing alongside a national currency.

Addressing a gathering of foreign correspondents, the National Front (FN) leader said: "I have not changed my mind on the process I will put to the French with regard to the EU."

If she wins the vote on May 7, she said she would immediately begin negotiations with the EU on restoring "four fundamental types of sovereignty: territorial, economic, monetary and legislative". The discussions, which would centre on France's call for the restoration of intra-European borders and the ability to adopt protectionist policies, would last six months after which she would organise a 'Frexit' in/out referendum.

"Either I will have secured the return of those four sovereignties and I will advise the French to remain in a new Europe of nations, or I will not and then I will advise them to leave the EU.

"There is no question for me of betraying the people." On the euro, Le Pen said she had "never been hostile to the return of a form of common currency", citing the European Currency Unit (ECU), a pre-euro basket of currencies that existed alongside national currencies, as a model.

Euro 'knife in ribs'

Polls last year showed French voters were opposed to exiting the EU but were more conflicted about the common currency. Le Pen admitted that the French had "fears" about a so-called Frexit but viewed the euro as a "millstone".

Brussels, she charged, had used the euro in Greece "not as a currency but a knife that you stick in a country's ribs to force it to do what its people don't want to do."

The anti-immigration, anti-EU Le Pen is seen as one of the top contenders for the French presidency, with polls routinely showing her making it to the run-off round in May against the conservative candidate Francois Fillon. Under her leadership, the FN has gone from strength to strength, topping the vote in France in European elections in 2014.

Like Donald Trump, she has warm ties to Vladimir Putin's Russia. Yesterday, she declared she would be no one's puppet. Sketching her vision of a multipolar world, she said: "I am a totally free woman." "I don't want France to be subjugated by the US... I also don't want us to be subjugated by Russia." —AFP

MYANMAR MEDIA EXECS GRANTED BAIL IN DEFAMATION TRIAL

YANGON: Two Myanmar media executives were granted bail yesterday in a high-profile defamation case that has become a lightning rod for fears over teetering press freedoms under the new democratic government.

The CEO of Eleven Media Group, Than Htut Aung, was freed after suffering a heart attack in Yangon's notorious Insein prison, where he had been detained for almost two months. He and the chief editor of one of the group's papers, Wai Phyo, were jailed in November over a column that accused a government minister of receiving a \$100,000 watch from a businessman who later won plum contracts.

The minister, Phyo Min Thein, is a high-profile member of Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, which came to power in March after winning elections that ended decades of military rule. Than Htut Aung looked faint as he waded through a scrum of journalists at the court yesterday, supported by his son. "The two defendants got bail today because the doctor who checked the CEO's health problems... reported to the court," their lawyer, Kye Myint, said. The pair, whose bail requests were rejected three times before yesterday, will next appear in court on January 13.

Media freedom has increased since Myanmar ended censorship in 2012, the year after a reformist quasi-civilian government took power from the former junta. But activists say defamation prosecutions have risen sharply since Suu Kyi's NLD party took office. Former political prisoner Maung Saugkha said seven people were sued with defamation under the telecommunications law between 2013-16. Since the NLD took over, 38 cases have been brought. "I do not see any progress on media freedoms under the new government," Ma Thida, dissident author and founder of the Myanmar chapter of writers advocacy group PEN, said.

"Stopping people from sharing what they think and saying what they see is not the democratic way." In another defamation case being tried in Yangon on Friday, an NLD official was denied bail after being charged with insulting the head of the army. Myo Yan Naung Thein, secretary of the NLD's central research committee, has been held since November for posts on Facebook criticizing General Min Aung Hlaing's handling of a crisis in Rakhine state.—AFP

'MASTERMIND' OF BANGLADESH CAFE SIEGE SHOT DEAD IN RAID

'SECURITY FORCES LAUNCH CRACKDOWN AGAINST EXTREMISTS'

DHAKA: An Islamist extremist accused of being one of the masterminds of last year's deadly siege at a Bangladeshi cafe was shot dead during a pre-dawn raid yesterday in Dhaka, police said. The bodies of Nurul Islam Marzan and another suspected extremist were found after officers raided a property in the capital's Rayer Bazar neighborhood, a spokesman for the Dhaka Metropolitan Police said. "Marzan and his associate Saddam died in an encounter with police," Inspector General of Police A K M Shahidul Haque said. "He (Marzan) was the operational commander of July cafe attack. He was one of the masterminds of it."

Additional deputy commissioner Yusuf Ali said police had found the body of a "suspected extremist" alongside Marzan, who was aged around 30. He was "one of the masterminds" of the siege at the up market Holey Artisan Bakery on July 1 last year in which 18 foreign hostages were shot or hacked to death, Ali added. The country's security forces launched a deadly crackdown against Islamist extremists following the cafe siege, which badly undermined Bangladesh's reputation as a relatively moderate Muslim nation.

Waves of attacks

Since the cafe attack, security forces have shot around 50 Islamist extremists including most of the alleged kingpins of JMB. The Islamic State (IS) organization claimed responsibility for the cafe attack, posting images of the carnage as it happened and photos of the gunmen who had posed with the IS's black flag. Mohibul Islam Khan, the deputy chief of Dhaka police's counter terrorism and transnational



DHAKA: A Bangladeshi man stands alongside the bodies of suspected Islamist extremists, one of whom is accused of being one of the masterminds of the 2016 deadly siege at a Bangladeshi cafe, at the Dhaka Medical College and Hospital morgue in Dhaka yesterday.—AFP

crime unit, said Marzan was an Arabic student at Chittagong University before he dropped out and joined an offshoot of Jamayetul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), a homegrown extremist group which has been blamed for the cafe attack.

"Along with Tamim (Ahmed Chowdhury), Marzan planned the Gulshan attack," he said, referring to the Canadian citizen of Bangladesh descent who police described as the main mastermind of the attack. Chowdhury was killed in another raid outside the capital in August last year. Police intelligence had found that Marzan organized the cafe siege and was its operational commander, said Khan. Bangladesh is reeling from a wave of attacks on foreign-

ers, rights activists and members of religious minorities.

While many of those attacks have been claimed by IS or Al Qaeda, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's secular government has blamed local militants, denying that international jihadists have gained a foothold in Bangladesh. Critics say Hasina's administration is in denial about the nature of the threat posed by Islamist extremists and accuse her of trying to exploit the attacks to demonize her domestic opponents.

Last September US Secretary of State John Kerry said during a visit to Dhaka that there was evidence to link the extremists behind the recent spate of deadly attacks in Bangladesh to IS.—AFP

PAKISTAN COURT ORDERS POLICE TO FIND 'TORTURED' CHILD MAID



ISLAMABAD: The wife, center, of a judge is escorted from the Supreme Court by her brother in Islamabad, Pakistan, yesterday.—AP

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's Supreme Court yesterday ordered police to find a ten-year-old maid who was allegedly tortured by her employers, and demanded a full investigation into the case which has spotlighted rampant child labor in the country. The case has shocked many in Pakistan after social media images allegedly showing injuries to the girl's face and hands went viral. The child was reportedly employed by a district judge in Islamabad and initially told police she'd fallen down the stairs and burnt her hands by accident, Pakistani media reported.

But in a later statement she said that she was beaten and that her hands were burned on the stove by the judge's wife, reports have said, citing police. According to Pakistani daily Dawn, authorities then placed the girl into a women's shelter. But on Tuesday the child's father told authorities he forgave the judge and his wife, and that his daughter's story was untrue, so no charges were brought, the newspaper reported.

The girl's parents were then reported to have taken her from the women's shelter and disappeared with her. The widely-publicized images of her injuries caught the attention of the Supreme Court, which issued a motion initiating a legal case. Chief Justice Mian Saqib Nisar demanded the child be found and a full investigation held by next Wednesday. Current figures detailing the precise scale of child labor in Pakistan are not available.

The last official national survey was carried out in 1996, and put the number of working children at 3.3 million. According to Human Rights Watch, approximately 13 percent of children aged 10 to 14 in Pakistan are engaged in child labor. There are no surveys on domestic child labor specifically, but Islamabad-based child rights NGO Sparc (Society for the Protection of the Rights of Child) estimates that some 15.5 million children are involved in domestic work.—AFP

N KOREA HOLDS MASS RALLY TO PUSH KIM'S NEW YEAR MESSAGE

PYONGYANG: Thousands of North Koreans have rallied in Pyongyang, chanting communist slogans and vowing support for leader Kim Jong-Un, who in his New Year's message announced plans to test-fire a ballistic missile capable of reaching the US mainland. Clad in thick winter coats and pumping their fists in the air, those assembled in Kim Il-Sung square chanted "long live comrade Kim Jong-Un" and held banners proclaiming "let us accelerate the victorious advance of socialism!"

Kim marked the New Year with a 30-minute televised speech that largely focused on the country's rise as a nuclear power, announcing that it was in the

"final stages" of developing an intercontinental ballistic missile of the kind that could threaten US soil. "The people should regard Kim Jong-Un's New Year address as a motto of life and struggle," state media KCNA quoted a party official at the rally as saying. Kim's New Year address drew swift response from US president-elect Donald Trump, who took to Twitter vowing to halt Pyongyang in its tracks.

In 2016, North Korea conducted two nuclear tests and numerous missile launches in its quest to develop a nuclear weapons system capable of hitting the US mainland, prompting Washington to reinforce its antimissile defenses in the region. But analysts are

divided over how close Pyongyang is to realizing its full nuclear ambitions, especially since it has never successfully test-fired an intercontinental ballistic missile.

Kim also admitted to his "shortcomings" as a leader in his New Year's speech and pledged "devoted efforts" to make North Korea prosperous again. Thae Yong-Ho, North Korea's former deputy ambassador to Britain who defected to the South in August, has referred to growing public discontent about the leadership, saying ordinary North Koreans have had to learn ways to survive on their own rather than relying on the party. —AFP



BANGKOK: Thailand's Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha addresses government officials and residents at Narathiwat City Hall, in front of stacks of emergency care packages for flood victims, in the southern Thai province of Narathiwat yesterday. —AFP

FLOODS SPARK CHAOS IN SOUTH THAILAND

UNUSUAL RAINS LEAVE 8 DEAD; 120,000 HOUSES AFFECTED

BANGKOK: Thai authorities yesterday warned of flash floods across the south as torrential rains lashed the region leaving at least eight people dead, delaying flights and disrupting holidays during peak tourist season. Nine provinces along Thailand's southern tail have been hit by unseasonal rains for nearly a week, with the resort islands of Samui and Phangan deluged, leaving thousands of tourists stranded or delayed. Eight people have been killed and at least 120,000 households have been affected by the flooding across the south, the Interior Ministry said, where waters have turned roads into rivers and upended rail tracks.

Authorities fear worse may be to come. The Thai Meteorological Department warned residents and visitors to the south of possible "heavy rain and flash floods" with downpours expected to continue for two more days. Photos circulating on social media showed cars and motorcyclists plying through muddy, waist-high waters. A smattering of foreign tourists on Samui took advantage of the flooded streets, drawing bemused looks

from locals as they bobbed along in inflatable tubes sipping beers.

Tuula Fitzpatrick, the owner of Moby Dick guesthouse near Samui's main party strip, said the flooding was the worst to hit the island in over a decade. "I've been living here for 12 years and I've never seen it so bad... It was scary. Some of my staff couldn't come to work," she said. The island, a stalwart of Thailand's cash-cow tourism industry, is a magnet for foreign visitors drawn by the promise of winter sun. But under menacing skies tourists stayed inside hotels, while others checked out early or cancelled bookings, according to a Thai tourism official on the island.

Planes, trains stopped

The worst flooding struck Nakhon Si Thammarat province on the mainland, where waters reached the roof-tops in some parts, closed the regional airport, cut the train line and made roads impassable. "The flood waters have hit the tracks and in some places the track was washed away," said Thanongsak Kongprasert, deputy governor of the State Railway of Thailand. Junta chief

Prayut Chan-O-Cha briefly visited the southernmost province of Narathiwat to distribute flood relief.

Across the border in northern Malaysia more than 15,000 people remained stranded in relief centers after days of tropical downpours as thousands more headed home to survey the damage wreaked by the floods. "The weatherman has predicted no more heavy rain. More relief centers are being closed but we remain on alert," Amir Sarifudin, Terengganu state civil department force deputy director said.

But frustration mounted among those stuck in relief centers as evacuees complained of their inability to work and provide for their families. "I usually earn about 50 ringgit (\$11) daily. Now I only have 15 ringgit in my pocket for my family of four," said Mohamad Zain Sapein, a labourer from northern Kelantan state. The rains are unusually heavy for this time of year, with the region normally experiencing a cooler, dry period from early November through January the three-month long peak tourist season. —AFP

JAPAN RECALLS S KOREA ENVOY OVER COMFORT WOMAN STATUE

TOKYO: Japan recalled its ambassador to South Korea yesterday to protest the placing of a statue symbolizing victims of Japanese wartime sex slavery outside its consulate in the city of Busan last month. In a move likely to reignite a feud over the so-called "comfort women", Japan's chief government spokesman Yoshihide Suga also announced that Japan is ordering home its consul-general in Busan and suspending discussions over a Japan-South Korea currency swap. "Japan and South Korea are neighbours," Suga said. "It's a very important country. It's extremely regrettable we had to take this action." "The Japanese government will continue to strongly urge the South Korean government as well as municipalities concerned to quickly remove the statue of the girl," he added.

Mainstream historians say up to 200,000 women, mostly from Korea but also other parts of Asia including China, were forced to work in Japanese military brothels during World War II. The plight of the women is a hugely emotional issue that has marred relations between the two Asian neighbors for decades and which, for many South Koreans, symbolizes the abuses of Japan's 1910-45 colonial rule over the Korean peninsula. The statue is a copy of one that sits across the road from the Japanese embassy in Seoul and that for more than five years has been a rallying point for supporters of the few surviving South Korean former sex slaves.

The statue in Busan was initially removed by local authorities after South Korean activists placed it in front of the Japanese consulate in the southern port city last week. But they did not stop it being put back after Japan's hawkish defense minister Tomomi Inada offered prayers at a controversial war shrine in Tokyo the next day. Suga, however, made no mention of Inada's visit to the shrine, which honors millions of mostly Japanese war dead-but also senior military and political figures convicted of war crimes. Her visit drew harsh criticism in South Korea as well as China.

'Very regrettable'

South Korean Foreign Ministry Spokesman Cho June-Hyuck lamented Japan's actions as "very regrettable", but struck a conciliatory note. "Even if there exist difficult issues, the government emphasizes again that it will continue developing South Korea-Japan relations based on trust between the two governments," he said. However, later in the day South Korean Foreign Minister Yun Byung-Se summoned the Japanese ambassador. Jiji Press said they spoke for about an hour and that Yun expressed "regret" over Japan's actions. —AFP



BUSAN: This picture shows a statue (L) of a teenage girl symbolizing comfort women who served as sex slaves for Japanese soldiers during World War II, outside the Japanese consulate in Busan. —AFP

TRUMP ON BORDER WALL: MEXICO WILL PAY US BACK

WASHINGTON: President-elect Donald Trump yesterday tweeted that Mexico will reimburse American taxpayers for a new border wall and that US money spent will be for the "sake of speed." His tweet came as congressional Republicans and his top aides consider a plan to ask Congress to ensure money is available in US coffers for the wall without passing any new legislation. Instead, they would rely on existing law that already authorizes fencing and other technology along the southern border.

The potential approach was disclosed Thursday by two congressional officials and a senior transition official with knowledge of the discussions; all spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly. Trump said in a tweet early Friday: "The dishonest media does not report that any money spent on building the Great Wall (for sake of speed), will be paid back by Mexico later!" Mexico's president and other senior officials have repeatedly insisted that Mexico won't pay for a wall.

During his campaign, Trump repeatedly told voters if elected he would build a wall along the US southern border and make Mexico pay for it. But Trump never settled on a mechanism for how Mexico would pay. He floated various options, including compelling the country to cover the cost through higher visa and border crossing fees and threatening to target billions of dollars in remittances sent home by immigrants living in the US. Trump transition spokesman Sean Spicer said putting U.S. money up-front "doesn't mean he's broken his promise."

Current law

In an interview Friday on ABC's "Good Morning America," Spicer said: "I think he's going to continue to talk to them (the Mexican government) about that." The approach could also stave off a legislative fight that Trump might lose if he tried to get Congress to pass a measure authorizing the kind of border wall he promised during the campaign. It's not clear how much could be done along the 2,000-mile border without additional actions by Congress. Lawmakers passed the Secure Fence Act of 2006, but most of those 700 miles have already been built. Some areas are in much better shape than others, though, and long stretches are made up of fencing that stops vehicles but not pedestrians. —AP

AT LEAST 33 INMATES KILLED IN NEW BRAZIL PRISON UNREST

'LATEST ERUPTION OF VIOLENCE INSIDE BRAZIL'S JAIL'

BOA VISTA, Brazil: At least 33 inmates were killed by their rivals at a prison in northern Brazil yesterday, officials said, days after a riot by warring gangs left dozens more dead at another prison. The government of Roraima state said the situation at the Agricola de Monte Cristo Penitentiary was now "under control." The latest violence did not appear to be an all-out riot but rather a rapid early morning attack by one group of inmates against another, lasting less than an hour, a local government spokeswoman said. Most of the killings were carried out with knives, she said. No firearms have been found inside the prison so far. It is the latest eruption of violence inside Brazil's overcrowded and underfunded jails. Rights activists have long condemned prison conditions in Brazil, where the justice ministry says 50 percent more capacity is needed to handle an inmate population swollen by efforts to crack down on a violent and lucrative drug trade.

The latest unrest comes a day after President Michel Temer said the federal government would spend \$250 million to build at least one new prison in each of Brazil's 26 states. The announcement came in response to a grisly riot in Manaus, the capital of Amazonas state, where jailed gang members beheaded and mutilated 56 of their rivals in a 17-hour bloodbath Sunday and Monday. That was the deadliest prison riot in Brazil since police killed 111 inmates in a crackdown on an uprising at the Carandiru prison in Sao Paulo in 1992.



MANAUS: Relatives attend the burial of an inmate killed in a prison riot, at the Parque Taruma cemetery, in Manaus, Brazil. The killing of dozens of inmates in two Brazilian prisons put Amazonas Gov Jose Melo under fire and led him to say that there were "no saints," among the victims. — AP

But Brazil's prisons are often scenes of deadly unrest.

In October, riots at several prisons triggered by fighting between rival gangs killed 18 people, including 10 at Agricola de Monte Cristo. At the time, the prison held 1,400 inmates-double its capacity. The prison holds inmates from the Red Command, a powerful drug gang based in Rio de Janeiro. It is allied with a local gang called the Family of the North, which authorities say was responsible for the riot in Manaus. Most

of those killed in Manaus were members of a rival gang, the Sao Paulo-based First Capital Command. The riot also enabled 184 inmates to escape.

No quick fix

The states of northern Brazil, which border top cocaine producers Bolivia, Colombia and Peru, are battle zones in the drug trade. Prisons are often controlled in Brazil by drug gangs, whose turf wars on the outside are also fought out among inmates. —AFP

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SPY CHIEFS DARE TRUMP WITH RUSSIAN FINDINGS

'MULTIFACETED CAMPAIGN ENTAILED CLASSICAL PROPAGANDA'

WASHINGTON: US spy chiefs were set to confront an openly dismissive President-elect Donald Trump yesterday with their evidence that Russia mounted an unprecedented bid to disrupt the US elections by hacking his Democratic rivals. The meeting comes amid high tension between the leaders of the US intelligence community and their future boss, who has bridled at any suggestion that Moscow tipped the election in his favor. "My hope is that when the president-elect receives his own briefings and is able to examine the intelligence,

"very high" confidence in their findings. "The Russians have a long history of interfering in elections, theirs and other people's," he said. "But we have never encountered such a direct campaign to interfere with the election process as we have seen in this case." "This was a multifaceted campaign. So the hacking was only one part of it, and it also entailed classical propaganda, disinformation, fake news."

Clapper, Rogers and Marcel Lettre, undersecretary of defense for intelligence, said in a joint statement that

Thursday, he again asked "how and why are they so sure about hacking," claiming that the DNC prevented the FBI from accessing their servers.

BuzzFeed News reported that the FBI had in fact never asked to examine them. US officials familiar with the report told CNN that the liaisons who delivered the stolen emails from Russia to WikiLeaks had been identified. And US intelligence agencies intercepted communications from senior Russian officials indicating they had celebrated Trump's victory as a win for Moscow, according to a report in The Washington Post. An unclassified version of the report presented to the president-stripped of sensitive details-will be released to the public early next week.

"I think the public should know as much about this as possible," Clapper said. Nevertheless, Thursday's much-anticipated hearing did not offer any new evidence to back the allegations. When asked by senators to provide more proof, Clapper repeatedly said he could not do so in public, saying it risked damaging the intelligence community's sources and operations. "We have invested billions, and we have put people's lives at a risk to glean such information," he said.

Soured relations

Friday's briefing for Trump will come amid worries he has already poisoned relations with key parts of the all-important national security establishment. Trump raised more hackles on Wednesday by citing WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange to suggest that anyone, even a 14-year-old child, could have been behind the hacking. Under strong criticism from politicians of both parties for placing more credibility in Assange than the CIA and FBI, Trump defended himself Thursday. "The media lies to make it look like I am against 'Intelligence' when in fact I am a big fan!" Trump said on Twitter.

"The dishonest media likes saying that I am in Agreement with Julian Assange - wrong. I simply state what he states, it is for the people...to make up their own minds as to the truth." Without naming Trump, Clapper said there was "a difference between healthy skepticism and disparagement" of the intelligence community. "And I've received many expressions of concern from foreign counterparts about, you know, the disparagement of the US intelligence community," he said. "Public trust and confidence in the intelligence community is crucial," he said.—AFP



FLORIDA: In this file photo, President-elect Donald Trump talks to reporters at Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach, Florida. —AP

as his team is put together and they see how professional and effective these agencies are, that some of those current tensions will be reduced," President Barack Obama told Chicago's NBC affiliate on Thursday.

After Trump first raised doubts early last month, Obama ordered the intelligence community to produce a comprehensive report on cyber attacks and Russian interference in the election. Obama was briefed on the report Thursday, and the intelligence chiefs were scheduled to detail it to Trump yesterday. James Clapper, the director of national intelligence, National Security Agency chief Mike Rogers, Federal Bureau of Investigation director James Comey and Central Intelligence Agency Director John Brennan were expected to take part in the briefing.

'High confidence'

Clapper told the Senate Armed Services Committee on Thursday he had

"only Russia's senior-most officials" could have authorized the operation, in which hackers stole Democratic Party files and emails. Those files were then disseminated via WikiLeaks, embarrassing the party and harming losing candidate Hillary Clinton's White House effort. "Russia has clearly assumed an even more aggressive cyber posture by increasing cyber espionage operations, leaking data stolen from these operations and targeting critical infrastructure systems," Clapper said.

Trump's doubts

Trump, who has pledged a rapprochement with President Vladimir Putin's Russia after taking office on January 20, has repeatedly dismissed the findings. The Republican has mocked via Twitter past intelligence errors of the CIA, FBI and other agencies, challenging them to prove that the hacking and leaks could be traced up to the top of Putin's government. Late



ILLINOIS: Family spokesman David Boyd and others hold a news conference, in Crystal Lake, Illinois, after an 18-year-old man was assaulted in Chicago earlier this week. —AP

4 CHARGED IN FACEBOOK LIVE ATTACK TO APPEAR IN COURT

CHICAGO: The two 18-year-old men had been schoolmates, police say. After meeting at McDonald's, they spent two days together, driving around visiting friends. Then a pretend fight escalated into a brutal beating of one of the men, a mentally disabled teenager, in an attack that stirred racial tensions and outrage after being broadcast on Facebook Live. How the white suburban teenager ended up beaten by the four black suspects, threatened with a knife and taunted with profanities against white people and President-elect Donald Trump is among the puzzles authorities are still trying to piece together after the suspects were charged with hate crimes.

The alleged attackers will make their first court appearance yesterday, a day after they were also charged with kidnapping and battery in connection to the attack. The beating was captured on cellphone video by one of the assailants and has since viewed millions of times on social media. "This should never have happened," David Boyd, the victim's brother-in-law, said at a brief news conference in suburban Chicago. He said the victim was traumatized but doing as well as could be expected. Neal Strom, a family spokesman, told The Associated Press the victim has had "profound emotional and physical disabilities throughout his life." He did not elaborate.

Police said drug use may have been involved in the incident. The video shows the two female suspects smoking cigars that authorities "presume to be blunts" while the victim is tied up and racial slurs and references "to his mental capacity starts coming out," Chicago Police Commander Kevin Duffin said. The uproar over the beating has intensified the glare on Chicago after a bloody year of violent crime and protests against Mayor Rahm Emanuel and a police department that has been accused of brutality and hushing-up wrongdoing. The department has also been the subject of a long civil-rights investigation by the Justice Department, which is expected to report its findings soon.

Despicable

The incident also stirred emotions still raw after a nasty presidential election campaign that split the nation. The case heightened political tensions on social media, with some conservatives suggesting it was linked to the Black Lives Matter movement. Police said there was no indication of any connection. The cruelty of the attack and the intense social media exposure prompted President Barack Obama to respond, calling it "despicable." "I take these things very seriously," he told Chicago's WBBM-TV on Thursday. But he said the incident does not mean that race relations have gotten worse. —AP

EVIDENCE PAINTS DYLANN ROOF AS RACIST, LONER

COLUMBIA: Before Dylann Roof was arrested for killing nine black church members, he scribbled a note to his mother, apologizing for all the repercussions his actions would cause. Weeks later, in a jailhouse journal, he wrote that he had no regrets. The evidence, along with his manifesto, hundreds of photos and a confession to the FBI, draw a portrait of a young white man consumed by racial

hatred who carefully planned the killings, picking out meek, innocent black people who likely wouldn't fight back. Jurors who convicted Roof of hate crimes and other charges will decide whether he should be executed or face life in prison.

Roof has pointed out that there was no dramatic confrontation that led him to begin hating blacks. Instead, when the Trayvon Martin case

made the news, Roof went to Wikipedia to read about the black teenager who was shot to death in 2012 by neighborhood watch volunteer George Zimmerman, who was acquitted. That led Roof to research black on white crime and to websites that offer false statistics inflating how often those crimes happen.

Roof was careful in his writings to say his beliefs

came just from himself, not his parents. But one of Roof's old friends suggested otherwise. "I don't think his parents liked his decisions, the choices that he made to have black friends," said Christon Scriven, who is black. Roof would go between partying with black friends and spewing racist diatribes to his white buddies, Scriven said shortly after the shootings. —AP

16 Final jobs report for Obama presidency seen to be solid 19

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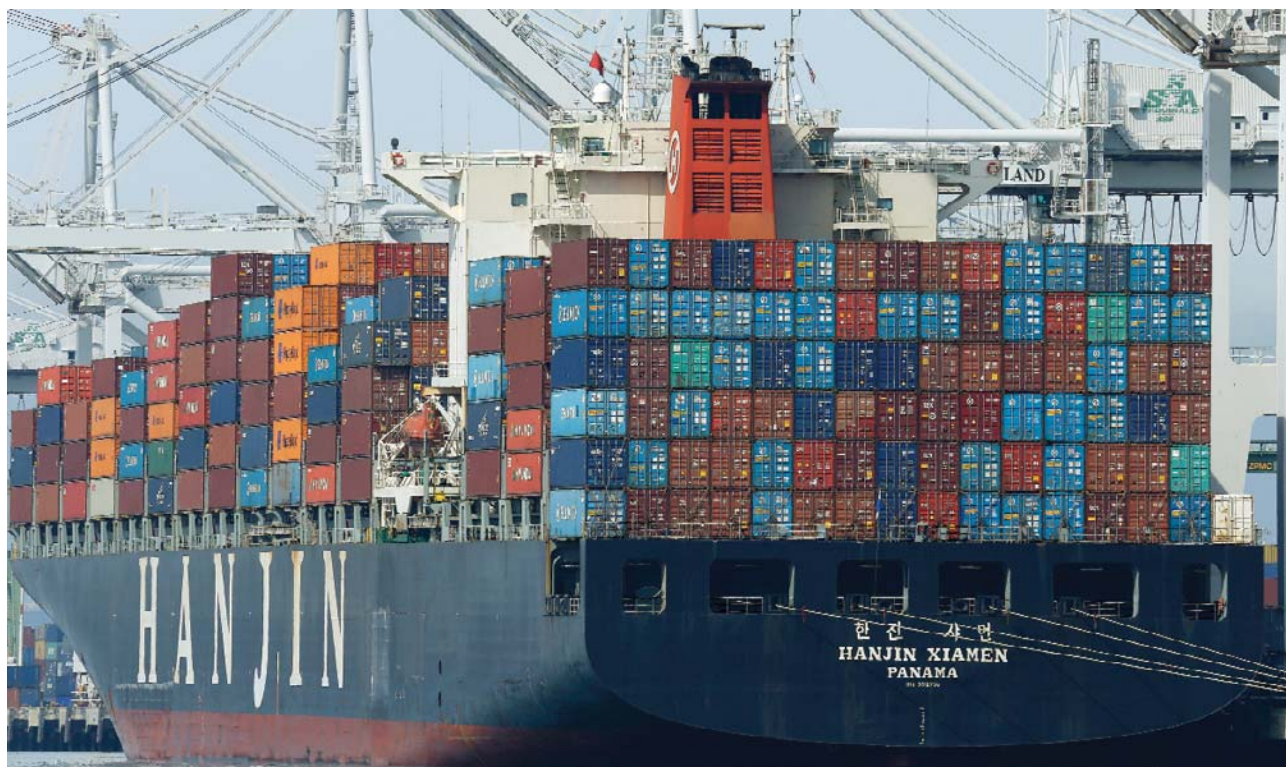
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OAKLAND: The container ship Hanjin Xiamen waits to be unloaded at the Port of Oakland, Calif. The trade deficit jumped 6.8 percent to \$45.2 billion, the largest imbalance since February, the Commerce Department reported yesterday. — AP

SAUDIS, RUSSIA TO DIVERGE ON SPEED OF OUTPUT CUTS

MARKET TIGHTNESS MAY BE FELT WITH START OF SUMMER

LONDON: OPEC and non-OPEC members have pledged to cut their combined oil production by an average of just over 1.7 million barrels per day (bpd) in the first six months of 2017.

Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies are expected to implement most of their cuts immediately, but other producers both within and outside the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries are likely to phase in the reductions gradually. The collective cut should increase progressively over the first half of 2017 and have its biggest impact on the supply-demand balance from the second quarter onwards. Market tightening should be felt at the start of summer as output cuts are fully phased in, US refineries ramp up for the driving season, and crude combustion in Saudi Arabia and Iraq starts to rise.

