

Friday Times

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Local

We are all members of the society



Local Spotlight

By Muna Al-Fuzai

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This article is a tribute to the silent group of people in society who suffer from injustice, indifference and sometimes mistreatment or lack of appreciation because they are labeled as people with special needs or handicapped, because sadly they do not have the capability to run, walk or play like others.

They need special care - unlike other individuals - because of their disabilities but that special care doesn't mean they don't contribute in positive and important ways to our society. The types of disabilities can vary from physical, emotional to mental disability and bring a host of health-related concerns. But the most prominent problems of people with special needs are not their health status, but the society's view of them as inferior, lack of respect, injustice and inequality, simply because they are different. They feel insulted when others focus their attention on their disabilities, especially at gatherings, malls and restaurants. Or worse, when non-disabled people occupy parking spots designated for them or make fun of them. It is terrible and inhumane.

Moreover, many public places lack the equipment or infrastructure necessary to accommodate disabled persons in a proper and dignified way. For example, seeing-impaired persons often cannot way in the malls or use elevators by themselves because these places do not provide the necessary navigation tools. Also, roads can make a person with special needs vulnerable to traffic accidents. There are other problems faced by disabled persons - mistreatment by the family that thinks they must sit at home without regard to their right to mix with people and get a job, along with showing the respect they deserve.

So there is no doubt that there is a need to change societal attitude towards people with special needs and respect the differences in others and accept them without pity or contempt. This is a problem in the Arab world. I believe there is a need to have awareness programs targeting the society and families with disabled persons - this is the role of the media.

I recently read some good news, where MP Mubarak Al-Hajraf said there are plans to treat disabled people in the same category as those with 10 years of service for retirement. Hajraf said in a statement that the committee of persons with disabilities discussed 21 amendments to the disabled law, pointing out that there is a consensus with the government on some points, most notably the age of retirement - 15 years for men and 10 years for women. I think it is good that some are thinking about those who cannot express their rights in a clear and frank manner and are often ignored by society.

What always bothers me is that people with special needs have a right to entertainment too. They should be provided with appropriate recreational activities and their access to these places must be facilitated. It is important for any entertainment venue to have a section dedicated for special needs people. I believe they are strong to fight for their place in this life and in societies that only see their outer selves - they are heroes.

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Photo shows the architectural details of the facade of the Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah Cultural Center in Kuwait City. — Photo by Yassine Bensaid/KUNA

Local student turns bullying into songs

By Nawara Fattahova

Bad experiences can sometimes lead to creative outcomes. Being bullied at a young age in school inspired and motivated 14-year-old Kuwaiti student Noor Qaddoumi to compose beautiful songs that have useful messages. Noor, a talented student of Kuwait English School, participated in the 'Little Big Stars' talent show broadcast on MBC.

"I saw an advertisement about the audition of this program on TV. The same day I went to the audition with my family. It took place in September in Kuwait, and the team chose those who qualified. Then we traveled to Lebanon in October, where the show was filmed. The episode where I participated was broadcast earlier this month (December)," she told Kuwait Times.

Noor's talent is in writing and composing songs about humanitarian issues such as bullying, pollution, injustice and others. 'Little Big Stars' is not a competition but rather a platform to showcase children's talents. It includes various themes such as singing, mathematics, exercise, athletics, cooking and other talents.

Kuwait Times: Why choose humanitarian issues for your songs?

Noor: I feel it's important to be able to discuss and present a message. Some people are feeling depressed due to being bullied, and I want to help them. This is a kind of support for them, and to tell them they are not alone. Through my songs, I want to encourage them to speak loudly about their problems.

'Don't Hide It' is the name of the song that I composed on bullying. Through this song I tell victims of bullying not to keep this bad experience to themselves, but to speak about it to get help from others. As I went through this experience, it made me able to compose this song. I also presented this song at an anti-bullying conference and during a school show, where I ranked third among the participants.

When I was a child at school, some older students used to bully me, especially since I wear glasses. They used to threaten me and ask me to do things that would make me get in trouble. At first I kept it to myself and was sad, as I didn't want my mom to get upset. I even told my mom I don't want to go to school. But later I decided to tell my parents, who informed the school administration.

KT: Which musical instrument do you play?

Noor: It's called a ukulele. It's kind of a small guitar with four strings. I like this instrument as it makes me happy



Noor Qaddoumi

whenever I play it. I learnt playing it on YouTube, and now it's almost a year that I'm playing the ukulele. I feel it produces happy melodies. I only write songs in English but I wish to write in Arabic as well in the future, when my Arabic gets better. I'm also learning to play the guitar and piano, in addition to ballet.

KT: When did you start composing songs?

Noor: I started at the beginning of this year, so it's been almost a year now. I registered with the school choir in third grade. They trained me how to sing and taught me how to do notes. I also participate in the British School in Middle East music festival every year. I compose songs on injustice, pollution, gossiping and bullying, and am working on ideas for new songs.

I would like to become a lawyer. I want to defend those who suffer from injustices, as I lived through this experience. I also want to become a popular singer. Music is a great way to express yourself and your feelings - it's my way to send a message.

Kuwait Times

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Local



KUWAIT: Businesses, hotels, community groups and churches celebrate the Christmas holiday in Kuwait with a variety of decoration, caroling and other social activities. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat and Christopher David



Local



Local

Biking to work

By Nawara Fattahova

Bicycling on the seaside has become very popular, especially during winter when the weather is pleasant. But it's rare to see people using bicycles to head to work, mainly due to the extremely hot weather in Kuwait most of the year. One of such people is Nadal Casenove, a 41-year-old French resident, who cycles to work not only in winter, but during summer as well. What is more impressive is that it's not due to not owning a vehicle or a driving license, but for it being a faster way to reach office and a form of exercise too.

"Most days I use the bicycle to reach the office, but sometimes I choose to walk. By bicycle it takes me around 10 minutes, and 15 minutes by walking," Casenove told Kuwait Times. "I very rarely use my car to get to work, as it takes me 20 to 25 minutes due to the traffic. I also save time when I use the bicycle as I don't need to spend time looking for a parking spot, which sometimes takes around 30 minutes, as my office is downtown, which is always packed," he said.

Casenove is able to use the bicycle as he lives near his workplace. "I live in Bneid Al-Gar and work in Sharq in Al-Hamra Tower, so it's easy for me to bear the summer heat. I have been bicycling to work for about a year and a half. As the trip is short, I can wear a formal suit too and don't need to

carry an extra outfit," he pointed out.

"I used to cycle back home in France before coming to Kuwait, and I enjoy it. Riding a bicycle is good for my body, and it's less stressful due to the traffic and parking. There are around three other people who cycle to work at Al-Hamra Tower but not in the same company, so we have a special space to keep them," he said.

Sometimes, riding a bicycle can be dangerous. "Once a driver almost hit me and I fell off the bicycle as he overtook me and made a sudden turn without bothering to see

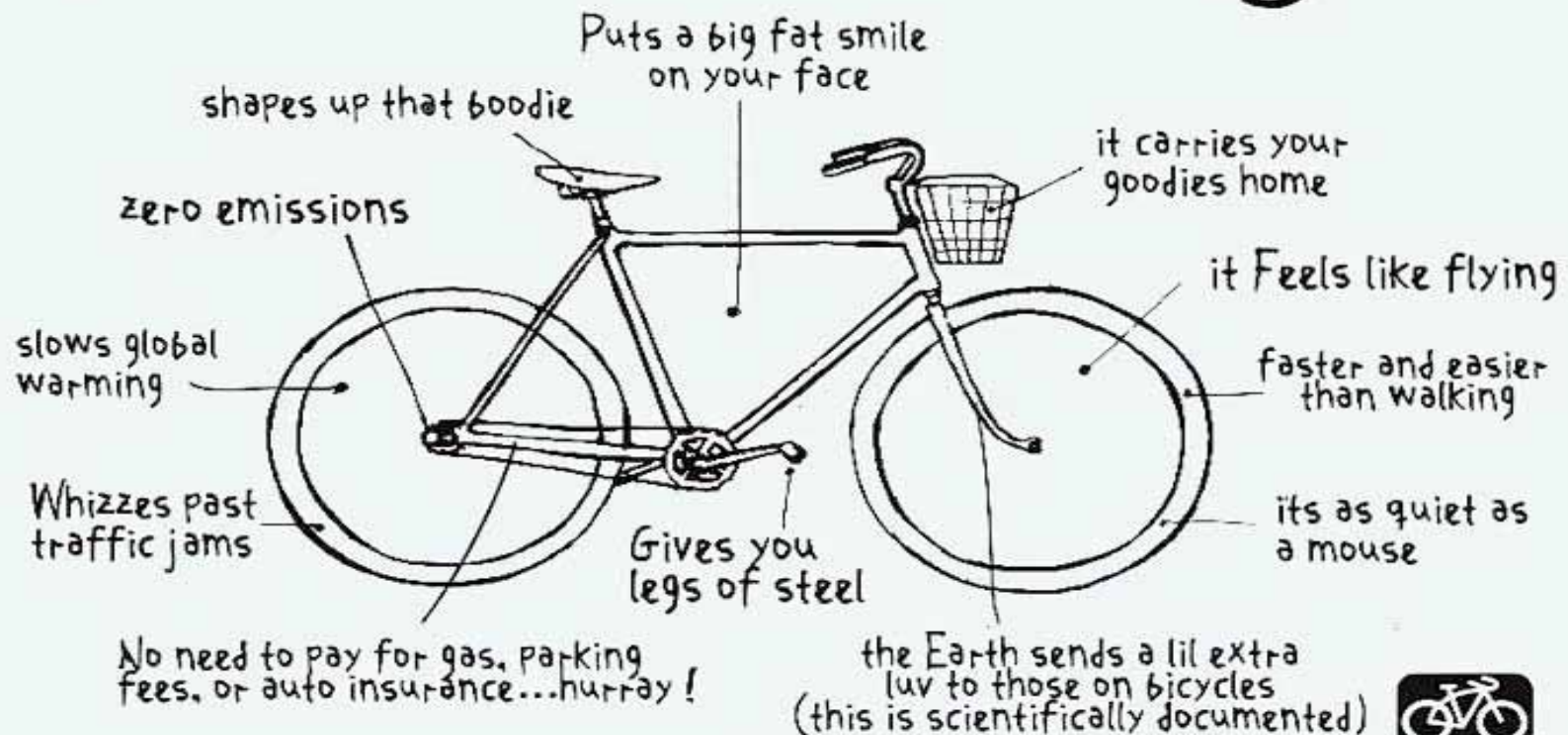
that I was there. People here are not used to cyclists on the roads and are not careful. Also, the roads are not meant for bicycles unless on the seaside. I hope the authority in charge of roads considers the needs of cyclists and makes practical arrangements to use a bicycle," stressed Casenove.

The bicycle doesn't need much maintenance. "I bought my bicycle for KD 400, as it's of a good quality. I only change the tires every six months. Apart from using it for work, I ride the bicycle during the weekend with my wife and kids, who all have their own bicycles," he said. "I advise people to try it. If more people use the bicycle as their means of transportation, the authorities will make it easier for us. Also, it's a way to exercise on a regular basis. I encourage people to cycle, with precautions," concluded Casenove.

“ Riding a bicycle is good for my body, and it's less stressful due to the traffic and parking. ”



Benefits of a Bicycle



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Local

Crown Prince attends 33rd Janadriyah Fest in Riyadh



RIYADH: HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah attends the Janadriyah Festival with Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud yesterday. — KUNA photos



Sheikh Nawaf is received by Saudi Prince Faisal bin Bandar bin Abdul Aziz at Riyadh airport.



Sheikh Nawaf is seen off at Kuwait airport by National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and other senior state officials.

KUWAIT: Representing HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and his accompanying delegation attended the 33rd edition of Al Janadriyah Festival 2018 in Riyadh yesterday. On his arrival, the Crown Prince was received by Saudi Prince Faisal bin Bandar bin Abdul Aziz, Kuwait's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Sheikh Thamer Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and members of the Kuwaiti embassy in Riyadh. — KUNA

GCC Red Crescent chiefs recommend joint guidelines

KUWAIT: Heads of Red Crescent societies in GCC countries, at end of a meeting yesterday, recommended adoption of joint guidelines for voluntary work for a two-year mandate. The chiefs, who met within the framework of the 14th meeting of the committee that groups leaders of Gulf Red Crescent societies and associations, also called for hammering out an action plan for the commission (2020-2024). Voluntary guidelines, generally, set work mechanisms and a host of other issues regulating such relief activity.

The leaders of the GCC Red Crescent societies called for organizing, on the occasion of the GCC Red Crescent Society Day on Oct 23, workshops and educational activities at schools, universities and higher education institutions on promoting voluntary work. They also recommended involving civil societies for spreading such a culture. Moreover, they urged for supporting Dr Hilal Al-Sayer of the Kuwait Red Crescent in his nomination

to serve as member at the permanent commission of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

Meanwhile, Khalifa Al-Abri, the GCC secretary general assistant for economic affairs, lauded exemplary efforts undertaken by the GCC relief societies, namely the Kuwait Red Crescent Society. Musaed Al-Enezi of the Kuwait Red Crescent's department of youth and volunteers, lauded exhibition on the sidelines displaying works of the GCC societies at this level.

In his keynote statement at the meeting, which convened at Kuwait Red Crescent Society's headquarters, the society's deputy chairman Anwar Al-Hasawi said relief associations in GCC member countries have been working in harmony according to accords and common principles. He lauded the GCC General Secretariat for playing a key role for full coordination among these societies in catastrophes and humanitarian missions. Hasawi indicated that such close coordination among the GCC Red Crescent societies has become vital in the shadow of regional conflicts that resulted in large numbers of refugees, displaced people and orphans. The meeting, he added, is an annual opportunity to examine accomplishments, humanitarian needs and challenges in afflicted countries. — KUNA

Allowance increase for examiners eyed

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: The Civil Service Commission is considering a proposal to increase the allowances of members overseeing and grading exams at the request of the education ministry. The commission asked for the amount of the proposed allowance and the current annual cost of such allowances, in addition to the requested annual increases. Sources expected the proposal to be approved, especially since it was made on the instructions of the education minister.

The sources said the ministry told the commission the annual cost according to what is being paid now (2017-2018) is KD 6 million over two semesters, after canceling the four semester system. The ministry said the total value of the proposed allowance for those handling the examinations for the next fiscal year 2019-2020 is estimated at KD 7.5 million.

The CSC also announced that Tuesday, Jan 1, 2019 will be an official holiday.

Health insurance tender woes

The tender for providing health insurance for expats is facing many technical issues that may lead to canceling and reissuing it, which means that official authorities are not comfortable with it. It was found that five companies from the same group were trying to win it through different offers, although they are directly and indirectly related. The fatwa and legislation department said if the health ministry wants to sign contracts to provide the service of registering subscribers for health insurance, then they should follow the contracting routes mentioned in law 49/2016 with regards to public tenders.