Compounding this effect, continued underlying growth in oil consumption in both OECD and non-OECD economies during the first six months should also help progressively tighten the supply-demand balance. OPEC and non-OPEC members also have given themselves the option to extend the cuts for a further six months depending on prevailing market conditions. If they decide on an extension, the supply-demand balance could tighten even more quickly in the second half of 2017.

CONTANGO VANISHES

Most traders expect market rebalancing to be backloaded, with futures prices trading in contango in the first half of 2017 but then moving to level or backwardation in the second half.

The structure of prices is consistent with a gradual phase-in of cuts during the first semester and their extension

into the second. But the different pace of production cuts for different countries increases the risk of non-compliance, especially towards the end of the first half and in the second half of 2017. If the agreement succeeds in raising prices and drawing down excess inventories, some countries may not deliver all the cuts they have promised.

Compliance is likely to be greatest by Saudi Arabia and its allies at the start of the period, and least by countries such as Russia towards the end.

PRODUCTION OPTIONS

In most cases, a new well will produce its highest daily output in the first days, weeks and months after completion, when the natural pressure in the reservoir is greatest.

Daily production tends to decline progressively thereafter as pressure falls. Production rates can be described by a decline curve. Oil producers employ several methods to offset production declines from existing wells and maintain field output. New wells can be drilled to replace declining production from existing holes (either within the same reservoir or from a new one).

Surface pumps or downhole pumps can be employed to raise more oil from old wells by providing artificial lift to replace natural field pressure. And production from old wells can be stimulated by injecting water, gas and chemicals into the producing formation to sweep more of the remaining oil towards the well bores and help it flow more easily.

Most producing countries have a mix of old and new wells, of varying vintages and at various stages of decline, some on artificial lift or being stimulated by secondary and tertiary recovery techniques. Producers therefore have a

menu of options for cutting output by shutting in or choking back existing wells, discontinuing artificial lift, ceasing to drill new holes, or scaling back secondary and tertiary recovery.

Hinting at the importance of these options, non-OPEC countries have committed "to reduce their respective oil production, voluntarily or through managed decline, in accordance with an accelerated schedule", OPEC said.

HOW TO CUT OUTPUT

Saudi Arabia and its allies are likely to cut production by shutting in or possibly choking back output from older wells in older fields. Saudi Arabia shut in more than 1,000 wells during the last round of OPEC cuts in 2008/9, according to an analysis of well data.

Most of those were less productive (and presumably older) because the number of wells still in production dropped much more than the decline in actual output. Production per active well rose sharply, indicating older and less productive wells were shut while newer and more productive ones continued to flow.

Much of Saudi Arabia's famed output flexibility comes from the kingdom's ability to shut in or reopen hundreds of older wells in older fields. Shutting old fields and wells makes economic sense because it can extend their lives and increase the amount of oil ultimately recovered from them. Conversely, Saudi Arabia can boost output by bringing old wells back into production, but at the cost of lower ultimate recovery. So this time around Saudi Arabia is likely to meet most of its output-cutting commitment by resting older wells and older fields, which can be implemented fairly quickly. — Reuters

GULF BANK ANNOUNCES WINNERS OF AL-DANAH DAILY DRAWS

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank held its Al-Danah daily draws on 2 January, 2017 announcing the names of its winners for the week of 25 December - 29 December, 2016. The Al-Danah daily draws include draws each and every working day for two prizes of KD 1,000 per winner.



The winners are:

(Sunday 25/12): Aryam Hani Mohmd Alghareeb, Adnan Hadi Thaqep Mesyer Al-Hussaine
(Monday 26/12): Zuhor Mohammed Amen Al Rayes, Felis Muhammed Velasseril
(Tuesday 27/12): Hassan Abdulla Ishaq Mahmeed, Hashim Ali Bager Zadah
(Wednesday 28/12): Jassim Mohammad Hussain Ghadhanfar, Seham Husain Ali Al Abdullah
(Thursday 29/12): Fouad Hussain Najah Hussain, Nidal Abdulrahman Mohd Mustafa

Five reasons why the Al-Danah account is the best:

- 1) Kuwait's single biggest yearly cash prize of KD 1 million
- 2) Kuwait's biggest quarterly cash prizes, up to KD500,000
- 3) Two winners of KD1,000 every working day
- 4) The most chances to win
- 5) Only Bank that transfers your chances to win from year to year

Only Al-Danah makes millionaires.

Al-Danah also offers a number of unique services including: the Al-Danah Deposit Only ATM card which helps account holders deposit their money at their convenience; as well as the Al-Danah calculator to help customers calculate their chances of becoming an Al-Danah winner.

Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account is open to Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti residents of Kuwait. Customers who open an account and/ or deposit more will enter the draw within two days. To take part in the Al-Danah 2017 upcoming quarterly and yearly draws, customers must have an Al-Danah account containing at least KD 200; customers can visit one of Gulf Bank's 56 branches, transfer on line, or call the Customer Contact Center on 1805805 for assistance and guidance.

OIL PRICES EDGE UP ON OPEC HOPES, BUT DOUBTS LINGER

LONDON: Oil prices edged higher by mid-morning yesterday as signs of output cuts by OPEC members met with lingering concern that other producers could try to shirk their share of planned decreases aimed at curbing global oversupply.

Brent crude futures, the benchmark for international oil prices, were trading at \$57.34 per barrel at 1033 GMT, up 45 cents from the previous close. In the United States, West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures were at \$54.19 a barrel, 43 cents above their last settlement.

Both contracts were largely flat on the week after days of choppy trading. "There's a lot of volatility, or at least changes in direction," ABN Amro senior energy economist Hans van Cleef said. "People think the long-term trend is up, but after a gain of a few dollars, they take profit."

Production cuts by OPEC kingpin Saudi Arabia and signs that it plans further trims have helped buoy the market. The Kingdom cut oil output in January by at least 486,000 barrels per day (bpd) to 10.058 million bpd, fully implementing an agreement by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and other producers to curb a global supply glut. State oil giant Saudi Aramco has started talks with customers globally on possible cuts of 3 percent to 7 percent in February crude loadings.

There are also reports of supply cuts from Abu Dhabi. Still, doubts remained that all producers would fully implement planned reductions.

"There will be some countries who will cheat...we expect zero compliance from Baghdad... And we definitely do not expect the Kurds to join in, given that they are autonomous from the federal government," Energy Aspects said in its 2017 oil market outlook, published this week. — Reuters

INDIA'S ECONOMIC GROWTH PROJECTED TO SLOW TO 7.1%

NEW DELHI: India's economic growth was projected to slow to 7.1 percent this fiscal year in the first indicator of the impact of the government's recent currency move.

The estimate released yesterday by the Indian Central Statistics Office for the fiscal year ending March 31 compared to 7.6 percent last year. The estimate is mostly based on data available through October, so likely it does not show the full impact of demonetization, which was announced on Nov. 8.

The GDP growth estimates will be key to India's preparations to unveil the budget for the next fiscal year on Feb 1. Normally full-year GDP estimates are released in February and factor in data until the end of December and the budget is announced at the end of February.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's surprise move to remove India's highest-value banknotes, worth 500 and 1,000 rupees, from circulation has wiped out 86 percent of India's currency. The intent was to fight tax fraud and corruption and



AMRITSAR: Indian visitors withdraw money from their bank accounts with an Aadhaar or Unique Identification (UID) card during a Digi Dhan Mela, held to promote digital payment, in Amritsar yesterday. — AFP

push India toward digitization, but has caused massive disruption for the vast majority of India's people, who earn and spend in cash.

Experts have said the move could push GDP growth to below 6.5 percent this year. "As was

expected, demonetization has hurt activity across all corners of the economy," Pranjul Bhandari Chief Economist, India HSBC Securities and Capital Markets (India) Private Limited, said in a research note Thursday.

Mistry ouster

Meanwhile, India's salt-to-steel conglomerate Tata Sons yesterday cranked up its legal tussle with ousted chairman Cyrus Mistry by calling for a shareholders' meeting to remove him from its board.

"Tata Sons has called for an EGM on February 6th to remove Cyrus Mistry as the director after receiving numerous complaints from shareholders," Debashish Ray, a Tata Sons spokesman, told AFP.

Mistry was sacked as chairman of Tata Sons in October and the group sought his ouster from operating companies including Tata Steel, Tata Motors and TCS. Mistry resigned from the board of six companies last month and dragged Tata Sons and its interim chairman Ratan Tata to the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), saying that he had been unfairly sacked.

Tata Sons, the holding company of India's sprawling \$103 billion Tata Group, retaliated with a legal notice last week accusing him of causing "irreparable harm and damage" to the company by making

public sensitive documents. The increasingly acrimonious battle saw a fresh twist yesterday with Tata's call for an EGM to remove Mistry as director of the board of Tata Sons, his last remaining foothold within the group. Tata said its ex-chief's decision to go public with minutes from board meetings had caused harm to Tata group companies and its shareholders.

"The board of Tata Sons Ltd is of the view that the integrity of the board proceedings is being jeopardized by Mistry's continuation as a Director and the confidentiality of the board decisions and proceedings cannot be ensured as the documents presented to the board have been leaked and made public in a distorted and untruthful manner," Tata Sons said in a note, according to the Press Trust of India news agency.

Mistry's dismissal shocked India's business community and saw family patriarch Ratan Tata take interim charge of the sprawling conglomerate that he led for more than two decades. — Agencies

NISSAN HALTS JOINT DEVELOPMENT OF LUXURY CARS WITH DAIMLER

PARIS: Nissan is halting joint development of luxury cars with Daimler's Mercedes-Benz, sources close to the companies told Reuters, suspending a key project in their seven-year partnership and potentially hitting profitability at a new shared factory in Mexico.

Nissan decided in October its premium Infiniti brand would not use "MFA2", an upgraded Daimler car platform that the companies have jointly funded, in part because Infiniti was not performing well enough to absorb Mercedes technology costs, the sources said. "It wasn't possible to close a deal on the basis of MFA2," said one of the people. "The targets set by Infiniti were too difficult to achieve."

The move could reduce efficiency at a \$1 billion shared factory opening this year in Aguascalientes, Mexico, where the companies had planned to use the same compact car architecture to cut complexity and production costs, two of the sources said. It could also ultimately force Nissan to write down part of a 250 million pound (\$306 million) investment at its UK plant that included Mercedes-based tooling, they added.

Daimler and Nissan pursue joint programs only when "beneficial for both sides", the companies said in separate statements to Reuters, without directly addressing emailed questions about their plans for MFA2 vehicles. Projects are constantly reviewed against targets to account for "developments beyond the control of management", they added, and discussions about joint development of future premium compact cars are ongoing.

Nissan's decision deals a blow to the broad cooperation deal struck between Renault-Nissan boss Carlos Ghosn and his Daimler counterpart Dieter Zetsche in 2010. It also underscores the mixed results of Nissan's battle over almost three decades to transform Infiniti into a significant global player in the lucrative luxury car market.

The decision predates Donald Trump's election as the next US president, the sources said, and was unrelated to campaign vows to penalize Mexican imports that have rattled the auto industry. Ford on Tuesday scrapped a planned compact car plant in the country. Nissan and Daimler are pushing ahead with Aguascalientes, where they will build Infiniti and Mercedes models for the US and other markets from a single assembly line opening in 2017. — Reuters

OFFSHORE YUAN SET FOR BIGGEST WEEKLY GAIN

CHINA BEARS DOWN ON SPECULATORS

SHANGHAI: China's offshore yuan pared some of its sharp gains racked up this week, but is still on course for its biggest weekly rise after Beijing was suspected of pushing up overnight borrowing costs to discourage bearish bets on the currency. Both onshore and offshore yuan have been rallying, driven predominantly by a blow-up in yuan borrowing costs offshore and tighter liquidity. The spread between the two spot rates widened to its highest since 2010.

Chinese authorities are keen to deter speculation in the currency and traders suspect policymakers have sought to prevent it from weakening to the 7-per-dollar level, ahead of US President-elect Donald Trump's inauguration on Jan. 20. Traders said the market had long held a strong "one-way" expectation of depreciation in the yuan and the rally in the currency over the week was the authorities' attempt to alter such views.

It is not clear if Chinese authorities have engineered the spike in yuan borrowing rates in Hong Kong this week. But they had used such a tactic before to support offshore yuan exchange levels and by extension relieve some of the pressure on the yuan onshore, which is trading at more than eight-year lows. But while policymakers may have some success in the short-run in arresting the yuan's descent, pressure will remain on the yuan to depreciate over time, they said.

"I don't think the volatility in the yuan so far this week will reverse the trend of depreciation. But the yuan is at least unlikely to have another rapid fall ahead of the Lunar New Year," said a Shanghai-based trader at a foreign bank, referring to the week-long holiday starting at the end of January.



BEIJING: Chinese 100 yuan notes and one US dollar notes in Beijing. China just raised the exchange rate for the yuan against the US dollar by 0.92 percent from the previous day, the biggest one-day increase in more than 11 years. —AFP

The People's Bank of China (PBOC) set the official midpoint for the yuan, which is allowed to move in a tight band around that guidance rate, at 6.8668 per dollar prior to the market opening, 639 pips or 0.9 percent, firmer than the previous fixing. That made it the largest upward move since the yuan was revalued and taken off a fixed dollar peg in July 2005.

The spot market opened at 6.8789 per dollar and settled at 6.9230 as of 4:30 pm (0830 GMT), 400 pips weaker than the previous late session close and 0.82 percent softer than the midpoint.

The Chinese currency traded 0.6 percent weaker against the dollar late yesterday, but is still around 0.3 percent firmer than last week's close and is on track to log its best week in more than a month. Onshore

yuan's retreat on Friday was a result of increasing dollar demand by companies after the US currency eased off 14-year highs, said a trader at a Chinese bank.

BATTLING YUAN BEARS

Interbank rates for the offshore yuan have been surging this week, suggesting China is keen to squeeze speculators by making it prohibitively expensive to short-sell the yuan. Yuan liquidity conditions in Hong Kong, the main offshore yuan hub, have been tightening. Overnight yuan interbank rates in Hong Kong were fixed at 61.333 percent yesterday, up sharply from 38.335 percent on Thursday, while yuan deposit rates implied by the offshore forward market ballooned to 112 percent before easing. — Reuters

EUROZONE ECONOMY STARTS YEAR IN CHIPPER MOOD

GERMANY OUTLOOK BRIGHT, BUT INDUSTRIAL ORDERS DOWN

BERLIN: Economic sentiment in the eurozone surged to a post-crisis record in December and German industrial orders pointed to a busy final quarter for factories in Europe's powerhouse with the government expecting the upswing to carry into 2017.

The overall strong data, released yesterday by the European Commission in Brussels and the Economy Ministry in Berlin, suggested vibrant business activity in the euro zone at the turn of the year despite increased political uncertainties. It matched strong data this week from purchasing managers and signs of an uptick in inflation.

"The euro zone has started the year on a positive note," ING economist Bert Colijn said, adding that Italy's referendum last month and the subsequent concerns about its banking sector had not dented confidence in the currency bloc as a whole.

"Improving order books, strong employment expectations and strengthening assessments of production in recent months outweigh increased political volatility for the moment."

The European Commission's monthly survey showed economic sentiment rose to 107.8 in December from 106.6 in November - its strongest level since March 2011 and well above the long-term average of 100. Separately, the European Commission's business climate indicator rose to its highest level since June 2011 - above all forecasts in a Reuters poll.

Together with the strong figures

from Wednesday's Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), the data suggested that "the eurozone economy enjoyed a much-needed growth spurt at the end of 2016," Stephen Brown at Capital Economics said. Berenberg economist Holger Schmieding agreed, saying the euro zone economy was now on course for a solid 2017 start after having delivered a robust finish to 2016.

"Together with the potential spillover from a strong fiscal boost in the United States, this introduces some upside risk to our forecast of 1.5 percent growth in 2017 after 1.6 percent last year," Schmieding added.

WEAK EURO

In Germany, industrial orders fell in November after surging in the prior month, but the monthly drop was widely expected and the broader picture remained bright as a weaker euro exchange rate helped to push up demand from countries outside the bloc. Contracts for "Made in Germany" goods were down 2.5 percent on the month, the Economy Ministry said. That was slightly weaker than the consensus forecast of a fall of 2.3 percent.

But revised figures showed orders had surged 5.0 percent in October, meaning that over the two months, bookings rose by 3.5 percent, with industrial orders from countries outside the euro zone jumping 6.4 percent. The Economy Ministry said the results together pointed to "a very favourable development" in the final quarter and

that the expected upswing in the industrial sector was likely to carry into the first quarter of 2017.

Commerzbank economist Marco Wagner said the overall positive picture reflected a slight pick-up in global demand. "The euro has weakened in the past months - that clearly helps to push up demand from outside the bloc too," he said. The German economy is widely seen to have rebounded in the fourth quarter after its quarterly growth rate halved to 0.2 percent in the third due to weaker exports. Commerzbank's Wagner said he expected GDP growth of 0.5 percent in the three months to December and a similar rate in the first quarter of this year. The data also prompted J P Morgan to upgrade its Q4 GDP growth estimate for Germany by 0.5 percentage points to 2.0 percent (q/q seasonally adjusted annual rate).

For 2016 as a whole, the government expects rising private consumption and increased state spending to have propelled growth in Europe's largest economy to 1.8 percent, which would be the strongest in five years. Underpinning this prediction, German retail sales rose by between 1.8 and 2.1 percent on the year in 2016 in real terms, the Federal Statistics Office said on Friday.

Record-high employment, increased job security, rising real wages and ultra-low borrowing costs have boosted the spending power of Germans, making consumption the main driver of growth in a traditionally export-driven economy. — Reuters

US DOLLAR TO EXTEND RALLY IN 2017: POLL

NEW YORK: The US dollar will keep strengthening against the euro with even chances of reaching parity this year, a Reuters poll showed yesterday, on expectations that President-elect Donald Trump's planned tax cuts will force interest rates higher.

It was also expected to strengthen against Britain's pound and to stay buoyant against a basket of major currencies. The findings suggest a good amount of optimism still prevails among currency strategists about the impact Trump's policies will have on growth, inflation and interest rates, especially considering the dollar has rallied almost 4 percent to a near 14-year peak last year.

In the months before the Nov 8 US presidential election, most foreign exchange analysts polled by Reuters said the dollar would decline 2 to 3 percent immediately after a Trump victory, a view they have abandoned altogether.

A little under two-thirds of analysts who answered an extra question in the poll said their forecasts for the dollar were more likely to be low than high. Several of those responses came after minutes from the Federal Reserve's December meeting revealed policymakers had begun factoring in the likelihood of greater fiscal stimulus into their forecasts, suggesting rates could rise faster than the three moves currently predicted by them.

"The Fed's thinking seems to have shifted already with its dots moving higher in December, compared to last year when they mostly moved lower, and that signals a period of dollar strength," said Eric Vitoria, FX strategist at Wells Fargo, the top forecaster for major currencies in Reuters polls in 2016.

"Dots" refers to a scatter chart of where Fed members see rates a year ahead. But Vitoria cautioned the dollar is well into its typical long-term cycle: "So I think there could be some further rise this year but a turning point after that cannot be ruled out either." The latest poll of 60 strategists taken this week forecasts the dollar index, which measures the currency against a basket of six major currencies, at 101.5 by end-2017. That is roughly where it is now, but only after surging over 40 percent since mid-2011. Expectations of further gains have dented the outlook for almost every other currency around the world from Asia to Europe to Latin America, Reuters poll data shows. — Reuters

STOCKS HOLD NEAR 1-1/2 YEAR HIGHS BEFORE US JOBS DATA

LONDON: World stocks held near 1-1/2 year highs and the dollar moved up from a three-week low yesterday, with investors looking ahead to US jobs data to provide clues on the pace of US interest rate rises this year.

MSCI's gauge of the world's stock markets hit its highest since July 2015, taking its gains so far this year to 1.7 percent, helped by this week's generally upbeat economic readings in the US, China and Europe. Asian shares recovered to four-week highs, while the pan-European STOXX 600 dipped 0.3 percent, just 0.7 percent off a 1-year high hit this week.

Wall Street futures indicated a flat open ahead of the release of US jobs data due out at 1330 GMT. A Reuters survey of economists signalled that US employers were likely to have maintained a solid pace of hiring in December while raising wages, putting the economy on a path to stronger growth and further interest rate increases this year.

Non-farm payrolls probably increased by 178,000 jobs last month, the survey showed. Federal Reserve minutes from December released this week showed that almost all Fed policymakers thought the economy could grow more quickly because of fiscal stimulus and many were eyeing faster interest rate rises than previously expected.

Despite this, investors have scaled back expectations for the number of rate rises this year since December, and the dollar is down from this week's 14-year high. The currency slumped 1.6 percent on Thursday to a three-week low of 115.04 yen, its biggest fall for five months. It bounced back 0.5 percent on



TOKYO: People walk by an electronic stock board of a securities firm in Tokyo yesterday. Asian shares wavered yesterday, with the dollar's recent weakness dampening sentiment among investors, who are also staying away from risky positions before the release of key US jobs data. — AP

Friday to 115.93 yen.

Weaker-than-expected private-sector ADP payrolls data on Thursday contributed to the dip in the dollar, despite other strong US data. Investors were looking to jobs figures to see if the bounceback for the dollar could be sustained. "It's likely that a stronger jobs number will, in the shorter term, strengthen the dollar. But (soon) people will start questioning how much of a strong dollar the Fed can stomach," ETF Securities' head of

research and investment strategy, James Butterfill, said.

"Given the sell-off in the dollar, there could be appreciation over the next few weeks, but in the coming few months we could see further dollar weakness."

The dollar's index against a basket of six major currencies was up 0.1 percent at 101.640, down more than two percent from Tuesday's 14-year high of 103.82. The dollar bounced back slightly against the yuan,

which gave up some of the massive gains made in the previous two days despite Friday's strong midpoint fixing by China's central bank.

The recent surge in the dollar and its borrowing costs sparked by Donald Trump's election victory has eased, with the U.S. 10-year yield slipping to one-month lows. Trump's victory had sparked a major realignment in markets. Expectations that his administration will bring tax cuts, higher spending and deregulation have boosted U.S. bond yields and the dollar, to the detriment of many emerging economies that have benefitted from cheap dollar funding and had attracted trillions of dollars from investors shunning low US yields. While US yields have slipped, concerns over rising inflation were prevalent in the eurozone, where government bond yields were set to end the first trading week of the year with their biggest weekly rise for at least a month.

The euro edged down 0.1 percent to \$1.0591 having posted its biggest gain for 7 months in the previous session. The retreat in US bond yields has supported gold this week, and bullion was up 2.3 percent for the week, set for its biggest weekly gain in two months, but down 0.2 percent on the day ahead of the US data.

That weighed on Britain's commodity-heavy FTSE 100, which lingered below record highs. Having closed 2016 at an all-time high, the British blue-chip index has hit two new record peaks this week already, but was last down 0.1 percent. — Reuters

GOLD SLIPS FROM 1-MONTH HIGH AHEAD OF US JOBS DATA

LONDON: Gold slipped yesterday from a one-month high touched in the previous session as traders cut bets on higher prices ahead of US jobs data that will offer clues on the pace of possible US interest rate hikes this year. Spot gold was down 0.4 percent at \$1,175.99 per ounce at 1232 GMT.

The metal was still 2.1 percent higher this week, its biggest weekly rise in two months, helped by a recent weakening of the dollar and a retreat in US bond yields. But with markets uncertain ahead of Donald Trump's inauguration on Jan. 20, investors turned cautious after gold reached its highest since Dec. 5 at \$1,184.90 on Thursday.

"Any profit that can be booked at this early stage is welcomed by most, so that's why we're seeing a scaling back a bit," said Saxo Bank analyst Ole Hansen. US gold futures were down 0.4 percent, at \$1,176.6 per ounce.

Investors were focused on US non-farm payrolls data due for release at 1330 GMT, which is expected to show job gains of 178,000 in December. Positive data usually puts pressure on gold prices, as it increases bets on US interest rate hikes that would increase the opportunity cost of holding non-yielding bullion.

"A respectable non-farm payrolls report may not be enough to immedi-

ately revive a broad USD uptrend," said Credit Agricole analysts in a note. "It should help reassure the markets that the fundamental reasoning behind a more hawkish Fed outlook this year largely remains in place."

The Fed has indicated it will press ahead with further interest rate hikes this year after its second rate increase in a decade last month. Hansen said lower US bond yields and the weaker dollar, which makes gold cheaper for holders of other currencies, had bolstered sentiment.

"If we can manage to hold above \$1,162 then the market has the potential of moving up towards testing the

really big area of resistance, which is just above \$1,200," he said.

Among other precious metals, spot silver was down 0.1 percent at \$16.45, having hit a peak of \$16.71, its highest since Dec. 15, in the previous session. Platinum was 0.3 percent lower at \$964.7, putting it on track for a gain of 7.2 percent this week. The metal touched a near 8-week high of \$975.80 on Thursday.

Palladium was up 0.4 percent at \$741.5, after hitting a 4-week high of \$747.80 in the previous session. Palladium has risen 9.2 percent this week, its biggest gain since the week ending July 1. — Reuters

FORMER DEBT PARIHAH ARGENTINA TO JOIN EMERGING BOND INDEX

LONDON: Argentina, a pariah among international debt investors until last year, will join JPMorgan's flagship GBI-EM index group for emerging currency bonds following government measures to ease access to the country's financial markets.

The GBI-EM Global Diversified index is tracked by investment funds managing \$185 billion, and Argentina will have an estimated 1.16 percent weight when it enters at the end of February, JPM said in a note to clients late on Thursday.

That implies fairly significant inflow from index-tracking funds to Argentina which, according to JPM, will be the first country in four years to enter the GBI-EM.

The news will be welcomed by Argentina's government which has struggled to attract investment, despite sweeping reforms by centre-right President Mauricio Macri who took office at the end of 2015 with a vow to revive an economy in crisis. Argentina fought a long legal battle with hedge funds over unpaid debt resulting from its record \$100 billion default in 2002, which locked it out of global debt markets for years.

That dispute was settled last year. But while Macri has also floated the peso, removed capital curbs and brought Argentina back to the global bond market, it remains mired in recession with 40 percent inflation. Macri sacked his finance minister last month.

New Treasury Minister Nicolas Dujovne took fresh steps this week to revive investment, removing a mandatory 120-day holding period for foreigners wanting to repatriate funds from Latin America's third biggest economy.

JPM said peso-denominated bonds maturing 2021, 2023 and 2026 would join the GBI-EM "following a series of measures implemented recently to facilitate access to the FX and government bond market for foreign investors".

Argentine debt will also be eligible for inclusion in JPM's GBI-EM (Narrow) Diversified and the GBI-EM Broad Diversified series with estimated weights of 3.34 and 0.78 percent respectively, JPM said.

"(Index entry) is a significant move for Argentina and it will help bring down borrowing costs. It will also provide support for the peso," said Jakob Christensen, head of emerging markets research at Danske Bank.

"It's been cut out of financial markets for many years so it hasn't been able to leverage itself as (much) as other emerging markets, which is a good thing."

JPM now plans to assess Argentine peso non-deliverable forwards for eligibility to enter its ELMI Plus index of emerging currency short-term rates. If the currency derivative meets liquidity and transparency criteria, Argentina will have a 1.4 percent weight in the ELMI Plus.

Separately, Argentine stocks could also re-join the most widely used emerging equity benchmark from MSCI, which is tracked by around \$1.4 trillion in funds. MSCI had moved Argentina out of that index to the smaller frontier market index in 2009 due to curbs on capital movement but it has proposed reclassifying the country as an emerging market again, with the outcome due to be announced in June. —Reuters



In this Dec 15, 2009, file photo, President Barack Obama speaks during a visit to Home Depot in Alexandria, Virginia. —AP

FINAL JOBS REPORT FOR OBAMA PRESIDENCY SEEN TO BE SOLID

US GAINED 15.4 MILLION JOBS OVER 74 CONSECUTIVE MONTHS

WASHINGTON: The last major economic report card for President Barack Obama was to arrive late yesterday with the release of the December jobs figures. The report will cap a long record of robust hiring after the Great Recession, though one that left many people feeling left out.

When Obama took office in January 2009, the economy was hemorrhaging jobs from employers who were panicking in the face of plummeting demand and a financial crisis that froze credit. When the bleeding finally stopped in February 2010, 8.7 million jobs had vanished.

The unemployment rate peaked at a quarter-century high of 10 percent in October 2009. Just over seven years later, it has reached a nine-year low of 4.6 percent. Hiring was slow at first but soon accelerated and has been consistently solid through most of the recovery. The US has gained 15.4 million jobs over 74 consecutive months - the longest streak of job gains on record.

December is sure to extend the streak, though likely at a more modest pace than prevailed a couple of years ago: Economists have forecast that employers added 173,000 jobs in December, according to data provider FactSet. The unemployment rate is thought to have risen slightly to 4.7 percent.

Weak spots remain in the job market: A smaller share of Americans either have a job or are looking for one than before the recession. That is particularly true for men. Many men, especially those without a college education, have suffered as the job market has shifted away from blue collar work such as manufacturing and mining toward industries that either require higher skills, like information technology, or that pay less and are dominated by women, such as health care.

The unemployment rate is back to healthy levels. But the proportion of Americans in their prime working years who are either working or looking for work remains far below its pre-recession level. When people stop looking for a job, they're no longer counted as unemployed. Those "dropouts" have contributed to a declining unemployment rate over the past eight years.

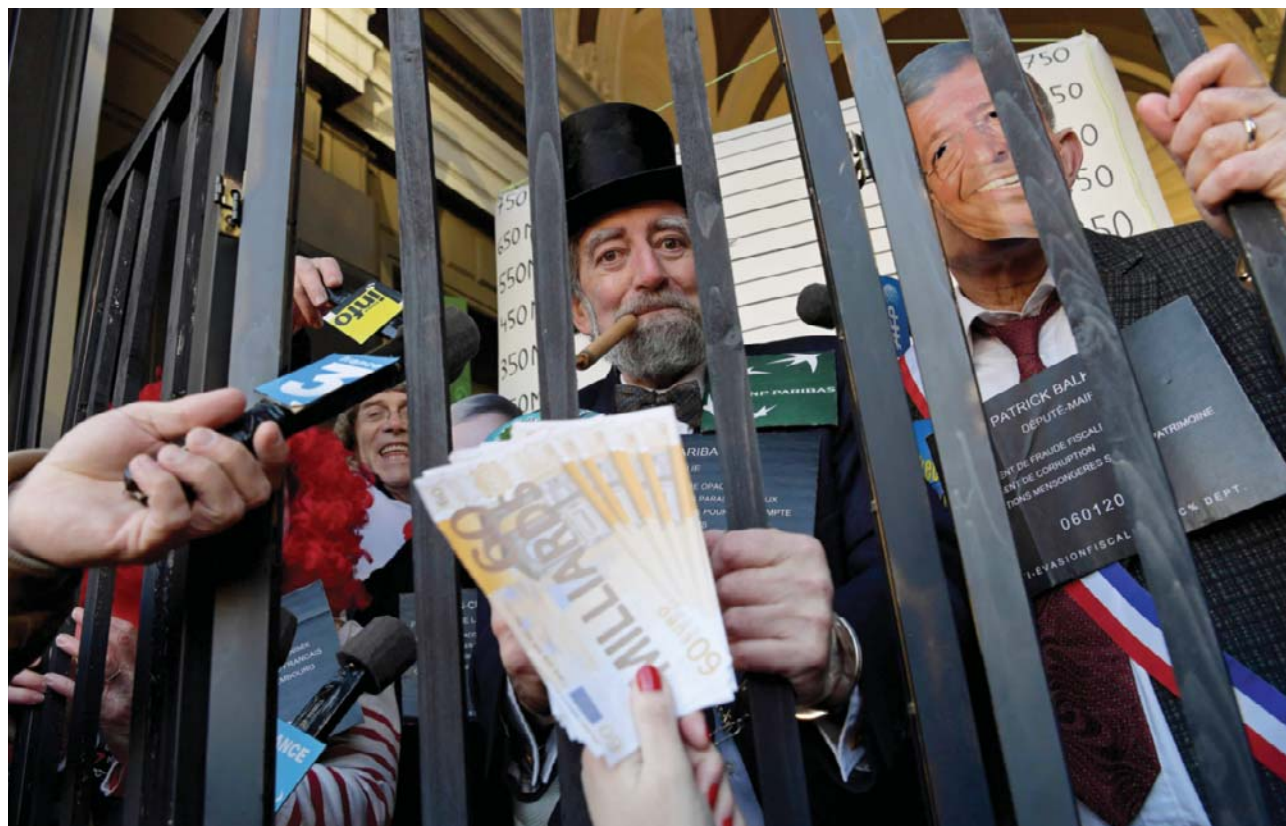
President-elect Donald Trump spotlighted that trend as a shortcoming in Obama's record and charged during the election campaign that the unemployment rate was a "hoax." He now faces the steep challenge of bringing back men who have left the workforce.

Since the election, Trump has successfully pressured several manufacturers to keep some jobs in the United States, including Ford and United Technologies'

air conditioning unit Carrier. In the meantime, the number of factory jobs has continued to decline. Manufacturers are struggling to adapt to a strong dollar and weak overseas growth, which have combined to reduce exports. Factories have cut 54,000 jobs in the past 12 months. According to payroll processor ADP, the bleeding continued in December, when factories shed 9,000 jobs.

The steady rise in restaurant, hotel and retail jobs has also increased the ranks of part-time workers who would prefer full-time work. Those industries disproportionately hire part-timers.

More than 5.6 million people worked part time in November but wanted full-time work, a big improvement since the recession. Yet seven years into the recovery, that figure is still well above pre-recession levels of about 4.4 million. Other recent economic data have been more encouraging. Consumers and small businesses have become more confident since the election, which could lead to increased spending and hiring. And purchases of costly items like homes and cars have been strong, though they're threatened by higher interest rates. But if hiring and wage gains continue, they could offset at least some of the depressive effects of higher borrowing costs. — AP



PARIS: Transactions and Citizen's Action (ATTAC) dressed as prisoners and mocking characters (behind bars, from left) Ronald McDonald, a banker and President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker as they stand in the premises of a BNP bank branch as they stage a protest against tax avoidance in Paris yesterday. —AFP

LE PEN PLAN RAISES QUESTIONS OVER FRANCE'S EURO DEBT PILE

CORPORATE BONDS ISSUED UNDER FOREIGN LAW LEFT IN LIMBO

LONDON: Should France ditch the single currency under a president Le Pen, redenominating nearly 2 trillion euros of government bonds in "new francs" could be legally straightforward, but hundreds of billions of corporate debt would be left in limbo.

The crux of the issue is that the sovereign debt is subject to French laws that could be changed by the government to prevent a currency switch triggering a default, while a large chunk of the 1 trillion euros (\$1.1 trillion) of bonds issued by major French companies are governed by foreign legislation.

Such a scenario became a possibility this week after French presidential hopeful Marine Le Pen - one of two candidates likely to make a May election run-off - said she would take France out of the euro if she won and denominate its national debt in a new currency.

Polls suggest the leader of the far-right National Front will eventually lose to a mainstream candidate, tipped to be conservative Francois Fillon, and also indicate that despite strong misgivings about the EU and the eurozone, most French voters want to remain members of both.

But after the Brexit vote and Donald Trump's US victory, few people are taking anything for granted. Le Pen did not specify whether she wants to redenominate all of the 1.9 billion of existing euro debt, or only new bond sales.

Lawyers contacted by Reuters said the government could convert its existing debt into a new French franc without major legal challenges. "Given that most French government debt, if not all of it, is governed by French law then that would be an easy change for the government to make," said Matthew

Hartley, a debt capital markets partner at London-based law firm Allen & Overy.

"Similar to when the euro was introduced, they could introduce legislative provisions stipulating that any change in currency won't give rise to any default under these contracts." France's debt management agency AFT, part of the French treasury, declined to comment on the subject.

CORPORATE QUAGMIRE

But while France could pass a law that would allow all its debt to be redenominated - a fundamental change to the terms of the bonds - with legal impunity, that legislation is unlikely to be recognised by courts in London or New York, for example.

Of around 1 trillion euros of French corporate bonds outstanding, more than 50 percent is governed by foreign laws, according to Thomson Reuters' data - mainly English legislation because many investors are more familiar with it. Around 60 percent of French government bonds are also held by foreigners, but as they see less chance of a sovereign default and are likely to have less bargaining power with the state anyway, they are less concerned about the underlying law.

If the French private sector had problems servicing its legacy euro-denominated bonds with a new currency, it could lead to mass defaults that could be devastating for the domestic economy and the region, where France is the euro zone's second-biggest economy.

In Italy, one of the bloc's most indebted states, politicians campaigning to leave the euro zone have argued that their legal system would also allow a redenomination of its sovereign debt

to occur without triggering a formal default. A similar debate was last aired when Greece was on the brink of leaving the bloc in 2015 but its myriad debt issued under different legal jurisdictions was thought to have made redenomination problematic.

GREATER RISK

For the foreign investors who hold France's sovereign debt, the lack of a legal recourse to redenomination would be compounded by the perils of inheriting assets with much greater exchange rate risk - especially for investors from other euro nations who currently assume no currency risk at all when investing in France.

As a result, if the prospect of France leaving the euro zone was seen as significant, many may not wait around to find out the impact on French debt.

"Redenomination might be the lesser of the two problems ... however this could still damage France's market reputation and adversely affect risk and pricing," another senior financial lawyer told Reuters on condition of anonymity, adding that all France's government debt could be changed legally via retrospective legislation. Investors who have bought insurance against a French default via the credit default swaps market - are also unlikely to get paid out if a redenomination takes place.

Definitions from ISDA, the market association whose members effectively decide whether a default has occurred to trigger these contracts, state that conversion from euros into another currency would not constitute a restructuring if it is the result of action taken by a government and there is a freely available market rate of conversion. —Reuters

FORECASTING 'IN CRISIS' ON BREXIT: BOE ECONOMIST

LONDON: Economic forecasting "is to some degree in crisis", the Bank of England's chief economist has said after it misjudged the fallout from Britain's vote in favour of Brexit.

Britain's economy has performed far better than expected since the country voted in June to exit the European Union, although economists are predicting a tougher ride in 2017.

"It is fair cop to say the profession is to some degree in crisis," Bank of England (BoE) chief economist Andy Haldane told an event hosted by think-tank Institute for Government, according to the Press Association news agency yesterday. The BoE "had foreseen a sharper slowdown in the economy than has happened in common with every other, almost every other mainstream macro forecaster", Haldane added. He called it "pretty much business as usual" for the UK economy despite warnings from Bank of England governor Mark Carney that the referendum outcome could have caused a recession on businesses delaying investment projects.

"The spending power in people's pockets was not materially dented during the course of last year," Haldane said. But he did not hold back from offering a forecast for the coming year.

"Do we think that (the economic climate) will last? Well there are reasonable grounds I would say, for thinking that this year might be a somewhat more difficult year for the consumer than was last year." British Prime Minister Theresa May has given a March deadline for triggering Article 50 of the EU's Lisbon Treaty that will formally begin the withdrawal process.

Speaking Thursday, British Finance Minister Philip Hammond said he hoped to maintain strong economic ties with the European Union even if the Brexit negotiations were set to be difficult.

"Of course the negotiations will be tough and they will be complicated," Hammond told CNBC Arabia television. —AFP

EASYJET LIFTS PASSENGER NUMBERS TO RECORD

LONDON: Budget carrier EasyJet said yesterday it transported a record 74.5 million passengers last year thanks to low oil prices and full planes, but it slipped further behind industry leader Ryanair. The 6.6 increase kept EasyJet in second place in Europe in terms of passengers carried behind low-cost rival Ryanair, but the Irish no-frills airline on Thursday reported a 15 percent gain 117 passengers in 2016, also a record.

An EasyJet spokeswoman said the acquisition of new Airbus A320 aircraft helped it offer more destinations and attract more clients.

The airline kept the percentage of filled seats nearly steady at a high 91.5 percent, with low fuel prices allowing it to offer attractive fares. However the drop in the value of the pound after Britain voted to leave the European Union has hit the airline as much of its costs are in dollars or euros.

Its heavy exposure to the uncertain British economy and weak pound saw investors shun the airline's shares, which fell 42 percent last year, a drop much worse than its rivals, according to Bloomberg. The airline is also exploring obtaining EU operating certification to ensure smooth operations once Britain does leave the bloc.

EasyJet didn't make any forecasts for passenger numbers in 2017, but has said previously it expects a 9 percent increase in the number of seats offered during its 2017 fiscal year that ends in October. — AFP



An Airbus plane of British low cost airline EasyJet as it takes off under heavy cloud in Geneva. — AFP

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Award-winning Indian actor Om Puri dies of heart attack

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Emirati men walk with their camels across the Liwa desert, some 250 kilometers west of the Gulf emirate of Abu Dhabi, during the Liwa 2017 Moreeb Dune Festival. — AFP





Brad Pitt saw some of his children over Christmas

The 53-year-old actor is currently allowed supervised visitation with his kids, Maddox, 15, Pax, 13, Zahara, 11, Shiloh, 10, and eight-year-old twins Knox and Vivienne - under the terms of a temporary agreement between him and estranged wife Angelina Jolie, and though it was initially thought he didn't see his brood during the festive season, it seems that isn't the case. A source told People magazine that the 'Big Short' star had "one visit with several of the younger kids." Though it is unclear when the visit took place, over the New Year, the children were seen skiing and sightseeing with their 41-year-old mother in Crested Butte, Colorado. It was previously claimed the 'Fury' actor was left feeling "broken" after having spent Christmas without his kids. A source said: "He desperately misses having his kids with him for Christmas and New Year. "He's broken down in tears so many times - he's not ashamed to cry anymore. Brad is like a broken man." Earlier this week, Angelina slammed Brad in court documents while agreeing to his request that documents relating to their custody battle be sealed from public view. In the documents, she accused Brad - who was accused of "getting physical" with Maddox on a private jet last September of lashing out because he's "terrified that the public will learn the truth." The documents claim the 'Tree of Life' star is trying to "deflect from [his] own role in the media storm which has engulfed the parties' children."

Ed Sheeran doesn't own a phone anymore

The 'Thinking Out Loud' hit maker has ditched his cell because he was addicted to Twitter and Facebook and he was alienating himself from real-life conversations as he spent hours scrolling social media sites. The 25 year old star who unveiled his two new singles 'Castle on the Hill' and 'Shape of You' from his third studio album yesterday has vowed to spend less time on social media and will simply be answering emails on his iPad instead. Speaking on the BBC Radio 1 Breakfast Show with Scott Mills and Chris Stark, he said: "I literally don't have a phone. I just do emails on an iPad. I have quite an addictive personality and I was just kind of glued to it the whole time. I wasn't having conversations with anyone. "So my New Year's resolution was to get off social media and I got rid of my phone. And then I came back and did the tweets on the iPad and then left it and I haven't really been checking it and it has been really nice." The 'I See Fire' singer - who recently returned to social media to tease details of his third studio album after taking a year off - has promised fans that he won't be abandoning Twitter and Instagram completely. Asked if his tweeting days are over, he said: "No. I will be on social media, but I won't be constantly glued to it. I will go to it once or twice a week to tweet or do a Snapchat." When he announced his departure from social media last year, Ed said he would be taking a break from his phone and emails.



LAMAR ODOM PLANS ON DOING A REALITY SHOW

The 37-year-old basketball player spent 35 days in a rehabilitation centre in San Diego as a preventative measure as he feared the 10-year anniversary of his son Jayden's death, coupled with the finalization of his divorce from Khloe Kardashian, could drive him back to drugs, and although he was only released on Thursday, he's already thinking about his next move. When asked by TMZ what he plans to do next, Lamar replied: "Just live life, bro. I might do a reality show." And the star is confident that his time in the facility has made him a changed man. Asked how he found his rehab experience, he told the publication: "Awesome. Life changing." A source previously claimed Lamar who suffered a near fatal overdose when he collapsed in a brothel in October 2015 - voluntarily went to rehab to help him "start fresh for the New Year". The insider said: "He went to continue making sure he stays sober and on the right path. It was something he chose to do. He did it for his kids and also wanted to feel 100 percent again. He did not relapse, but felt like he wanted to get away and start fresh for the New Year." Lamar's attorney, Walter Mosley, previously revealed the sportsman - who has children Destiny, 18, and Lamar Jr., 14, with former partner Liza Morales - was doing well in rehab and was working towards becoming a better person when he completed treatment. He said: "It's 100% of bettering himself. Being a better father to his kids, being a better friend and just taking responsibility and live a more healthy and



fulfilled life. There's a lot to live for. He's young. He has the rest of his life in front of him. He has a lot to look forward to."



Nicki Minaj officially splits from Meek Mill

The 'Anaconda' hit maker has called time on her relationship with the 29 year old rapper and has decided to fly solo and focus all of her energy on her music, which she has teased will be out "really soon." Taking to Twitter to address the rumors, she wrote: "To confirm, yes I am single. Focusing on my work and looking forward to sharing it with you guys really soon. Have a blessed New Year. Love u (sic)" Rumors of their split run riot after she posted a cryptic message on her Instagram account in December by quoting Beyonce's 2011 break-up ballad 'Best Thing I Never Had.' She wrote: "Thank God u blew it. Thank God I dodged the bullet. I'm so over u. Baby good looking out. #BestThingUNeverHad. (sic)" The suspicious post led to Meek - whose real name is Robert Rihmeek Williams - deleting his Instagram account completely. The couple first started dating in 2015 and a few months later hinted that they were engaged when the 34-year-old beauty was spotted wearing a huge diamond sparkler on her ring finger. However, she later confirmed that she and Meek were not planning to get hitched and the hip-hop artist is merely "this boy that likes me." And, although the wound is still sore, it seems Nicki is not yet ready to get herself back out there as she recently admitted she doesn't want to get with any guys that are just in it for the games.

Ryan Seacrest thinks Mariah Carey's NYE performance was unfortunate



The 46-year-old singer was performing in Times Square, New York, on Saturday as part of 'Dick Clark's New Year's Rockin' Eve with Ryan Seacrest' when she was plagued with technical difficulties that caused her to storm off stage but the 42-year-old presenter who has hosted the spectacular since 2006 - insists the situation could have happened to anyone because working on live TV is so "complicated." He said: "I'm just catching up on all this, but there's been a lot reported about the performance in Times Square for Mariah. And, you know, just to talk about it for a second, it is difficult to perform in Times Square. "She had done it before because she was the first musical guest that we had had live when I started doing the show years-about a decade ago. So she had seen it. She knows what Times Square's about. It's complicated. Imagine every single outlet-TV outlet-in the world is there, so there's all kinds of technical things going on. "For

Mariah, I was up there at the stage to introduce her on the same stage she performs on. And it's live television, and things happen on live TV, and, you know, if something goes wrong, it's unfortunate for anybody." However, the former 'American Idol' host admitted he didn't actually see the disastrous performance because he had to run to a different stage in order to lead the countdown to the turning of the year. Speaking on his 'On Air With Ryan Seacrest' radio show, he said: "Interestingly, from where I was, I remember after I introduced the artist, I immediately physically moved from that stage back down several blocks to the other stage. So I didn't have a visual." But while the 'Hero' singer's management team have laid the blame at Dick Clark Productions, Ryan insists producers would never have set out to make Mariah look bad. "It's just unfortunate that it comes to all of this. It's a night of celebration and a night of fun."

Justin Bieber's neighbor demands more money

The 'Sorry' hit maker has already paid out \$90,000 to Jeffrey Schwarz for the attack on his Calabasas home, but the man is seeking further damages after accusing the 22 year old star of "terrorizing" him and causing emotional distress with the egg attack, alleged spitting and fight challenges. And according to TMZ, Jeffrey and his wife Suzanne claim the 'What Do You Mean?' singer used anti-Semitic taunts, and their distress has led them to suffer headaches, stomachaches and sleepless nights. Lawyers acting for Justin have asked the judge to limit any possible damages to \$25,000, but new legal documents filed by his former neighbor claim the singer's representatives have secretly offered more to settle the case. It was recently claimed the 'Never Say Never' hit maker was attempting to block the release of a deposition video relating to the case.



Lawyers for the star were said to believe the release of the video could create an unwelcome storm around Justin, who recently courted controversy when he lashed out at a fan in Barcelona, Spain, after he reached into his car and tried to grab him. Last summer, Justin demanded his former neighbors undergo a mental evaluation to prove they're battling psychological issues as a result of their feud with him. Following the egging incident, the 'Baby' hitmaker - who moved out of the gated community in 2015 was sentenced to probation after he pleaded no contest to misdemeanor vandalism. He was also told to carry out five days of community service at a homeless shelter and fork out an estimated \$80,000 in damages to his neighbors. He was also ordered to undergo anger management counseling.

Naomi Campbell was attacked in Paris in 2012

The 46-year-old supermodel has a lot of sympathy for Kim Kardashian West - who was robbed at gunpoint in the French capital in October - because she understood the ordeal after a terrifying experience of her own. She said: "I've gotten to know Kim in the last few years, and she's a really great girl. "I sympathize with her a lot. "I kept mine on the down low, but in 2012 I was attacked in Paris. They followed me from the airport.



They attacked me. They opened my car door and said, 'Naomi Campbell, we're going to kill you.' I didn't make it so public; I didn't want it to be. I think there's a picture of me in a wheelchair at the time. "I had taken a plane from Switzerland to Paris, which is like one hour. I didn't call security - it was just a quick trip." Naomi had a lucky escape and is thankful she realized there was something "weird" about the situation before anything bad happened to her. And Naomi claims she and Kim aren't the only high-profile stars to have been subjected to such terrifying experiences.

AWARD-WINNING INDIAN ACTOR OM PURI DIES OF HEART ATTACK

'The end of an era, the legacy lives on'

MUMBAI: Om Puri, the acclaimed Indian actor who appeared in hit films including "Gandhi", "City of Joy" and "East is East", died yesterday after suffering a heart attack. The award-winning character actor, whose career ranged from art house Indian films to Hollywood epics, died of a heart attack at his home in Mumbai, a family member told the Press Trust of India. He was 66. "It's really a great loss," the veteran



Nandita Puri, wife of the award-winning character actor Om Puri, is consoled by relatives as she leaves the hospital in Mumbai yesterday.

scriptwriter Javed Akhtar told PTI. "Wonderful person, great actor and with such impressive body of work, right from Satyajit Ray to any commercial Hindi film to films in US and Pakistan," he said, referring to the renowned Indian director.

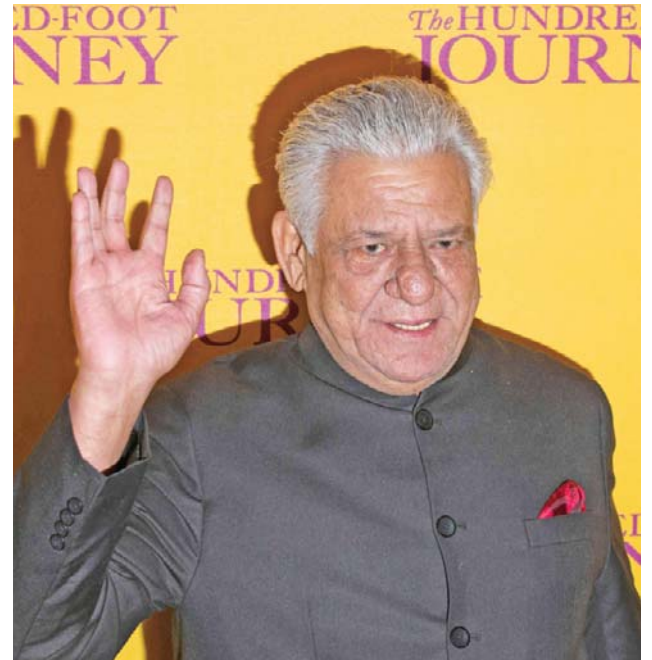
Bollywood stars tweeted their shock at the news, which broke early Friday, with Amitabh Bachchan saying he was "shocked" to learn of Puri's death. "A dear friend, a lovable colleague and an exceptional talent ... in grief!" he said. Actress Priyanka Chopra said it was "The end of an era", adding, "the legacy lives on." Puri made his debut in the mid-1970s before going on to star in a number of major Hindi hits as well as, controversially, in some Pakistani movies.

He was known in India for his role in edgy art house movies such as Aakrosh (1980) and Ardh Satya (1982), for which he won the National Indian Film Award for Best Actor. But he also acted in major Hollywood hits, featuring alongside the likes of Jack Nicholson, Tom Hanks and Patrick Swayze. "Though I did try to resist commercial films for quite some time, I succumbed to it finally as money was equally important as art," Puri wrote in his autobiography. "But as an artist I never compromised on what I had to do on-screen, even if the film was not up to the standard."

Controversy

Puri appeared in a number of British films, notably Richard Attenborough's 1982 epic on the life of India's independence movement leader Mahatma Gandhi. He starred in the 1999 Bafta-winning comedy "East is East" as a fish-and-chip shop owner who struggles to get his British family to follow the strict Pakistani customs he is used to. He was awarded the Padma Shri, the fourth highest civilian award in India, for his services to the film industry and in 2004 received an honorary OBE for contributions to British cinema.

The award-winning actor made an impact on the other side of the Atlantic too, appearing alongside Nicholson in "Wolf" (1994) and Val Kilmer in "The Ghost and the Darkness" (1996). In 2007 he played Pakistani general Muhammad Zia ul Haq in Hollywood film "Charlie Wilson's War", which starred Hanks and Julia Roberts. Puri—who was born in Ambala, now in Haryana state—to a Punjabi family in 1950, also starred oppo-



This file photograph shows Indian Bollywood actor Om Puri waving as he attends the UK Gala Screening of the film, The Hundred Foot Journey, in central London. — AFP photos

site legendary British actress Helen Mirren in the 2014 film "The Hundred Foot Journey."

He was sometimes in the headlines for the wrong reasons, enduring an acrimonious and well-publicized split from his wife Nandita Puri. In October he was accused of insulting Indian soldiers shortly after 19 were killed in an attack on an army base in Kashmir when he asked, "who had asked the soldiers to join the army?" India blamed Pakistan for the raid and Puri was actually arguing against banning Pakistani artists from working in Bollywood films, but his comments sparked a furor on social media. — AFP

The little something that makes France's New Year cake

All over France this month millions of children will excitedly bite into a flaky pastry cake hoping to come upon a tiny toy or trinket. Even in these play-safe times, when you might think parents would be reluctant to expose their child to a choking risk, the post-Christmas Twelfth Night tradition of sharing a "Galette des Rois" (Pancake of the Kings) shows no signs of flagging. More than 30 million cakes will be devoured in France in January, and millions more in neighboring Switzerland, Belgium and Luxembourg, usually washed down with a bottle of fizzy cider.

Whoever comes upon the "feve"—a token or figurine hidden in the frangipane filling—is proclaimed the king or queen of the feast, and crowned with a cardboard diadem that comes with each cake. The lucky monarch is supposed to be blessed with good luck for the New Year, but a recent survey found most French people cheat to make sure a child gets the honor. "Feve" (pronounced "fev") literally means a dried bean which was

historically baked into the cake.

But by the late 19th-century the beans were replaced by porcelain figurines, some of which have become highly collectable. To the horror of purists, more and more plastic charms are being used for the celebration, which traditionally marked the Christian feast of the Epiphany yesterday, when the three Magi were supposed to have visited the Christ child. But in a small village in the Vosges region of Lorraine in eastern France two middle-aged sisters are doggedly holding out against the tsunami of plastic knickknacks. Christel and Muriel Nex are among the very last to make the "feves" by hand.

Tiny treasures

The pair turn out between 40,000 and 50,000 charms a year between them, with Christel said that "no two are ever exactly the same." "We don't have any machines, and we want to keep up the quality, so we can't increase our production any more than that," the 51-year-old added. Each clay "feve" takes

several days to make from the molding and sculpting to the painting and final firing. In the past these tiny treasures were often passed down through families to be baked into the cake each year.

These days, however, the galettes are rarely homemade. The sisters took over from their parents in 2005 supplying bakeries across the country with a range of traditional and child-orientated figurines, many carrying company logos. They range from little animals to the baby Jesus and a Kama Sutra collection for the more daring. With collectors always on the lookout for rarities, they introduce new designs every year.

Twelfth Night traditions

The custom of hiding trinkets or coins in Twelfth Night cakes is not confined to France. Similar traditions exist across Europe from the ringed Spanish "roscon de reyes", to the Portuguese "bolo rei" and the Provencal "gâteau des Rois" eaten in the South of France. These brioche-style cakes decorated

with dried fruit were clearly the inspiration for the "king cakes" of the American Deep South and the Latin American "rosca de reyes".

Historian Nadine Cretin believes the practice dates back to the Roman mid-winter Saturnalian feasts when a "king was elected by the throwing of dice to preside over domestic banquets." Parallel customs exist across Eastern Europe and the Balkans with the Greeks ushering in the New Year with the "vassilopita" (or king pie) which often contained a gold sovereign.

However, the tradition can leave a bitter taste in the mouth in Spain, where the feast of the three kings is still bigger than Christmas. If you are unlucky enough to get the "feve" there you are supposed to pay for the cake, while the king or queen is the person who finds the accompanying trinket. In Ireland the Epiphany was known as "Women's Christmas" and is remembered more for its gastronomic horrors rather its treats, with men left at home to cook while women went to the pub. — AFP



Wastebusters Rastislav Krul (L) and Veronika Krul pose for a picture as they clean the surroundings of a lake in Rovinka, in the suburb of the Slovak capital Bratislava. — AFP photos

SLOVAK 'WASTEBUSTERS' ON ANTI-LITTER CRUSADE

ROVINKA, Slovakia: Slovak financial analyst Rastislav Krul and his wife once waited out an hour-long traffic jam by picking up several bags worth of rubbish around a rest area off the motorway. "No one joined in. People just watched us from their cars," recalls the 30-year-old, who has launched an anti-litter campaign from his western village of Rovinka.

"For us time flew by, for them it went slowly," he adds, picking up yet another plastic bottle on a weekend stroll around a lake. Their idea is simple: anyone who picks up at least one item of trash a day qualifies as a Wastebuster. Since last year, they have been spreading their philosophy online. Their Facebook page now has thousands of followers, who post stories and photos of cleaning up the streets and countryside. Most of the comments are positive.

Rastislav says setting an example is like a long-distance run. No instant results but he is optimistic about change down the line. "When people see us picking up trash, they never join in. But I think it does make them start to reflect on what we're doing," he says. "Maybe it'll stop them from tossing their next

beer can or bubble gum wrapper." In the same vein, the 1 Piece of Rubbish campaign, launched by British expatriate Eddie Platt in the southern French city of Marseille has won cyber fans around the world from Buenos Aires to New York. Participants post selfies on a social network each time they pick up a piece of litter and put it in the rubbish bin.

Boss on board

Their crusade began two years ago, when Rastislav was living in the capital Bratislava and overheard his neighbors complain about litter on the block. "I realized that if fewer people complained and instead each picked up one piece of garbage off the ground and binned it, our city would not be as polluted," he said. He, himself, began doing so and has been picking up litter every day since. He also encouraged his wife, Veronika, 30, to join in. "Before I met Rasto, I thought garbage on the ground didn't concern me. He's shown me that it doesn't take any extraordinary effort to pick up trash," she says.

"Now it's become a part of me," she adds, pointing to the plastic bottles, beer cans, empty cigarette cartons and

sweet wrappers poking out of the grass. She says they do not stop at one piece of trash a day. "When we go for a walk, bike ride or hike, we usually take some gloves and bags with us. Then if we see something we can just stop, pick it up and walk on." Rastislav has even managed to win over his boss: "When he's out with his kids, they sometimes pick up trash."

Anywhere, anytime

Slovakians rank among the least worst offenders for piling up rubbish in the European Union, according to Eurostat figures, which showed each of the country's 5.4 million inhabitants produced about 321 kilos of household rubbish in 2014. How much of it ends up thrown out on to the streets is hard to say, but the couple feel they still have plenty to do and say the Wastebusters project is a good option for those who hate organized cleaning. "They don't have to plan anything or specifically go somewhere to pick up trash," he says. "You can do it on your way home, on the way to the cinema or while waiting for the bus."

"One person's a litterer, another's a cleaner. You drop litter, I pick it up." "Laws

and fines don't solve anything. It's people's mentalities that should change." Last month, the Slovak Wastebusters launched a website to further spread the word. They also plan to provide tips and tricks on how to reduce waste.

"I took the first step by no longer buying bottled water for work. Instead, I brought a glass water bottle that I fill up and use," says Rastislav. Their main piece of advice, however, is one that may sound like a no-brainer but makes a world of difference: all it takes is one piece of garbage a day. — AFP

BBC sparks a stir with IS 'Real Housewives' sketch

The BBC sparked a social media storm after screening a comedy sketch called "The Real Housewives of ISIS", satirizing the women lured into joining the Islamic State jihadist group. The two-minute sketch, which featured in the comedy show "Revoluting", has been seen more than 21 million times and drawn nearly 90,000 comments on the BBC 2 television channel's Facebook page since airing on Tuesday. The reaction has varied between those who found it "sick" and "tasteless", causing "pain and hurt", to others who found it "hilarious", and lauded it for mocking the "violent, pedophilic, regressive death cult" of Islamic State.