7 new schools to open

Sources said the education ministry is preparing to open seven new schools in January. They said the ministry is putting the final touches on five schools in Sabah Al-Ahmad residential city (one kindergarten, two elementary, one intermediate and one secondary), in addition to an elementary school with female teachers in Qairawan and a school in Jaber Al-Ahmad.

Men forcing kid to smoke in custody

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Ahmadi detectives identified the person who forced a child to smoke a cigarette in a video that went viral on social media and was shown by a satellite channel. The Arab expat, who was summoned, said the child is the son of his friend and it was the father who was filming them for fun. The father admitted making the video, and was sent to the child protection department and charged accordingly. Further investigations revealed that the person who appeared in the clip forced children under 18 to work in a Fahaheel



market shop in violation of the residency law. Both men were sent to concerned authorities.

Quad ban in 2 areas

Traffic department added Khairan and Seaside Sabah Al-Ahmad City to residential areas where all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) are not allowed to be driven, implementing the Council of Ministers law 900/2009 regarding banning small vehicles from main roads, highways and neighborhoods.

PM opens new expansion project at Amiri Hospital



KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, ministers and officials attend the new expansion project of Amiri Hospital, under patronage of HH the Amir. — KUNA



Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah greets Sheikh Jaber.



Sheikh Jaber tours the facilities of the new building, including medical departments, clinics, wards and reception units.

KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah attended yesterday the opening of the new expansion project of Amiri Hospital, under the patronage of HH the Amir. Jaber Al-Mubarak toured the facilities of the new building, including medical departments, clinics, wards and reception units.

The premier, in a press release, praised efforts exerted in building the new expansion, expressing confidence in the abilities of national cadres to operate and manage the facility. He noted that the project is a great addition to the hospital in order to provide good care to citizens and residents. — KUNA

Premier hosts NUKS team

KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah receives a delegation of the National Union of Kuwaiti Students branch in the US at Seif Palace yesterday. — KUNA



Defense Minister visits Chinese Yangshan Port

KUWAIT: Envoy of HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, First Deputy Premier and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah visited Yangshan Port yesterday. The visit came upon an official invitation from the Chinese government. The deep water port for container ships is in Hangzhou Bay south of Shanghai. Connected to Shanghai's Pudong new area by the Donghai Bridge and forming part of the Port of Shanghai, the islands of Greater and Lesser Yangshan are administered separately as part of Zhejiang's Shengsi county. —KUNA



SHANGHAI: First Deputy Premier and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah visits the Chinese sea-port of Yangshan yesterday. —KUNA

International

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'Breaking Bad' Nigeria?
Fear of a new narco-state

India farmers get \$9bn loan relief ahead of elections

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A Syrian child evacuated from Eastern Ghouta stands between the crutches of another man while looking up to him after arriving in the village of Qalaat al-Madiq, some 45 kilometres northwest of the central city of Hama, on March 27, 2018. — AFP

US not the police of the Middle East: Trump

President faced intense opposition to abrupt announcement

WASHINGTON: The United States does not want to be the “Policeman” of the Middle East, US President Donald Trump tweeted yesterday, as he defended his controversial decision to pull US forces out of Syria. “Does the USA want to be the Policeman of the Middle East, getting NOTHING but spending precious lives and trillions of dollars protecting others who, in almost all cases, do not appreciate what we are doing? Do we want to be there forever? Time for others to finally fight.....” he tweeted.

Trump added: “Russia, Iran, Syria & many others are not happy about the US leaving, despite what the Fake News says, because now they will have to fight ISIS and others, who they hate, without us. I am building by far the most powerful military in the world. ISIS hits us they are doomed!” The US president faced intense opposition to his abrupt announcement Wednesday that Islamic State had been defeated in the region, and that he was ordering the

2,000 US troops in Syria to exit the country.

US allies were stunned after President Donald Trump declared victory over the Islamic State group in Syria and abruptly ordered the withdrawal of US ground troops from the country. The decision runs counter to long-established US policy for Syria and the region. It blindsided lawmakers, the Pentagon and international allies alike. Britain and France warned on Thursday that the fight against jihadists in Syria was not finished.

‘We won against ISIS’

Trump earlier said: “We’ve won against ISIS,” in a short video posted on Twitter. “We’ve beaten them and we’ve beaten them badly. We’ve taken back the land. And now it’s time for our troops to come back home.” A withdrawal could have major geopolitical ramifications, and plunges into uncertainty the fate of US-backed Kurdish fighters who have been tackling Islamic

State jihadists, thousands of whom are thought to remain in Syria.

A US official told AFP that Trump’s decision was finalized Tuesday. “Full withdrawal, all means all,” the official said when asked if the troops would be pulled from across Syria. Currently, about 2,000 US forces are in the country, most of them on a train-and-advise mission to support local forces fighting IS. Pentagon officials scrambled for a reaction. A spokeswoman eventually said the Defense Department had “started the process” of bringing troops home.

Lawmakers assailed Trump’s decision, saying it could embolden Ankara to attack US-backed Kurdish fighters. Republican Senator Lindsey Graham, a Trump ally, said the president’s decision was unwise and put the Kurds “at risk.” Democratic Senator Jack Reed said it amounted to a “betrayal” of the Kurds that “provides further evidence of President Trump’s inability to lead on the world stage.” Blasting the move as a

“huge Obama-like mistake,” Graham said “I fear it will lead to devastating consequences for our nation, the region and throughout the world.”

Most US troops are stationed in northern Syria, though a small contingent is based at a garrison in Al-Tanaf, near the Jordanian and Iraqi borders. Trump has previously voiced skepticism about the US presence in Syria, saying in March he wanted to bring troops home “soon.” But military advisors and international allies warned Trump against a precipitous pull-out, and he later acquiesced to an indefinite Syria mission.

The US official would not provide a withdrawal timeline, saying only it would come “as quickly as possible.” White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders said the US-led coalition that includes dozens of nations would continue fighting the jihadists. “These victories over ISIS in Syria do not signal the end of the Global Coalition or its campaign,” Sanders said in a statement. — AFP

International

Turkey, Iran vow to work closer on Syria after US announcement

‘Syria’s territorial integrity must be respected by all sides’

ANKARA: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Iranian counterpart Hassan Rouhani yesterday vowed to work closer to end the fighting in Syria. But the two leaders made no comment on US President Donald Trump’s shock announcement that he was pulling US troops out of the war-ravaged nation.

“There are many steps that Turkey and Iran can take together to stop the fighting in the region and to establish peace,” said Erdogan, without elaborating, at a joint news conference with Rouhani in Ankara. “Syria’s territorial integrity must be respected by all sides. Both countries are of the same opinion regarding this,” Rouhani said in translated remarks. The two leaders’ meeting had been arranged before Trump’s announcement about the US pull-out, a move already welcomed on Thursday by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Some Western analysts consider the US presence a key counterweight to Iranian influence in the region. Ankara has repeatedly called for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s ouster and supported Syrian opposition fighters. Tehran and Moscow meanwhile are Damascus’s strongest allies and have helped to turn the war in Assad’s favor. Turkey, despite its differences with Iran and Russia over Syria, has worked closely with both countries to find a political solution to the war through the Astana

process launched last year. As part of the peace talks which began in the Kazakh capital, Turkey, Iran and Russia agreed four “de-escalation” zones in Syria. All of those except the northwestern province of Idlib have been retaken by Damascus. At yesterday’s news conference, Rouhani said Turkey and Iran would continue their cooperation under the Astana peace process.

Turkey ‘stands by Iran’

Erdogan threatened last week to launch a new operation east of the Euphrates in northern Syria against the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG). This US-backed Kurdish militia is viewed by Ankara as a “terrorist offshoot” of Kurdish insurgents inside Turkey. There are around 2,000 US forces in Syria, most of them on a train-and-advise mission helping the YPG under the banner of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) alliance fighting against the Islamic State extremist group.

Turkey and Iran, regional rivals for centuries, have in recent times focused on developing a pragmatic relationship and boosting trade. Erdogan yesterday repeated Turkey’s criticism of the US this year pulling out of the nuclear deal with Iran and imposing new sanctions on the Islamic republic. “I want to stress once more than we (Turkey) do not



ANKARA: Iran’s President Hassan Rouhani (L) and Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (R) attend a joint press conference at the Turkish presidential complex. — AFP

support these decisions and that American’s sanctions against Iran increase the risks to the region’s safety,” he said, adding that Turkey would “stand by the Iranian people”.

The deal envisaged sanctions on Iran being lifted in return for it accepting inspections by the UN atomic watchdog and limits on its nuclear activities. — AFP

‘Uneasy calm’ in Yemen’s Hodeida as combatants await UN truce team

HODEIDA: An uneasy calm returned to the battleground Yemeni city of Hodeida yesterday after further overnight skirmishes as the warring parties await the promised deployment of UN staff to oversee a hard-won but fragile truce. The ceasefire in the Red Sea port city which is a vital aid lifeline for millions at risk of starvation is the centrepiece of a peace push that is seen as the best chance yet of ending four years of devastating conflict.

Military officials and residents have reported intermittent fighting between Saudi-backed government forces and Houthi Shiite rebels since the UN-brokered ceasefire came into effect in the Red Sea port city on Tuesday. A pro-government official told AFP that four loyalists were wounded in a firefight on Wednesday night. “The exchange of fire lasted for about half an hour, and there is an uneasy calm this morning,” he said.

Residents reached by telephone confirmed to AFP that there was no fighting yesterday morning. The official added there has been intermittent fighting on a number of battlefronts in Hodeida province, including the districts of Hays and Al-Tuhayta. Pro-government forces and Houthi rebels accused each other on Thursday of breaching the ceasefire agreed at talks in Sweden earlier this month. The rebel-run Saba news agency said loyalists targeted a “number of neighborhoods in the city” overnight.

‘Breathing down the neck’

UN observers are due in Yemen to head up monitoring teams made up of government and rebel representatives tasked with overseeing the implementation of the UN-brokered ceasefire,

under the auspices of a Redeployment Coordination Committee. The committee’s UN chair, Patrick Cammaert, convened its first meeting by videoconference from New York on Wednesday “to discuss the general outlines of its work, including agreement of a code of conduct”, UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

UN chief Antonio Guterres was “breathing down the neck” of officials to make sure the UN observers are deployed as soon as possible, Dujarric said. He added that Cammaert will head on Thursday to Jordan from where he will travel to the rebel-held capital Sanaa and Hodeida. A UN official told AFP that he was expected in Amman on Friday.

“His departure to Yemen depends on logistics arrangements and flight availability,” the official, who requested anonymity, said. Brigadier General Ahmed al-Kokbani, a Yemeni government representative on the committee, told AFP that the videoconference with Cammaert covered the bases of the committee’s mission. “Cammaert asked members of the team to work diligently in calming the situation and to reject any violations,” he said.

The Saudi-led coalition said Wednesday that the hard-won ceasefire agreement will collapse if rebel violations persist and the United Nations does not intervene. The committee’s observers are due to oversee the withdrawal of the warring parties from Hodeida, including a rebel pullout from the city’s docks that are the entry point for 80 percent of Yemeni imports and nearly all UN-supervised humanitarian aid.

Cammaert is due to report back to the Security Council on the situation on the ground on a weekly basis. According to the International Crisis Group, the “odds are stacked against” UN envoy Martin Griffiths and his team. “The Hodeida agreement came about in a rush, and critics have assailed it as too vague and open to interpretation,” it said in a statement on Wednesday. “Griffiths will now have to build on this imperfect but highly welcome and overdue agreement, which, as Crisis Group has argued, the UN Security Council should endorse via a new resolution. “Without strong international support, the Hodeida ceasefire will falter.” — AFP

Syria Kurds say to keep up anti-IS fight

RAS AL-AIN: Syrian Kurdish forces said yesterday they will keep fighting the Islamic State group in eastern Syria unless they come under Turkish attack, after their US allies announced their withdrawal. The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) stressed they would freeze operations if Turkey attacked, as widely expected after a pullout of US forces which have served as a buffer.

“The Hajin battles continues,” said Mustafa Bali, a spokesman for the Kurdish-dominated force, referring to the main front against IS in the Euphrates Valley. “The US decision is just a decision and does not yet affect the situation on the ground,” Bali told AFP. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, fighting was ongoing yesterday.

Backed by air strikes from the US-led coalition, SDF forces last week seized Hajin, the largest village in the last pocket of territory still controlled by IS in eastern Syria. Hundreds of die-hard jihadists, however, have regrouped in Sousa and Al-Shaafa, the last two hubs in the ever-shrinking rump of the group’s once sprawling “caliphate”. “We have previously said that, if attacked, we would dedicate ourselves to the defense of our land,” Bali said.

“The scenario of a halt in the anti-terrorist battle is tied to Turkish threats,” the SDF spokesman added. He also hinted the US pullout, which many Kurds see as a betrayal, could make Syria’s autonomous Kurdish administration less inclined to retain custody of detained IS fighters whom Western countries do not want to return home. — AFP

International

'Breaking Bad' Nigeria? Fear of a new narco-state

Drug trafficking is nothing new to Nigeria

OBINUGWU: In the early hours of a humid November morning, a 16-car convoy rolled into Obinugwu village in southeast Nigeria and stopped outside the iron gates of a non-descript house. More than 50 drug enforcement officials crept through the compound and surrounded the methamphetamine lab hidden by overgrown jungle behind the property.

The bust happened just before daybreak. Dozens were arrested, including the suspected kingpin at his mansion in the nearby city of Owerri. "It took one year of surveillance," a National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) officer, who was involved in the raid, told AFP. "They were all sleeping. We took them by surprise." Inside the lab there was 78 kilograms of meth — a drug as notorious for its exhilarating highs as its life-destroying, addictive lows. But the haul, worth tens of thousands of dollars, was not for domestic consumption.

Instead, it was probably destined for South Africa and Asia, investigators said. Drug trafficking is nothing new to Nigeria, which has long been a transit point for cocaine and heroin going to Europe and North America. The difference is that now Nigerians are producing the drugs. With vast quantities of chemicals entering the country, porous borders and corrupt law enforcement, Nigeria is an ideal place to produce the drug.

Since the country's first meth lab was discovered in 2011, authorities have found 14 more producing mass quantities of the stimulant, while seizures of the drug have jumped

from 177 kilos in 2012 to 1,363 kilos in 2016. "It (meth production) is on the increase, significantly on the increase. Meth today is a serious threat to Nigeria," said Sunday Zirangey, NDLEA Special Enforcement Team commander. "If this continues, Nigeria may turn into a narco-state."

Glen Prichard, Nigeria project coordinator with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, agreed. "Nigeria is potentially following the same footsteps as Mexico that led to instability, organised crime and an infiltrated government," he added.

Church massacre

Reliable data on meth production in Nigeria is hard to come by and seizures are small compared with global giants Mexico and Myanmar. But evidence on the ground points to a much larger industry. Nigeria's estimated need for the stimulant ephedrine, which is used as a medical decongestant, is 771 kilos, according to a US State Department report on international narcotics.