"The Real Housewives" US reality television franchise shows the lives of affluent women in various cities. In the "Revoluting" sketch, they are replaced by black-clad British wives of Islamic State jihadists who discuss their outfits, including two women turning up in matching suicide vests. "It's only three days till the beheading, and I've got no idea what I'm going to wear," complains one. "Ali bought me a new chain which is eight foot long, so I can almost get outside, which is great!" says another, attached to an oven.

While the BBC declined to comment, Jolyon Rubinstein, one of the duo behind "Revoluting", which satirises current affairs, posted on Twitter: "Why shouldn't we mock female jihadists?" His co-creator Heydon Prowse said he was "glad the nation (is) discussing this." Both retweeted the comments of Ali Official, a British comedian of Bangladeshi descent, who said: "The sketch ridicules online grooming and draws attention to an important topic. The whole point of satire is to expose stupidity. "Satire like this highlights the absurdity of those that recruit and get recruited for ISIS." — AFP





In this photograph, young Sindhi women pose as they attend a Sindh Cultural festival in Karachi.



In this photograph, a young Sindhi woman looks on as she attends a Sindh Cultural festival in Karachi.



In this photograph, Sindhi children pose as they attend a Sindh Cultural festival in Karachi. — AFP photos



In this photograph, a Sindhi folk singer wearing traditional Sindhi cap and Ajrak performs during a Sindh Cultural Day festival in Karachi.

Sindh Cultural Festival



In this photograph, young Sindhi women pose for a 'selfie' as they attend a Sindh Cultural festival in Karachi.

Pakistan's regional languages face looming extinction

Around a hundred women have gathered in a community centre in Peshawar, the heart of Pakistan's fabled northwest-but they are conversing in a dialect incomprehensible to the Pashtun ethnic group that dominates the region. Instead they are exchanging anecdotes and ideas in their native Hindko (literally, "the language of India") at a conference organized to promote the increasingly marginalized language. Pakistan's 200 million people speak 72 provincial and regional tongues, including official languages Urdu and English, according to a 2014 parliamentary paper on the subject that classed 10 as either "in trouble" or "near extinction".

According to scholars, Hindko's decline as the foremost language of Peshawar city began in 1947 when Hindu and Sikh traders left the city after the partition of British India. Known for its curious aphorisms such as "Kehni aan dhiye nu, nuen kan dhar" ("I'm talking to my daughter, my daughter-in-law should listen") — which is meant to convey a harsh message but indirectly, it only has some two million speakers across Pakistan as opposed to Pashto's 26 million. It has also become a minority language in the city of its birth.

"Years and years of political unrest in Pakistan's northwestern region and Afghanistan have adversely impacted

our language and it has lost grounds to Pashto," Salahudin, Chief Executive of the Gandhara Hindko Board which organized the event, explained. Some three million mainly Pashto speakers fled war from neighboring Afghanistan over the past 35 years, while others are more recent migrants from other parts of Khyber Pakhtunkwa province.

Loss of culture

The most endangered of Pakistan's dialects are now spoken by only a few hundred people, such as Domaaki, an Indo-Aryan languages confined to a handful of villages in remote northern Gilgit-Baltistan. Even regional languages spoken by tens of millions like Sindhi and Punjabi are no longer as vigorous as they once were. "There is not a single newspaper or magazine published in Punjabi for the 60 million-plus Punjabi speakers," wrote journalist Abbas Zaidi in an essay, despite it being the language of the nationally revered Sufi poet Bulleh Shah and the native-tongue of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. English has been seen as the language of the elite in Pakistan since the country was founded. It is used at the highest official levels, despite the fact this excludes the majority of Pakistanis—many of whom, as a consequence of low literacy rates, do not speak English well or at all, according to leading linguist Tariq Rahman.



In this photograph, Pakistani men read Hindko language books at The Hindko Centre in Peshawar. — AFP

Urdu, the most common national tongue and spoken as a second language by the majority of Pakistanis, has been relegated to the middle- and lower-level halls of power, while the widely spoken regional languages—usually native to their speakers—are not even taught in schools. "The result is an underclass that remains out of any public policy making, its upward mobility increasingly limited, and harboring a deep sense of inferiority," wrote Urdu poet Harris Khaliq in a research paper. "A majority of Pakistanis is unable to recognize car registration plates, many road signs that are only in

English, the signboards of shops and offices."

Taking a stand

Some language activists have taken a stand, such as Rozi Khan Baraki, a champion of the Urmari language of South Waziristan tribal zone that claims some 50,000 speakers. At its peak in the early 16th century, the language flourished across much of Afghanistan and what is now north-west Pakistan.

"But then people in [the area] began speaking Pashto and Persian because many of the speakers of

those languages migrated to the fertile lands of this region. "Migrations have also threatened our next generation, who being Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in Dera Ismail Khan, Peshawar, and Karachi have stopped communicating in their mother tongue." Baraki said to avoid extinction, community elders have asked their people to "force their children to speak Urmari at homes, especially those who have married women who speak other languages." "Our next generation is threatened, this language is going to die if we don't preserve it today," he said. Rahman lauds such efforts but says the process of saving dying languages can only happen when it is taken up at a governmental level as was the case with Welsh, a regional language of Britain. A loss of diversity can have lasting ill effects, he warns.

Those who shift from their mother tongue to assimilate "try to become clones of another group—the one which they want to imitate, and lose respect for their former group," he said. Children find it difficult to communicate to their elders, while folk stories and music can also fade from memory.

"There are names of herbs and local names for fruit and animals that are lost. In some cases when you lose the name of the herb the use is also forgotten," he said. — AFP

Agatha Christie helped uncover Iraq's Nimrud

Her diligence and face cream cleaned Nimrud's most famous ivory. She captured the archaeological dig in Iraq on celluloid and Kodak film, developing the prints in water painstakingly filtered from the nearby Tigris River. And every day, after she balanced the books and arranged for the next day's meals, Agatha Christie sat down to write. The British mystery writer's second husband, Max Mallowan, was an archaeologist - respected in his field, but with nowhere near the renown of his older wife. But Christie set aside her career for months each year to accompany Mallowan into the field.

Mallowan built his career on digs in the 1950s in Nimrud, the remains of the ancient Assyrian city



People gather around the partially-unearthed statue of a lamassu, a great winged bull protective deity, in this undated photo taken by British mystery writer Agatha Christie at the ancient site of Nimrud in northern Iraq.



A winged genie is depicted standing in front of a tree of life in the Palace of Assurnasipal II at the ancient city of Nimrud in northern Iraq in this 1950 photo taken by British mystery author Agatha Christie.

This undated photo taken by mystery writer Agatha Christie shows statues of two Assyrian winged bull deities called lamassu stand at the entrance to Palace of Assurnasipal II at the ancient city of Nimrud in northern Iraq. — AP photos



This 1949 photo taken by British mystery author Agatha Christie shows a statue of a lamassu, a winged bull from Assyrian mythology who guarded the royal court from evil, at the ancient site of Nimrud, near modern day Mosul, Iraq.



This 1963 file photo shows mystery author Agatha Christie at age 73, in London.

that survived 3,000 years only to be blown into rubble by Islamic State group conquerors last year. And Christie, then in her 60s, was there to document his work, in photo and film. Every winter, according to her grandson Mathew Prichard, "they disappeared into Iraq or Syria and returned in May or June. To her it was just as important as writing. Her role, and she was quite old-fashioned about this ... Her role in the 1950s was to go on these digs with her husband and help him with the photography and dealings with the local labor force," he said.

Famed for her detective characters Mrs. Marple and Hercule Poirot, Christie had a longtime fascination with archaeology that showed up in novels set in the Mideast, including "Death on the Nile" and "Murder in Mesopotamia." Christie's non-fiction book "Come Tell Me How You Live," about a series of digs in Syria in the 1940s, is testament to her love for adventure, travel and the ancient sites of civilization. "Inshallah, I shall go there again, and the things that I love shall not have perished from this earth," she wrote in conclusion in 1944. But seven decades later, one of her favorite places - Nimrud - is in danger as never before.

Passionate jigsaw solver

Islamic State fighters took over the site near the city of Mosul in 2014, and in 2015 smashed the winged bulls guarding the entrance and blew up the Northwest Palace where Mallowan made his most significant discoveries. The site, though liberated last month from the extremists, is reduced to rubble, largely unguarded and vulnerable to looters. Among Mallowan's finds were a series of ivories, including one of a woman's face dubbed the Mona Lisa of Nimrud, which was extracted with great difficulty from a muddy well. "She spent hours drying it and cleaning it off, with her face cream," said Georgina Herrmann, a British archaeologist who worked there with Mallowan.

Other ivories were discovered smashed, and Christie delighted in assembling them, Herrmann said. "Agatha was a passionate solver of jigsaw puzzles and crossword puzzles. She laid all these pieces out - there must have been hundreds of them - and put them together." Christie and Mallowan would be dismayed to learn what has become of the site, according to Prichard, who recalled his grandfather teaching him the basics of cuneiform writing as a boy. "To say they would have thought it was a tragedy is an understatement," he said. "If my grandparents could somehow be alive again and see the newspapers for a week, they would not have recognized the places where they had been and lived and worked." —AP

The Sense of an Ending

A couple years back, festival audiences fell in love with Indian director Ritesh Batra's genuine gem of a debut, "The Lunchbox," in which an accountant on the brink of retirement exchanges intimate notes with the complete stranger who has been cooking for him each day. That low-key treasure displayed Batra's unique touch for the subtle sense of longing and mystery that can haunt men of a certain age, and proved to be an ideal precursor to the director's first English-language film, "The Sense of an Ending," a well-acted, if somewhat trickier dish to digest, focusing on a British divorcee's futile search for closure to a long-ago relationship.

As source material goes, "The Sense of an Ending" is rather more literary, adapted from Julian Barnes' 2011 novel by playwright Nick Payne, and one can feel the ideas knocking about behind the deceptively simple-looking facades of its characters. Fusty curmudgeon Tony Webster (Jim Broadbent) appears content to have traded his ambitions as a poet for a life spent tending a tiny vintage camera shop. It was an early girlfriend, Veronica (Freya Mavor), who gave Tony his first Leica camera, though the humiliation of losing her to an old schoolmate also seems to have shaped his younger self (played by Billy Howle). But whose love was Tony more devastated to lose: hers or the golden boy they both admired?

"The Sense of an Ending" wallows in such ambiguities for much of its running time, even as it comes straight out and states its thesis early on, when Adrian ("Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk" star Joe Alwyn) recites in class: "History is that certainty produced at the point where the imperfections of memory meet the inadequacies of documentation." Adrian claims to be quoting a scholar named Patrick Lagrange to explain why he considers it futile to ascribe responsibility to a fellow student's suicide. Lagrange, as it turns out, does not exist, but then, isn't that the film's point? This flashback to Tony's school days has been lifted directly from his memory, which is itself distorted not only by time, but by a sort of deliberate rewriting on Tony's part, for he must find a way to live with himself after what happened to his good friend. As it turns out, he doesn't know the half of it.

Tony's rather unflattering plunge into self-absorption begins with the receipt of a letter, and like those wonderful thoughts that take shape only gradually over the course of several days in "The

Lunchbox," he takes rather a long time to get around to reading it. In places, "The Sense of an Ending" seems almost frustratingly uninterested in establishing, much less solving, the riddles at its core, when in fact, it's merely uninterested in pandering to those who lack the patience to appreciate its nuances. Its most receptive audiences will almost certainly be older, with enough life experience to recognize the mix of curiosity and regret that ensnares us like so many wild brambles each time we hazard a stroll down Memory Lane.

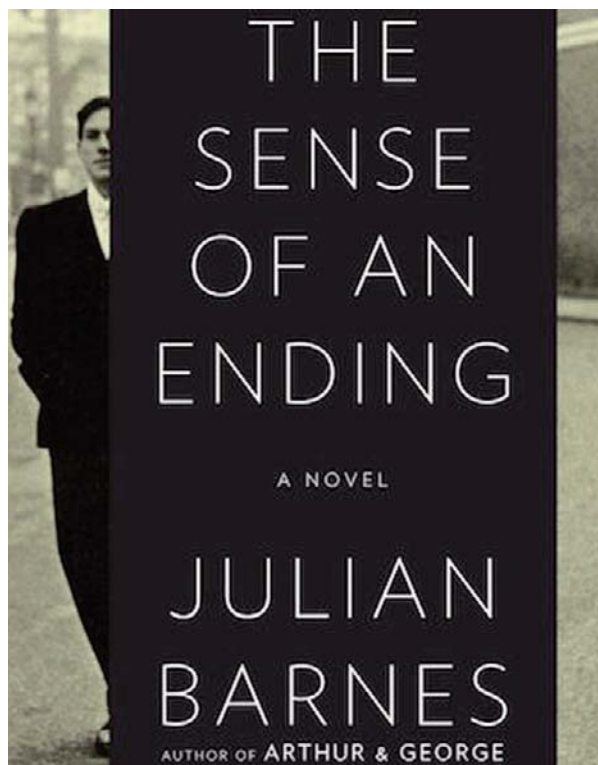
The letter refers to a diary, which once belonged to Adrian but had since passed into the hands of Veronica's mother, Sarah (Emily

Mortimer, by far the liveliest presence amid all the film's flashback scenes), for reasons that aren't entirely clear—though in bequeathing it to Tony, Sarah dredges the past back up again. The movie, which fairly pulses with a latent homoeroticism just beneath the surface every time its hot-blooded young characters look at one another, teases us with possible explanations: What exactly is the nature of Tony and Adrian's past relationship? Does Tony fancy both Veronica and her mother, or perhaps it's her brother who occupies his solitary late-night fantasies? And what does his ex-wife (Harriet Walter) — or their very pregnant daughter (Michelle Dockery) — make of all this?

The explanation is at once simpler and more complicated than any of these questions could suggest, and it is revealed only after the last of the onion's layers has been peeled away. It works to the film's advantage that someone as benign as Broadbent should be playing Tony, since it offsets what a disagreeable character he might otherwise have been: Despite not being a particularly interesting or clever person in his own right, Tony is single-mindedly obsessed with resolving a relationship that played itself out decades earlier, to the point of stalking an ex who had otherwise left all memory of him in the dust.

Charlotte Rampling plays Veronica in the present, though she doesn't appear until late in the film, like an ace that Batra has been keeping up his sleeve. Still beyond his grasp, Veronica has intercepted Adrian's diary and has no intentions of returning it to Tony, which drives him crazy, sending him deeper into the spiral of his own narcissism—a far more unpleasant space to share if it weren't for the wry way that Walter's character (augmented significantly from the novel) has of humoring him. And Max Richter's seductive score turns potential revulsion into a sort of unrequited melancholy.

Like a male-centric counterpart to Iain McEwan's "Atonement," Tony's journey offers a poignant commentary on how each of us attempts to make meaning of our lives, distorting memories and destroying documentation to suit agendas we can't entirely rationalize. It's a fundamental human impulse to seek meaning in things, and yet, as Tony ultimately realizes, the corollary to the butterfly effect—where the smallest incident can have a seismic impact on other people's lives—is admitting that sometimes we've left absolutely no impression at all.—Reuters



See You Tomorrow

Overkill feels like an understatement when it comes to "See You Tomorrow," a star-spangled, chintz-tinted dramedy co-written and produced by Wong Kar-wai, featuring Tony Leung Chiu-wai as a barman who moonlights as a love doctor. Though China's Zhang Jijia takes billing as writer-director, it's impossible to miss Wong's pet themes of nostalgia, unrequited love, and numerology scribbled all over the frame. And yet without the Hong Kong auteur's usual sense of subtlety, this boozy mix of screechy characters, splashy visuals, and trite tales will likely leave audiences feeling the cinematic equivalent of a hangover.

Despite dramatically overtaking Matt Damon starrer "The Great Wall" when it first opened, the film has since leveled off at the local box office. In fact, together with Zhang Yimou's monster blockbuster, it has provoked such a virulent backlash from bloggers and disappointed audiences in China that the state newspaper the People's Daily published an editorial reprimanding popular online movie review sites for "undermining domestic film industry." The film's flaws begin at the script level: Previously known as the screenwriter on "The Butcher, the Chef, and the Swordsman," Zhang reportedly went through 118

drafts attempting to adapt his own short story.

And while Zhang strains mightily to emulate Wong's sense of intellectual introspection, his dialogue is full of platitudes and phony feelings. At the same time, obvious references to a number of Wong's films, along with blatant imitations of comedies co-written by Wong and director Jeff Lau (such as "The Eagle Shooting Heroes" and "Chinese Odyssey 2002"), pale by comparison. In the film, Chen Mo (Leung) runs a bar in Shanghai nightlife hotspot with buddy Guan Chun (Takeshi Kaneshiro). He's a self-appointed "ferryman" (also the Chinese name of his bar) who helps people move on after a painful breakup—though he could use the service himself.

A flashback to 10 years earlier shows him falling hard for Muzi (Du Juan, "Lost in Hong Kong"), a bartender whose house cocktail "See You Tomorrow" is so lethal even a hooch hound like Chen gets knocked out. In one of the film's funnier routines, he drinks, falls down the stairs, but keeps hobbling back for more. Just as Muzi warms to him, the narrative stops short, leaving audiences frustrated. Like many of Wong's protagonists, everyone in Zhang's film seems trapped in the past. Guan, formerly an arcade-game champ, once had a crush on Maomao (Sandrine Pinna, "Touch

of the Light"), the daughter of a Taiwanese master pancake-chef. Now, after a decade-long absence, she has returned to revive her father's joint, but has no memory of Guan.

DJ Xiaoyu (Angelababy) has a crush on wasted rocker Ma Li (Cantopop star Eason Chan) which dates back to her tween years, when Ma was still a budding band boy (former K-pop idol Lu Han). In a scenario that defies logic, Ma proposes to longtime girlfriend Jiang Jie (Lynn Hung), who says she's been waiting for this moment forever, then proceeds to break up with him. To help him get back on his feet, Xiaoyu asks Chen to show her the ropes of being a "ferryman." Finally, one gets to see Chen in action using unconventional methods to help clients get over their failed relationships. These exploits should have been played at the start, as lighthearted lead-ins to the main protagonists' weightier personal back stories. Now that it's already halfway through the film, they feel more like distractions.

By the time more flashbacks reveal what happened to Maomao and Muzi a decade earlier, audiences no longer feel invested in these characters. As he did with "The Butcher, the Chef and the Swordsman," Zhang employs an episodic structure, which in this case feels as if several unfinished

films have been lumped together. Consistent with current mainland film trends, the director seems to have confused comedy with making a very loud racket. Each of the individual love stories parodies a genre, from culinary film to '90s Cantopop MV to Japanese "Yankii" (a type of high school hillbilly) subculture. Leung provides an inordinate amount of voiceover narration, while bringing a laid-back yet playful air to his performance, generating easy chemistry with such diverse personas as the aloof Du Juan and bubbly Angela baby.

The other cast members bust their guts to look animated but can't hide how little they're invested in the drama. Though location shooting took place in Nanjing and Qinghai, the Shanghai that appears onscreen is so brightly lit and saturated with color that it feels like an imaginary place created via visual effects. Despite its similarity to the cafe in "My Blueberry Nights," the bar never comes alive as a character in its own right. Peter Pao and Cao Yu, usually masterful DPs, seem to overdose on stylized camera tricks, to unsightly effect, while Alfred Yau's production design and William Chang's costumes create an eclectic clutter. Nathaniel Mechaly's score is a repetitive playlist of retro-Cantopop songs, mostly by Hong Kong band Beyond and Eason Chan.—Reuters

The Beach



Children and visitors play in an art installation called 'The Beach' as they float on polyethylene balls as part of the annual Sydney Festival yesterday. —AFP photos



LAS VEGAS: An attendee watches an LG Signature OLED TV W at the LG booth at CES 2017 at the Las Vegas Convention Center on January 5, 2017 in Las Vegas, Nevada. —AFP



A Camerama 4K panoramic camera (L) and smart phone app are shown at ShowStoppers during the 2017 Consumer Electronic Show (CES) in Las Vegas, Nevada on January 5, 2017.

TVS GRAB SPOTLIGHT AT CES GADGET GALA

LAS VEGAS: LG Electronics showed off a “wallpaper” thin television as TV makers vied for the spotlight ahead of the Consumer Electronics Show officially opening in Las Vegas, Nevada on Thursday. As in years past, the South Korean consumer electronics giant staked out the opening slot in a day rich with back-to-back press briefings by industry titans. LG and rivals touched on hot themes at this year’s show—including robots, appliances equipped with artificial intelligence, and self-driving car technology.

A surprise star of the presentation was a strikingly thin LG Signature OLED flat-screen television simply branded “W.” The super high-definition TV measured just 2.57 mm thick in a 65-inch screen

model. LG boasted that a larger screen model garnered a CES Best of Innovation Award. “Why the ‘W?’” LG Electronics USA marketing vice president David VanderWaal asked rhetorically during the presentation. “Wallpaper. Window. Wow,” he said. The screens are designed to affix to walls with magnetic brackets, protruding less than 4 mm.

Sony OLED shines

Sony used CES to introduce a stunning A1E series Bravia OLED television in a shift to image technology that had been terrain ruled by LG in the US market. “It renders every detail of an image,” Sony Corporation chief executive Kazuo Hirai said of the new flagship TV at the company’s booth on the CES show floor. “You will see more than you every thought possible in a display.” Sony eliminated speakers from the A1E series, creating technology that generates rich sound by making the screen vibrate in what Hirai boasted to be an industry first. Google’s Android TV software for accessing internet content was also built into the screens, according to the Japanese consumer electronics and entertainment titan. Hirai promised a rising sea of 4K resolution content for high-definition screens.

TCL out to grow

China’s fast-growing television maker TCL was at the show with a mission to expand its market. TCL unveiled 25 new Roku-enabled TV models heading for North America, boasting improved high-definition imagery and enhanced audio. “We are here today because we are investing in the future of technology, specifically smart TVs,” TCL marketing executive Ranjit Gopi said during a press briefing. “We are, as of 2016, one of the fastest growing brands in the world.”

TCL partners include internet powerhouse Google and its Android TV offering. TCL is investing some \$7.7 billion in high-quality television screens and is aiming to make the world’s slimmest curved television, according to Gopi. He introduced a new flagship “X” series television that will launch first in China and then be rolled out elsewhere. South Korean consumer electronics giant Samsung unveiled a new 75-inch QLED TV model at its CES press gathering, along with a company-first gaming laptop.

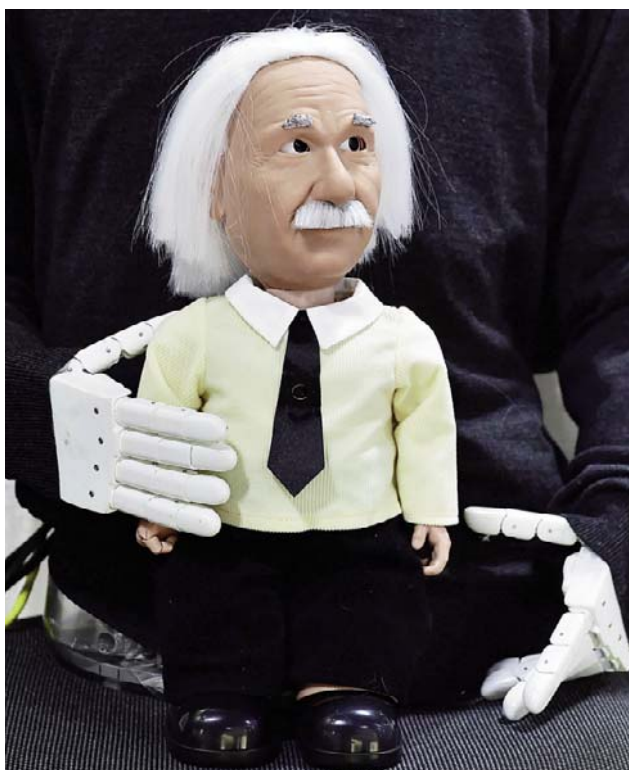
“Despite some challenges, we’ve made big strides in 2016, gaining market share in TVs, home appliances, wearables and smartphones,” said Samsung Electronics America chief operating officer Tim Baxter. “We are delivering on our vision of the future.”

Eye-grabbing screens

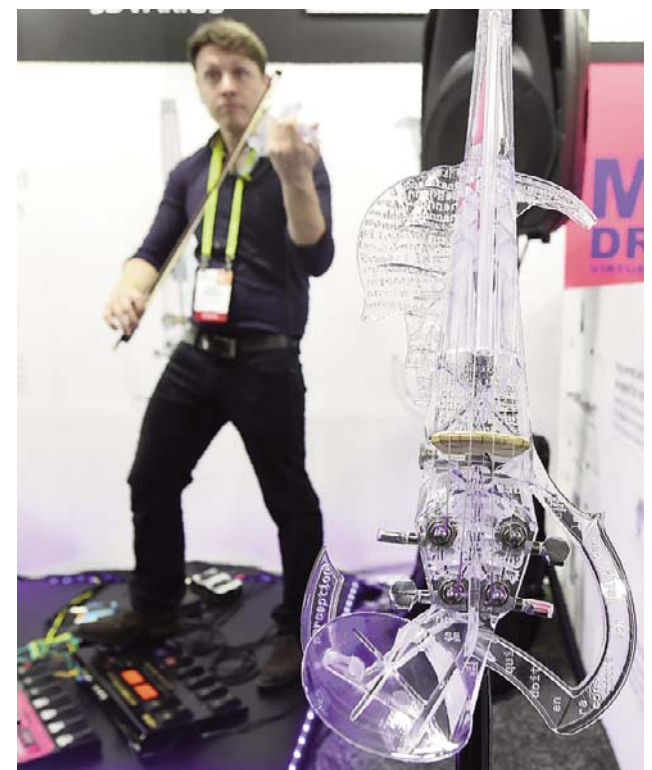
Samsung ramped up its smart TV platform with an offering tailored for sports lovers, and added a new entertainment application. Features in the new models included being able to recognize who is speaking while being commanded by voice. The South Korean

device maker also showed off a new television built with “Quantum Dot” technology.

Sales of televisions globally have been slipping, a seeming result of viewers turning to smartphones, tablets, and computers for video, according to Steve Koenig, senior director of market research at the US Consumer Technology Association trade group behind CES. Koenig forecast that \$105 billion will be spent this year on televisions, down from \$108 billion last year. However, those who do buy televisions are expected to prefer 4K high-definition models, with the number of those screens sold jumping to nearly 82 million this year compared with just shy of 53 million last year, according to Koenig. —AFP



The soon to be released Albert Einstein Robot from Hanson Robotics is displayed at their booth on the showroom floor during the 2017 Consumer Electronic Show (CES) at the Las Vegas Convention Center in Las Vegas, Nevada, on January 5, 2017.



Laurent Bernadac gives a demonstration on the 3Dvarius electric violin during the 2017 Consumer Electronic Show (CES) in Las Vegas, Nevada on January 5, 2017.

SHHH, YOUR WASHING MACHINE MIGHT OVERHEAR YOU

LAS VEGAS: Alexa, are you spying on me? It is a fair question in light of attempts by authorities investigating the slaying of an Arkansas man to obtain voice recordings collected by an Amazon Echo speaker and its Alexa digital assistant.

Yet the popularity and capabilities of voice-enabled products such as the Echo continue to grow. At the CES gadget show in Las Vegas, which opened Thursday, Whirlpool, Samsung and other manufacturers are unveiling new ways to use voice services to control laundry machines, refrigerators and other home systems.

Consumers are apparently willing to trade a certain amount of privacy for convenience. So what exactly is being collected, stored or shared? To work, the Echo is always listening. Once it hears someone utter a keyword, such as "Alexa," it shares what it hears with Amazon's servers to process a response. Those conversations are then stored indefinitely. Google's Home speaker works in a similar fashion.

The Echo "has to listen to everything. That's kind of disturbing," said Ryan O'Leary, vice president of WhiteHat Security's threat research center. "It doesn't capture voice until it hears the keyword, but it could. You're trusting the devices to not do that, but it's entirely possible."

In the Arkansas case, authorities investigating the death of a man found floating face-up in a hot tub at a friend's home requested the contents of the home's Echo and Amazon's stored recordings in hopes they might contain evidence. The friend is charged with murder.

A judge has signed off on the search, but Amazon has balked. Amazon has declined to comment specifically on the case but said the company objects to "overbroad or oth-



LAS VEGAS: John Herrington, senior vice president of Samsung Electronics America, unveils new refrigerators with Family Hub 2.0 during a Samsung news conference before CES International, on January 4, 2017 in Las Vegas. —AP

erwise inappropriate demands as a matter of course."

Some experts worry that allowing such a search would erode people's privacy. "It's not necessarily a direct threat for the average person, but the same thing can be said with any kind of privacy concern," O'Leary said. "People say you shouldn't be concerned if you're not doing anything wrong, but that's a dangerous precedent to set."

Meanwhile, companies keep asking consumers to invite them into their homes. Whirlpool is adding Alexa voice control to its smart-home appliances, including a washing

machine, a stove and a refrigerator. Someone can instruct the oven to pre-heat to 400 degrees by speaking a command to an Alexa-enabled device, such as the Echo. Simplehuman has a voice-activated trash can, and GE Lighting has a table lamp using Alexa voice control.

For now, voice control is mainly an add-on feature rather than a core component of gadgets. It's there for those who want to use it, but it's not essential for the product to function. Many manufacturers are opting to use Amazon's Alexa service for now, though some are embracing voice systems from

Google, Apple or Samsung.

Nvidia's Shield TV streaming device, for instance, employs Google's Assistant service so viewers can control video playback or find out the weather with just a voice command. Meanwhile, Samsung's new Family Hub lets people use their voice to add items to shopping lists and order groceries online.

CES chief economist Shawn DuBravac said as many as 700 companies could announce Alexa-integrated products during the gadget show, on top of more than 1,500 existing ones. As the smart home becomes more entrenched, DuBravac said, voice control could change the way we interact with technology in much the way the mouse did in the 1980s.

"Connected microphones are starting to appear in everything from cars to children's toys," said James Plouffe, lead solutions architect at mobile-security company MobileIron. "Consumers should think carefully about how comfortable they are with the prospect of a live mic in common household items."