Yet Nigeria imports over eight tons a year, with the difference suspected of either being used to produce meth or trafficked elsewhere. Despite the risks of arrest and even execution for traffickers in Asia, the profits are irresistible in a country where the minimum wage is just 18,000 naira (\$50, 44 euros) a month.

A kilo of meth sells for \$3,500 on the streets of Lagos but by the time it reaches South Africa it is worth \$12,000 and \$150,000 in Japan — and the stakes are rising. Last year,



National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) officials stand on guard, securing the perimeter around a busted clandestine methamphetamine lab on November 22, 2018 in Obinugwu village in southeast Nigeria. - AFP

the fight for control of the lucrative South African market more than 6,000 kilometers away came to St Philip's Parish in Ozubulu, a village in the southeast Nigerian state of Anambra.

Thirteen people were shot dead in an apparent reprisal attack between Nigerian drug barons operating in Johannesburg. Piles of

trash line the dirt road leading to Ozubulu, where an endless stream of people hawk everything from adulterated fuel to plastic flip-flops. But among the grinding poverty are huge villas with grand columns and intricate wrought iron gates — glaring anomalies in a region with epileptic power and disintegrating roads. — AFP

Albania expels Iranian diplomats for 'harming security'

TIRANA: Albania said Wednesday it has expelled two Iranian diplomats for security reasons, with US officials identifying one as the ambassador and saying the pair plotted terrorist attacks in the Balkan country. The diplomats were suspected of "involvement in activities that harm the country's security," Albania's Foreign Ministry's spokeswoman Edlira Prendi told reporters, adding that the decision was taken in consultation with other countries.

She declined to provide the diplomats' names or elaborate on the nature of their alleged offence. But in a statement welcoming the move, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo described the diplomats as "two Iranian agents who plotted terrorist attacks

in Albania." US National Security Adviser John Bolton also identified one of the diplomats as the ambassador.

"Prime Minister Edi Rama of Albania just expelled the Iranian ambassador, signaling to Iran's leaders that their support for terrorism will not be tolerated," Bolton wrote on Twitter. He added: "We stand with PM Rama and the Albanian people as they stand up to Iran's reckless behavior in Europe and across the globe." An Albanian TV station, Top Channel, reported that the Iranians were suspected of links to an alleged plot to attack a 2016 World Cup match between Albania and Israel.

After the match some 20 people were arrested in Albania and Kosovo in connection with the alleged plot. At the request of US authorities and the UN in 2013, Albania agreed to take in some 3,000 members of Iranian opposition group known as The People's Mujahedin Organisation of Iran (PMOI). Their relocation from a camp in Iraq was completed in 2016 when the last 280 people left for Albania. They currently live in a compound in the northwest of the country. — AFP

France boosts pay for police in wake of 'yellow vest' protests

PARIS: The French government will give police officers a long-sought raise after a strike called in the wake of the "yellow vest" anti-government protests, which have strained security forces already on high alert after years of jihadist terror attacks. The accord was announced just before midnight Wednesday by unions after two days of talks with officials, and a one-day strike which saw police stations virtually shut as officers carried out only emergency duties.

They have complained of exhausting hours of patrols and chronic under-investment in equipment which have stretched departments to the breaking point and taken a heavy toll on the force. Last month an officer who led an "angry police movement", which emerged after the 2016 fire-bombing of a squad car with two officers inside, was found dead at her home in a suspected suicide. For many officers, the violent clashes with ri-

oting "yellow vest" protesters in Paris and other cities on recent Saturdays, and the huge manhunt for the gunman who attacked a Christmas market in Strasbourg last week, were the final straw. "This agreement... paves the way for improved and upgraded working conditions and pay for officers," Interior Minister Christophe Castaner said in a statement.

Union officials said that starting next year average monthly pay will be gradually boosted by 120 euros (\$137) a month, and up to 150 euros a month for senior ranks. The government will also begin negotiations on the huge backlog of overtime pay, with unions saying they are owed a collective 275 million euros. With the pay hikes, the government said a planned 300-euro bonus for officers would now be reserved only for administrative employees and technicians. "It's what we were looking for, we wanted an immediate boost to spending power," said Yves Lefebvre of the Unite-SGP Police union after Wednesday's talks.

Police were emboldened in their demands after the government announced a 10-billion-euro package of financial relief for low-income households to quell the "yellow vest" protests which have rocked France over the past month. The measures include a rise in the minimum wage, tax relief for pensioners and tax-free overtime pay for workers. The total cost of the police pay increases was not disclosed. — AFP

International

Belgian Jewish museum attack suspect in court

BRUSSELS: An alleged French jihadist accused of returning from Syria and shooting dead four people in an attack on the Jewish Museum of Belgium in central Brussels appeared in court yesterday. Mehdi Nemmouche, allegedly the first foreign fighter to return to stage a terror attack on European soil, is charged with murder in the May 24, 2014 attack.

Since then there have been several deadly attacks in both France and Belgium by militants connected to or inspired by movements like the Islamic State group. Belgium's State Security intelligence agency warned last month of a possible new wave of violence from militants radicalized in prison or Middle East conflicts. The 33-year-old confirmed his identity in the Brussels criminal court alongside his alleged accomplice, fellow French citizen 30-year-old Nacer Bendrer.

"Mehdi Nemmouche, 33, no profession," said the young man, with a thin beard and a dark jumper, who was brought to court under tight security. No pleas were submitted at what was a pre-trial hearing, but defense lawyer Sebastien Courtoy said Nemmouche wants, after four years in custody, "to see his innocence recognized."

Yesterday's hearing was arranged to finalize the witness list before the full trial, which is due to start next month, but was the pair's

first public appearance. Between 150 and 200 witnesses will be called when the main trial gets under way after January 10. In the attack, a man opened fire with an assault rifle in the Jewish Museum of Belgium, killing two Israeli tourists, a French volunteer and a Belgian receptionist. Prior to the attack, Nemmouche is said to have fought in Syria as part of a jihadist faction and is accused of acting as a jailer to kidnapped French journalists.

During the investigation he acknowledged playing a role in the anti-Semitic assault on the museum, but denied that he was the shooter. Another suspect, caught on a security camera walking with Nemmouche by Brussels' Gare du Nord station after the attack has never been identified. Nemmouche was himself arrested on May 30, 2014, arriving at a bus station in the southern French city of Marseille with a bag containing several firearms.

Anti-Semitic attacks

His co-defendant Bendrer, a petty criminal from Marseille, was arrested at a later date with weapons, but his lawyer has insisted he had nothing to do with the attack. Investigators say Nemmouche was in Syria from 2013 to 2014 and met Najim Laachraoui, a member of the gang which carried out bombings in Brussels in March 2016, killing 32



BRUSSELS: Belgian lawyer of Mehdi Nemmouche, the French suspect in Brussels Jewish museum attack, Sebastien Courtoy answers to journalists as they leave the courthouse in Brussels on December 20, 2018 after a preliminary hearing designed to finalize a list of 150 to 200 witnesses, ahead of his trial on charge of shooting four people dead at a Jewish museum after his return from Syria's battlefields. — AFP

people. The same Brussels cell is also alleged to have carried out the gun and bombing attacks on November 13, 2015 in Paris that killed 130 people and wounded hundreds.

The Islamic State group, which drew thousands of jihadists from Europe to parts of Syria and Iraq under its control, claimed responsibility for these attacks. Nemmouche is expected to face a separate trial in France for holding French

hostages in Syria. He was charged in connection with that case in November last year. Born in the northern French town of Roubaix to a family of Algerian origin, he is being held in a Belgian prison. Belgium's Jewish community will be watching the trial closely, and its leaders have previously underscored the anti-Semitic nature of the museum attack. Investigators also believe one of the March 2016 bombers who hit Brus-

sels airport specifically targeted Jewish travelers.

The Jewish community was also singled out in attacks in the French city of Toulouse in March 2012, the Paris suburbs in January 2015, and in Copenhagen in February 2015. The EU Agency for Fundamental Rights reported earlier this month that nine out of 10 European Jews believe anti-Semitism has worsened in the last five years. — AFP

Kuwait Times

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International

Drone intrusion brings London Gatwick Airport to a standstill

Causing misery for tens of thousands of stuck passengers

GATWICK AIRPORT: London Gatwick Airport was forced to suspend all flights yesterday due to drones flying over the airfield, causing misery for tens of thousands of stuck passengers just days before Christmas. Flights into Gatwick, south of the British capital, were diverted to other airports while passengers waiting to take off faced grueling delays. Gatwick is the eighth-busiest airport in Europe and sits behind Mumbai as the world's busiest single runway air hub.

A cat-and-mouse manhunt is under way to catch the drone operator. Two drones were first spotted flying over the airport at around 9:00 pm (2100 GMT) on Wednesday. The airfield briefly reopened at 3:00 am on Thursday, but had to be closed again following further sightings. "All flights to and from Gatwick are suspended due to ongoing drone activity around the airport. Unfortunately, there are significant delays and cancellations to all flights," the airport said. "We apologize to everyone affected, but the safety of all our passengers and staff is our number one priority." Some 10,000 passengers were affected on Wednesday night, and a further 110,000 were due to either take off or land at the airport on 760 flights yesterday. More than 20 police units from two forces were searching for those responsible.

"We believe this to be a deliberate act to disrupt the airport. However, there are absolutely no indications to suggest this is terror-related," said Superintendent Justin Burtenshaw of the local Sussex

Police force. "Each time we believe we get close to the operator, the drone disappears; when we look to reopen the airfield, the drone reappears."

'Everyone's trying to get home'

Chris Woodrooffe, Gatwick's chief operating officer, told BBC radio that it would be dangerous to shoot at the drone due to the danger of stray bullets. Inside the airport, weary passengers faced a grim wait to reach their destinations, with many returning home for the holidays. Gisele Fenech, 43, who was travelling to Malta, was among those stranded. "We're meeting family and it's my daughter's birthday today so it's gone all wrong. We've been looking forward to this for so long," she told AFP. "Everyone's trying to get home for Christmas."

Musab Rashid, 22, who was going to Copenhagen, said: "It's wrong, it's childish of them to do this, because it's affected more than 100,000 people." Karin Sjostrom-Nandris, 49, was heading to Stockholm, said: "We can't really leave this queue because this seems to be the only place we could possibly find out any information. The queue looks like it's several hours long, so we could be here for some time."

Under British law, drones cannot be flown near aircraft or within a kilometer of an airport, or at an altitude of over 400 feet. Those breaking the law could face up to five years in prison. Prime Minister Theresa May's spokesman slammed the perpetrator. "This behavior is irresponsible and



GATWICK AIRPORT: Passengers wait at the North Terminal at London Gatwick Airport, south of London, yesterday after all flights were grounded due to drones flying over the airfield. — AFP

completely unacceptable," he told reporters. "We feel for all the passengers who are facing so much disruption." In parliament, members of the upper House of Lords raised the likelihood of a new

wave of people getting hold of drones as presents this Christmas. Gatwick serves more than 228 destinations in 74 countries for 45 million passengers a year. — AFP

Morocco eyes 'terror' link in hikers murder

RABAT: Moroccan investigators said yesterday they have arrested three fugitive suspects in the grisly murder of two Scandinavian hikers as they follow a link to Islamic extremism. The arrests in the city of Marrakesh on Thursday morning follow a first arrest on Monday of a man suspected of belonging to an Islamic extremist group, hours after the discovery of the two women's bodies in the High Atlas mountains.

"The suspects have been arrested" and investigators are in the process of "verifying the terrorist motive, which is supported by the evidence and the findings of enquiries," a statement from Morocco's central judicial investigations office said. The bodies of Danish student Louisa Vesterager Jespersen, 24, and 28-year-old Maren Ueland from Norway were found on Monday, after the women had pitched their tent at an isolated mountain site two hours walk from the tourist village of Imlil.

Moroccan police have focused on the terrorism line of inquiry since arresting the first suspect on Monday in a poor neighborhood of the region's main city of Marrakesh, which is a magnet for foreign tourists. "The radical Islamism line has not been removed, because of the profile of the (first) suspect arrested and the three" others, who have links to radical Islamic circles, a source close to the investigation told AFP on Wednesday. Investigators released profiles of the three fugitives late on Wednesday as they launched an intensified manhunt.

In one of the black and white photos circulated by the authorities, one of the suspects wears long white clothing and a white skullcap, and has a long beard. A second suspect also has a long beard, while the third has a thin face and a goatee. All three hail from Marrakesh, and one of them had "a court record linked to terrorist acts", police spokesman Boubker Sabik said.

'Brutal and meaningless'

A source close to the investigation told AFP that "the arrests highlight the efficiency of the security forces". Danish Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen denounced what he called a "beastly crime". Addressing reporters on Thursday morning, Rasmussen said "like the whole world, we react with consternation, disgust and a profound sadness."

Norway's Prime Minister Erna Solberg condemned what she called a "brutal and meaningless attack on innocents". Authorities are still determining the authenticity of a grisly video posted on social media allegedly showing the murder of one of the women, an investigation source said. The killings have sparked fears of a hit to Morocco's crucial tourist sector — which accounts for 10 percent of national income — as the kingdom's relative security has always been a major selling point.

"What most of us had feared - that is to say a terrorist angle to the double crime in the region of Imlil, has been confirmed," said leading news website Medias 24. "Shock, sadness and revulsion are perceptible in Morocco," it added. Traumatized by the murders, residents of Imlil are deeply fearful for their livelihoods, and have lent their help to investigators in identifying suspects, a tourism sector source told AFP. Morocco has been spared jihadist attacks since 2011, when a bomb attack on a cafe in Marrakesh's famed Jamaa El Fna Square killed 17 people, most of them European tourists. An attack in the financial capital Casablanca killed 33 people in 2003. — AFP

Row over Christmas plan to 'evacuate' Greece migrants

THE HAGUE: The Dutch government yesterday warned local volunteers who want to drive to Greece to fetch 150 asylum seekers over Christmas that their plan amounted to illegal human trafficking. The "Let's Bring Them Here" foundation is set to leave the central Dutch city of Utrecht for Athens today in a convoy of around 50 cars and a specially refurbished bus. The foundation said the purpose of the 2,500-kilometre road trip was to "evacuate refugees" living in dire conditions in camps in Greece.

"A humanitarian disaster is ongoing," the foundation said in a statement on its website, which also has a petition with some 44,701 signatures urging the Netherlands to take 1,000 refugees from Greece. "Because we cannot wait for the authorities to respond to the signatures and something has to be done now, we are going to drive to Greece with about 50 cars on 21st December," the foundation said.

Let's Bring Them Here has "announced to the Greek government that they are coming with the intent to bring 150 refugees home" to the Netherlands. The convoy will also have an elongated bus painted in the foundation's colors. But the Dutch authorities poured cold water on the plan. "Even though I share the concerns about the conditions in camps on the Greek islands, fetching people illegally and bringing them to the Netherlands without assurances is a bad idea," Deputy Justice Minister Mark Harbers said.