Because Amazon says it uses information gathered by the Echo to improve its voice technology, that information has the potential to "live forever" online, Plouffe said. The issue first grabbed headlines a couple of years ago, after Samsung said sensitive conversations could be captured by its voice-controlled smart TVs.

Based on the flood of new voice-controlled gadgets headed to market, tech companies are betting that consumers will get over their fears. Derrick Dicol, executive director of Comcast's Xfinity home, which uses voice controls in its home automation products, noted that people had to get used to sharing their banking information online. "This is less invasive than that," he said. "It's just a different thing people have to feel comfortable with." —AP



LAS VEGAS: Jing Kun, general manager of operating system DuerOS powering a new Baidu digital valet, shows off the "Little Fish" home assistant unit at the 2017 Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas on January 5, 2017. —AFP

BAIDU FAMILY ROBOT A CHINESE SPIN ON AMAZON ECHO

LAS VEGAS: Chinese internet colossus Baidu is out to make a splash with 'Little Fish,' a family robot that is a voice-controlled virtual valet akin to Amazon Echo or Google Home. Baidu showed off "Little Fish," a translation of its Chinese name "Xiaoyu Zaijia," on Thursday at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas ahead of its release in China later this year.

"I think 2017 will be the year of conversational computing," Baidu chief scientist Andrew Ng said while demonstrating Little Fish for AFP behind closed doors at the show. "We see a clear path of conversational computers changing everything."

Using voice to interact with computers that are able to essentially learn from experience was among the hot trends at CES. Arrays of device makers added digital aide capabilities with the help of Amazon's Alexa or Google Assistant technology.

Unlike "faceless" Amazon Alexa or Google Home devices that rely on people asking for information or controlling devices by speaking, Little Fish also features a touch-screen on top of its orb-shaped base. A camera on top tracks faces, and the screen swivels to keep facing a speaker.

"Speech is the fastest way for you to communicate with a computer, but a screen is a very fast way for a machine to communicate back to you," Ng said. For example, it would be quicker to glance at a requested list of top restaurants from Yelp than it would be to listen to the computer read all the names and descriptions, he said.

Transformative

Little Fish uses Baidu's operating system DuerOS, which is already employed by other devices in China, such as set-top TV boxes that can switch channels by voice command or figure out names of actors on screen when asked.

The bigger vision is to build DuerOS into a broad range of gadgets that tap into Baidu's internet capabilities for search, food delivery, online commerce and more. "If this

takes off, I am not worried about how we will make money," Ng said when asked about revenue plans. "It will transform how you use devices in your home. There are plenty of business models."

Little Fish, a second-generation device, will be released in China at a price yet to be disclosed, according to Baidu. Baidu partnered with hardware firm Ainemo to build it. "We believe family robots will be the next big category that will be a member of everybody's home," Ainemo chief executive and founder Chenfeng Song said in a release.

AI taking hold

Artificial intelligence, or AI, is getting a foothold in homes, with developers feverishly adding "skills" to Amazon Echo speakers infused with Alexa. Google, meanwhile, is using its AI prowess in Android smartphones, messaging software, and a vase-sized Home digital assistant.

The home hubs, sometimes referred to as smart speakers, fetch content or answers from the internet, and can act as remote controls for other devices in houses. "We are moving technologies beyond the smartphone," said Shawn DuBravac, chief economist at the Consumer Technology Association (CTA) that organizes CES. "Ultimately, vocal computing is replacing the (screen)."

Chinese tech giant Huawei said at CES that it is adding Amazon's Alexa to its flagship smartphone for its US launch. China-based Lenovo announced it was launching a smart home assistant powered by Alexa, joining the growing roster of contenders in the market for voice-activated devices.

"In the smart home, voice is clearly important," DuBravac said. "We are seeing that play out at CES." He expected voice technology to quickly improve, within years perhaps even being able to recognize speakers so accurately it could be used for biometric security, or simple parental override of internet use by offspring. —AFP

SATURDAY, JANUARY 7, 2017



- 00:50 Big Fish Man
- 01:45 Bondi Vet
- 02:10 Bondi Vet
- 02:40 Big Fish Man
- 03:35 Tanked
- 04:25 Tigress Blood
- 05:15 Gator Boys
- 06:02 Big Fish Man
- 06:49 Big Fish Man
- 07:36 Night
- 08:00 Night
- 08:25 Big Fish Man
- 09:15 Lone Star Law
- 10:10 Hunt For The Russian Tiger
- 11:05 Wildest Islands Of Indonesia
- 12:00 Treehouse Masters
- 12:55 Bondi Vet
- 13:20 Bondi Vet
- 13:50 Tigers Attack
- 14:45 Tigers Attack
- 15:40 Hunt For The Russian Tiger
- 16:35 Extinct Or Alive: The Tasmanian Tiger
- 17:30 Tigress Blood
- 18:25 Untamed & Uncut
- 19:20 Lone Star Law
- 20:15 Big Fish Man
- 21:10 Hunt For The Russian Tiger
- 22:05 Treehouse Masters
- 23:00 Lone Star Law
- 23:55 Gator Boys



- 00:40 Mythbusters
- 01:30 How Do They Do It?
- 01:55 Food Factory
- 02:20 Mythbusters
- 03:10 What Could Possibly Go Wrong?
- 04:00 Powering The Future
- 04:48 Mythbusters
- 05:36 Mythbusters
- 06:24 What Could Possibly Go Wrong?
- 07:12 How Do They Do It?
- 07:36 Food Factory
- 08:00 How Do They Do It?
- 08:26 Food Factory
- 08:50 Food Factory
- 09:14 Food Factory
- 09:38 Food Factory
- 10:02 Food Factory
- 10:26 How Do They Do It?
- 10:50 How Do They Do It?
- 11:14 How Do They Do It?
- 11:38 How Do They Do It?
- 12:02 How Do They Do It?
- 12:26 Nextworld
- 13:14 Origins
- 13:38 Origins
- 14:02 Prototype This
- 14:50 The Gamechangers: Inventing The World
- 15:38 Powering The Future
- 16:26 Mythbusters
- 17:14 Mythbusters
- 18:02 Mythbusters
- 18:50 Mythbusters
- 19:40 Mythbusters
- 20:30 The Genius Of George Boole
- 21:20 Joe Rogan Questions Everything
- 22:10 Alien Planet Earths



- Disney HD
- 00:10 Hank Zipzer
 - 00:35 Binny And The Ghost
 - 01:00 Violetta
 - 01:45 The Hive
 - 01:50 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
 - 02:15 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
 - 02:40 Hank Zipzer
 - 03:05 Binny And The Ghost
 - 03:30 Violetta
 - 04:15 The Hive
 - 04:20 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
 - 04:45 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
 - 05:10 Hank Zipzer
 - 05:35 Binny And The Ghost
 - 06:00 Violetta
 - 06:45 The Hive
 - 06:50 Mouk
 - 07:00 Dog With A Blog
 - 07:25 Dog With A Blog
 - 07:50 Tsum Tsum Shorts
 - 07:55 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug And Cat Noir
 - 08:20 Elena Of Avalor
 - 08:45 Star Darlings
 - 08:50 Liv And Maddie
 - 09:15 Jessie
 - 09:40 Jessie
 - 10:05 Jessie
 - 10:30 Pixel Perfect
 - 12:00 The 7D
 - 12:10 Wizards Of Waverly Place
 - 13:50 Wizards Of Waverly Place
 - 14:15 Backstage
 - 14:40 Backstage

- 15:05 Bizaardvark
- 15:30 Dog With A Blog
- 16:20 Stuck In The Middle
- 16:45 Best Friends Whenever
- 17:10 Elena Of Avalor
- 17:35 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug And Cat Noir
- 18:00 The Next Step
- 18:25 The Little Mermaid
- 19:55 The 7D
- 20:05 Disney Cookabout
- 20:30 Elena Of Avalor
- 20:55 Best Friends Whenever
- 21:20 Jessie
- 21:45 Jessie
- 22:10 Jessie
- 22:35 H2O: Just Add Water
- 23:00 Binny And The Ghost
- 23:25 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch



- 00:20 Henry Hugglemonster
- 00:35 The Hive
- 00:45 Loopdidoo
- 01:00 Henry Hugglemonster
- 01:15 Calimero
- 01:30 Art Attack
- 01:50 Zou
- 02:05 Loopdidoo
- 02:20 Henry Hugglemonster
- 02:35 Calimero
- 02:50 Zou
- 03:05 Art Attack
- 03:30 The Hive
- 03:40 Loopdidoo
- 03:55 Henry Hugglemonster
- 04:10 Art Attack
- 04:35 Loopdidoo
- 04:50 Calimero
- 05:05 Art Attack

- 05:30 Henry Hugglemonster
- 05:45 Zou
- 06:00 Art Attack
- 06:30 Henry Hugglemonster
- 06:45 Loopdidoo
- 07:00 Zou
- 07:15 Calimero
- 07:30 Loopdidoo
- 07:45 Henry Hugglemonster
- 08:00 Sheriff Callie's Wild West
- 08:25 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
- 08:50 Goldie & Bear
- 09:15 Miles From Tomorrow
- 09:30 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
- 10:00 Sofia The First
- 10:30 Doc McStuffins Toy Hospital
- 11:00 The Lion Guard
- 11:30 Goldie & Bear
- 12:00 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
- 12:30 Miles From Tomorrow
- 13:00 PJ Masks
- 13:25 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
- 13:50 Sheriff Callie's Wild West
- 14:20 Doc McStuffins
- 14:45 Sofia The First
- 15:10 Goldie & Bear
- 15:40 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
- 16:05 Doc McStuffins
- 16:30 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
- 17:00 The Lion Guard
- 17:25 PJ Masks
- 17:55 Doc McStuffins
- 18:20 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
- 18:45 Sheriff Callie's Wild West
- 19:15 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
- 19:30 Sofia The First
- 20:00 Goldie & Bear
- 20:30 Goldie & Bear
- 21:00 Unbungalievable
- 21:05 Goldie & Bear
- 21:35 Miles From Tomorrow
- 22:00 Sheriff Callie's Wild West
- 22:25 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
- 22:55 Minnie's Bow-Toons
- 23:00 The Lion Guard
- 23:30 The Lion Guard

- 06:00 WAGs Miami
- 06:55 E! News
- 07:10 WAGs Miami
- 08:10 E! News
- 09:05 WAGs Miami
- 09:55 WAGs Miami
- 10:45 Mariah's World
- 11:35 Mariah's World
- 12:25 Mariah's World
- 13:15 E! News
- 13:45 Celebrity Style Story
- 15:10 Rob & Chyna
- 16:05 Rob & Chyna
- 17:00 Rob & Chyna
- 18:00 Rob & Chyna
- 19:00 E! News
- 20:00 Celebrity Style Story
- 20:30 Celebrity Style Story
- 21:00 Botched
- 21:30 Botched
- 22:00 Mariah's World
- 23:00 E! News
- 23:30 Celebrity Style Story
- 23:05 Coronation Street



- 00:00 Hangar 1: The UFO Files
- 01:00 How The States Got Their Shape
- 02:00 Ancient Impossible
- 03:00 America's Book Of Secrets
- 03:50 Ancient Aliens
- 04:40 Serial Killer Earth
- 05:30 Hangar 1: The UFO Files
- 06:20 How The States Got Their Shape
- 07:10 The Universe
- 08:00 Ancient Impossible
- 09:00 Brad Meltzer's Decoded
- 10:00 Ancient Aliens
- 11:00 Serial Killer Earth
- 12:00 Hangar 1: The UFO Files
- 13:00 In Search Of Aliens
- 14:00 Ancient Aliens
- 15:00 Ancient Aliens
- 16:00 Ancient Aliens
- 17:00 Ancient Aliens
- 18:00 In Search Of Aliens
- 19:00 Serial Killer Earth



- 00:00 Chappelle's Show
- 00:25 David Spade: My Fake Problems
- 01:15 Lip Sync Battle
- 01:40 Another Period
- 02:05 South Park
- 03:00 Workaholics
- 03:25 Disorderly Conduct: Video On Patrol
- 04:15 Key And Peele
- 05:05 Ridiculousness
- 05:55 Tosh.0
- 06:50 Workaholics
- 07:15 Workaholics
- 07:40 Key And Peele
- 08:30 Workaholics
- 08:55 Workaholics
- 09:20 Tosh.0
- 09:45 Ridiculousness
- 11:00 Urban Tarzan
- 11:25 Urban Tarzan
- 11:50 Tosh.0
- 13:05 Framework
- 13:55 Ridiculousness
- 15:10 Lip Sync Battle: All Stars Live
- 16:00 Workaholics
- 16:55 Key And Peele
- 17:50 The It Crowd
- 18:15 I Live With Models
- 18:39 Brotherhood
- 19:03 The Jim Gaffigan Show
- 19:27 Idiotsitter
- 19:50 Idiotsitter
- 20:13 Tosh.0
- 20:37 Tosh.0
- 21:00 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah
- 21:30 Kroll Show
- 21:54 Important Things With Demetri Martin
- 22:18 The Meltdown With Jonah And Kumail
- 22:42 The Meltdown With Jonah And Kumail



- 00:20 Gold Rush
- 01:10 Fast N' Loud
- 02:00 Misfit Garage
- 02:50 Street Outlaws
- 03:40 How Do They Do It?
- 06:00 Storage Hunters UK
- 08:05 How Do They Do It?
- 10:10 Gold Rush
- 11:00 Deadliest Catch
- 11:50 Catching Monsters
- 12:40 Street Outlaws: New Orleans
- 16:50 Misfit Garage
- 17:40 Kings Of The Wild
- 18:30 Impossible Engineering
- 19:20 Marooned With Ed Stafford
- 20:10 Treasure Quest: Snake Island
- 21:00 Curiosity: Volcano Time Bomb
- 21:50 Curse Of The Frozen Gold
- 22:40 Alaska: The Last Frontier



BIG STONE GAP ON OSN MOVIES HD



- 06:00 Supa Strikas
- 06:25 Supa Strikas
- 06:50 Counterfeit Cat
- 07:00 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
- 07:15 K.C. Undercover
- 07:40 Atomic Puppet
- 08:10 Lab Rats
- 08:35 Danger Mouse
- 09:00 K.C. Undercover
- 09:25 Lab Rats
- 09:50 K.C. Undercover
- 10:20 Lab Rats
- 10:45 K.C. Undercover
- 11:10 Lab Rats
- 11:35 K.C. Undercover
- 12:00 The Incredibles
- 13:55 Danger Mouse
- 14:10 Disney Mickey Mouse
- 14:15 K.C. Undercover
- 14:40 Counterfeit Cat
- 14:50 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
- 15:05 K.C. Undercover
- 15:30 Atomic Puppet
- 15:55 Lab Rats
- 16:25 Danger Mouse
- 16:50 Star Wars Rebels
- 17:15 Future-Worm!
- 17:40 Star Wars Freemaker Adventures
- 18:05 Disney Mickey Mouse
- 18:10 K.C. Undercover
- 18:35 The Incredibles
- 20:30 Danger Mouse
- 20:45 Mighty Med
- 21:10 Pickle And Peanut
- 21:40 Disney Mickey Mouse
- 21:45 Guardians Of The Galaxy
- 22:10 Ultimate Spider-Man
- 22:35 Boyster
- 23:00 Programmes Start At 6:00am KSA



- 00:20 Pirate Treasure Of The Knights Templar
- 01:10 Leepu And Pitbull
- 02:00 Aussie Pickers
- 02:50 Pawn Stars
- 03:15 Pawn Stars
- 03:40 Pirate Treasure Of The Knights Templar
- 04:30 Shipping Wars
- 05:00 Mankind The Story Of All Of Us
- 06:00 Storage Wars Texas
- 06:25 Storage Wars Texas
- 06:50 Pawn Stars South Africa
- 07:15 Pawn Stars South Africa
- 07:40 American Pickers
- 08:30 American Restoration
- 09:20 Leepu And Pitbull
- 10:10 Fifth Gear
- 11:00 Shipping Wars
- 11:25 Shipping Wars
- 11:50 Ice Road Truckers
- 12:40 Ax Men
- 13:30 Battle 360
- 14:20 Pirate Treasure Of The Knights Templar
- 15:10 Sean Bean On Waterloo
- 16:00 Storage Wars Texas
- 16:25 Storage Wars Texas
- 16:50 Counting Cars
- 17:15 Car Hunters
- 17:40 Pawn Stars
- 18:05 Storage Wars: Best Of
- 18:30 Mountain Men
- 19:20 American Pickers
- 20:10 American Pickers
- 21:00 Pawn Stars Best Of
- 21:25 Pawn Stars Best Of
- 21:50 Hunting Hitler
- 22:40 The Rise And Fall Of El Chapo



- 00:05 Famously Single
- 00:55 Famously Single
- 01:50 E! News
- 02:50 WAGs Miami
- 03:45 WAGs Miami
- 04:40 WAGs Miami
- 05:30 Celebrity Style Story



- 00:10 My Sri Lanka With Peter Kuruvita
- 00:35 The Food Files
- 01:00 The Food Files
- 01:25 The Food Files
- 01:50 Gok's Chinese Takeaway
- 02:40 Miguel's Tropical Kitchen
- 03:05 Glamour Puds
- 03:30 Poh & Co

SATURDAY, JANUARY 7, 2017

- 03:55 Miguel's Feasts
- 04:20 Rustic Adventures Italy
- 04:45 Tom's Istanbul Delight
- 05:10 Lucky Chow
- 05:35 The Food Files
- 06:00 A Is For Apple
- 06:25 A Is For Apple
- 06:50 Ariana's Persian Kitchen
- 07:15 Cesar To The Rescue
- 08:05 Grandma's Boy
- 08:30 Grandma's Boy
- 08:55 Food Lover's Guide To The Planet
- 09:20 Food Lover's Guide To The Planet
- 09:45 The Game Chef
- 10:10 What's For Sale?
- 11:00 The Wine Show
- 11:50 Places We Go
- 12:15 Places We Go
- 12:40 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia
- 13:05 The Food Files
- 13:35 Gok's Chinese Takeaway
- 14:30 Miguel's Tropical Kitchen
- 14:55 Grandma's Boy
- 15:25 Grandma's Boy
- 15:50 Wineroads
- 16:20 Food Lover's Guide To The Planet
- 16:45 The Game Chef
- 17:15 Rustic Adventures Italy
- 17:40 A Is For Apple
- 19:05 Grandma's Boy
- 19:30 Grandma's Boy
- 20:00 Wineroads
- 20:25 Food Lover's Guide To The Planet
- 20:50 The Game Chef
- 21:15 Rustic Adventures Italy
- 21:40 A Is For Apple
- 22:55 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia
- 23:20 The Food Files



JUPITER ASCENDING ON OSN MOVIES ACTION HD

OSN FIRST HD COMEDY

- 00:30 Happy Endings
- 01:00 Happy Endings
- 01:30 Divorce
- 02:00 Divorce
- 02:30 Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll
- 03:00 Black-Ish
- 03:30 Kevin Can Wait
- 04:00 Angie Tribeca
- 04:30 The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon
- 05:30 Breaking In
- 06:00 Til Death
- 06:30 Living With Fran
- 07:00 Late Night With Seth Meyers
- 08:00 Angie Tribeca
- 08:30 Breaking In
- 09:00 Black-Ish
- 09:30 Kevin Can Wait
- 10:00 Fresh Off The Boat
- 10:30 Living With Fran
- 11:00 The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon
- 12:00 Til Death
- 12:30 Angie Tribeca
- 13:00 Breaking In
- 13:30 Living With Fran
- 14:00 Kevin Can Wait
- 14:30 Kevin Can Wait
- 15:00 Fresh Off The Boat
- 15:30 Happy Endings
- 16:00 Happy Endings
- 16:30 Til Death
- 17:00 Late Night With Seth Meyers
- 18:00 2 Broke Girls
- 18:30 Life In Pieces
- 19:00 Life In Pieces
- 19:30 Young & Hungry
- 20:00 The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon
- 21:00 Happy Endings
- 21:30 Happy Endings
- 22:00 Saturday Night Live
- 23:30 Late Night With Seth Meyers

OSN FIRST HD

- 00:00 The Americans
- 01:00 Secrets And Lies
- 02:00 Timeless
- 03:00 American Crime
- 04:00 Good Morning America
- 06:00 Prison Break
- 07:00 The Amazing Race
- 08:00 The Night Shift
- 09:00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show
- 10:00 Prison Break
- 11:00 The Art Of More
- 12:00 The Art Of More
- 13:00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show
- 14:00 The Amazing Race
- 15:00 Royal Pains
- 16:00 Live Good Morning America - Weekend

- 17:00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show
- 18:00 The Night Shift
- 19:00 The Blacklist
- 20:00 The Blacklist
- 21:00 Better Call Saul
- 22:00 Better Call Saul
- 23:00 Grimm

OSN MOVIES HD ACTION

- 00:00 Mama
- 02:00 Jurassic World
- 04:15 Justice League: Gods And Monsters
- 06:00 Jupiter Ascending
- 08:15 Nick Of Time
- 10:00 Panic Room
- 12:00 Swelter
- 13:45 Jupiter Ascending
- 16:00 Reign Of Fire
- 17:45 Panic Room
- 19:45 Independence Day
- 22:15 X-Men: First Class

OSN MOVIES HD COMEDY

- 00:00 It Boy
- 02:00 The Proposal
- 04:00 The Beautician And The Beast
- 06:00 Hot Rod
- 08:00 A Lot Like Love
- 10:00 The Beautician And The Beast
- 12:00 The Proposal
- 14:00 The Butcher's Wife
- 16:00 A Lot Like Love
- 18:00 Shanghai Noon
- 20:00 Playing It Cool
- 22:00 Dance Flick

OSN MOVIES HD DRAMA

- 01:15 Eden (2015)
- 03:00 Rudderless
- 05:00 Don't Wake Mommy
- 07:00 Cas & Dylan
- 09:00 A Stranger In Paradise
- 11:00 Don't Wake Mommy
- 13:00 A Mother Betrayed
- 15:00 Assassin's Bullet
- 17:00 A Stranger In Paradise
- 19:00 Selma
- 21:15 The Silent Storm
- 23:00 God's Pocket

OSN MOVIES HD FAMILY

- 01:30 Bonta
- 03:15 The Last Song

- 05:00 The Lone Ranger
- 07:30 The Boxrolls
- 09:15 Bonta
- 11:00 The Last Song
- 13:00 Pet Pals In Windland
- 15:00 Storm Rider
- 17:00 Emma's Chance
- 19:00 Strange Magic
- 21:00 Pet Pals In Windland
- 23:00 Storm Rider

OSN MOVIES HD

- 01:00 The Atticus Institute
- 03:00 The Lady In The Van
- 05:00 The Finest Hours
- 07:00 Spare Parts
- 09:00 The Lady In The Van
- 11:00 Still Alice
- 13:00 Joy
- 15:15 Chloe And Theo
- 17:00 San Andreas
- 19:00 Infinitely Polar Bear
- 21:00 Big Stone Gap
- 23:00 Vacation

OSN MOVIES HD KIDS

- 01:15 The Heart Of The Oak
- 02:45 Marco Macaco
- 04:15 The Unbeatables
- 06:00 True Story Of Puss'n Boots
- 07:45 Pim And Pom: The Big Adventure
- 09:15 Worms
- 11:00 The Boxcar Children
- 12:45 Marco Macaco
- 14:30 Tom And Jerry: Spy Quest
- 16:00 Snow Queen
- 18:00 Worms
- 20:00 Barnyard
- 22:00 Tom And Jerry: Spy Quest
- 23:30 Snow Queen

OSN MOVIES FESTIVAL

- 01:30 Starred Up
- 03:15 Instinct
- 05:30 The Blind Side
- 07:45 Bottle Rocket
- 09:30 One Fine Day
- 11:30 Instinct
- 13:30 The Blind Side
- 15:45 The Fold
- 17:15 One Fine Day
- 19:00 The Hurricane
- 21:30 The Keeping Room
- 23:30 True Confessions



- 00:15 Team Umizoomi
- 00:38 Louie
- 00:45 Louie
- 00:53 Olive The Ostrich
- 01:03 Max & Ruby
- 01:26 Wanda And The Alien
- 01:37 Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom
- 02:00 Blaze And The Monster Machines
- 02:22 Blaze And The Monster Machines
- 02:45 Zack & Quack
- 03:05 Team Umizoomi
- 03:28 Louie
- 03:48 Paw Patrol
- 05:10 Wanda And The Alien
- 05:19 Wanda And The Alien
- 05:30 Dora And Friends: Into The City!
- 05:53 Dora And Friends: Into The City!
- 06:16 Blaze And The Monster Machines
- 07:00 Paw Patrol
- 07:13 Paw Patrol
- 07:36 Dora The Explorer
- 08:00 Wanda And The Alien
- 08:11 Zack & Quack
- 08:22 Dora And Friends: Into The City!
- 08:46 Blaze And The Monster Machines
- 09:10 Paw Patrol
- 09:35 Shimmer And Shine
- 09:58 Dora The Explorer
- 10:21 Paw Patrol
- 10:45 Little Charmers
- 10:57 Bubble Guppies
- 11:20 Fresh Beat Band Of Spies
- 11:40 Zack & Quack
- 11:52 Team Umizoomi
- 12:15 Team Umizoomi
- 12:38 Louie
- 12:45 Louie
- 12:53 Olive The Ostrich
- 12:58 Olive The Ostrich
- 13:03 Max & Ruby
- 13:26 Wanda And The Alien
- 13:37 Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom
- 13:48 Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom
- 14:00 Blaze And The Monster Machines
- 14:22 Blaze And The Monster Machines
- 14:45 Zack & Quack
- 15:05 Team Umizoomi
- 15:28 Louie
- 15:35 Louie
- 15:42 Louie
- 15:48 Paw Patrol
- 17:10 Wanda And The Alien
- 17:19 Wanda And The Alien
- 17:30 Dora And Friends: Into The City!
- 18:16 Blaze And The Monster Machines
- 18:38 Blaze And The Monster



- 00:10 Locked Up Abroad
- 01:00 The Border
- 02:00 Nazi Underworld
- 02:55 WW2 Hell Under The Sea
- 03:50 Megastructures
- 04:45 Mega Factories
- 05:40 Air Crash Investigation
- 06:35 Years Of Living Dangerously
- 07:30 Desperate Hours
- 08:25 Dirty Rotten Survival
- 09:20 Continent 7: Antarctica
- 10:15 Highway Thru Hell
- 11:10 Do Or Die
- 12:05 Hubble's Amazing Journey
- 13:00 Startalk
- 14:00 The Chinese Hajj
- 15:00 Air Crash Investigation
- 16:00 Mega Factories
- 17:00 Megastructures
- 18:00 Years Of Living Dangerously
- 19:00 The Border
- 20:00 Mega Factories
- 20:50 Megastructures
- 21:40 Years Of Living Dangerously



bottle rocket

BOTTLE ROCKET ON OSN MOVIES FESTIVAL



- 00:10 Masterpiece With Alan Titchmarsh
- 01:00 Tracey Ullman's Show
- 01:30 Emmerdale
- 03:55 Coronation Street
- 06:00 Alphabetical
- 06:55 5 Star Family Reunion
- 07:45 Murdoch Mysteries
- 08:35 Murdoch Mysteries
- 09:30 Paul O'grady's Favourite Fairy Tales
- 10:25 The Doctor Blake Mysteries
- 11:25 Jericho
- 12:20 Masterpiece With Alan Titchmarsh
- 13:15 Alphabetical
- 14:05 Big Star's Little Star
- 15:00 Surprise Surprise
- 15:55 5 Star Family Reunion
- 16:50 Royal Stories
- 17:20 Murdoch Mysteries
- 19:05 Big Star's Little Star
- 20:00 Surprise Surprise
- 20:55 Jericho
- 21:45 Royal Stories
- 22:10 Royal Stories
- 22:35 Tracey Ullman's Show



- 00:20 Croc Labyrinth
- 01:10 World's Deadliest
- 02:00 David Attenborough's Rise Of Animals
- 02:50 Wild 24
- 03:45 Wild Indochina
- 04:40 Ultimate Animal Countdown
- 05:35 Savage Kingdom
- 06:30 Hooked
- 07:25 Megafish
- 08:20 Unlikely Animal Friends
- 09:15 How Human Are You?
- 10:10 World's Weirdest (2015)
- 11:05 Dr. Oakley: Yukon Vet
- 12:00 The Kill Zone
- 12:55 Monster Frog
- 13:50 Wild 24
- 14:45 Wild Kalahari
- 15:40 Predator Patrol
- 16:35 Monster Fish
- 17:30 Secret Life Of Predators
- 18:25 Man And The Wild
- 19:20 Wild Kalahari
- 20:10 Predator Patrol
- 21:00 Monster Fish
- 21:50 Secret Life Of Predators
- 22:40 Man And The Wild
- 23:30 The Kill Zone



PAKISTAN QIRRAAT AND NAAT COUNCIL KUWAIT ORGANIZES SEERAT UN NABI (PBUH) CONFERENCE

Pakistan Qirrat and Naat Council Kuwait (PQNCK) organized Seerat un Nabi (PBUH) Conference on the sacred occasion of our beloved Prophet's (PBUH) birthday. A large number of people from all walks of life attended this event. The chief guest of this conference was Ali Ahmed Aghbash, the Ambassador of Chad Republic and Dr Umar Jawaid, the Community Welfare Attaché from Embassy of Pakistan Kuwait. Conference was held under patronage of Shamshad Khan Tanoli, the Patron in Chief of PQNCK and presided by Muhammad Irfan Adil, the Founder/President of PQNCK.

Conference started by recitation of Holy Quran by Muhammad Asif and Qari Sohaib Anjum, whereas Nasheed was presented by, Mujahid Chishti, Muhammad Faisal Naqshbandi, Rana Muhammad Irfan, Baber Ali, Sarwar Hussain Naqshbandi, Ahmed Yar, Sufi Abdul Majeed, Muhammad Khurram and Muhammad Ayub and event was conducted by Qari Muhammad Waheed and Muhammad Zaman Chishti.

PQNCK is well known organization in Quranic education and the main segment of the event was the performance of young kids, the presented Qirrat, Nasheed, Niqaabat and answered Islamic general knowledge questions very beautifully and very highly appreciated by all audience. Chief guest Dr Umar Jawaid, the Community Welfare Attaché from Embassy of Pakistan Kuwait said in his key note speech that We should follow the golden principles of Islam and Hadith of Holy Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) only, then we shall succeed.



He appreciated PQNCK all team members for educating young kids in Islamic education and for holding such a successful conference.