"The illegal transportation of people without residency rights comes down to human trafficking and is punishable by law," Harbers said in a statement sent to AFP. — AFP

International

US Senate approves stopgap averting shutdown, denying Trump wall funds

A step closer to avoiding a potentially crippling closure

WASHINGTON: The US Senate on Wednesday night approved an emergency short-term spending bill that averts a looming government shutdown, but excludes the \$5 billion that President Donald Trump sought for a US-Mexico border wall.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said the measure will fund normal government operations at current levels through February 8 — bringing Washington a step closer to avoiding a potentially crippling closure of some federal offices over the Christmas holiday.

The bill, which cleared the Senate by voice vote, will need to pass the House of Representatives and be signed by Trump before midnight Friday, when funding is set to expire for key agencies such as the Department of Homeland Security. Republican and Democratic leaders gave strong signals that the stopgap bill, known as a continuing resolution, would pass Congress and land on the president's desk.

"It's good that our Republican colleagues in the Senate finally realized that they should not shut down the government over a wall that does not have enough support to pass the House or Senate and is not supported by a majority of the country," Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said upon the bill clearing the Senate. White House aides told US media that

Trump is inclined to sign the measure. But it is seen as a defeat for the president, who had argued strenuously for new funding for a wall that he insists would check illegal immigration.

Trump essentially abandoned his position from last week, when he told Democrats he would be "proud" to shutter government over border security. The six-week deal would temporarily break an impasse over spending and border security, as Democrats and Republicans continue to clash over immigration. It comes a day after Democratic leaders rejected a longer-term Republican offer that would have increased border security. Once Democrats take House control next month, they will be loathe to greenlight more money to Trump for his wall.

'Political spite'?

The president has fumed about Democrats not giving in, and he ranted about it again Wednesday. "In our Country, so much money has been poured down the drain, for so many years, but when it comes to Border Security and the Military, the Democrats fight to the death," he tweeted. "We won on the Military, which is being completely rebuilt. One way or the other, we will win on the Wall!"

McConnell's pragmatic move belied his irritation over what he called "Democrats' allergy to sensible immi-



In this file photo taken on November 18, 2018, would-be migrants to the United States from Honduras peer through the fence demarcating the US-Mexico border in San Ysidro, California. — AFP

gration policies." "It seems like political spite for the president may be winning out over sensible policy," he said. Some congressional conservatives complained about McConnell's maneuver — including Texas Senator Ted Cruz, who lamented the bill's pas-

sage. "This is a missed opportunity to deliver on the promises made to the American people," he said.

House Republican Mark Meadows had also said there was no excuse to back down on wall funding. Punting the issue to February 8 gives

Democrats a "Christmas present," tweeted Meadows, who chairs the far-right House Freedom Caucus. "Democrats will win, the wall will not be built, and Congress will once again have punted when we should've been taking a stand." — AFP

Federal judge deals setback to Trump's asylum restrictions

WASHINGTON: A US federal judge dealt a new setback to President Donald Trump's anti-immigration efforts Wednesday, declaring unlawful a decision to block domestic and gang violence victims from seeking asylum. US District Judge Emmet Sullivan in Washington branded the restrictions "arbitrary, capricious, and in violation of the immigration laws."

"It is the will of Congress — not the whims of the executive — that determines the standard for expedited removal," he wrote. On June 11, then-attorney general Jeff Sessions announced that being a victim of domestic violence or a gang target was not sufficient grounds to seek asylum. "The asylum statute does not provide redress for all misfortune," Sessions said at the time. Twelve Central American asylum seekers — all fac-

ing deportation — then filed suit with the backing of immigrant rights groups.

Sullivan sided with them, suspending the restrictions and ordering that the plaintiffs' deportation orders be cancelled — or that those who had already been deported be brought back to the US. It followed his similar order in August to halt the deportation of a mother and daughter and return them to the US after removal proceedings began amid their appeal. White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders said the ruling will "will further overwhelm our immigration courts with meritless cases" and "encourage more illegal immigration."

"Today's ruling is only the latest example of judicial activism that encourages migrants to take dangerous risks; empowers criminal organizations that spread turmoil in our hemisphere; and undermines the laws, borders, Constitution, and sovereignty of the United States," she added in a statement. Last month, a Californian judge blocked another administration attempt to automatically reject asylum seekers who cross the border illegally, sparking fury from the president. Trump's flagship effort — a travel ban for citizens from several mostly Muslim countries — was also repeatedly blocked before the Supreme Court approved the latest version. — AFP

George HW Bush sponsored a Filipino boy

CHICAGO: To the boy in the Philippines, his American benefactor and source of kind letters and gifts was known simply as "G. Walker." To the Christian charity helping him keep his benevolence secret from the world, he was George Herbert Walker Bush — the 41st president of the United States. Compassion International, which helps poor children around the world through a network of local churches, revealed for the first time this week that the late president, who died last month, had quietly sponsored a Filipino boy named Timothy for 10 years.

The organization released a number of Bush's heartwarming letters to his young charge. "I want to be your new pen pal," Bush wrote in his initial letter sent on January 24, 2002. "I am an old man, 77 years old, but I love kids; and though we have not met, I love you already," said the former president, identifying himself as a resident of Texas. Bush's former press secretary Jim McGrath con-

firmed to AFP the authenticity of the letters.

"This is but one of seemingly countless acts of kindness that George Bush performed through the years without fanfare, but rather because it was what was in his heart," McGrath said. Bush began sponsoring Timothy with a monthly donation in 2002 until his graduation from the charitable program in 2012. Through all of that time, Bush's true identity was kept secret due to security concerns. At times, Bush's letters contained hints of his true identity, such as one in which he wrote: "I got to go to the White House at Christmas time. Here is a little booklet that I got at the White House in Washington." In others, he offered gentle advice.

"I sure hope you like school and athletics. I do. I am an old man — now 78 — but I feel young at heart," Bush wrote. Bush also occasionally sent gifts to Timothy, who spoke in his letters of loving to draw, and playing basketball and guitar. "I'd like to thank you for the letter you sent me, as well as the drawing pad, colored pen and colored pencil," Timothy wrote in 2004. At age 17, he graduated out of the program and a charity employee revealed to him the identity of his pen pal. Timothy was stunned, the organization told US media. The charity has since lost touch with Timothy, but its former president Wess Stafford is sure of Bush's impact on the young man's life. — AFP

International

Bangladesh opposition goes underground as threats grow

DHAKA: Subrata Chowdhury, an opposition candidate in the looming Bangladesh election, is too scared to leave his party office as campaign deaths and threats mount. The Dhaka lawyer should be out on the streets handing out leaflets on meet-and-greets. But he says it is too dangerous while his party insists authorities are doing nothing to protect candidates.

paigning and more than 8,700 activists, including 14 candidates, have been detained in the past month.

Terrified voters

The opposition says its rallies have been broken up by police firing pellet guns and tear gas, terrifying voters turning out to show solidarity with the beleaguered movement. Candidates like Chowdhury, trying to boost their visibility, have been threatened on the campaign trail by ruling Awami League followers wielding metal bars. Two Awami League followers have also been killed in fights with the opposition.

Police have denied interfering in rallies or harassing opposition campaigners and authorities say those detained in recent weeks — which opposition figures say are in the thousands — had outstanding warrants for their arrest. Obaidul Quader, general secretary of the Awami League, said the party did not tell its workers to attack opponents. “I won’t say all (the allegations) are false. But... we did not give any order,” he said. The Election Commission says it has taken steps to ensure a level playing field — despite the overwhelming number of opposition candidates disqualified. But alarm has been growing as the poll looms.

One-sided race

Rights groups and government critics warn the election is not shaping up to be free or fair in the country of 160 million. “Members and supporters of the main opposition parties have been arrested, killed, even disappeared, creating an atmosphere of fear and repression that is not consistent with credible elections,” said Brad Adams, Asia director for New York-based Human Rights Watch.

There are fears of a repeat of the one-sided 2014 national election — when the BNP boycotted



DHAKA: In this photo taken on December 16, 2018 a man walks past a wall with images of Bangladeshi founding father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (L) and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wazed (R) as general election campaigns take place. — AFP

the vote, letting Hasina walk into office unchallenged. Since then, Hasina and her party have been accused of drifting toward authoritarianism, silencing dissent and the press by using an onerous digital-security law. Critics, notably award-winning photojournalist Shahidul Alam, were jailed for making “provocative” statements.

The opposition’s veteran opposition leader Khaleda Zia was handed another stiff jail term in November, ensuring she was kept out of the race. The browbeating has left voters wondering if there is an alternative to the governing party. “It’s a one-sided poll so far. The opposition is too afraid to campaign,” said Rezaur Rahman, a voter from West Nakhhalpara in the capital Dhaka. The streets of

West Nakhhalpara are plastered with images of the incumbent, a ruling party minister whose supporters have staged noisy parades. His challenger — head of an opposition youth league — remains all but invisible.

“I doubt the opposition is even contesting the polls,” said one shopkeeper, who declined to be named for fear of retribution. “I haven’t seen any of his posters or leaflets. No one came to me seeking a vote for him.” Opposition candidates say the odds are stacked against them. “They claim the people are with them. Then why aren’t they letting everyone campaign freely?” asked BNP candidate Afroza Abbas, whose motorcade was attacked last week. — AFP



‘We were attacked by ruling party men’

“We were attacked by ruling party men as we tried to hang these posters,” said Chowdhury in his glum headquarters amid stacks of unused flyers and banners. “The police were just silent spectators, or actively supported them.” At least six people have been killed in campaign clashes between Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s ruling Awami League and the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

Election authorities have deployed more than 20,000 paramilitary personnel across the country to boost security ahead of the December 30 vote. Army troops are due to join them. But the BNP is not reassured. It says at least four party activists have been killed — including one who fell to his death from a Dhaka rooftop last week in suspicious circumstances — and thousands hurt in the past week. The party claims that 152 out of 300 opposition candidates have been attacked while cam-

US envoy doubts Taliban’s desire for Afghan peace

KABUL: US peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad raised doubts yesterday about the Taliban’s desire to end the 17-year war, after the militants refused to meet with a Kabul-backed negotiating team. While he was certain the Afghan government wanted to stop the conflict, Khalilzad told Arriana News that he questioned whether the Taliban were “genuinely seeking peace”.

“We have to wait and see their forthcoming steps,” Khalilzad said according to a translation of the interview provided by the US embassy in Kabul. Khalilzad’s remarks to Afghan media following his latest face-to-face meeting with the Taliban echoed those expressed privately by some Western diplomats in the capital. Saudi Arabia and Pakistan also attended the talks in Abu Dhabi earlier this week, which the United Arab Emirates hailed as “positive for all parties concerned”. But the Taliban would not meet with a 12-person Afghan delegation, Khalilzad said, describing the decision as “wrong”. —AFP

DR Congo election panel ‘may postpone vote’

KINSHASA: Elections in Democratic Republic of Congo — due to take place on Sunday — may be postponed for a week, a senior electoral official has told AFP, after electronic voting machines were destroyed in a suspected arson attack on a warehouse last week. The official, from the Independent National Election Commission (CENI), speaking on condition of anonymity, said on Wednesday that both the presidential and legislative polls could be delayed.

President Joseph Kabila is scheduled to step down after nearly 18 years in power following the elections — which are already two years overdue. Nearly 8,000 of some 10,000 voting terminals for the capital Kinshasa were destroyed in the warehouse blaze last Wednesday, according to CENI. Around 11 percent of the country’s 44 million registered voters live in the city.

Opposition candidates last week suggested the government could have been behind the fire, to use as a pretext to again delay the vote. A “seven-day postponement” is being discussed, the CENI official said on Wednesday, as efforts are made to obtain replacement machines. “We are not going to ask for anyone’s opinion, even that of the head of state,” the source insisted, adding that a formal decision may be announced yesterday. CENI head Corneille Nangaa is considering that matter and will hold a press conference on Thursday in Kinshasa, a spokesman for the election commission said.

‘Extremists are prepared’

The possible election postponement comes as problems have piled up ahead of the December 23 vote, with violence at electoral

rallies, inter-ethnic conflict, militia attacks in the east and an Ebola outbreak. Electoral campaigning began on November 22, since when at least six people have died in violence, according to Congolese rights NGO Acaj. The authorities deny that there have been any deaths linked to the campaign.

The governor of Kinshasa on Wednesday announced a ban on all public rallies due to security concerns — as opposition hopeful Martin Fayulu said he had been blocked from entering the city. “Extremists are prepared and are preparing for confrontations in the streets of the city of Kinshasa during election campaigning,” governor Andre Kimbuta said in a statement. The ban applies to “all presidential candidates, without exception,” Kimbuta said, giving no details as to how long the measure would last. Fayulu had been due to hold a meeting in the city. The opposition candidate said on Twitter that the government had “prevented (him) from returning” to Kinshasa and that his motorcade had been attacked in Masinimba, east of the capital. “What are they afraid of?” he asked. Police blocked the N1 highway on the city’s outskirts, which Fayulu’s motorcade would have used, and fired teargas to disperse several hundred supporters who had come to greet him, an AFP reporter saw. Fayulu has repeatedly accused the authorities of trying to thwart regional campaign appearances in the sprawling country.

More than 40 million people are eligible to cast their vote on Sunday. The elections are a huge challenge for DRC, which has never known a peaceful transition of power since it gained independence from Belgium in 1960. Kabila, 47, came to power after his father was assassinated in 2001. He is at the helm of a government that critics say is notorious for corruption, incompetence and rights abuse. Kabila should have stepped down as president at the end of 2016 when he reached a two-term limit. He stayed on, invoking a caretaker clause in the constitution, but at the cost of protests that were bloodily repressed. —AFP

International

India farmers get \$9bn loan relief ahead of elections

Set to be a major issue in the polls

JAIPUR: Three newly elected Indian state governments have waived up to \$8.6 billion in farm loans in a bid by Rahul Gandhi's main opposition Congress party to boost support ahead of 2019 elections. The sorry plight of farmers in India, where thousands commit suicide every year, is set to be a major issue in the polls when Prime Minister Narendra Modi will run for a second term.

Last week Congress wrested power from Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in three state elections, partly by promising the help voters working in agriculture. Late Wednesday the new government of one of these states, Rajasthan, announced a write-off on loans of small farmers up to 200,000 rupees (\$2,850), at an estimated cost of \$2.5 billion. The two other states, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, where Congress ended 15 years of BJP rule, announced similar plans this week to forgo loans worth nearly 440 billion rupees.

The move signals Congress's intent to latch on the growing disquiet in rural areas, where 68 percent of India's 1.25 billion people live, against Modi, 68. "It's done!," Gandhi, 48, whose standing was boosted by the state election successes, said on Twitter. "We asked for 10 days. We did it in 2." Modi swept to power in 2014 largely on promises of improv-

ing lives of poor, ending corruption, boosting the economy and more jobs. But tens of thousands of farmers have rallied in recent months — including 80,000 in New Delhi this month — over his government's failure to mitigate their problems.