Addressing the conference, Shamshad Khan Tanoli, the Patron in Chief of PQNCK, Muhammad Irfan Adil the Founder/President, Qari Talat Shareef Naqshbandi Vice President said that The Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) led a simple life, which is the best example for all the people of world. He wears the clean clothes. These clothes were usually not in a good condition, which depicts the simplicity of our beloved prophet. He was the leader of Muslims and has all the power but he did not avail any benefit from these powers. Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) possesses tolerance. At the time of con-

quest of Makkah, he forgave all his enemies. He built up the Islamic Government in Madina. Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) possesses good manner and affection for all. He emphasized on Independence of slaves. In his Last Hajj, he addresses the Muslims that no white is superior to black, but can be, depending on deeds. Islam is a religion of peace, love, truth, affection and all good morals of life. It abstain us from sins and bad habits and lead us to good deeds and happy life. Islam saves our life in both of the worlds. We should follow the golden principles of Islam and Hadith of Holy Prophet (PBUH) only, then we shall succeed. At the end Eng. Adnan Yousef thanked all distinguished guests and dinner was served after Dua and conference ended in time.

PEFK ORGANIZES TRAINING ON CORPORATE PRESENTATION SKILLS

Pakistan Employment Forum Kuwait (PEFK) organized training for working professionals on the topic of "Corporate Presentation Skills" on 29th December, 2016 at one of the well-known hotels in Kuwait City. Executive level professionals including project managers, company directors, department heads and marketing managers from all walks of life participated in the free training session.

The session began with recitation of The Holy Quran, followed by PEFK introduction and a welcome note delivered by the Founder President of the organization, Muhammad Irfan Adil. He gave a brief introduction about the history, vision and mission of the organization. PEFK being a non-political and non-governmental organization is a premier and first ever Pakistani forum of its kind in the State of Kuwait that is purely designated to provide assistance to job seekers and career counseling for students residing in Kuwait. PEFK has been organizing such professional training sessions in the past.

Renowned Training Consultant Anwar Ali, who is the head of training and development division at PEFK, conducted the comprehensive training session on "Corporate Presentation Skills". He was actively assisted by Sadia Baig, PEFK

Training Coordinator and very well supported by Waqas Ahmed the Joint Secretary of PEFK.

The training session comprised various group activities, team building exercises and reactive discussions. The key factors related to the subject, were demonstrated in detail. All participants showed keen interest. In their feedback they acknowledged that they had learnt a lot of new things during the session and such training are very essential for professional growth. The participants were all thankful to PEFK for organizing such a wonderful training, and said that they are anxiously looking forward to the next training session. Anwar Ali said that the response from participating members was very encouraging and we at PEFK will arrange similar training seminars in near future.

Irfan Shafiq, the General Secretary of PEFK, delivered vote of thanks to all the participants, training team, media team and the organizing committee. He mentioned that PEFK has plans to conduct several training sessions, workshops and seminars in 2017. Later Participation Certificates were delivered to all participants by the event executives. Dinner was served at the end of the training session.



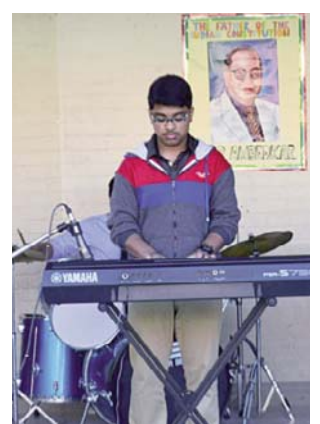


ICSK KHAITAN ORGANIZES SENATE FEST 'LEARN AND EARN'

The Senate Fest of ICSK (Khaiatan) held on Thursday, 29th December, 2016 was a day of 'learn and earn' with fun and frolic. The Principal, K G Shirsath inaugurated the fest and wished everyone a joyful day. Music filled the campus with students dancing and singing to the beat of the drums.

There were fashion shows and group dances. The students were dressed colorfully and enjoyed their much-awaited day. They were bubbling with joy visiting the stalls their friends had put up. There were food stalls, game stalls and films in the auditorium. There was a football match for the senior boys. By

the end of the day, the students had much to add to their memories. The Senate Fest was indeed a 'Learn and Earn' opportunity for the students. It also helped them develop a skill of entrepreneurship and sense of community, essential for their future practical life.



'TREE MAN' SEES HOPE AFTER 16 SURGERIES

DHAKA: A Bangladeshi father dubbed the "tree man" because of the bark-like warts that once covered his body will soon be able to leave hospital after groundbreaking treatment for one of the world's rarest diseases. Abul Bajandar has undergone at least 16 operations to remove five kilos of growths from his hands and feet since his condition came to doctors' attention a year ago. The 27-year-old former rickshaw driver is one of only four people in the world ever to be diagnosed with epidermodysplasia verruciformis, an extremely rare genetic condition dubbed "tree-man disease" that left him unable to hold his three-year-old daughter.

"Bajandar's cure was a remarkable milestone in the history of medical science," said Samanta Lal Sen, plastic surgery coordinator at Dhaka Medical College Hospital. "We operated on him at least 16 times to remove the warts. The hands and feet are now almost fine. He will be discharged within next 30 days after a couple of minor surgeries to perfect the shape of his hands," Sen said.

Sen believes Bajandar could become the first person to be cured of the disease, provided the warts do not grow back. Only last year an Indonesian man died of the rare genetic condition. Speaking from his bed at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital, which has been treating him free of charge, Bajandar said the pain of his condition had been "unbearable". "I never thought I would ever be able to hold my kid with my hands," he said, showing a bandaged hand. "Now I feel so much better, I can hold my daughter in my lap and play with her. I can't wait to go back home."

Bajandar, who comes from a poor village in the southern coastal district of Khulna, became a celebri-



(Left) This file photograph taken on Jan 31, 2016 shows Bangladeshi man Abul Bajandar dubbed the 'Tree Man' as he sits at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital. (Right) In this photograph taken on Jan 4, 2017, Bajandar relaxes with his daughter in a ward at the hospital. — AFP



ty after his condition was widely covered in local and international media.

He met his wife Halima Khatun before he contracted the disease, but it had taken hold by the time they married, against her parents' wishes. All three have lived in the hospital since he was admitted for the first surgery nearly a year ago. "He is probably the most loved and longest-staying patient

in this hospital," said duty doctor Nurun Nahar. Bajandar initially thought the warts were harmless, but they eventually covered his hands and feet, forcing him to stop working. Now he plans to set up a small business using donations received from well-wishers across the world. "I was so worried about raising my daughter," he said. "I hope the curse won't return again." —AFP

CONSERVATIONIST FIGHTS TO SAVE CAMBODIA SEAHORSES

ACH SEH ISLAND, Cambodia: A 7-inch creature with a head resembling a horse and a monkey-like tail glides gracefully out of a dark coral crevice off the Cambodian coast. Master of camouflage, unrivaled as a hunter and a much-loved figure of ancient myths and legends, the seahorse may be spiraling toward annihilation after surviving beneath the waves for some 40 million years. Taking photographs and detailed notes, two divers swim through turbid water to spot the male in the crevice and a nearby female, both hanging on in a once-pristine habitat turned to withered coral beds and ragged remnants of seagrass meadows.

The tropical seas around this jungled island depict, in microcosm, both the seahorse's threatened state - tens of millions are harvested globally each year - and possible ways to save the iconic species from extinction. "The seahorse faces an enormous variety of threats," says Paul Ferber, a British conservationist who has lived on Ach Seh Island for three years, studying the genus *Hippocampus* and trying to protect its ravaged environment against an armada of illegal trawlers, crab traps and divers in sleek longboats specifically targeting seahorses and related species.

Peering into the darkness one night, Ferber hears the tell-tale chugging of his No. 1 enemy: trawlers from neighboring Vietnam dragging miles-long nets with mesh so fine that even creatures smaller than seahorses can't escape. "Big, nasty Vietnamese (boats). It's either a seine trawler or a pair of them," he says of ves-



In this Nov 27, photo, Jasmine, daughter of British conservationist fighting to save Cambodian seahorses Paul Ferber, reads a seahorse study book at a base-camp on Koh Ach Seh Island near the Cambodia-Vietnam border. — AP

sels that leave behind a lifeless ocean. If equipped with electrified nets, they can even stun and suck in living things burrowed in sea beds.

A powerfully built man with a pair of seahorses tattooed on his chest, Ferber urgently calls his contact in the Cambodian fisheries department, hoping its speedboat can rush from the mainland to arrest the intruders. No luck; the department's fastest boat was being repaired. The 39-year-old Ferber,

who underwent police training in Britain, said that before such cooperation began, he and his team confronted illegal fishermen alone, armed only with "a slingshot and a bunch of rocks". He said they were shot at with AK-47 rifles and even a spear gun, and one of their boats was rammed and sunk. Death threats continue.

Seahorses, caught in waters around the world, are sold mainly for Asian traditional medicine, especially in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Vietnam and China. Amanda Vincent, a Canadian marine biologist and founder of Project Seahorse, estimates that more than 20 million are so consumed each year. Lesser numbers end up as key rings, encased in jewelry or other curios, or in aquariums, with the United States the world's top buyer for the pet trade. Data from CITES, the international monitor of the wildlife trade, shows that more than 630,000 were imported in the US from 2004 to 2014.

Neither their unique look and behavior (the male, for example, gives birth to the young) nor their place in popular imagination (as charioteers for the Greek god Poseidon, or powerful sea dragons of Chinese myth) seems to have prevented massive exploitation. In Chinese traditional medicine, seahorses ground into powder or dried and eaten whole are believed to cure everything from kidney disease to baldness, despite a lack of scientific evidence. Rice wine with seahorses stuffed inside the bottles is advertised as a powerful sex tonic to "turn a man into an all-night Romeo". —AFP

US CANCER DEATHS DROP 25% SINCE '91

WASHINGTON: The cancer death rate in the United States has dropped 25 percent from a peak in 1991, mainly due to a steady decline in smoking and advances in early detection and treatment of tumors, new research released Thursday shows. The rate decrease means there were about 2.1 million fewer deaths between 1991 and 2014, according to an annual report by the American Cancer Society (ACS). "The continuing drops in the cancer death rate are a powerful sign of the potential we have to reduce cancer's deadly toll," ACS chief medical officer Otis Brawley said.

The decreasing death rates were most pronounced for patients suffering from four major types of cancer - lung, breast, prostate and colorectal. Lung cancer deaths among men plummeted by 43 percent between 1990 and 2014, and by 17 percent among women between 2002 and 2014, according to the research published in *CA: A Journal for Clinicians*. The breast cancer mortality rate for women decreased by 38 percent between 1989 and 2014.

The drop is even more dramatic among men suffering from prostate cancer - 51 percent between 1993 and 2014 - and in colon cancer deaths among both sexes, which plunged 51 percent between 1976 and 2014. Some 1.68 million new cases of cancer will emerge in the United States this year, the report predicts, along with 600,000 deaths from the disease. Cancer remains the second most prominent cause of death in the country, behind cardiovascular ailments.

Gender disparities

Over the past decade, the incidence of cancer has remained stable among women and declined among men by almost two percent a year. The mortality rate from the disease has dropped by around 1.5 percent annually among both sexes. But the report finds significant disparities in incidence and mortality between genders. In all forms, the frequency of cancer is 20 percent greater among men and the mortality rate 40 percent higher. That difference is mainly due to the risk factors affecting each sex. Liver cancer, an extremely fatal form of the disease, is three times more common in men than women. — AFP

EATING PEANUTS AS BABY PREVENTS PEANUT ALLERGY

WASHINGTON: US health authorities recommended Thursday feeding infants foods containing peanuts as a way to prevent an allergy to them. The guidelines were issued by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) on the basis of a clinical study sponsored by the same organization. The study showed that eating peanut-containing foods from the age of four months to five years reduces by 81 percent the risk of peanut allergy among infants deemed at high risk because they already had severe eczema, egg allergy or both.

The NIAID, which is part of the National Institutes of Health, said that peanut allergy is a growing public health problem for which there is no treatment. The allergy generally develops in childhood and persists through adulthood. The allergic reactions can be severe and life-threatening. Around two percent of children in America have peanut allergy, according to a 2010 study. That is four times more than in 1999. "Living with peanut allergy requires constant vigilance. Preventing the development of peanut allergy will improve and save lives and lower health care costs," said NIAID director Anthony Fauci.

"We expect that widespread implementation of these guidelines by health care providers will prevent the development of peanut allergy in many susceptible children and ultimately reduce the prevalence of peanut allergy in the United States," Fauci said. Under the new guidelines, peanuts should be introduced into the diets of high-risk infants between the ages of four and six months. For infants with mild or moderate risk of developing peanut allergy, the timeframe is about six months of age. There is no timeframe for infants without eczema or any food allergy.

All infants should begin eating solid foods before peanuts are introduced. The new approach was welcomed by the American Academy of Pediatrics. Seventeen years ago, it published recommendations that children should not be fed peanuts before age three. — AFP

PLANS TO OPEN US WATERS IN PACIFIC TO FISH FARMING

HONOLULU: As traditional commercial fishing is threatening fish populations worldwide, US officials are working on a plan to expand fish farming into federal waters around the Pacific Ocean. The government sees the move toward aquaculture as a promising solution to overfishing and feeding a hungry planet. But some environmentalists say the industrial-scale farms could do more harm than good to overall fish stocks and ocean health.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is creating a plan to manage commercial fish farms in federal waters, the area of ocean from three to 200 miles offshore, around Hawaii and other Pacific islands. The program is similar to one recently implemented by NOAA in the Gulf of Mexico. The farms in the Gulf and the Pacific would be the only aquaculture operations in US federal waters, though there are smaller operations in state waters close to shore.

Fish farming has been practiced for centuries in Hawaii and around the world. But modern aquaculture, some environmentalists say, carries pollution risks and the potential for non-native farmed fish to escape and enter the natural ecosystem. Most shellfish consumed in America comes from farms, and their methods are widely considered sustainable. However, some farms that grow carnivorous fish such as salmon have raised concerns about sustainability because they use wild-caught fish to feed the captive species. There are three ways to farm fish:



ALAMEDA, California: In this Dec 19, 2016 photo, Dr Sylvia Earle stands beside a carved bust of herself at Deep Ocean Exploration and Research Marine Center. — AP

Fully contained land-based systems that pump water in and out with little, if any, environmental impact; near-shore operations incorporating natural and man-made elements; and offshore farms. Former NOAA chief scientist and founder of ocean advocacy group Mission Blue Sylvia Earle said there are more environmentally sustainable and economically viable options than open-ocean aquaculture, which uses huge floating net-pens or submerged cages. "We have to make a choice with aquaculture," she said. "Is our goal to feed a large number of people? Or is our goal to create or to

serve a luxury market?"

Last year, NOAA and the Scripps Institution of Oceanography put an economic value of \$17 billion a year on the ocean off the west coasts of North and South America.

That includes \$4.3 billion from commercial and sport fishing and \$12.9 billion for the capture of carbon. Earle said the ocean is worth more, and no dollar figure can be attached to keeping the ocean, and in turn humans, healthy. "We now have recognition of other values of the ocean beyond what we can extract either for food or for products," she said. — AP

CLINIC PAGE



Kuwait Times
248 33 199

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SATURDAY, JANUARY 7, 2017



Flight Schedule

DIAL 161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

Arrival Flights on Saturday 7/1/2017

Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
KLM	413	Amsterdam/Dammam	00:25
JZR	267	Beirut	00:30
CLX	852	Luxembourg	00:35
JZR	539	Cairo	00:40
THY	772	Istanbul	00:55
RJA	642	Amman	01:05
QTR	1086	Doha	01:15
SAI	441	Lahore	01:30
THY	764	Istanbul	01:50
MSC	511	Alexandria	02:00
PGT	858	Istanbul	02:00
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:05
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30
UAE	853	Dubai	02:30
KAC	412	Bangkok	02:50
KAC	332	Trivandrum	05:45
THY	770	Istanbul	05:55
KAC	364	Colombo	06:05
KAC	384	Delhi	06:05
KAC	206	Islamabad	06:20
KAC	346	Ahmedabad	06:25
BAW	157	London	06:40
PAL	668	Manila/Dubai	07:00
KAC	204	Lahore	07:15
FDB	5061	Dubai	07:15
FDB	053	Dubai	07:50
KAC	302	Mumbai	08:20
UAE	855	Dubai	08:40
KAC	382	Delhi	08:45
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:05
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	09:05
KAC	352	Kochi	09:10
QTR	1070	Doha	09:30
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40
SVA	512	Riyadh	10:00
AVV	653	Sohag	10:10
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40
KAC	774	Riyadh	11:05
RBG	553	Alexandria	11:15
IRM	1188	Mashhad	11:15
JZR	165	Dubai	11:30
FDK	801	Damascus	11:45
IAW	157	Al Najaf	12:00
SYR	343	Latakia	12:05
MSC	401	Alexandria	12:30
JZR	239	Amman	12:45
FDB	075	Dubai	12:50
UAE	871	Dubai	12:50
MSR	610	Cairo	13:00
BON	101	Sarajevo	13:30
JZR	779	Jeddah	13:35
KAC	564	Amman	13:40
KAC	788	Jeddah	13:45
KNE	231	Riyadh	13:55
KAC	672	Dubai	14:00
QTR	1078	Doha	14:10
FDB	059	Dubai	14:20
KAC	692	Muscat	14:30
GFA	221	Bahrain	14:40
KAC	542	Cairo	14:45
KNE	529	Jeddah	14:55
KAC	618	Doha	15:00
KNE	683	Madinah	15:05
ETD	303	Abu Dhabi	15:15
KAC	286	Dhaka	15:20
OMA	645	Muscat	15:35
UAE	857	Dubai	15:45
ABY	127	Sharjah	15:50
MSR	575	Sharm el-Sheikh	15:50
KAC	154	Istanbul	15:55
SAW	705	Damascus	16:00
SVA	504	Madinah	16:00
KNE	531	Jeddah	16:05
QTR	1072	Doha	16:10
JZR	535	Cairo	16:10
JZR	787	Riyadh	16:25
FDB	051	Dubai	16:25
JZR	357	Mashhad	16:25
KAC	662	Abu Dhabi	16:35
RJA	640	Amman	16:55
KAC	118	New York	17:00
SVA	510	Riyadh	17:15
GFA	215	Bahrain	17:30
JZR	777	Jeddah	17:45
JZR	325	Al Najaf	17:50
NIA	251	Alexandria	17:55
SVA	500	Jeddah	18:00
UAE	875	Dubai	18:00
FDB	063	Dubai	18:10
JZR	177	Dubai	18:20
MSR	620	Cairo	18:30
QTR	1080	Doha	18:50
IRA	669	Mashhad	18:55
SYR	341	Damascus	19:00

KAC	512	Mashhad	19:20
ABY	123	Sharjah	19:25
GFA	217	Bahrain	19:30
KAC	502	Beirut	19:30
CLX	856	Luxembourg	19:35
KAC	674	Dubai	19:45
KAC	104	London	19:50
FDB	057	Dubai	19:50
KNE	381	Taif	19:55
KAC	166	Rome	19:55
MSR	618	Alexandria	20:05
OMA	647	Muscat	20:10
JZR	189	Dubai	20:15
QTR	1088	Doha	20:35
KAC	562	Amman	20:40
KAC	134	Munich	20:45
KAC	174	Munich	20:45
KAC	616	Bahrain	20:50
FDB	5053	Dubai	20:50
JAI	572	Mumbai	20:55
KAC	786	Jeddah	21:15
ETD	307	Abu Dhabi	21:20
MEA	402	Beirut	21:20
ALK	229	Colombo	21:25
UAE	859	Dubai	21:40
KAC	676	Dubai	21:45
GFA	219	Bahrain	21:45
QTR	1082	Doha	22:00
KLM	415	Amsterdam/Dammam	22:05
JZR	125	Bahrain	22:05
NIA	151	Cairo	22:10
ETD	309	Abu Dhabi	22:15
AIC	987	Chennai/Hyderabad	22:25
JZR	241	Amman	22:45
KNE	533	Jeddah	22:45
KAC	164	Paris	22:55
KAC	1544	Cairo	22:55
JZR	185	Dubai	23:15
FDB	071	Dubai	23:45
JAI	574	Mumbai	23:50

Departure Flights on Saturday 7/1/2017

Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
AIC	976	Goa/Chennai	00:05
PIA	240	Sialkot	00:40
FDB	072	Dubai	00:40
JAI	573	Mumbai	00:50
BBC	044	Dhaka	01:30
KLM	413	Amsterdam	01:50
KAC	417	Manila	02:00
CLX	888	NBO	02:05
KAC	285	Dhaka	02:25
THY	773	Istanbul	02:25
SAI	442	Lahore	02:30
MSC	512	Alexandria	03:05
ETH	621	Addis Ababa	03:05
PGT	859	Istanbul	03:35
KAC	103	London	03:40
UAE	854	Dubai	03:45
KKK	6505	Istanbul	03:55
OMA	644	Muscat	03:55
THY	765	Istanbul	04:00
MSR	613	Cairo	04:10
ETD	306	Abu Dhabi	04:10
QTR	1077	Doha	04:40
FEG	938	Sohag	05:00
QTR	1087	Doha	05:50
FDB	070	Dubai	06:30
KAC	153	Istanbul	06:50
THY	771	Istanbul	06:50
KAC	165	Rome	06:55
JZR	164	Dubai	06:55
RJA	643	Amman	07:05
JZR	238	Amman	07:10
KAC	541	Cairo	07:15
GFA	212	Bahrain	07:15
KAC	163	Paris	07:25
KAC	773	Riyadh	07:30
KAC	133	Munich	07:35
KAC	173	Munich	07:35
KAC	787	Jeddah	07:45
JZR	778	Jeddah	07:55
FDB	5062	Dubai	07:55
KAC	563	Amman	08:00
BAW	156	London	08:40
FDB	054	Dubai	08:55
KAC	691	Muscat	09:00
KAC	117	SNN/New York	09:00
KAC	671	Dubai	09:15
JZR	534	Cairo	09:15
KAC	101	London	09:35
ABY	126	Sharjah	09:45
UAE	856	Dubai	09:55
ETD	302	Abu Dhabi	10:10
JZR	356	Mashhad	10:25
KAC	411	Bangkok	10:30

FDB	056	Dubai	10:35
QTR	1071	Doha	10:40
SVA	513	Riyadh	11:00
KAC	617	Doha	11:10
AVV	654	Asyut	11:10
KAC	501	Beirut	11:15
GFA	214	Bahrain	11:25
RBG	554	Alexandria	11:55
KAC	661	Abu Dhabi	12:05
JZR	776	Jeddah	12:05
IRM	1189	Mashhad	12:30
FDK	802	Damascus	12:45
IAW	158	Al Najaf	13:00
SYR	344	Latakia	13:05
JZR	786	Riyadh	13:10
KAC	511	Mashhad	13:15
MSC	402	Alexandria	13:30
JZR	176	Dubai	13:45
MSR	611	Cairo	14:00
FDB	076	Dubai	14:05
UAE	872	Dubai	14:15
JZR	324	Al Najaf	14:25
KNE	382	Taif	14:50
BON	102	Sarajevo	14:55
KAC	561	Amman	15:00
KAC	673	Dubai	15:00
FDB	060	Dubai	15:10
KAC	785	Jeddah	15:15
PAL	669	Dubai/Manila	15:20
GFA	222	Bahrain	15:25
JZR	188	Dubai	15:40
QTR	1079	Doha	15:40
KAC	1543	Cairo	15:55
KNE	530	Jeddah	15:55
KNE	684	Madinah	16:00
KAC	357	Kochi	16:20
ETD	304	Abu Dhabi	16:20
ABY	128	Sharjah	16:30
OMA	646	Muscat	16:35
MSR	576	Sharm el-Sheikh	16:50
SAW	706	Damascus	16:55
KNE	532	Jeddah	16:55
KAC	675	Dubai	17:00
SVA	505	Madinah	17:00
JZR	266	Beirut	17:05
JZR	240	Amman	17:15
FDB	052	Dubai	17:25
KAC	615	Bahrain	17:35
QTR	1073	Doha	17:40
JZR	538	Cairo	17:45
UAE	858	Dubai	17:45
RJA	641	Amman	17:55
SVA	511	Riyadh	18:15
KAC	353	BLR	18:15
GFA	216	Bahrain	18:20
JZR	184	Dubai	18:40
NIA	252	Alexandria	18:55
JZR	554	Alexandria	18:55
FDB	064	Dubai	19:05
JZR	124	Bahrain	19:15
UAE	876	Dubai	19:30
SVA	501	Jeddah	19:30
MSR	621	Cairo	19:30
QTR	1081	Doha	19:50
IRA	666	Esfahan	19:55
SYR	342	Damascus	20:00
ABY	124	Sharjah	20:05
GFA	218	Bahrain	20:15
KAC	383	Delhi	20:30
FDB	058	Dubai	20:35
KAC	361	Colombo	20:35
KAC	775	Riyadh	20:45
KNE	232	Riyadh	20:55
CLX	856	Hong Kong	21:05
MSR	607	Luxor	21:05
OMA	648	Muscat	21:10
KAC	205	Islamabad	21:25
KAC	345	Ahmedabad	21:30
QTR	1089	Doha	21:35
KAC	741	Dammam	21:45
FDB	5054	Dubai	21:50
DHX	171	Bahrain	21:50
JAI	571	Mumbai	21:55
KAC	351	Kochi	22:00
ETD	308	Abu Dhabi	22:15
MEA	403	Beirut	22:20
ALK	230	Colombo	22:25
GFA	220	Bahrain	22:30
KAC	381	Delhi	22:45
KAC	301	Mumbai	22:45
UAE	860	Dubai	22:55
KLM	415	Dammam/Amsterdam	23:05
ETD	310	Abu Dhabi	23:05
NIA	152	Cairo	23:10
QTR	1083	Doha	23:20
KNE	534	Jeddah	23:35

SATURDAY, JANUARY 7, 2017

WORDSEARCH PUZZLE

Chocolate

Find and circle all of the words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining 55 letters spell a secret message.

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

- | | | | |
|--------------|---------------|------------|-------------|
| ADDICTIVE | CONFECTIONERY | FILLING | PUDDING |
| BAKING | COOKIES | FONDUE | SEMISWEET |
| BARS | CREAM PIE | FOOD | SUGAR |
| BITTERSWEET | CUPCAKE | FUDGE | SWISS |
| BROWNIES | DARK | ICE CREAM | SYRUP |
| CAKES | DECADENT | ICING | TREAT |
| CANDY | DELICIOUS | INGREDIENT | TRUFFLES |
| CHIPS | DESSERT | MILK | UNSWEETENED |
| CHOCOLATIERS | DRINKS | MOUSSE | WHITE |
| COCOA | | | |

Yesterday's Solution

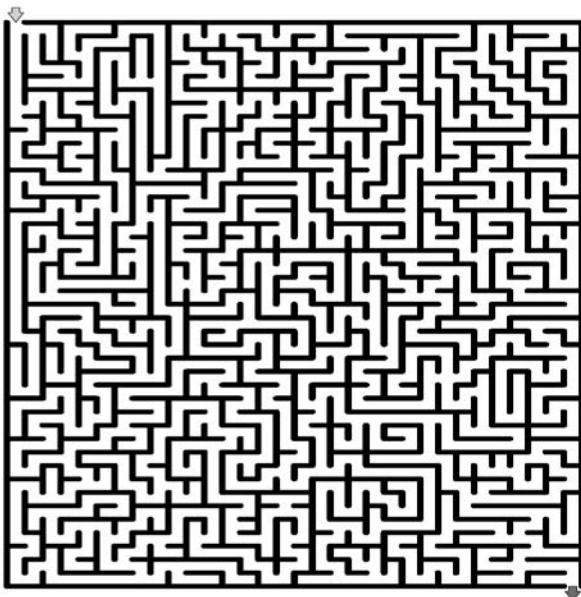
Chess

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

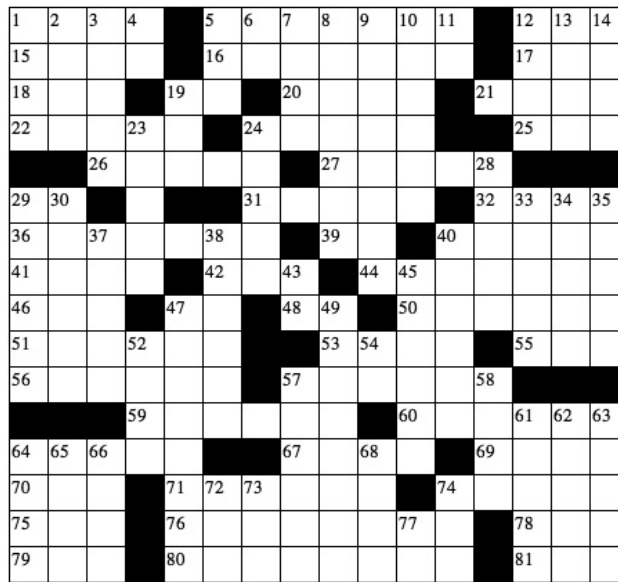
- | | | | |
|-------------|--------------|-------------|------------|
| ATTACK | CHAMPIONSHIP | GRANDMASTER | PAWN |
| BISHOP | DEEP BLUE | JUMP | PIECE |
| BLITZ CHESS | DIAGONAL | KASPAROV | PROMOTION |
| BLOCKED | EN PASSANT | KIBITZING | QUEEN |
| BLUNDER | ENDGAME | KING | QUEENING |
| CAPTURE | EXCHANGE | KNIGHT | ROOK |
| CASTLING | FILE | LOSE | SACRIFICE |
| CENTER | FISCHER | MATE IN TWO | STALEMATE |
| CHECKMATE | FORK | MIDDLEGAME | TOURNAMENT |
| CHESSBOARD | GAMBIT | OPENING | WIN |

Hidden sentence: IF YOU CAN'T BEAT YOUR COMPUTER AT CHESS, TRY KICKBOXING

CHALLENGING MAZE



CROSSWORD 1483



ACROSS

- An aggressive remark directed at a person like a missile and intended to have a telling effect.
- Make or become coarse or coarser.
- (in Scotland or Ireland) A mountain or tall hill.
- The biblical name for ancient Syria.
- A collection of resources.
- A flat wing-shaped process or winglike part of an organism.
- Light informal conversation for social occasions.
- Large sweet juicy hybrid between tangerine and grapefruit having a thick wrinkled skin.
- Open-heart surgery in which the rib cage is opened and a section of a blood vessel is grafted from the aorta to the coronary artery to bypass the blocked section of the coronary artery and improve the blood supply to the heart.
- Squash bugs.
- A unit of length of thread or yarn.
- Spiritual leader of a Jewish congregation.
- A member of western Finnish people formerly living in the Baltic province where Saint Petersburg was built.
- A unit of magnetomotive force equal to 0.7958 ampere-turns.
- A musical form that is often the last movement of a sonata.
- Report or maintain.
- A genus of Vespertilionidae.
- (Akkadian) God of wisdom.
- A recurring sleep state during which rapid eye movements do not occur and dreaming does not occur.
- South American wood sorrel cultivated for its edible tubers.
- A soft lightweight fabric (usually printed).
- Being one more than two.
- A gonadotropic hormone that is secreted by the anterior pituitary.
- Store in a silo, as of fodder.
- An archaic name for Easter or Passover.
- A very light brown.
- The habitation of wild animals.
- Of or pertaining to or written in Altaic.
- Something whose name is either forgotten or not known.
- A state in northwestern North America.
- The fourth month of the civil year.
- Horny plate covering and protecting part of the dorsal surface of the digits.
- A branch of the Tai languages.
- Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
- Motivation based on ideas of right and wrong.
- A form of entertainment that enacts a story by a sequence of images giving the illusion of continuous movement.
- United States general who commanded the American Expeditionary Force in Europe during World War I (1860-1948).
- A light touch or stroke.
- The residue that remains when something is burned.
- The time and process of budding and unfolding of blossoms.
- A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.