Modi had pledged to double farm income by 2022 but most say nothing has changed. His opponents accuse him of being pro-rich and ignoring the plight of millions of poor farmers. Political parties often promise farm loan waivers or other agricultural sops to win support in rural India. Roughly 55 percent of the population is directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture, making the community the largest voting bloc. The agriculture sector accounts for around 15 percent of India's economic output. But nearly 300,000 farmers have killed themselves in the last two decades, as drought — or flooding — poor yields and low prices push them into a cycle of debt and despair.

Two BJP state governments in 2017 announced similar packages for farmers worth 770 billion rupees but Modi's government ruled out a similar nationwide amnesty plan in July. But recent media reports suggest that Modi's government may reconsider and announce a multi-trillion dollar relief package in the run up to the elections, which are due by

three are under investigations, eight are under-going voluntary training. Twenty-three women are free and living in Xinjiang of their own free will," he added. In recent years, Pakistan has heavily pushed its relationship with China, lauding the tens of billions of investment dollars that Beijing is pouring into the country as a "game changer".

Beijing has also upgraded the treacherous mountain road connecting Gilgit-Baltistan to Xinjiang. But China has had difficulty reconciling its desire for development with fears that Uighur separatists will import violence from Pakistan. Chinese authorities have long linked their crackdown on Xinjiang's Muslims to international counter-terrorism efforts, arguing that separatists are bent on joining foreign extremists like Al-Qaeda.

They describe the camps as "vocational education centers" for people who appear to be drawn towards Islamist extremism and separatism. But human rights activists say members of China's Muslim minorities are being held involuntarily for transgressions such as wearing long beards and face veils, and that the region has become a police state. Faisal said his ministry and Chinese authorities will continue to coordinate on this matter. "The Chinese authorities have also offered to arrange visits to Xinjiang of the families of the convicted women," said Faisal. —AFP



NEW DELHI: Indian supporters and members of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) take part in a protest holding placards featuring an image of opposition Congress party president Rahul Gandhi for his alleged derogatory remarks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi. —AFP

May. The previous Congress-led alliance in 2008 promised a nationwide farm loan waiver

of more than 700 billion rupees, helping it win a second term in office in 2009. —AFP

Pakistan: Outcry over detention camps 'sensationalized'

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan yesterday defended its close ally China against a growing outcry over Muslims who are being detained by Chinese authorities, saying the issue was being "sensationalized" by foreign media. Numerous extrajudicial detention centers have been set up in China's vast, troubled Xinjiang region, holding as many as one million ethnic Uighurs and other Muslim minorities, according to estimates cited by a UN panel.

Among them are believed to be dozens of women who married men from neighboring Gilgit-Baltistan region in Pakistan, where people regularly cross the border into China for trade. "Some section of foreign media are trying to sensationalize the matter by spreading false information," Mohammad Faisal, spokesman for Pakistan's ministry of foreign affairs, told reporters at a weekly press briefing in Islamabad yesterday.

"As per Chinese authorities, out of 44 women, six are already in Pakistan. Four have been convicted on various charges,

India police steer clear of forbidden island

PORT BLAIR: One month after an isolated tribe killed an American missionary seeking to convert them, Indian police have still not tried to retrieve the body of John Allen Chau from his remote island grave. But they are still trying to interview two American missionaries suspected of encouraging Chau to go to North Sentinel in the Andaman Islands, in breach of a strict cordon put around its isolated inhabitants.

Chau, 26, was cut down in a hail of arrows, according to fishermen who dropped him off nearby, as he marched towards the Sentinelese tribespeople with his "Jesus loves you" message. Investigators in the Indian Ocean chain of 500 islands will formally ask two American missionaries who had spoken with Chau before his death to give evidence, police said. "We have initiated the process of serving them a notice to be part of (the) investigation," local police chief Dependra Pathak said.

The notice, which would have to go between the Indian and US governments, would

only require the Americans to answer questions. The identities of the Americans, a man and a woman, have not been given. They are known to have left India. Chau was killed in mid-November but news of his death only emerged six days later. The incident cast a new spotlight on efforts to protect one of the world's last "uncontacted" tribes, whose language and customs remain a mystery to the rest of the world.

Outsiders are banned from travelling near the island to protect the tribe from outside diseases. Police have twice sent a vessel close to North Sentinel in a bid to see where Chau may have been killed. They acknowledge that it is unlikely that they would risk provoking the tribe by setting foot on the island. Anthropologists and activists for isolated tribal communities have called on Indian authorities not to try to retrieve the body.

"We are still awaiting the firm view of the Anthropological Survey of India and field experts," Pathak said. "What we have gathered is that going over there is not desirable for their health and psychological wellbeing." Seven people, including six local fishermen, were arrested for helping Chau travel to the remote island. All were granted bail this week. Two Indian fishermen were killed in 2006 after their boat drifted onto North Sentinel. One week after their deaths, their bodies were put on stakes facing out to sea on the beach. —AFP

International

Despite Trump tirade, Fed reiterates independence

Washington pushing to maintain measures against the North

SEOUL: North Korea said yesterday its commitment to denuclearization of the Korean peninsula was bound up with a “complete removal of US nuclear threats”. Following a rapid diplomatic rapprochement this year, the North’s leader Kim Jong Un and President Donald Trump signed a vaguely-worded statement in Singapore in June, agreeing to work towards the “denuclearization of the Korean peninsula”. But the two countries have since disagreed on what it means, causing follow-up negotiations to stall.

Now Pyongyang is demanding sanctions relief and has condemned US insistence on its nuclear disarmament as “gangster-like”, while Washington is pushing to maintain the measures against the North until its “final, fully verified denuclearization”. Yesterday’s commentary released by the North’s official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) asserted that the commitment was a mutual rather than unilateral undertaking. “It must be clearly understood that the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula means the removal of all nuclear threats — not only those from the North and the South but those aiming at the Korean peninsula from surrounding areas as well”, it said.

It urged the US to give up the “delusion” of

forcing the North to give up its nuclear arsenal “unilaterally” through “pressure and coercion”. It also called for the lifting of sanctions, describing it as a “touchstone” in determining whether the US was committed to implementing the Singapore agreement. A second summit between Trump and Kim — who exchanged personal insults and threats of war throughout 2017 — is expected to take place next year.

The US leader faces criticism over the planned talks since North Korea has taken few concrete steps to abandon its nuclear and ballistic missile programs. Pyongyang has long said it needs the weapons to deter a possible US invasion. It has spent decades developing them, at a heavy cost in both resources and the imposition of multiple sets of UN, US, EU and other sanctions.

Washington last week added three senior North Korean officials to those subject to sanctions over human rights abuses, including Choe Ryong Hae, who has been considered a right-hand man to Kim. Pyongyang condemned the move, warning Washington’s approach could “block the path to denuclearization on the Korean peninsula forever”. Trump played down hopes last week for any imminent deal to persuade Pyongyang to give up its nuclear arsenal



SINUJU: This picture taken on November 30, 2018 shows a person walking along railway tracks in front of North Korean buildings and the skyline of the Chinese city of Dandong (rear), on the outskirts of the border city of Sinuiju. —AFP

but he also expressed optimism, saying North Korea’s economy has “wonderful potential” and

that Kim “sees it better than anyone and will fully take advantage of it for his people”. —AFP

Fugitive spy jailed again in Vietnam

HANOI: A fugitive spy was jailed for a second time in Vietnam yesterday after a court convicted him for “abuse of power” for pilfering more than \$8 million from a bank in a share-buying scheme. Phan Van Anh Vu was convicted as Vietnam’s communist government widens a corruption crackdown that has already seen dozens of former high-flying officials, executives and businessmen put behind bars. The former property developer turned runaway spy is already serving eight years after he was convicted in July for “divulging state secrets”.

That conviction came after he was arrested in Singapore and swiftly sent back to Vietnam to face trial earlier this year. Yesterday, a court in Ho Chi Minh City found him guilty of abuse of power in a separate trial linked to the partially state-owned Dong A Bank, Vu’s lawyer told AFP. He was jailed for 17 years while the bank’s former general director Tran Phuong Binh got life. “Vu insists that he was not guilty and he will appeal,” his attorney Nguyen Huu The Trach said.

Binh allegedly instructed Vu to sign a falsified document that said Vu purchased \$8.7 million worth of stocks in Dong A Bank, when in fact he pocketed it. Vu paid the money back this year, his lawyer said. Vu grabbed headlines when he was arrested in Singapore carrying two passports — one of which was fake — while passing through the city state en route to Europe. Vu’s conviction shocked many in conservative Vietnam because of his links to the powerful Ministry of Public Security (MPS), long believed to be untouchable. But several other MPS-linked officials have been targeted as a hardline administration makes good on a promise to clean up the graft-prone country. The anti-corruption campaign initially zeroed in on the state-run oil industry, but has since expanded to security, banking and land sectors.

Earlier this week, the former CEO head of the state-run PetroVietnam Exploration Production Corp was arrested for allegedly “abusing power to appropriate property”, according to MPS. Observers say the anti-graft crackdown — which echoes Beijing’s anti-corruption drive — is aimed at cleaning up the notoriously crooked country, but may also be aimed at eliminating political foes. Transparency International ranks Vietnam 107 out of 180 countries on its corruption index, behind Thailand, Indonesia and China. —AFP

Academic stalked in HK hits out at China

SYDNEY: An Australian academic who was followed for a week by a state-owned newspaper in Hong Kong has suggested Beijing could be behind the intimidation and has vowed not to be bullied. Kevin Carrico — a lecturer in Chinese Studies at Sydney’s Macquarie University — was tailed by the Wen Wei Po tabloid during a visit earlier this month and was the subject of a front-page “expose”. The paper accused him of stirring “pro-independence” sentiment in Hong Kong, holding “secret meetings”, and secretly photographed him throughout his week-long trip, as well as on previous visits.

The incident has raised concerns about ebbing freedoms in Hong Kong, including the ability of academics to carry out research. Carrico — who has written extensively on Chinese nationalism — on Wednesday accused the paper of trying to intimidate him or people he speaks to, telling AFP its motivations were not “particularly pure or admirable”.

If the authorities were trying to scare him away from returning to Hong Kong, that was “not going to happen”, Carrico insisted. But he fears it was “Beijing signaling to Hong Kong to refuse me entry next time” or “intimidating people away from speaking with me”. That, he admitted, “could happen, considering how tense things are in Hong Kong now”. In Beijing, Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua

Chunying dismissed Carrico’s allegations as “preposterous and absurd”.

‘Patriotic hoodlums’

Beijing has sought to tighten its grip on the semi-autonomous city following mass pro-democracy protests in 2014. Since then, key protest leaders have been charged while a string of pro-democracy lawmakers were stopped from sitting in the Hong Kong legislature. Earlier this year, a small pro-independence party was banned on national security grounds, and a British journalist who hosted a press club talk with that party’s leader had to leave the city after his visa renewal was suddenly denied.

Hong Kong was handed back to China by Britain in 1997 and still enjoys freedom of speech and other rights unseen on the mainland. But critics have been stopped from coming to the city. Last year, British human rights activist Benedict Rogers was denied entry on arrival at the airport, prompting London to seek an explanation. Carrico said he fears the paper has now made him a possible target for “patriotic hoodlums” from gangs with links to the Chinese Communist Party when he does return. “The Wen Wei Po is essentially an intelligence service masquerading as a paper and should be shut down,” he said.

In a statement issued yesterday, Wen Wei Po defended its article, saying it was built around “clear facts” that “complied with usual news reporting rules and skills”. The paper accused Carrico of making “false accusations” and attacking press freedom, adding it reserved the right to pursue legal action against the academic. In July this year, Ta Kung Pao — a sister paper to Wen Wei Po — followed pro-independence activist Andy Chan during a holiday to Taiwan. —AFP

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An Indian shopper arranges Santa Claus masks on display on a road side stall in Bangalore ahead of the celebration of Christmas. — AFP

Hero or Zero? Bollywood's Khan eyes hit as dwarf

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In this file photo, Jennifer Lopez attends a photocall for "Second Act" at the Four Seasons in Los Angeles.



In this file photo, Jennifer Lopez attends a photocall for "Second Act" at the Four Seasons in Los Angeles.

With 'Second Act,' Jennifer Lopez makes her own opportunity

Jennifer Lopez learned a long time ago that in the entertainment business you can't just sit around waiting for opportunities, you have to make them for yourself. It's the simple reason "Second Act," her first film in three years and her long-awaited return to the glossy, modern-day fairy tale, exists. "I'm quite particular," Lopez said on a recent afternoon in Los Angeles. "I've been offered a couple of movies over the past couple of years but unless it's the right thing and I get the right types of opportunities, I'd rather create them. That's mine and Elaine's mantra. We don't force things, but we don't wait around either ... If no one is giving us the stories that we want to tell, then we'll create them ourselves."

Elaine is Elaine Goldsmith-Thomas, Lopez's longtime friend and producing partner who've worked together on projects like "The Boy Next Door" and "Shades of Blue." "Second Act," which hits theaters nationwide Friday, was her idea. She thought that Lopez would be the right woman to play the 40-year-old big box store worker with business savvy but no degree who gets a chance to prove herself to Madison Avenue's elite. A little bit "Working Girl," a little bit "It's a Wonderful Life," it was right up Lopez's alley.

"We're stuck on these movies because we know, we grew up on them and we know. They're necessary. People need inspiration. They need to believe in a fairy tale," Lopez said. "I think that is the evolution of the romantic comedy. It's not so much about falling in love with Prince Charming, it's about falling in love with yourself and your life and realizing that you have to be the love of your life." Lopez, 49, said she even cried describing the story in a pitch meeting to STXfilms Chairman Adam Fogelson ("Our great champion," she said), who agreed on the spot to make the movie.

"(He) believes in these types of movies and believes in women producers," she said. They signed on a director, Peter Segal ("50 First Dates"), carved out some time in Lopez's busy schedule ("I literally think she's the busiest person on the planet earth," Segal laughed) and got to filming in New York City, which proved to be its own kind of challenge. "It was crazy shooting in New York with her," Segal said. "I remember one scene we're in Central Park, going down the mall, the promenade with her, you know the same one of 'Kramer vs Kramer' and 'When Harry Met Sally' and there are all the vendors who are selling caricatures, and their sketches are like Michael Jackson and Barack Obama and Jennifer Lopez! It's like, 'Hey can we turn those around?' She's everywhere."

Then there were the ever present looky-loos and paparazzi, some of whom they had to digitally erase from shots in post-production. It's just part of doing business with Lopez, an industry unto herself. She knows she is tough to pin down, but always makes sure to give her all when she's there.

Biggest contracts

"Everyone who gets in business with me has to bear with me a little bit because I do so much and I always want to be great when I'm in front of you," she said. "Once you get in the rhythm of that, you're like, ok she's going to show up. It may take her a minute for me to get her but when I get her, she's going to be 100." She hopes that people find inspiration and hope in "Second Act." One person

who already found himself quite emotional about the film is Lopez's boyfriend Alex Rodriguez, who related to being self-conscious about not having a college degree.