DOWN

- Mentally or physically infirm with age.
- A theocratic republic in the Middle East in western Asia.
- An imaginary elephant that appears in a series of French books for children.
- The square of a body of any size of type.
- A compartment in front of a motor vehicle where driver sits.
- A state in northwestern United States on the Pacific.
- An Asian river between China and Russia.
- A vasodilator (trade name Loniten) used to treat severe hypertension.
- A nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (trade name Clinoril).
- Any plant of the genus Eryngium.
- A Mid-Atlantic state.
- Any of numerous local fertility and nature deities worshipped by ancient Semitic peoples.
- A river in central Europe that arises in northwestern Czechoslovakia and flows northward through Germany to empty into the North Sea.
- Kamarupan languages spoken in northeastern India and western Burma.
- A workplace for the conduct of scientific research.
- Capital of the state of Oregon in the northwestern part of the state on the Willamette River.
- English theoretical physicist who applied relativity theory to quantum mechanics and predicted the existence of antimatter and the positron (1902-1984).
- A bar or bars of rolled steel making a track along which vehicles can roll.
- The ritual placing of a corpse in a grave.
- Well grounded in logic or truth or having legal force.
- The boy whose upbringing was described by Jean-Jacques Rousseau.
- (of e.g. celestial bodies) Above the horizon.
- A person who believes that God created the universe and then abandoned it.
- A constitutional monarchy in a tiny enclave on the French Riviera.
- Of or relating to the hands.
- A silvery ductile metallic element found primarily in bauxite.
- Of or relating to herbs.
- An antineoplastic drug used to treat certain malignancies.
- Something or someone that causes anxiety.
- (of a young animal) Abandoned by its mother and raised by hand.
- A heavy odorless colorless gas formed during respiration and by the decomposition of organic substances.
- Expel from a community or group.
- Serving as or forming a base.
- The main city of ancient Phoenicia.
- Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
- Jordan's port.
- Armor plate that protects the chest.
- German organist and contrapuntist (1685-1750).
- Goddess of fertility.
- Being one more than nine.
- Hormones (estrogen and progesterin) are given to postmenopausal women.
- System of measurement based on centimeters and grams and seconds.
- A hard malleable ductile silvery metallic element that is resistant to corrosion.

Yesterday's Solution

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

Daily SuDoku

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

Yesterday's Solution

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



SYDNEY: Pakistan batsman Sharjeel Khan (left) cuts a ball away as Australia's Matthew Wade (right) and Peter Handscomb look on on the fourth day of the third cricket Test match against Australia at the SCG yesterday. —AFP

AUSSIES PUSH FOR PAK CLEAN SWEEP

SYDNEY: Australia were nine wickets away from a series clean sweep and Pakistan an improbable 410 runs from victory with one day left in the third Test in Sydney yesterday. Spinner Nathan Lyon grabbed the wicket of debutant opener Sharjeel Khan for 40, caught at mid-wicket, nearing stumps to have Pakistan at 55 for one. At the close, Pakistan's leading series scorer Azhar Ali was not out 11 with nightwatchman Yasir Shah on three. Skipper Steve Smith called a halt to Australia's second innings at 241 for two with 16 overs left on the fourth day and the tourists facing the herculean task of scoring 465 for victory.

Usman Khawaja was left unbeaten on 79 off 98 balls and Peter Handscomb was on 40 off 25 balls. Handscomb finished with a series average of 114.66. "I think the position we're in is pretty good, the way the guys batted today, especially Davy Warner, to get those runs as quickly as possible and do some pretty unselfish batting," paceman Josh Hazlewood said. "The wicket's still pretty good, but I think there's enough there to create nine more chances, if it's reverse swing or spin."

Smith was out in a review after 'Hot Spot' detected a faint edge off his glove and was caught behind off Yasir for 59 off 43 balls to finish the series with 441 runs at 110.25. David Warner smashed the second fastest 50 in Test history to give Australia a flying start in their chase for runs and a declaration. The explosive Warner smashed leg-spinner Yasir for six, six, four, four in the fourth over of the innings, and then clouted Imran Khan for four consecutive boundaries in the seventh over.

His breathless half-century came off 23 balls with seven fours and three sixes and was the second fastest in Test history after Pakistan skipper Misbah-ul-Haq's 21 balls against Australia in Abu Dhabi in 2014. But Warner perished when he missed in a lusty swing and was bowled by Wahab Riaz for 55 off 27 balls. Younis Khan was left unconquered on 175 as Pakistan lost their last two wickets in an hour's play post-lunch after rain washed out the first session.

'A Proud Pakistani'

"We want to finish this Test series on a good note," Younis said. "It will not be easy because the fifth day old Test match and we play in Sydney and they have two spinners and good fast bowlers as well." Younis was dropped on 141 by wicket-keeper Matthew Wade, who got his right glove to the chance but could not cling on, much to bowler Mitchell Starc's annoyance. Wade was forced off during Thursday's play with a stomach illness but returned to the game yesterday.

Yasir gave Smith his ninth catch of the series when he was picked up in the slips off Josh Hazlewood for 10 before Imran Khan was bowled two balls later for a duck.

Younis remained unbeaten off 334 balls with 17 fours and three sixes, and was given a big ovation from the SCG crowd as he left the ground after his 34th Test century. "I love to perform for my country, for my team and whenever my team needs me, it's a little bit late this time, but I am a proud Pakistani," Younis said. The tourists on 315 finished 223 runs in arrears, but skipper Smith did not enforce the follow-on. Hazlewood finished with four wickets for 55 and spinner Nathan Lyon captured three for 115. — AP

'KING KOHLI' CROWNED INDIA ODI, T20 SKIPPER

NEW DELHI: Selectors appointed Virat Kohli as India's limited overs skipper yesterday as the number one ranked Test side sets its sights on winning back its title as one-day cricket's world champions. Two days after India's most successful ever captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni stood down from the helm of both the Twenty20 and 50 overs sides, Kohli was confirmed as skipper in all three of the game's formats.

The swashbuckling batsman, who has presided over an 18-match unbeaten run as Test captain, will first lead India in three one-day internationals starting from January 15 before the sides play three Twenty20 matches. His first major assignment will come in June when he will lead India's defence of the Champions Trophy and his appointment also means he should captain India in the 50 over World Cup final in England in 2019.

Dhoni, who led India to victory in the 2011 World Cup as well as the 2007 World Twenty20, kept his place in both 15-men squads, the Indian board's chief selector M.S.K Prasad announced in a televised press conference. Prasad told reporters that Kohli took part in the selection meeting which also decided on a surprise recall for the veteran batsman Yuvraj Singh. "Virat was with us on Skype" for the selection meeting in Mumbai, said Prasad. "After discussing with him, this is the best possible team we have. It's a fantastic team."

Red-hot form

The new 28-year-old skipper, whose nickname is 'King Kohli', is the world's number one-ranked batsman in T20 cricket and is also second in the rankings for the 50 over and five-day formats. Since taking over from Dhoni as Test skipper in early 2015, Kohli has



MOHALI, India: This file photograph taken on Oct 24, 2016 shows India's Virat Kohli raising his bat after India won the third one day international (ODI) cricket match between India and New Zealand at the Punjab Cricket Stadium Association Stadium. —AFP

been in scintillating form, leading India to five successive series victories and scoring three double centuries in the last six months. He was also the player of the tournament in last year's World T20 and smashed the record for most runs in the last edition of the Indian Premier League (IPL).

After making his debut in 2008, Kohli has scored 7,570 runs in 176 ODIs, including 26 hundreds and 38 half-centuries, at an average of 52.94. He also averages over 57 in T20 internationals. While India have built up a big lead over their rivals at the top of the Test rankings, they are second in the table in ODI cricket and third in the T20 format. Dhoni's position as skipper came under threat after India lost to the West Indies in the semi-finals of last year's World Twenty20, despite being overwhelming favorites as hosts of the tournament.

India also went out of the 2015 World Cup at the semi-final stage to the eventual winners Australia.

Kohli has nevertheless remained steadfastly loyal to Dhoni who was his captain when he was part of the Indian team which won the 2011 World Cup on home soil. Writing on Twitter shortly before yesterday's announcement, Kohli said: "Thanks for always being the leader a youngster wants to have around him. You'll always be my captain @msdhoni Bhai." Prasad said that Dhoni had agreed to captain an India A side which would play a warm-up match against England on Jan 10 in Mumbai. "I think he is the best guy to look after the youngsters. We know what Mahi (Dhoni) is all about," Prasad said. "It's not just about whether he has stepped down or anything. He is a captain by nature who leads from the front." — AFP

MUNRO BELTS NZ TO T20 WIN

MOUNT MAUNGANUI, New Zealand: Colin Munro produced a masterclass of controlled aggression to smash 101 off 54 balls as New Zealand coasted to a 47-run win in the second Twenty20 against Bangladesh yesterday. The comprehensive victory at Mount Maunganui gave New Zealand an unbeatable 2-0 lead in the three-match series, and follows their

3-0 sweep of the 50-over matches. With Munro in sublime form, hitting seven sixes and as many fours in his whirlwind innings, New Zealand posted a daunting 195-7.

Bangladesh in reply were all out for 148 in the 19th over. Sabbir Rahman and Soumya Sarkar made a bold attempt to run down the target after Bangladesh

slumped to 36-3 in the fifth over. The pair piled on 68 off 40 deliveries, including 21 off a Colin de Grandhomme over before a spectacular collapse in which seven wickets fell for 44 runs. With Sabbir and Soumya scoring with ease, and the required run rate after 10 overs at 9.3, New Zealand were forced to bring back Trent Boult, their main strike bowler, earlier than expected for his third over.

Boult immediately removed Soumya for 39 and Sabbir fell to Ish Sodhi for 48 to start a slide that saw Bangladesh all out with 11 balls remaining. Bangladesh, needing to win to keep the series alive, won the toss and opted to bowl first on a ground where the side batting second has traditionally won. They made the best possible start with opener Luke Ronchi dismissed first ball, but the game was immediately taken away from them when Munro arrived at the crease.

Kane Williamson (12) and Corey Anderson (four) did not hang around long but Tom Bruce joined Munro to form the backbone of the innings with a 123-run stand for the fifth wicket in just 67 balls. — AFP



MOUNT MAUNGANUI: Rubel Hossain of Bangladesh bowls during the 20/20 International between New Zealand and Bangladesh at Bay Oval yesterday. — AFP

FEDERER UNABLE TO STOP FRENCH ADVANCE

PERTH: A singles masterclass from Swiss champion Roger Federer wasn't enough to stop the French pairing of Richard Gasquet and Kristina Mladenovic winning through to the Hopman Cup final yesterday. Federer's



PERTH: Roger Federer of Switzerland hits a return against Richard Gasquet of France during their men's singles match on day six of the Hopman Cup tennis tournament yesterday. — AFP

comeback from injury gained momentum when he produced a flawless performance to beat Gasquet in the men's singles, but it was the French who won the tie 2-1. Mladenovic squared the tie with a three-set win over Belinda Bencic, before the French claimed the deciding mixed doubles. The French will face the United States team of Jack Sock and Coco Vandeweghe today.

After being beaten by young gun Alexander Zverev in his previous singles match, Federer bounced back to thrash the 18th-ranked Gasquet in straight sets in under an hour. The Hopman Cup is Federer's first tournament since a six-month layoff due to knee and back injuries. The 35-year-old entered 2017 ranked 16th - his lowest placing since 2001 - but in brushing aside Gasquet showed he was again ready to be a serious contender at the Australian Open, starting a week from Monday.

The 17-time Grand Slam champion barely missed a groundstroke, getting his first break of serve in the fourth game of the match and dominating proceedings from that point on. He also sent down 11 aces in nine service games, winning 6-1, 6-4 in 56 minutes. Gasquet had been in good touch heading into the match, beating Zverev and Dan Evans, both in straight sets.

Even Federer was a little stunned by his own form. "It was completely different from the previous two," he said. "Today was great, I started to feel the ball better and better and just moving around the court better. I am surprised how well I am playing already. I couldn't be more happy right now." Three matches into his comeback, Federer said his body was feeling great. Today is the best I have felt since I have arrived and that is super encouraging." — AFP

AGGRESSIVE RAONIC DOWNS NADAL CORNET, PLISKOVA MEET IN FINAL

BRISBANE: A more aggressive Milos Raonic moved into the semi-finals of the Brisbane International when he beat Spaniard Rafael Nadal in a high quality quarter-final yesterday. Raonic, the defending champion, came back from losing the first set to overhaul Nadal 4-6, 6-3, 6-4, disappointing the sell-out crowd who were almost all cheering for a Spanish victory. He will now play Bulgaria's seventh seed Grigor Dimitrov following a 6-3, 4-6, 6-3 winner over fourth ranked Dominic Thiem of Austria.

Raonic beat Roger Federer to win the 2016 title, the start of a successful year that saw him rise to three in the world. But in the first set his serve was slightly off and Nadal took advantage, breaking in the fifth game to take the early lead. Nadal had the chance to break again in the fifth game of the second set, but Raonic served his way out of trouble, saving the game with one of his 23 aces then breaking the Spaniard in the eighth game to level proceedings. The Canadian then seized on a poor Nadal service game at the start of the third set to break him to love and when he fought off a break point of his own to go ahead 3-1, the momentum had swung to the defending champion. Stan Wawrinka and Kei Nishikori will meet in the second semi-final following contrasting wins. Second seed Wawrinka battled for over two-and-a-half hours

before seeing off rising British player Kyle Edmund 6-7 (2/7), 6-4, 6-4, before Nishikori, the third seed, demolished young Australian Jordan Thompson 6-1, 6-1. Wawrinka, the reigning US Open champion, looked out of sorts against an inspired Edmund, who dominated the match for long periods and deservedly won the first set. But the 31-year-old Swiss scrambled well and was able to break Edmund once in the second set to level the match.

Meanwhile, Alize Cornet reached her biggest final in over two years after an "exhausted" Garbine Muguruza withdrew from their semi-final of the Brisbane International yesterday. The unseeded Frenchwoman was leading her Spanish opponent 4-1 in the first set when Muguruza decided she couldn't continue. Although the official reason was a right thigh injury, the fourth seeded Spaniard, who had spent over seven hours on court in her first three rounds, conceded later that she was physically spent.

Cornet will now play third seeded Czech Karolina Pliskova in the final, the first time the 26-year-old from Nice has reached the decider of a Premier Level tournament since she lost to Venus Williams in Dubai in 2014, after having beaten Serena in the semi-finals. A delighted Cornet said Muguruza's withdrawal had been the perfect result. — Agencies

FRUSTRATION AS FIXING SCANDAL HITS AHEAD OF AUSTRALIAN OPEN

SYDNEY: A match-fixing charge in Australia has underlined concerns about corruption in tennis ahead of the year's opening Grand Slam, with top players frustrated at another scandal hitting the sport. Police said an 18-year-old had been charged with match-fixing at a tournament in Victoria last October and would appear in court in March. Australian media yesterday named him as Oliver Anderson, an emerging star who is the reigning Australian Open boys champion.

The claim, just days before the world's leading players assemble in Melbourne for the first Grand Slam of the season, related to a first-round match at the second-tier Traralgon Challenger event. World number one Andy Murray, playing in the Qatar Open in Doha, said he had read about the case and that although he did not want to comment on the specifics, corruption must be tackled. "It's disappointing for the game any time something like that comes out," said Murray. "However, if people are caught and charged, I see that as being a positive thing. If it's going on and nothing is happening about it that's much worse for the future of the sport. So, if it's happening, there should be the most severe punishments for whoever is involved in it."

He was backed by rival Novak Djokovic, also in Doha, who said he was saddened by the news. "Very disappointing to hear, especially considering the fact that he's young and won the junior Grand Slam," said Djokovic. "You know, obviously the quality is there and the potential is there. I don't understand why he has done it," he said, before adding: "Everyone makes mistakes."

Fourteen-time Grand Slam champion Rafael Nadal said the latest police case showed the fight against match-fixing was working. "You get tired about this kind of stuff, but the most important thing is (to) fight against these kind of things," he told reporters at the Brisbane International tournament. "And he is young. That's even the worst part."

'ZERO TOLERANCE'

On the eve of the Australian Open last year, there were bombshell media allegations that match-fixing was rife in tennis and the authorities had done little to counter corruption. They included claims that players who had reached the top 50 had been repeatedly suspected of fixing matches but had never faced action. It sparked an independent review headed by Adam Lewis QC, a London-based expert on sports law, aimed at shaking up tennis's under-fire anti-corruption body, the Tennis Integrity Unit. — AFP

DJOKOVIC SAVES FIVE MATCH POINTS TO REACH QATAR FINAL

DOHA: Novak Djokovic saved five match points against world number 42 Fernando Verdasco yesterday to reach the Qatar Open final where he could meet world number one Andy Murray. Djokovic won a thrilling match 4-6, 7-6 (9/7), 6-3 to progress to his second successive final in Doha but was earlier on the brink of a straight sets defeat as he trailed in the second set tie-break. But through a combination of typical Djokovic grit and Verdasco errors he saved four match points at 6-2 down in the tiebreak and another when 7-6 behind.

"It's definitely one of the most exciting matches I have played," Djokovic said after coming back from five match points down for just the third time in his career. "I haven't saved five match points many times. He (Verdasco)

should have finished it off." Djokovic's progress to the semi-finals had been serene and yesterday's match was the first time the Serb had even dropped a set in Doha in almost two years.

Despite losing his opening service game, the world number two broke back in the eighth game. But he was then immediately broken back by Verdasco, who not only served out for the set but then broke Djokovic's opening service game in the second. Only after closing the tense second set tie-breaker, did Djokovic's victory seem likely. His win keeps alive hopes of final clash between the top two players in the world. Djokovic will play either Murray or the Czech Republic's Tomas Berdych in the final. Their semi-final was later yesterday. — AFP



DOHA: Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates after beating Spain's Fernando Verdasco in their semifinal tennis match of the ATP Qatar Open yesterday. — AFP

NENE NAILS GAME-WINNING FREE THROWS FOR ROCKETS

HOUSTON: James Harden scored 26 points and Nene made two free throws with 0.7 seconds remaining to lift the Houston Rockets to their sixth straight win, 118-116 over the Oklahoma City Thunder on Thursday night. Houston overcame Russell Westbrook's 49 points, though the star guard struggled down the stretch. Nene was fouled by Jerami Grant as he attempted a shot right under the basket, setting up the winning free throws. Nene had a season-high 18 points.

A pair of foul shots by Harden tied it with just under two minutes remaining. The teams combined to miss seven shots after that, with Westbrook missing three in that span, before Nene's free throws. The Thunder attempted an alley-oop on the inbounds pass after that, but Enes Kanter couldn't finish the play and Houston held on. Westbrook finished two points shy of his season high as Oklahoma City dropped its third straight.

HAWKS 99, PELICANS 94

Dennis Schroder scored 23 points and Atlanta beat New Orleans to win its fifth straight, even as shooting guard Kyle Korver spent the entire game on the bench amid reports he could soon be traded to Cleveland. Paul Millsap had 17 points and 10 rebounds for the Hawks, who trailed by three after Anthony Davis' dunk with 3:51 left before outscoring New Orleans 14-6 the rest of the way. Dwight Howard added 12 points and 11 rebounds, and Tim Hardaway Jr scored 14. Davis had 20 points and 19 rebounds for New Orleans, which has lost its last two. Jrue Holiday added 18 points and Buddy Hield scored 15 for the Pelicans, who shot only 36.6 percent (34 of 93) for the game.

PISTONS 115, HORNETS 114

Marco Belinelli nearly pulled off one of the craftiest buzzer beaters in memory, but his bank shot was disallowed because it came too late, and Detroit held on against Charlotte. Belinelli was inbounding from the sideline with 0.5 seconds remaining and the Hornets down by one. Detroit's Marcus Morris was guarding the inbounder but had his back turned, and Belinelli bounced the ball off him and caught the carom. He then took a shot that banked in, but it was waved off - and a video review confirmed the basket came just after time expired.

Kemba Walker scored 20 of his 32 points in the final period, helping Charlotte rally from a 19-point fourth-quarter deficit. Reggie Jackson put Detroit up 115-113 when he made two free throws with 1.9 seconds remaining. Morris was then called for a foul while Charlotte was trying to inbound at the other end, giving the Hornets one free throw and the ball. Belinelli made it to pull Charlotte within one. Boban Marjanovic had 15 points and a career-high 19 rebounds, helping the Pistons overcome Andre Drummond's foul trouble. Tobias Harris scored 25 points for Detroit, and Jackson had 22 points and 11 assists.

SPURS 127, NUGGETS 99

LaMarcus Aldridge scored 28 points, including 11 while sparking a third-quarter spurt, and San Antonio defeated Denver. Kawhi Leonard added 24 points, while Tony Parker had 21 and a season-high nine assists for the Spurs, who improved to 17-3 on the road this season. Parker shot 10 of 11 from the field. Aldridge helped San Antonio pull away in the third quarter by knocking down a flurry of mid-range jumpers and hook shots. He has reached double figures in 30 of 33 games this season. Nikola Jokic had 19 points and 11 rebounds for the Nuggets, who dropped their fourth straight.

RAPTORS 101, JAZZ 93

Kyle Lowry scored 16 of his 33 points in the fourth quarter to lead Toronto to a come-from-behind victory over Utah. Lowry, who had 19 points in the final quarter of a comeback win at Utah two weeks ago, added six rebounds and five assists for the Raptors (24-11). DeMar DeRozan had 23 points and seven rebounds, while Jonas Valanciunas added 18 points and 13 rebounds as Toronto rallied from a deficit of 11 points in the second period. The Jazz (22-15), who led for the first 44-plus minutes, were paced by Rudy Gobert's 15 points and 16 rebounds. Shelvin Mack added 17 points. DeRozan's 18-foot jumper with 3:44 left gave the Raptors their first lead, 89-88. It was an advantage they never relinquished.



HOUSTON: With the game tied at 116, Oklahoma City Thunder's Russell Westbrook and Victor Oladipo foul Houston Rockets' Nene (42) as he drives for a basket in the second half of an NBA basketball game Thursday. Nene's sunk two free throws to win the game 118-116. —AP

TRAIL BLAZERS 118, LAKERS 109

CJ McCollum had 27 points and Damian Lillard returned from a sprained ankle with 21 points and 10 assists to lead Portland over Los Angeles. Evan Turner scored 15 of his 20 in the fourth quarter as the Trail Blazers secured their ninth straight regular-season victory over the Lakers, a franchise record. D'Angelo Russell had 22 points, 10 in the final period, and Jordan Clarkson added 21 off the bench for Los Angeles, which led by 14 in the first half. McCollum's floater put Portland in front before he hit a 3-pointer with 4:06 to go that pushed the lead to 107-103. He added another basket that extended the margin. Lillard missed five games after spraining his left ankle against San Antonio on Dec. 23. Portland went 2-3 without him.

SUNS 102, MAVERICKS 95

Eric Bledsoe scored 26 points, including five straight to break a tie in the final two minutes of Phoenix's victory over Dallas. Devin Booker added 22 points as the Suns (12-25) won consecutive games for just the second time this season and denied the Mavericks (11-25) their third two-game winning streak in a matchup of Western Conference also-rans. Deron Williams led the Mavericks with 20 points, including consecutive baskets for a 93-all tie before Bledsoe's tiebreaking 3-pointer started a 9-2 run to finish the game. Tyson Chandler had 18 rebounds for Phoenix against his former team, and Brandon Knight scored 17 points after missing one game with a sprained right wrist.

PACERS 121, NETS 109

Jeff Teague had 21 points, 15 assists and seven rebounds, and Myles Turner finished with 25 points and 15 boards as Indiana beat Brooklyn for its fourth consecutive victory. Paul George scored 26 points and Thaddeus Young added 10 points and six rebounds for Indiana. Leading 66-59, the Pacers (19-18) went on an 18-4 run that gave them a 21-point lead. The Nets clawed their way back, pulling within eight with less than five minutes remaining in the fourth quarter, but Indiana then stretched its advantage back to double digits. Trevor Booker and Justin Hamilton had 16 points apiece for the Nets (8-26), who fell to 1-17 on the road. Brooklyn has lost four straight and nine of 11 overall. —AP

GUARD KYLE KORVER HEADED TO CAVALIERS

NEW ORLEANS: The Atlanta Hawks are on the verge of finalizing a trade that would see guard Kyle Korver join the defending NBA



Kyle Korver

champion Cleveland Cavaliers, the US media reported on Thursday night. The 35-year-old Korver did not play in Atlanta's 99-94 victory over the New Orleans Pelicans and told reporters after the contest that he believed he was being dealt. "What can I say about it?" Korver said. "It will definitely be mixed emotions. "This is where I had my best basketball career, honestly. It's where I had all my kids, so it's hard to leave that behind. Obviously, it's a great opportunity for me to go to Cleveland. I'm very excited about that part, but there's definitely a lot of relationships that care a lot about here that I'm going to miss." Atlanta will reportedly receive a 2019 first-round pick and reserve Mike Dunleavy, according to Yahoo Sports, and ESPN reported that reserve Mo Williams may also be going back to Atlanta in the deal. Korver is a three-point shooting specialist who is averaging 9.5 points and 40.9 percent shooting from beyond the arc this season. The former second-round pick of the Philadelphia 76ers in the 2003 NBA entry draft is a lifetime 42.9 percent three-point shooter.

Guard Dennis Schroder scored a game-high 23 points, including a go-ahead three-pointer with 73 seconds left, and forward Paul Millsap added a 15-foot jumper with 38 seconds left to cement the victory for Atlanta. It was the Hawks' fifth consecutive win and their 10th in the last 14 games. Schroder and Millsap combined for the Hawks' final 11 points. "It's tough, man," Millsap said of Korver's apparent exit. "But to see him on the bench and continue to cheer us on knowing that he's going to another team - to me, that means a lot. —AFP

PREVIEW

GIANTS TARGET RODGERS IN PACKERS SHOWDOWN

LOS ANGELES: Finding a way of nullifying Aaron Rodgers will be the name of the game when the New York Giants take on a Green Bay Packers team tomorrow who have roared back to life thanks to the scintillating form of their star quarterback. In mid-November, the Packers were sliding towards a losing season, falling to 4-6 after a run of four consecutive defeats which culminated in a 42-24 pummeling by the Washington Redskins.

But Rodgers' determined rallying cry that the Packers could "run the table" and still win the NFC North galvanized the famous Wisconsin franchise as they embarked on a six-game winning streak. Rodgers was superb last week in a shoot-out victory over the Detroit Lions that clinched the division, throwing for four touchdowns and 300 yards in a 31-24 win. In the Packers' six-game winning finish to the regular season, the 33-year-old has thrown 15 touchdowns and no interceptions, stats which propelled him to NFC Offensive Player of the Month for December.

"He's on fire, taking care of the ball, and is moving very well in and out of the pocket making all the throws," Giants coach Ben McAdoo said of Rodgers. As well as a sublime passing game, Rodgers has tor-

mented opponents with his fleet-footed elusiveness outside of the pocket. His ability to pick up vital rushing numbers is reflected in figures of 369 yards from 67 carries. Rodgers' mobility also creates a headache for opposition defenses, often forcing them to try and cover the Packers' receiving corps by several additional seconds. "His escape-ability and his ability to scramble and extend a play, you have to be able to account for that, and you have to cover the receivers for an extra 2-3 seconds, which is a nightmare for DBs (defensive backs)," said Giants linebacker Jonathan Casillas.

'GET HIM UNCOMFORTABLE'

Giants safety Landon Collins said the game could hinge on New York's ability to knock Rodgers out of his stride. "Of course we're trying to slow him down," Collins said. "That's the job: Get him uncomfortable and take advantage of it. That's the biggest key, keeping him contained and inside the pocket so he doesn't have a chance to escape (and) look downfield and make those big plays."

Rodgers, meanwhile, says there will be no danger of complacency as the Packers prepare for a meeting

against a team who have twice beaten them at Lambeau Field in playoff meetings over the past decade, winning in 2008 and again in 2012. On both occasions, the Giants, led by quarterback Eli Manning, would go on to win the Super Bowl. Rodgers was on the receiving end of the second of those losses, when the Packers fell 37-20.

"I thought we were going to run through that thing and be in the Super Bowl," said Rodgers, who is now solely focused on ensuring the Packers maintain their winning momentum tomorrow. "It's win or go home at this point," he said. "That's the focus. Keep on winning and get this thing to Houston." Clay Matthews, the Packers' stalwart linebacker, said Rodgers' determination to turn around Green Bay's season during their slump had inspired the team.

"Aaron, he has a type of leadership where he likes to prove people wrong," Matthews said. "I think by putting those expectations out there, kind of really (had) this locker room come together, and kind of back him up. Now we're six in a row. The type of leadership he brings is one that I think is kind of infectious in what you see on Sunday and every day in practice." — AFP

BLUE JACKETS' WIN STREAK ENDS

WASHINGTON: Columbus delivered a clunker in its try for a historic win. The Blue Jackets lost 5-0 to the Washington Capitals on Thursday night, ending their winning streak at 16 games, one shy of the NHL record. Columbus lost for the first time since Nov 26, ending a captivating run for coach John Tortorella's team that fell short of the 1992-93 Pittsburgh Penguins' record of 17 consecutive wins. The Capitals kept the Blue Jackets' league-leading power play off the board in five chances, and Daniel Winnik, John Carlson, Nate Schmidt, Andre Burakovsky and Justin Williams scored to chase goalie Sergei Bobrovsky.