"He didn't get to go to college because he went into the big leagues at 18-years-old and he always missed that," Lopez said. "When he saw it he was like 'I felt inadequate because of that.' He's one of the greatest baseball players of all time who has made some of the biggest contracts, but it's not about that, you can feel inadequate being measured up to others because of their privilege and intelligence." Lopez herself only attended one year of college, but for her, that was a choice that was necessary to jump-start her performing career. Still, she remembers feeling self-conscious and not worthy of some of her successes early on, like becoming the first Latin actress to get \$1 million for a role ("Selena").



In this image released by STXfilms, Leah Remini, left, and Jennifer Lopez appear in a scene from "Second Act." — AP photos

"I probably didn't realize how important it was. I was so young at the time. And there was a lot of to-do made about that," Lopez said. "Back then you were kind of ashamed like maybe I didn't deserve this. You come from a culture where you don't ask for anything. But now I realize that it was important because our community needed that boost to say, 'Yes we are just as valuable as any other actor playing leading role in Hollywood in a big film.'" Lopez doesn't like the word "reinvention" - it implies that you have to be something different than you are - but rather she prefers "evolution." And she believes change is happening in the entertainment film industry because women are forcing it to.

"It takes time for us to believe in ourselves. I didn't believe it back then and it happened to me," she added. "Now I'm at a point in my life where I think yes, I do have worth and value and I should be compensated in this way or that way and I do deserve to have a good life and I do deserve to have love... We all are our own activists, we all are our own change, we all are our own vessel to have the life that we deserve but we have to believe that we deserve it." — AP

Crackdown on rappers 'pointless', Putin says

Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday said he does not support concert bans and arrests of musicians, in response to a continuing crackdown on rap stars popular with Russian youth. Putin said he is not against rappers and even had a rapper on his campaign once who was covered with tattoos. "About detention of these rappers, I agree with you. That's just pointless... there is nothing good in that," Putin told an annual end-of-year press conference. "We can't just jail, ban and punish, that's wrong," Putin said. Last month popular rapper Husky was jailed after authorities dis-

rupted his concert in southern Russia. Other performers have reported concert cancellations and blockages of online videos. Some things should be off limits, like "propaganda" of drugs or suicide, according to Putin. But, he said rather than heavy-handed banning, more delicate methods should be employed to "convince (youth) of the greater attractiveness of other values".

On Saturday, Putin explained at a discussion with culture advisors that the foundation of rap consists of "sex, drugs, and protest against everything", three things of which he finds drugs the most worrying. He

hinted that some rappers actually benefit from concert cancellations. "Some artists will now be lining up to have their concert banned and then get the so-called hype," he said. In an indication of what sort of role models he suggests for modern youngsters, Putin said yesterday that whenever he is asked, he thinks of a group of 96 youth that joined the Red Army during World War II; only six of them survived. "Those are heroes, that's youth," Putin said. — AFP



Rapper Husky

Lifestyle | Feature

Weinstein back in court seeking dismissal of sex assault case

Could Harvey Weinstein, public enemy number one of the #MeToo movement, end up walking away a free man? The onetime Hollywood heavyweight producer will be back in a New York courtroom as his star attorney Ben Brafman asks a judge to dismiss the sex assault charges against his client. Brafman says police misconduct, specifically the work of one investigator, has “irreparably tainted” the case. He will face off with prosecutors before Manhattan criminal court Judge James Burke for a hearing that could be a game changer for the 66-year-old Weinstein, who could face life in prison if convicted.



Harvey Weinstein

Though one charge against him has been thrown out, Weinstein—who was arrested in May—is still facing five counts over an alleged rape in March 2013 and a forced act of oral sex in 2006. The disgraced movie mogul has been accused by more than 80 women of sexual misconduct. He insists that all of his sexual liaisons were consensual and is free on \$1 million bail. But the scandal upended his career and Weinstein became the poster boy for a cascade of abuse accusations against powerful men in Hollywood, the media and other industries.

His arrest and arraignments have led #MeToo campaigners to hope that the twice-married father of five will be put on trial, convicted and sent to prison. But Brafman, one of America’s most celebrated defense attorneys, has made several dents in the prosecution’s case, including getting one count of a forced act of oral sex in 2004 — lodged by former actress Lucia Evans—thrown out in October.

Avalanche of mistakes

Prosecutors opted not to pursue the charge, after it emerged that one detective who worked on the investigation had failed to disclose witness testimony that contradicted Evans’s account. A friend of Evans said she had heard her say that she had willingly engaged in oral sex with Weinstein to secure a movie role. Brafman said the detective in question, Nicholas DiGaudio, made

other mistakes.

He apparently told another accuser, Mimi Haley, who says Weinstein forced her into oral sex in 2006, to delete text messages that could be potentially embarrassing for her, despite prosecutors’ advice not to do so. Prosecutors also apparently failed to disclose to the defense affectionate text messages Haley sent to Weinstein after the alleged assault, which would have introduced a notion of doubt about the forced nature of the encounter.

Prosecutors nevertheless want the case to continue and reject Brafman’s motion that the process is beyond repair. They say everything in Haley’s mobile phone was turned over to investigators, and that the detective’s conduct only affected Evans’ case. DiGaudio has since been removed from the case. As for emails, prosecutors say they are not obliged to share any of those with the defense at this stage of the proceedings.

‘Psychological coercion’

Nevertheless, since October, many experts speculate that the case against Weinstein has suffered a serious blow. Some even suggest that prosecutors will eventually cave, as they did in dismissing sex assault charges brought against former IMF chief Dominique Strauss-Kahn—also defended by Brafman—in 2011. Barbara Barron, a professor at Hofstra University School of Law, says the detective’s conduct created a “surprise” in the Weinstein case.

“The issue to me is how much taint... how much the police officer’s actions influence the other charges,” Barron told AFP. “I don’t know what the judge will consider.” For Bennett Gershman, a former prosecutor who teaches law at Pace University, prosecutors threw out the charge related to Evans precisely to avoid contaminating the rest of the case. “I know Brafman is going to argue to dismiss the whole indictment. He is going to lose that without any doubt,” Gershman said.

He added that he still believes prosecutors have a solid case with the two remaining accusers, no matter what they said to Weinstein after the alleged assaults. “These women saying nice things to Weinstein—would that surprise anybody? You have a hugely powerful man (...) who literally controlled their reputation and their careers,” Gershman said. If the case is not thrown out, Brafman will likely argue for all other Weinstein accusers to be barred from testifying.

In the case against veteran television star Bill Cosby, the depositions of five women who did not bring complaints against him were admitted into evidence for his second trial. Cosby was convicted and sentenced to at least three years in prison in the first court win for the #MeToo movement. If the judge decides to allow the case to continue, he could set a trial date on Thursday. If that happens, Gershman says the jury will have to decide: “Did they consent or did they consent involuntarily?” “If these women testify strongly on the witness stand, Weinstein will lose,” he predicted. — AFP



Indian Bollywood actors Shah Rukh Khan (left), Katrina Kaif (center), Anushka Sharma (right) and Manish Paul (behind) during the promotion of the Hindi film ‘Zero’.



Indian Bollywood actors Anushka Sharma (left), Katrina Kaif (center) and Shah Rukh Khan (right) are seen on stage during the promotion of the Hindi film ‘Zero’ at the Indian television singing reality show ‘Indian Idol’ 10th season grand finale in Mumbai. — AFP photos

Hero or Zero? Bollywood’s Khan eyes hit as dwarf

Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan’s latest film releases this week with the acclaimed actor, who plays a dwarf, seeking a hit after an underwhelming run at the box office. “Zero”, hitting cinemas on Friday, sees the Hindi movie icon, miniaturized with special effects, caught up in a love triangle alongside a wheelchair-bound Anushka Sharma. Director Aanand L Rai believes he brought the larger than life actor, nicknamed “King Khan”, out of his comfort zone to play a character three feet (90 centimeters) tall. “This kind of story about a man’s journey and his love story needed someone like him. By casting him, we challenged Mr. Khan to show us what he could do,” Rai told AFP.

“Zero”—which is heavy on special effects—sees Sharma play a NASA scientist with cerebral palsy and Katrina Kaif portray a Bollywood actress with a drink problem. Bauua Singh, played by Khan, is struggling to find a wife because of his height but develops close bonds with both women as he searches for his true love. It is Khan’s first movie since “Jab Harry Met Sejal” bombed last year. The actor’s “Races” (2017) and “Fan” (2016) also didn’t do as well as hoped.

The 53-year-old’s last undisputed blockbuster was “Dilwale” (The Big Hearted) in 2015 and with “Zero” reported to cost a hefty two billion rupees (\$26.5 million) it may be starting to prey on his mind. “If people feel that ‘Zero’ is very important for me, it’s their feeling,” Khan told the Hindustan Times in a recent interview. “God forbid, if this film doesn’t work, what will happen? Maybe, I won’t get work for six months or 10 months, but if I believe that my craft and art is good, I will continue to get work,” he added. Khan shot to fame in the mid-90s as the romantic hero of hits like “Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge” (The Brave-hearted Will Take The Bride) and “Kuch Kuch Hota Hai” (Something Happens).

Win-win?

Critics say Khan—a ubiquitous presence in advertising—has struggled to transition away from those roles and find a new niche for himself as he has gotten older. They point out that playing the

romantic hero alongside much younger actresses can jar with audiences. His “Zero” co-stars Sharma and Kaif are 30 and 35 respectively. Some industry watchers have tipped “Zero” for success, though. Vajir Singh, editor of Bollywood website “Box Office India”, told AFP that Khan and Rai, known for romantic flicks “Raanjhanaa” (Beloved One) and “Tanu Weds Manu”, are a “win-win combination”.

The film also includes a cameo role by legendary actress Sridevi Kapoor who died from accidental drowning in a Dubai hotel room bathtub in February aged 54. Khan will have just one week to woo cinema-goers, however, with the Rohit Shetty-directed “Simmba” set to release in theatres on December 28.



Indian Bollywood actors Katrina Kaif (left), Shah Rukh Khan (center) and Anushka Sharma (right) pose for photographs during the promotion of the Hindi film ‘Zero’.

The action movie stars Ranveer Singh, one of several bankable younger stars who are challenging the hegemony of the Khans of Bollywood at the box office. For over two decades the triumvirate of Shah Rukh Khan, Aamir Khan and Salman Khan have dominated film receipts. But with Aamir’s “Thugs of Hindostan” and Salman’s “Race 3” both rated among the worst films of 2018, the jury is still out whether Shah Rukh will record a dud or a hit. “Just because two Khans had flops, doesn’t mean the third one will too,” Hindi film trade analyst Komal Nahta told AFP. “Audiences are not tired of the Khans. They are just looking for fresh and good content,” he added. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features

Lithuania wraps tree in plastic to protest Christmas consumerism

Lithuanian artists yesterday said they have placed a giant plastic bag over a fir tree in the capital Vilnius to warn against consumerism taking over the holiday season. "This is a Christmas tree but we are using it as a piece of art to protest against the negative effects of hyper-consumerism," reads the message printed on the plastic. Adorned with breathing masks, the art installation is located at the Vilnius railway station, which the city has turned into an alternative Christmas market this year.

"People who do not feel comfortable at traditional Christmas markets or shopping malls are most welcome here," said

Dominykas Ceckauskas, one of the artists behind the installation. "Our message is that consumerism does huge harm to the environment during the holiday season," he told AFP. The youth-oriented market also features train cars used as bars and restaurants, techno music instead of Christmas pop songs and local street artists, designers and second-hand merchants selling their wares. Vilnius mayor Remigijus Simasius said the event represents the "liberty, tolerance, and openness" of the city. — AFP



A wrapped Christmas tree (center, in the background) can be seen at the Independent Christmas Town located at the Vilnius Railway Station in Vilnius, Lithuania. — AFP photos

Paintings of working women by a leading suffragette acquired for Britain

Four paintings by one of Britain's leading suffragettes, Sylvia Pankhurst, documenting the conditions of female workers in the early 20th century, have been acquired for the nation as it marks 100 years since women were allowed to vote. The watercolors by Pankhurst, a key figure in the women's suffrage



Two of Pankhurst's paintings: In a Glasgow Cotton Mill Minding a Pair of Fine Frames, and In a Glasgow Cotton Spinning Mill Changing the Bobbin. — Photo by Sylvia Pankhurst

movement that was founded by her mother Emmeline, were painted during a tour of industries in 1907 to highlight the poor conditions and low wages faced by working-class women.

They have now been purchased from her family by the government-sponsored Tate gallery network. "At a time when gender pay gaps and women's rights at work remain urgent topical issues, these images remind us of the role art can play in inspiring social change," Ann Gallagher, director of collections for British art, said in a statement.

Pankhurst, who died aged 78 in 1960, was among the leading figures in militant organizations in the early 20th century pushing for women's rights and votes. It was not until 1918 that Britain granted women aged over 30 who met a property qualification the right to vote and to run for parliament. They had been able to contest local elections since 1907. Pankhurst used her art as a campaigning tool, and created the four paintings during a trip to research and document the lives of poor working women in northern England and Scotland.

Two of the watercolors show cotton mills in Glasgow, Scotland, where Pankhurst later described "the almost deafening noise of the machinery and the oppressive heat", saying she was "so hot and airless that I fainted within an hour". The other two show Staffordshire potteries, in northern England, where women were often restricted to lower-paid jobs and exposed to flint dust and fumes from lead glaze.

The pictures were purchased from her grandchildren, Helen and Alula Pankhurst, and will go on display at the Tate Britain in central London in 2020, the gallery said. "Sylvia was an artist as well as a champion of working women's rights, her first passion not as well-known as her second," Helen Pankhurst, who is also a women's rights campaigner, said in a statement. "In these beautiful pieces these interests are powerfully combined." —Reuters

George Lucas's film empire tops Forbes list of richest US celebrities

Filmmaker George Lucas's "Star Wars" empire - the movie franchise, not Darth Vader's fictional galactic government - planted him firmly atop Forbes magazine's third annual ranking of the wealthiest US celebrities which was released on Tuesday. The net worth of the 74-year-old writer, director, producer and creator of the enduring space saga was estimated at \$5.4 billion, leading a list that also included athletes, musicians and one wealthy illusionist.

Most of Lucas's wealth came from the \$4.05 billion sale of the LucasFilm production company to Walt Disney Co in 2012, Forbes said. The figures on the list are Forbes' estimates based on the celebrities' known holdings of real estate, art and shares of companies both public and private, as well as other assets and estimated lifetime earnings. Reuters has not independently confirmed the figures. Fellow filmmaker Steven Spielberg, who turned 72 on Tuesday, came in second, with an estimated \$3.7 billion net worth. Spielberg's career as director, writer and producer spans some 50 years with credits that include "Jaws," "E.T.," "Raiders of the Lost Ark," "Schindler's List" and "Saving Private Ryan."

The celebrities on the list had estimated combined assets of \$18.7 billion, more than the gross domestic product of Iceland, Forbes said. The richest female celebrity was Oprah Winfrey, 64, whose acting and media enterprises have yielded her a net worth of an estimated \$2.8 billion, third overall. Basketball legend Michael Jordan boosted his net worth by an estimated \$400 million in the past year, mostly off his 34-year-long sneaker deal with Nike Inc and his stake in the Charlotte Hornets. His estimated \$1.7 billion net worth ranked him fourth.

New to the Forbes list this year was Kylie Jenner, whose growing wealth from her Kylie Cosmetics are on track to make the 21-year-old the youngest ever self-made billionaire, the magazine said. Jenner was tied with Rapper Jay-Z at No. 5, each with fortunes estimated at \$900 million. Rounding out the list were illusionist and entertainer David Copperfield, who amassed his fortune through a grueling pace of 600 shows per year in Las Vegas, rapper Diddy, golfer Tiger Woods and author James Patterson. — Reuters



Lifestyle | Feature

Long despised, tattoos emerge from shadows in Tunisia

Once widespread in rural Tunisia, tattoos have long been considered vulgar and associated with convicts or the uneducated. But now they are emerging from the shadows as young people like Ghada Atiaoui get inked and take up courses at the first tattoo school in the Arab world. The 19-year-old, who also studies tourism and hospitality, says she was drawn to the training by a “passion” for tattooing, but not only that. “It’s an art and a profession of the future and it’s a field where there aren’t many women, which is a challenge for me,” says Atiaoui. Leaning over a piece of synthetic skin, she sketches out sophisticated geometric figures in Chinese ink before switching to a tattoo machine.

In her class, the eight other students, aged 19 to 31, also hope to graduate as professional tattoo artists. Currently, most tattooists in Tunisia work illegally without authorization from the authorities, in a profession that has only emerged as such relatively recently. “I’m enjoying myself with something I love,” says Sami Essid, his arms proudly adorned with green motifs. The 31-year-old physiotherapist hopes to open a tattoo service inside his clinic.

From passion to profession

The state-sanctioned tattoo school opened last month in the chic Tunis neighborhood of La Marsa, the first of its kind in North Africa and the Arab world. It was founded by Fawez Zahmoul, a renowned tattoo artist who fought for the authorization and acceptance of the profession and also helped to establish a workers’ union. The former engineer entered the field in 2006, going abroad to learn “a passion that has become a profession”, he says.

Zahmoul, who also runs a tattoo parlor that was the first to be legalized in Tunisia, in 2016, says his goal is to share his knowhow. It was a path that often saw him run into trouble, including being assaulted in the same year by four people who accused him of Freemasonry and selling Satanic services. But “tattooing is no longer a problem as in the past in Tunisia, with the evolution of media in the world and the frequent sighting of tattooed stars and celebrities”.



Tunisian tattoo artist Fawez Zahmoul poses for a picture with his tattoo gun at his school in Tunis. — AFP photos



Tunisian tattoo artist Fawez Zahmoul removes a tattoo from his client in his school.

‘New door’

Each Saturday and Sunday, for six months, his students are given lessons on hygiene and skills of the trade at a cost of 4,000 dinars (\$1,360 or 1,200 euros). One of the teachers, Amine Labidi, says the school has opened a “new door” for tattoo enthusiasts in North Africa and the Arab world.

“In our day, we had a lot of trouble learning techniques and tips. I hope these new artists won’t face the same difficulties,” says Labidi, his body decorated with 40 tattoos including a flag of Tunisia. “Arabs in general have not contributed much to the art of tattooing. We hope to add our contribution, with this school and with the generations we are training,” says the 32-year-old.

For sociologist Abdessatar Sahbani, the growing popularity of tattoos in Tunisia reflects changes in society. “A new type of tattoo is gaining ground today, influenced by Western techniques and trends,” he says. This is also the result of a “crisis of values” and the domination that politicians have over public space which pushes segments of society to resort to “more daring” means of expression, he added. Tunisia is also home to a form of tattooing known as “El-wcham” which is practiced by secular Berbers for aesthetic reasons.

The symbols are etched onto the faces and bodies of Berbers using a blunt tool called the “mchelta”. But religious leaders condemned it, and cityfolk regarded these traditional devices as backward, especially when the country embarked on modernization after independence in 1956. Tattooing also suffered from being associated with crime and prisons, where, in the 1970s, inmates often marked names on their bodies. “Morals change. In a few years, it will no longer be perceived as something bad or stigmatizing,” says Atiaoui. But getting tattoos is still “something we do to rebel”, her teacher Labidi chips in. “It has never been an accepted art, never, neither in the past nor in the present, nor in Tunisia nor elsewhere.”— AFP



A student learns tattooing in a new school.



In this file photo British musician and Queen guitarist Brian May, poses for photographers before leading a demonstration in the form of a mock ‘funeral parade,’ in protest against the culling of 2,263 badgers in 2013/2014, in London. — AFP photos



In this file photo British musician and Queen guitarist Brian May, poses for photographers before leading a demonstration in the form of a mock ‘funeral parade.’

Queen guitarist Brian May releases tribute to NASA spacecraft

Jamming and astrophysics go hand-in-hand for Queen lead guitarist Brian May, who announced Wednesday he is releasing a musical tribute to a far-flung NASA spacecraft that is about to make history. The US space agency’s New Horizons spacecraft will soon make the most distant flyby of a cosmic object ever, zipping by an object called Ultima Thule—a billion miles (1.6 billion kilometers) beyond Pluto, on January 1.

A NASA scientist involved with the mission asked the legendary British guitarist behind “Bohemian Rhapsody”—who also holds a doctorate in astrophysics—to contribute some music to play as the flyby occurs. And May, 71, agreed. The “New Horizons” track (Ultima Thule mix), which will be released New Year’s Day, is his first solo single since 1998. “For me it’s been an exciting challenge to bring two sides of my life together—astronomy and music,” said May in a statement.

“I was inspired by the idea that this is the furthest that the Hand of Man has ever reached—it will be by far the most distant object we have ever seen at close quarters, through the images which the spacecraft will beam back to Earth,” he added. “To me it epitomizes the human spirit’s unceasing desire to understand the Universe we inhabit.”

Portions of the wailing guitar track, overlaid with the voice of the late legendary scientist Stephen Hawking, are already available on www.brianmay.com. A third installment is expected in the next few days. Scientists do not yet have a clear picture of exactly what Ultima Thule is, whether a single object or a cluster, spanning about 19 miles (30 kilometers) in diameter. But when New Horizons passes, it should capture images at a resolution of 98 to 230 feet (30 to 70 meters) per pixel. New Horizons completed a successful flyby of Pluto three years ago, and returned stunning images of the dwarf planet. — AFP

Gallagher claims Liam quit Beady Eye by text message

Liam Gallagher quit Beady Eye by text message, his estranged brother Noel Gallagher has claimed. The 'Greedy Soul' singer formed the band with the other remaining members of Oasis - Gem Archer, Andy Bell and Chris Sharrock - after Noel quit the group in August 2009 following a backstage bust-up between the brothers before a headline appearance at a Paris music festival. Beady Eye disbanded in October 2014 after releasing two albums, 'Different Gear, Still Speeding' and 'BE', and now guitarist Gem and drummer Chris play in Noel's touring band the High Flying Birds. The 'Wonderwall' songwriter has accused Liam of not having the guts to tell his friends he was walking away from the group to their faces or even in a phone call and instead sent them a message via his phone. Speaking in the new issue of Mojo magazine, he said: "Listen I know the true story of Beady Eye and how it fell apart. He left the band by text! The Prince of Darkness, The

Man, he didn't even have the balls to phone his bandmates. Because he got a solo deal, it was, See you later, lads. Then when he got his deal with Live Nation, no one was telling him, 'Don't do any Oasis songs, do your new stuff, that's what your good at.'" Once he knew that Beady Eye was finished Noel had no hesitation in welcoming Gem and Chris into his group and the timing was perfect because two of his members had decided to quit the High Flying Birds the same year. The rock legend said: "When I first started [as a solo artist], I had Tim [Smith, guitar] and Jeremy [Stacey, drums], and the great thing about session musicians is that when you're not sure what you're doing, they're bang on it, they make it sound like the record. That's what I needed at the beginning. But it's not the same as having a band. Chris and Gem are much looser, it's not the same every night. Tim and Jeremy left at exactly the same time Beady Eye broke up, so I took that as a sign."



Noel Gallagher in MOJO magazine

Take That feel 'settled' despite lineup changes

Take That finally feel "settled" after some "tricky" lineup changes. The 'Greatest Day' hitmakers - which currently consist of Gary Barlow, Howard Donald and Mark Owen - recently reunited with former bandmate Robbie Williams for the 'X Factor' final, while Jason Orange hasn't been part of the lineup since 2014. Admitting it might be more confusing for the fans rather than the group themselves, Gary told ES magazine: "It's a very tricky thing, this whole four, three, five thing, for everyone except for us. 'We've settled. Take That is a three-piece. That's it, full stop. But it was brilliant to see Rob, who's in the best shape I've seen him in years.'" The singer also suggested the band's upcoming tour in 2019 will mark the end of "chapter two" of their career so far. He explained: "I think it's a farewell to this period. 'We've definitely seen the Nineties as stage one and this is chapter two and [the tour] is definitely the end of chapter two and it's lovely that it is. It's then quite exciting to think what happens next.' The trio aren't seeing it as a sad time, with Gary insisting they have the potential to enjoy the longevity of acts like the Rolling Stones. He added: "Absolutely, definitely we could. If we have the appetite or it. Donald agreed: "It's not going to be emotional for me, because I believe there's going to be more." Meanwhile, Robbie has suggested he would rejoin with his friends again in the future if he's in the same place as them during their upcoming tour. Robbie - who also recently performed with Take That at the gala night of 'The Band' musical in London's Theatre Royal Haymarket - previously said: "As long as we stay healthy, I'm sure there'll be another moment where we all get together."



Westlife to release first single in eight years in January

Westlife will release the lead single from their first album in eight years on January 11. The Irish band - comprised of Nicky Byrne, Kian Egan, Markus Feehily and Shane Filan - have been back in the studio working on songs for their comeback record, the first since 2010's 'Gravity', with producer-and-songwriter Steve Mac and Ed Sheeran. And now Nicky has given fans an update by sharing a picture with his bandmates in the studio, whilst confirming they will be debuting their new single, which is as yet untitled, on 'The Graham Norton Show' next month. He captioned the Instagram snap: "Here we go again! Having just announced two Cardiff dates that brings the Twenty Tour to 32 shows so far next summer in Ireland/UK, A brand new album after 8 years coming in 2019! But it all kicks off on The Graham Norton Show January 11th with our brand new single. @westlife @grahnort (sic)" The single announcement comes after Steve previously shared that the band have returned to their signature sound. The 46-year-old songwriter has penned several songs for the record and was one of the key players in their reunion following their split in 2012. Steve insists fans should be excited about the new music as it will contain all the hallmarks of their past hits such as big "key changes" and "gospel choirs". Speaking exclusively to BANG Showbiz, he said: "There's a few songs at the moment. We're not sure how many will end up on the album."



The Streets tease Glastonbury set

Mike Skinner has teased that The Streets will be performing at Glastonbury 2019. The 'Fit But You Know It' rapper has dropped a huge hint for the iconic festival in June next year, and confirmed he will be at the event while stopping short of announcing an official show. Speaking to Annie Mac on BBC Radio 1, he responded to a fan question and said: "I'm going to get in trouble. 'Basically, I'm going to Glastonbury this year. That's all I can say. But I can't say whether I'm performing at Glastonbury.'" Despite remaining coy about the possibility of a Streets set at Worthy Farm, the 'Dry Your Eyes' hitmaker did open up about how he has grown to love festivals over the year. He added: "You know what, when I was younger, all I really cared about was night clubs and I guess gigs as well. But I wasn't really into festivals. 'Obviously Glastonbury is the most extreme festival you can do. So when I was young I was a little bit cynical, but since I've been DJ weirdly, I've really got into it. 'Because you're up in the hills in these made weird places and actually once you're away from the bigger, main stages..." The Streets went on hiatus after touring 2011's 'Computers and Blues' album, but reunited this year for 'The Darker The Shadow The Brighter The Light Tour' and ahead of those shows they unveiled fresh song 'Boys Will Be Boys' in March. Last month Skinner - who will be touring with the British rap group early next year - also revealed he intends to unveil a new LP and play a host of festival dates.



Blunt says Mary Poppins offer was 'like a marriage proposal'

Emily Blunt says the offer to play Mary Poppins was like a marriage proposal. The 35-year-old actress - who is married to fellow Hollywood star John Krasinski - has opened up about the circumstances surrounding her casting in 'Mary Poppins Returns', admitting it was a career-changing moment. She recalled: "It was like [director Rob Marshall] was about to propose to me! Then when he said it's Mary Poppins, I was like, 'Oh my God'. "I like to imagine he got down on one knee. But Mary Poppins is a big deal for all of us - we all had to approach it with a sense of courage." "We have waited 54 years to see her come back out of the clouds so we very much wanted to walk that fine line between paying homage and being the next chapter and bringing the spirit of the first one. "We had to think how we make our version our own and a standalone spectacle on its own, that people can watch for generations to come." Emily was intent on making her version of the iconic nanny distinct from Dame Julie Andrews' performance in 1964's 'Mary Poppins'. Dick Van Dyke - who starred in the original movie - makes a cameo appearance in 'Mary Poppins Returns', but Andrews declined the chance to appear in the film. Speaking to the Irish News, Emily explained: "I really understand why she didn't want to be in it and it means a lot to me that she chose to not do it in the way that she did."



Smith says Aladdin will pay homage to Robin Williams

Will Smith's version of the Genie in his 'Aladdin' remake will pay "homage" to the late Robin Williams. The 50-year-old actor has assumed the role of the Genie in the upcoming live-action film, and Will has admitted he initially found playing the character - who Williams voiced in the 1992 'Aladdin' movie - to be a daunting prospect. He confessed: "Whenever you're doing things that are iconic, it's always terrifying. The question is always: where was there meat left on the bone? Robin didn't leave a lot of meat on the bone with the character." But, over time, Will developed a confidence that he could deliver something that was a homage to Williams but was also musically different. Speaking to Entertainment Weekly, Will added: "Just the flavor of the character would be different enough and unique enough that it would be in a different lane, versus trying to compete." The upcoming film also stars the likes of Naomi Scott and Mena Massoud. And according to Will, working on the Guy Ritchie-directed project was "one of the greatest film-making experiences" of his career.