Bobrovsky had been rock solid during the streak but stopped just 18 of 23 shots Thursday. A game after being pulled himself, Vezina Trophy winner Braden Holtby made 29 saves, giving Columbus just its second shutout defeat this season. The Capitals moved within five points of the Blue Jackets for the top spot in the ultra-competitive Metropolitan Division.

WILD 5, SHARKS 4

Mikko Koivu scored back-to-back goals midway through the third period and Minnesota overcame a late two-goal deficit to beat San Jose. The teams combined for five goals in the third, with Joel Ward and Patrick Marleau putting San Jose ahead 4-2 in the first five minutes before Eric Staal scored once and Koivu twice to bring the Wild back. Koivu scored twice in 1:55, with the go-ahead goal coming with 9:42 left. Minnesota got its seventh straight victory on the road. Staal also had two goals and Zach Parise scored for the Wild, who were playing their first game since their 12-game winning streak was snapped by Columbus. Devan Dubnyk saved 30 shots in his first appearance in San Jose in over two years, when he was with the Phoenix Coyotes. Joonas Donskoi and Joe Pavelski also scored for the Sharks, who lost their third straight, matching a season high. Martin Jones made 21 saves.

OILERS 4, BRUINS 3

Patrick Maroon had a hat trick and also squared off in a fight with 6-foot-9 defenseman Zdeno Chara, helping Edmonton beat Boston. Cam Talbot stopped 33 shots for the Oilers. He took a 4-2 lead into the final four minutes before David Krejci scored on a rebound of Patrice Bergeron's shot in the last two seconds of a 5-on-3 power play. But Talbot killed off the rest of the power play with the Oilers one man down. He then blanked Boston for another minute with goalie Tuukka Rask pulled for an extra skater. Bergeron and Colin Miller also scored for the Bruins, and Rask stopped 21 shots.

BLACKHAWKS 4, SABRES 3, OT

Patrick Kane scored 56 seconds into overtime, Artem Anisimov had two goals and Chicago beat Buffalo. Jonathan Toews set up Kane's 12th goal when he forced Anders Nilsson



LOS ANGELES: Detroit Red Wings goalie Jared Coreau (right) dives on the puck as Los Angeles Kings center Nic Dowd (left) and defenseman Jonathan Ericsson of Sweden battle during the first period of an NHL hockey game Thursday. — AP

to make a left pad save. The rebound went right to Kane, who knocked it into the open side of net before Nilsson could recover. Ryan Hartman also scored for the Blackhawks, who had dropped five of six. Kane also had two assists against his hometown team and Corey Crawford made 17 stops in Chicago's 10th consecutive victory against Buffalo.

RED WINGS 4, KINGS 0

Thomas Vanek scored twice during a three-goal first period, Jared Coreau stopped 34 shots for his first career shutout and Detroit beat Los Angeles. Andreas Athanasiou also scored in the first period, and Coreau turned away Tanner Pearson on a penalty shot during the opening frame. Anthony Mantha added a goal in the third period to help the Red Wings end a two-game skid. Vanek scored in the first two minutes and last two minutes of the first for his 53rd career multi-goal game, giving him nine goals this season. Jeff Zatkoff made 18 saves for the Kings, who had a two-game winning streak halted as they kicked off a critical seven-game homestand.

HURRICANES 4, BLUES 2

Jeff Skinner put Carolina ahead in the third period and Derek

Ryan scored twice to beat St Louis. Skinner scored a power-play goal with 6:08 remaining to make it 3-2, and then Ryan added an empty-netter for his second of the game with 1:19 left. Skinner's goal was his 14th of the season. Jay McClement also scored for Carolina, which ended a two-game losing streak. Cam Ward made 21 saves. Joel Edmundson and Vladimir Tarasenko scored for St. Louis, which was coming off a 4-1 win over Chicago in the Winter Classic on Monday. Jake Allen made 25 saves but lost to Carolina for the first time in four starts.

PREDATORS 6, LIGHTNING 1

Colton Sissons ended a 12-game goal drought with his first career hat trick, Pekka Rinne made 27 saves and Nashville beat Tampa Bay. Tampa Bay pulled its goalie for an extra skater with seven minutes left in the third, and Sissons got his second of the game a minute later before completing the trick from close with three minutes remaining. He entered with two goals this season and seven overall in 78 career games. Nashville also got goals from Mike Fisher, Filip Forsberg and Ryan Ellis. Rinne improved to 7-0-1 against Tampa Bay. Tyler Johnson scored for the Lightning, who went 2-2-1 on a five-game homestand. Andrei Vasilevski stopped 13 shots. — AP

PREVIEW

DRAXLER IN LINE FOR HOME PSG BOW

PARIS: Julian Draxler could make his competitive debut for Paris Saint-Germain when they begin their defence of the French Cup at home to Bastia today. The German World Cup-winning winger, 23, completed his move to Paris from Wolfsburg for a reported fee of up to €42 million (\$45 million) in time to make his first appearance for his new club in a friendly win over Club Africain in Tunisia on Wednesday. Giovanni Lo Celso, the 20-year-old midfielder recruited from Rosario Central in his native Argentina, also made his bow in that game and PSG are hoping the new duo can provide a faltering team with a boost in the new year.

"Lo Celso and Draxler are intelligent players who have already understood how the team plays. They had good games," said captain Thiago Silva after the match in Tunisia, which PSG won 3-0. With these two players we can do some great things in the second

half of the season." Unai Emery's side, who went into the winter break in third place in Ligue 1 five points behind leaders Nice, are looking to complete a clean sweep of the domestic trophies in France for a third season in succession.

Bastia have never won away to PSG but the Parc des Princes was the scene of their finest hour, a 2-1 victory over Michel Platini's Saint-Etienne in the 1981 French Cup final when Cameroonian great Roger Milla scored the winning goal. Nice enjoyed a superb first half to the season but will be depleted as they travel to Lorient in their round-of-64 tie. Mario Balotelli is suspended after being red-carded in the 0-0 league draw at Bordeaux just before Christmas, while playmaker Younes Belhanda is on the sidelines with a toe injury.

Their preparations have also been disrupted by the virus that has left coach Lucien Favre bed-ridden

in recent days. Second in Ligue 1, Monaco host second-tier Ajaccio with coach Leonardo Jardim admitting that he will use the game to rotate his squad. Marseille, who lost to PSG in last season's final and have not lifted the trophy since 1989, go to Toulouse in one of four all-top-flight ties. Coach Rudi Garcia is hopeful of strengthening a squad that suffered four straight league wins to end 2016, but no moves have been completed yet amid speculation about a possible move to bring Dimitri Payet back to the club from West Ham United. — AFP



Julian Draxler

PREVIEW

RUGANI: JUVE FULLY CHARGED FOR 2017

MILAN: Juventus defender Daniele Rugani insists the champions are "fully charged" up for a successful 2017 and ready to put their Italian Super Cup defeat behind them with a win at home to Bologna tomorrow. Despite boasting a lead of four and seven points respectively on nearest challengers Roma and Napoli, 2016 ended in disappointment for the Turin giants. Juve lost the Super Cup as AC Milan 'keeper Gianluigi Donnarumma proved the hero when the final, staged in Doha, went to penalties just before Christmas.

But despite a few bumps on the road, Massimiliano Allegri's men remain the team to beat this season. And Rugani, who has gained extra top-flight experience lately due to a rash of injuries in defence, said the champions are determined to start 2017 off in positive fashion. "We've always bounced straight back after defeat and I hope after our defeat to Milan in the Super Cup, which hurt a lot, we'll return to the fray fully charged up," Rugani said. "It will be tough against Bologna on Sunday. In the second half of last season it was Bologna who managed to snatch a draw with us and end our lengthy winning streak. We want to start off well, but the season is still long. We still have two games to play from the first half of the season as well as the entire second half."

Excused from league duties in the final round of games in 2016, Juventus will play their postponed fixture against strugglers Crotone on Feb 8. By that time, Allegri will be hoping Roma and Napoli have slipped further behind in the chase for the title. On Feb 22 Juve face Porto away in the last 16 of the Champions League. Roma and Napoli have struggled to match the consistency of a Juventus side that is still recovering from an injury crisis in defence.

Roma coach Luciano Spalletti, for one, has plenty of reason to be worried ahead of Saturday's trip to Genoa. Spalletti will be without influential Egyptian winger Mohamed Salah due to Africa Cup of Nations commitments and he is also sweating on the availability of defenders Kostas Manolas (thigh) and Thomas Vermaelen (calf). A trip to the Luigi Ferraris stadium, where both Napoli and Juventus have slipped up this season, is probably the last one Spalletti would want for the first game of 2017.

Napoli were held to a scoreless draw by Genoa in September and a practically unrecognisable Juventus suffered a 3-1 defeat there in November. Napoli have the chance to pull level on points with Roma with a home win over Sampdoria on Saturday, when Belgian international forward Dries Mertens will be expected to return to striking duties for the southernners. Mertens has performed brilliantly in the absence of Poland striker Arkadiusz Milik, who is recovering from a cruciate knee ligament injury.

In December he became the first player since the 1994/95 season to hit hat-tricks in successive Serie A games, taking his goals tally to 11, only three behind league leader Mauro Icardi of Inter Milan (14). Lazio, eight points behind Juventus in fourth, will be expected to account for Crotone tomorrow while Milan, a point further behind in fifth, host Cagliari at the San Siro. — AFP

CHINESE CHEER CURBS ON 'RIDICULOUS' SPENDING

SHANGHAI: Chinese football fans yesterday cheered a government move to curb the huge sums being lavished on foreign players after a string of record-breaking deals, even though details of the clampdown remained hazy. A state sports spokesman on Thursday vowed action to put the brakes on "irrational investment" after Chinese teams reportedly made Oscar and Carlos Tevez the world's best-paid players. China will seek to rein in high-priced transfers and keep player salaries "reasonable", a General Administration of Sport (GAS) spokesman warned.

Chinese Super League clubs, encouraged by President Xi Jinping's drive to turn China into a football power, have broken the Asian transfer record five times in less than a year. In a sign of the impact on transfer markets, Cristiano Ronaldo's agent said the Ballon D'Or winner had turned down a world-record £257million (€300m) bid from China. Antonio Conte, manager of Oscar's former club Chelsea, has called the Chinese market a "danger for all teams in the world".

But many Chinese fans have also been uncomfortable with the clubs' high spending, and Thursday's announcement triggered a flood of support on social media. "The irrational competition in the football market has borne evil fruit: Higher and higher salaries for big-name foreign players, worsening league match levels, and a worsening football environment," said one representative posting on China's Twitter-like Weibo.

"The market economy does not mean you can do whatever you want. Government intervention is absolutely necessary." The GAS announcement omitted any figures when it referred to "limits" on salaries and transfer fees, and it was an open question how effective it would be as teams gear up for the coming Chinese season.

'NOT SUSTAINABLE'

President Xi has declared his hopes of China one day hosting and winning a World Cup, comments widely seen as helping fuel the spending spree as club

owners seek to win political favor. "It's hard to predict what will happen. China is like a supertanker. Once something like this (big spending) gets going, it's hard to stop it," said Mark Dreyer of China Sports Insider.

But Dreyer said the government had

to speak out against a looming "bubble" that was also beginning to affect Chinese player salaries. "If you look at the numbers, they are clearly ridiculous. It's not sustainable from any business perspective and not helping Chinese football," he said. — AFP



LONDON: In this Sept 22, 2012 file photo, Chelsea's John Obi Mikel plays against Stoke City during their English Premier League match at Stamford Bridge. — AP

MIKEL JOINS CHINA GOLD RUSH WITH TIANJIN MOVE

LONDON: Nigeria captain John Mikel Obi announced yesterday he is leaving English Premier League leaders Chelsea to join Chinese side Tianjin TEDA. He is the latest star to head to the Chinese Super League, after the high-profile signings of Chelsea teammate Oscar by Shanghai SIPG and Carlos Tevez by Shanghai Shenhua in recent weeks. Midfielder Mikel has not featured at all for Chelsea under manager Antonio Conte, who took over in July.

"After 10 years, 374 appearances

and 11 trophies, it is time for me to say goodbye," Mikel said in a letter posted on his Twitter account. "I haven't featured as much this season as I would have liked, and at 29 I still have many years in the game ahead of me. With this in mind, I feel now is the time to seek a new challenge. I'm delighted to be joining Tianjin TEDA FC in China, at a time that the Chinese Super League is really taking off. I look forward to helping Tianjin TEDA FC continue to grow both on and off the pitch in the next few years." — AFP

PREVIEW

STAM PLOTS UPSET ON MAN UNITED RETURN

LONDON: Jaap Stam returns to Manchester United yesterday with the Reading manager plotting an FA Cup giant-killing at the club that sold him when he fell out with Alex Ferguson. The 44-year-old Dutch former hardman defender, who won three Premier League titles, an FA Cup and the 1999 Champions League during his three-year stay at United, has impressed in his first job in England, guiding Reading to the cusp of the automatic promotion places to the Premier League.

However, his "Royals" confront a United side that are FA Cup holders and at last are beginning to gel under Jose Mourinho, putting together a run of seven successive victories in all competitions. Stam, whose

biography sparked the falling-out with Ferguson and saw him sold to Lazio, said the weekend cup third-round clash was not about him. "Of course we're looking forward to it. It's a great draw, not only for me, but also for the players," Stam told Reading's website.

"To play at Old Trafford in front of 80,000 people, against quality players in the FA Cup, a competition everyone wants to do well in, a trophy everybody wants to win, it's going to be nice. It'll be good to be back in Manchester. I still love the club, I love the fans, I had a great time over there and it's going to be good to be going back in this way. We're not saying we don't have a chance. Everybody has a chance. It's not about me, it's about Reading facing United at Old Trafford."

Fellow second-tier side Preston are also hoping to claim a major scalp. They host an Arsenal side which is not in a good place at the moment with Chilean star Alexis Sanchez apparently refusing to speak to his team-mates after the 3-3 draw with Bournemouth this week. Sanchez, like Mesut Ozil - both of whom are holding out on signing new contracts - will be rested for the match. Preston will hope to go one better than their 1999 predecessors under David Moyes, who led the Gunners 2-0 in their third-round tie before losing 4-2. Arsene Wenger says he is not taking the opposition lightly. "The FA Cup is a big priority for us," he said. "It's a massive competition for us." — AFP

PREVIEW

UNITED HOPE DEFENSE WON'T COME AT A COST

MANCHESTER: Jose Mourinho is keen to maintain his team's momentum against Reading in the FA Cup third round today even though it could jeopardize their league form in the process. Manchester United ended a 12-year wait to win the FA Cup last season, although that was still not enough to save Louis van Gaal's job after he failed to get them into the Champions League. A run of six successive Premier League victories has put United into a good position to challenge for Champions League qualification over the second half of the season.

Ironically, the biggest threat to league progress may yet turn out to be cup success. United are still in two other knockout competitions, with the first leg of their League Cup semi-final against Hull City this coming Tuesday and a Europa League round-of-32 tie against Saint Etienne in February. With fixture congestion a significant possibility, Mourinho must decide whether to make changes against Reading, a team who are third in the Championship and managed by former United favourite Jaap Stam.

Mourinho is clearly already thinking about rotation, having made five changes for Monday's 2-0 win at West

Ham. He is likely to have midfielder Michael Carrick available again after recent illness, while captain Wayne Rooney is back in training after missing three matches with a thigh problem. Centre-back Eric Bailly is unavailable, having joined up with the Ivory Coast for the Africa Cup of Nations. Carrick has been a key figure during the recent upturn in form, impressing in a deep midfield role and allowing Paul Pogba to focus more on attacking.

Whatever side the manager puts out, defender Daley Blind is confident that it will be able to cope, citing the United squad's strength in depth. "It's a very important period. We have a very fit squad and I think we need everyone because we have a lot of games," Blind said. "I think that competition for places makes the team better and better. Everyone wants to fight for his place and when the competition is high, you have to perform and you lift each other's performances. It's good for the team."

STAM RETURN

Stam's return to Old Trafford will inevitably revive memories of United's treble-winning campaign in 1999 when

Alex Ferguson's side completed a clean sweep of the Champions League, Premier League and FA Cup. The Dutchman was an integral part of that team but left the club two years later in controversial circumstances after falling out with Ferguson over the content of the player's book.

"It would be nice to have a warm welcome," Stam said. "I had a great time over there. I've loved the fans, the club. It was a very important period in my career. I haven't been back on an occasion like this so it's good to be back, it's good to play over there. But it's not about me, it's about the team and hopefully we can be a surprise."

Stam's appointment at the Madejski Stadium last June marked his return to English football and after an inconsistent start to the season, Reading have emerged as one of the main contenders for promotion to the Premier League. "We're not going to change how we think and our philosophy," he said. "Certain details we can change but our belief is possession. We still want to play. We're not going to change our style of play." —AFP

PREVIEW

WENGER DEMANDS MORE CUP SUCCESS

PRESTON, United Kingdom:

Arsene Wenger says the FA Cup remains "a big priority" for Arsenal despite his side already waging two-pronged assaults on the Premier League and Champions League. The FA Cup has been good to the Gunners in recent years and Wenger's side travel to Championship side Preston on Saturday seeking to lift the trophy for a third time in four years. Their 2014 triumph ended Arsenal's nine-year wait for silverware and a repeat success 12 months later suggested Wenger's side were acquiring a winning mentality.

But their failure last season to really challenge Leicester in the Premier League title race and their current standing in fifth place, eight points adrift of leaders Chelsea, suggest the north London side still have work to do if they are to become league champions for the first time since 2004. Wenger knows he must once again at a minimum deliver a place in next season's Champions League, but is adamant that does not mean he will view the FA Cup, and the potential fixture pile-up that comes with it, as a distraction.

"It is a big priority for us," Wenger said. "We have shown historically that we care about it and it is a massive competition for everybody. To win the FA Cup is always a target each year. We know as well that after a congested Christmas period that the third round is always a tricky game. That is why I believe it is a mental challenge for the Premier League teams to prepare well and not have a bad surprise, especially when you go to a Championship team, as it is always difficult. It's a debate every year about how special the FA Cup is. I personally have no special solution but when April and May comes and teams go to Wembley, it's something special. It's a special occasion, a special trophy and in every single country, everybody dies to win the cup."

SUFFERED

Arsenal go into the tie having recovered after trailing 3-0 to claim a point at Bournemouth, although the relief of avoiding defeat was tempered by the loss of two points in the title race. Wenger is likely to make changes and could include Danny Welbeck for the first time since the forward picked up a knee injury against Manchester City last May. "He wants to play," Wenger said. "But Danny is as well conscious of taking his time. He came back after a long injury and had a setback so he suffered a lot." Preston manager Simon Grayson has inspired a team to an FA Cup upset before, having been in charge of Leeds, then a third-tier side, when they defeated Manchester United at Old Trafford in the third round seven years ago. —AFP



Arsene Wenger



MANCHESTER: Manchester United's Portuguese manager Jose Mourinho gestures during the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and Middlesbrough at Old Trafford on Dec 31, 2016. —AFP

Live Matches on TV (Local Timings)

Spanish League	
Real Madrid v Granada	15:00
beIN SPORTS	
Eibar v Atletico Madrid	18:15
beIN SPORTS	
Vigo v Malaga	20:30
beIN SPORTS	
Real Sociedad v Sevilla	22:45
beIN SPORTS	
Italian League	
Empoli v Palermo	20:00
beIN SPORTS	
Napoli v Sampdoria	22:45
beIN SPORTS	
England FA Cup	
Manchester United v Reading	15:30
beIN SPORTS	

PREVIEW

REAL SEEK NEW RECORD RUN AS LIGA RETURNS

MADRID: Real Madrid will welcome back Cristiano Ronaldo for his first appearance of 2017 as the European champions look to equal Barcelona's Spanish record of 39 games unbeaten when lowly Granada visit the Santiago Bernabeu today. Ronaldo was rested as Real showed no signs of rust after a 17-day break since winning the Club World Cup to sweep aside Sevilla 3-0 in the first leg of their Copa del Rey last 16 tie on Wednesday.

The victory endorsed Madrid boss Zinedine Zidane's brave decision to leave Ronaldo out as he capped a dream debut year in charge at the Bernabeu with three trophies and just two defeats in 54 games. "I won't rest Ronaldo. He will play on Saturday and he will play many games, there is no need to worry," said Zidane. However, the enigmatic Frenchman has succeeded where former Real coaches have failed in ensuring Ronaldo accepts

missing certain games throughout the season to get to the business end of the campaign 100 per cent fit.

"There are some players that make the difference like Cristiano because he is a different player, but we will need everyone to win what we want," added Zidane. With potentially another 20 games to come in the next 10 weeks, Zidane is likely to take the opportunity to rotate his squad once more against a Granada side that has won just once in 16 La Liga games this season. Gareth Bale, Mateo Kovacic, Lucas Vazquez and Pepe remain sidelined by injury, whilst captain Sergio Ramos is suspended. However, Isco and Karim Benzema look set to return after being left on the bench against Sevilla. Another Real win would stretch their lead at the top over Barcelona to six points ahead of the Spanish champions' far trickier trip to Villarreal on Sunday night.

WILL BARCA BOUNCE BACK?

In contrast to Madrid, Barca started 2017 with defeat, 2-1 at Athletic Bilbao in the first leg of their last 16 Cup tie, despite the hosts being reduced to nine men in the second-half. An immediate return to form is needed from Luis Enrique's men, but they won't have it easy against a Villarreal side that has lost just once at home all season. The result at El Madrigal will not just have a big bearing on the title race, but also on the fight for the top four with Sevilla in third and Atletico Madrid in sixth only separated by four points.

Fifth-placed Real Sociedad can close the gap on Sevilla to just a point when the in-form Basques host the Europa League holders on Saturday night. Atletico remain the favourites to take third spot and looked back close to their best in easing past Las Palmas 2-0 on Tuesday with Antoine Griezmann breaking his five-game goal drought. — AFP



EIBAR, Spain: Eibar's French defender Florian Lejeune (center) attends a training session at the Atxabalpe training field of the Spanish Basque village of Arrasate on Dec 2, 2016. — AFP

EIBAR SHOWING 'ANOTHER WAY'

EIBAR, Spain: In a league dominated by the wealth of the two richest clubs in the world, Spanish side Eibar are punching above their weight to show "another kind of football is possible". A town of just 27,000 people sandwiched between Bilbao and San Sebastian in the northern Basque region is enjoying a third consecutive season of top-flight football as the likes of Barcelona's Lionel Messi and Real Madrid's Cristiano Ronaldo pass through their 6,200 capacity Ipurua stadium.

Despite their limitations Eibar are far from just making up the numbers and they host Atletico Madrid this weekend just two places and five points behind the Champions League finalists, in eighth. Eibar believe they can be a model for modest clubs all over Europe. "With little money Eibar have done a lot," said Juan Carlos Castaneda Aguirre, proud president of supporters club La Casa de Cantabria. "We have a lot of heart."

From the president to the fans, Eibar have used their heads to defy the odds since promotion to La Liga for the first time in their history in 2014. No sooner had Eibar won promotion, they had to raise 1.7 million euros (\$1.4 million) to comply with new Spanish football regulations to safeguard the finances of all clubs. Failure to raise the funds would have seen Eibar denied promotion and relegated to the third tier - despite being one of very few Spanish clubs not burdened by debt.

A crowd-funding campaign called "defend Eibar" saw the club's number of shareholders grow from just 1,800 locally to 10,000 across the world with the help of high-profile figures such as then-Real Madrid and now Bayern Munich midfielder Xabi Alonso. "Eibar were only known here. We created a story and we were able to sell shares in Eibar in 69 countries across the world," said ex-president Alex Aranzabal, who oversaw the campaign. — AFP

BARCA START 2017 WITH DEFEAT AT 9-MAN BILBAO

MADRID Athletic Bilbao held out with nine men to secure a first win over Barcelona in four years and carry a 2-1 lead into the second leg of their Copa del Rey last 16 tie on Jan 11. Two goals in three first-half minutes from Aritz Aduriz and Inaki Williams put the hosts in command. Lionel Messi's fine free-kick halved Barca's arrears after the break. And the five-time World Player of the Year was inches away from a precious second away goal when he hit the post with the final kick of the game after Raul Garcia and Ander Iturraspe had been sent-off.

"We struggled at the start," admitted Barca boss Luis Enrique. "They used two counter-attacks to put together two good moves and get ahead. In the second-half we concentrated more on what we could control, our play, and I think we did enough to deserve more, even taking into account Athletic's numerical disadvantage."

Enrique started all three of his star strike force of Messi, Luis Suarez and Neymar despite handing them an extended winter break which meant they only returned to training on Monday after two weeks off. This is the sixth time Barca and Athletic have been paired together in the Cup in nine seasons, including three finals. Barca have emerged victorious in all five previous occasions, but Athletic looked well on their way to reversing that run with two excellent goals midway through the first-half. Firstly, Aduriz stooped unmarked to head home Garcia's cross and round off a fine team move on 25 minutes.

ALVAREZ HOMAGE

Then, in the midst of a homage to Athletic defender Yeray Alvarez who was recently diagnosed with testicular cancer, the hosts struck again when Williams smashed home a volley from Aduriz's neat backheeled layoff. Alvarez was in the crowd and the club announced earlier on Thursday he will return to training in the next few weeks after undergoing successful surgery. "I think in the first-half we were much better than them," Williams told GoTV. "The referee left us with nine men, but that is football and we have to suffer. We will go to the Camp



BILBAO: Barcelona's Neymar falls to the ground as he vies for the ball with Athletic Bilbao's Xabier Etxeita during the Spanish Copa del Rey match at San Mames stadium on Thursday. — AP

Nou and do our best to reach the next round."

The match was then dogged by refereeing controversy as Aduriz escaped unpunished for an elbow on Samuel Umtiti. Barca were even more incensed in first-half stoppage time when David Fernandez Borbalan somehow failed to point to the spot when Neymar was chopped down by Borja Etxeita. Andres Iniesta, Sergio Busquets and Jordi Alba were all booked for taking their protests too far, whilst Messi also had to be restrained from confronting Borbalan as the players left the field for half-time. "The first-half ended in the worst way with a lot of cards on our part and the players upset at what we saw on the field," added Enrique.

Borbalan did come to Barca's aid just after the break, though, when he adjudged Messi's free-kick to have

crossed the line despite Gorka Iraizoz's best efforts in the Athletic goal. Iraizoz tipped over a dangerously dipping effort from Neymar as the pressure from the visitors built and the home side were reduced to nine men in their efforts to halt the Brazilian. Garcia and then Iturraspe had few complaints after seeing second yellow cards for late challenges on Neymar. More Messi magic nearly prevented Barca starting the year with defeat as he danced past two defenders before a desperate saving challenge from Mikel San Jose prevented the Argentine getting a shot off. And in the dying seconds Messi smashed a loose ball inside the area off the inside of the post. No side other than Real Madrid has eliminated Barca from the Cup since 2008 and the holders will remain confident of turning the tie around on home soil on Wednesday. — AFP

Sports



'King Kohli' crowned India ODI, T20 skipper

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ABUJA: Algerian and Leicester forward Riyad Mahrez poses for a photo after being crowned African Footballer of the Year late Thursday. — AFP

MAHREZ NAMED TOP AFRICAN FOOTBALLER

ABUJA: Algeria forward Riyad Mahrez was Thursday voted African Footballer of the Year after he inspired Leicester City to the English Premier League title last season. Mahrez, 25, beat Gabon skipper Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang, who scooped the prestigious accolade last year, into second place, with Senegal star Sadio Mane, who features for Liverpool, taking third place. The France-born forward said it was an honor to be named the best African player for the past year.

"It's a huge honor, I am happy and pleased. I thank all my teammates at Leicester and Algeria," Mahrez said as he received the award. "I dedicate this to my family and all those who support me every day." Leicester caused a major shock when as 5,000-1 outsiders they went on to win the Premier League last season. Mahrez, a slightly-built, right-sided forward who started out with hometown club AAS Sarcelles in 2004, played a key role in the Foxes' stunning run with 17 goals, 10 assists in 37 appearances.

He was the first Algerian to win a Premier League champions medal and sparked a massive following back home in Algeria for the club, who he had first thought was a rugby team when he was contacted to join them four years ago. Mahrez's win ended a 19-year absence on the podium for a player from north Africa since Morocco's Mustapha Hadji in 1998. Other Algerians to have won the award were

Rabah Madjer in 1987 and Lakhdar Belloumi in 1981.

All three players who made the shortlist for the African Footballer of the Year were also picked in CAF XI that also features Ivory Coast defender Eric Bailly from Manchester United. Goalkeeper Denis Onyango was picked for the African Player of the Year Based in Africa award ahead of

Mamelodi Sundowns teammate Khama Billiat and Zambia's Rainford Kalaba. Onyango was outstanding when seven-time South African champions Sundowns won an historic CAF Champions League and also when Uganda qualified for this year's Africa Cup of Nations after a long absence. — AFP

AWARD WINNERS

African Player of the Year: Riyad Mahrez (Algeria & Leicester City)

African Player of the Year - based in Africa: Denis Onyango (Uganda & Mamelodi Sundowns)

Women's Player of the Year: Asisat Oshoala (Nigeria & Arsenal Ladies)

Most promising talent: Kelechi Iheanacho (Nigeria & Manchester City)

Young Player of the Year: Alex Iwobi (Nigeria & Arsenal)

Coach of the Year: Pitso Mosimane (Mamelodi Sundowns)

Club of the Year: Mamelodi Sundowns

National team of the Year: Uganda

Women's national team of the Year: Nigeria

Referee of the Year: Bakary Papa Gassama

CAF African XI for 2016

Goalkeeper: Denis Onyango (Uganda & Mamelodi Sundowns)

Defenders: Serge Aurier (Cote d'Ivoire & PSG), Aymen Abdenour (Tunisia & Valencia), Eric Bailly (Cote d'Ivoire & Manchester United), Joyce Lomalisa (DRC & AS Vita)

Midfielders: Khama Billiat (Zimbabwe & Mamelodi Sundowns), Rainford Kalaba (Zambia & TP Mazembe), Keegan Dolly (South Africa & Mamelodi Sundowns)

Forwards: Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang (Gabon & Borussia Dortmund), Sadio Mane (Senegal & Liverpool), Riyad Mahrez (Algeria & Leicester City)

Subs: Aymen Mathlouthi (Tunisia & Etoile du Sahel), Kalidou Koulibaly (Senegal & Napoli), Salif Coulibaly (Mali & TP Mazembe), Islam Slimani (Algeria & Leicester City), Mohamed Salah (Egypt & Roma), Kelechi Iheanacho (Nigeria & Manchester City), Alex Iwobi (Nigeria & Arsenal).