Oprah Winfrey: Black Panther is bigger than a movie



Oprah Winfrey thinks 'Black Panther' is "bigger than a movie". The 64-year-old star has hailed the Ryan Coogler-directed Marvel movie, saying it represented a "game-changing" moment for the film industry. She said: "I just wanted to say that when I first saw 'Black Panther', I sent an email to my friend [Disney chief Bob Iger] and said, 'Hi Bobby! Just saw it. It's worth everything I've heard and more. A phenomenon in every way, on every level. "Makes me tear up to think that little black children will grow up with 'Wakanda forever'. It's game-changing, it's pride-making, it's dazzling, it's phenomenal. That was my personal review." Oprah subsequently described the superhero movie - which features a predominantly black cast - as a "cultural happening". She explained, according to The Hollywood Reporter: "I also know that throngs and throngs and so many people came, and came with their families, and then they went back and they got more family members, and then they went back and told their co-workers and their friends, because everybody recognized that something bigger than a movie was happening up on that screen."

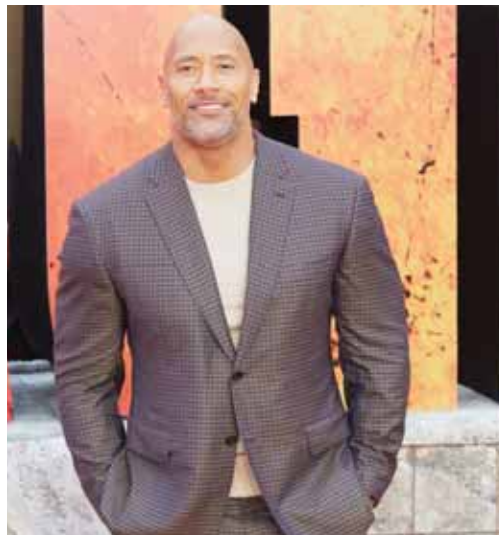


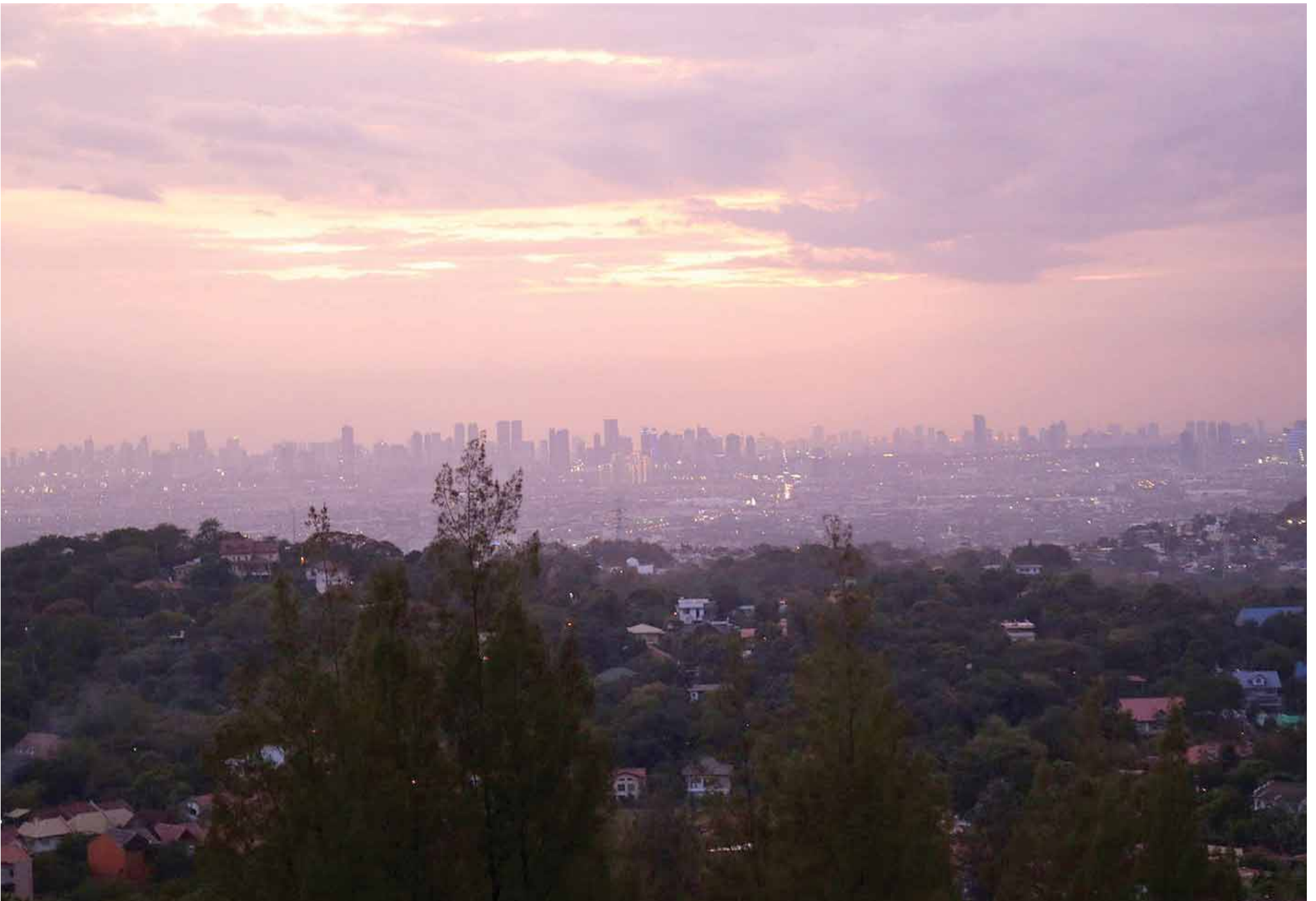
Rami Malek's fake teeth helped Bohemian Rhapsody performance

Rami Malek's fake teeth helped his performance in 'Bohemian Rhapsody'. The 37-year-old actor played Queen frontman Freddie Mercury in the biopic and although the costume provided some difficulties it actually ended up giving him a boost on set. He told The Wrap: "They started out being pretty difficult to deal with. We tried out all different sizes and when they first went in I felt very insecure, but immediately I compensated. "Physically, I started to sit with more posture and elegance and I thought, 'Oh, he is so elegant!' "You see him covering up his lips and his teeth all the time, and I could never quite get the hang of it. But as soon as those teeth went in, it was done. It was little things like that that were very informative for me." Rami previously admitted he has always been open with producer Graham King about his lack of musical ability prior to landing the coveted role. He shared: "We sat down for a six-hour meeting and he'd really only seen me in 'Mr Robot', where I played this profoundly alienated, socially anxious human being who's a pretty far cry from Freddie Mercury. "Graham saw something in me with Dennis O'Sullivan, and gave me a shot. I said, 'Listen, I'm not a singer."

Johnson and Statham have 'chemistry'

Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson thinks he and Jason Statham have a "biting chemistry". The 46-year-old actor has been reunited with his former 'Fast and the Furious' co-star for their upcoming spin-off movie 'Hobbs And Shaw', and Dwayne admitted he loves working with the action star. He explained: "We started talking about the potential of a spin-off really after 'Fast Five'. And then when 'Fast 6' came around, that's when we started having real talks about it, but then the challenge was just finding out what the creative could be and how we cracked that. "I'm really happy that we were not only be able to crack the creative and really lean into the relationship and chemistry - the biting chemistry between myself and Jason Statham - but I think that also you find out that it's something the fans have been wanting for some time now." Dwayne admitted he's always had the ambition of extending his connection to the 'Fast' franchise for as long as possible. He told Entertainment Weekly: "When you have a franchise that is as successful as the 'Fast and Furious' franchise, the goal, certainly my goal, was always to try and create a scenario where we have as much longevity as we possibly can have. "And in that spirit, you have to evolve and you have to spin off and you have to create new characters and new stories, especially when you're coming off 'Fast 8', where you have an eight at the end of your title."





Five adventurous getaways from Manila

Manila's fast pace and heavy traffic can try anybody's patience, but there are ways to escape the madness. Whether you prefer sea-based or land-based activities, cultural diversions or adrenaline-pumping adventures, you have plenty to choose from if you're looking to get out of town for a day. Here are five spots that will make the chaos of the capital seem like a distant memory.

Antipolo

You don't have to venture far out of Manila for a complete change of scenery. Set in the foothills of the Sierra Madre mountains just 20km from central Manila, Antipolo is an enclave of creativity. The town is awash in quirky little galleries and cool restaurant concepts like Burrow Cafe. But the highlight is surely

the Pinto Art Museum, which features six spacious, semi-open-air, modern-art galleries, a lovely cafe and originally landscaped grounds dotted with contemporary sculptures. Also on the grounds: viewing platforms with spectacular views of the Metro Manila skyline.

East of the museum, near the border of Antipolo and neighbouring Tanay, is the brilliantly conceived Masungi Georeserve. It's a thrilling two-hour hike and scramble through a karst-studded protected area, navigating a web-like network of rope canopies, bridges and ladders. Contact the reserve well in advance to join a group tour. Outdoor lovers can also check out Mt Purro Nature Reserve, an eco-resort with hiking trails, natural playgrounds, pools, great birdwatching and a restaurant serving organic delicacies sourced from the surrounding forest.

Mt Pinatubo

When Mt Pinatubo in central Luzon's Zambales range blew its top in 1991, the whole world felt the effects. It rained ash in Manila, which lies about 80km south of the volcano, while temperatures dropped across the globe. Locally, the relentless cascade of lahar (volcanic mud) rerouted rivers, inundating entire towns under newly formed lakes.

Today the volcano is interesting both for its historical significance - the eruption hastened the withdrawal of a long-standing American military presence in the Philippines - and for its austere beauty. Touring the volcano involves a two-hour jeep ride from the village of Santa Juliana, followed by a short (15-30 minute) hike up to what is surely one of the most stunning sites in the country: a crater lake nestled amid stark gray massifs, its hue fluctuating between shades of blue and green.

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tuating between ice blue and emerald green according to the whims of the sun and sky.

Organised day trips to Mt Pinatubo from Manila depart as early as 3am and arrive in Santa Juliana around 6am. They do not let groups up the mountain after 8am or so; be sure to call the Santa Juliana Tourism Council ahead to announce your arrival.

Anilao

Located in Batangas Province about a 2.5-hour drive south of Manila, Anilao is the birthplace of scuba diving in the Philippines. The area is best known for rich corals and macro (small) organisms - colourful nudibranchs, frogfish, cuttlefish, clown fish and mini-shrimps. If small creatures don't get you excited, don't worry, larger reef creatures such as parrot fish, barracuda, moray eels, trevally and sea turtles also patrol the area.

Dive resorts are strung out for 13km along a beautiful, sunset-facing stretch of coastline. Some of the best snorkeling and dive sites are right offshore, or you can hire a bangka (Philippine outrigger boat) and head out to dive sites around nearby Maricaban and Sombrero islands. For daytrippers, we recommend Arthur's Place; it has been around since the advent of scuba diving in Anilao - the late owner was a dive pioneer - and it has some of the best snorkeling on the peninsula out front around 'Arthur's Rock.'

Tagaytay

Meandering serpent-like along the giant maw of an ancient crater, this breezy Manila suburb offers a blissfully oxygenated escape from the steamy capital. Tagaytay is best known as a giant platform for viewing the unique Taal Volcano, which peeks out of Taal Lake several hundred metres beneath the town's 15km ridge road. Dozens of eateries along the ridge road are strategically positioned to optimise those million-dollar views.

At 600m above sea level, Tagaytay brims with nurseries and fruit stalls, and is a Mecca for spas, detox centre and delightful garden restaurants like Antonio's. Activities such as horse-riding and ziplining will keep the kids happy, or you can descend to Taal Lake, hop in a boat and zip out to 'Volcano Island' to hike up teeny-weenie but still quite active Taal Volcano. The climb only takes 45 minutes, or you can ride up on a pony. Warning: it's a hot, dusty ascent. Try later in the day when the crowds have dissipated.

Clark Freeport and around

This former US military air base two hours north of Manila is now a recreational 'freeport' full of family-friendly theme parks, duty-free shops and restaurants. For splashy fun, head to Aqua Planet, a giant water park with scores of slides and a wave pool (keep in mind it gets busy on weekends). Golf, casinos, spas and museums are other attractions in the freeport.

Beyond the freeport, the mountains of surrounding Pampanga Province are a playground for adrenaline junkies. Driving up from Manila, you can't miss craggy-topped Mt Arayat (1026m), centrepiece of Mt Arayat National Park, looming to the east. You can climb this extinct volcano in a half day, starting at the park office San Juan BaOo, where there are also hot springs and swimming pools. Or skip the climb and head to the Angeles Flying Club, where 30-minute tandem flights in an ultralight cost about £47GPB and soar right over Mt Arayat.



Back in the freeport, budget a few hours to try wakeboarding at the Decawake Clark. There's a beginner's area, or you can test your mettle on the main oval. Pampanga is the Philippines' food

capital so definitely enjoy an authentic Kampampangan meal at Matam-ih Restaurant before heading back to Manila. (www.lone-lyplanet.com)



Our **creamy scalloped potatoes** has a browned, cheesy crust

By America's Test Kitchen

In our experience, most recipes for scalloped potatoes take hours of work yet still produce unevenly cooked potatoes in a heavy, curdled sauce. This version is faster than most and produces layer upon layer of thinly sliced, tender potatoes, creamy sauce, and nicely browned, cheesy crust.

Simmering the potatoes briefly in heavy cream thinned out with milk before

moving the production into a baking dish cut the cooking time significantly while also eliminating the risk of raw potatoes in the finished dish. A sprinkling of cheddar cheese and a mere 20 minutes in the oven were enough to produce an appealingly browned, cheesy crust. Russet potatoes, thinly sliced, gave us neat layers with the best texture and flavor. For the fastest and most consistent results, slice the potatoes in a food processor.

SCALLOPED POTATOES

Ingredients

Servings: 8-10
 Start to finish: 1 hour
 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
 1 small onion, chopped fine
 2 cloves garlic, minced
 4 pounds russet potatoes, peeled and cut into 1/8-inch-thick slices
 3 cups heavy cream
 1 cup whole milk
 4 sprigs fresh thyme
 2 bay leaves
 2 teaspoons salt
 1/2 teaspoon pepper
 4 ounces cheddar cheese, shredded (about 1 cup)

Preparation

Heat oven to 350 F. Melt butter in large Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add onion and saute until it turns soft and begins to brown, about 4 minutes. Add garlic and saute until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add potatoes, cream, milk, thyme sprigs, bay leaves, salt, and pepper and bring to simmer. Cover, adjusting heat as necessary to maintain light simmer, and cook until potatoes are almost tender (paring knife can be slipped into and out of center of potato slice with some resistance), about 15 minutes. Discard thyme sprigs and bay leaves. Transfer potato mixture to 3-quart baking dish and sprinkle with cheese. Bake until cream has thickened and is bubbling around sides and top is golden brown, about 20 minutes. Let cool for 5 minutes before serving.

Nutrition information per serving: 462 calories; 302 calories from fat; 34 g fat (21 g saturated; 1 g trans fats); 119 mg cholesterol; 577 mg sodium; 35 g carbohydrate; 3 g fiber; 5 g sugar; 9 g protein.



COOKING ON DEADLINE:

Texas Red Chili

By Katie Workman

If you know anything about Texas chili, then you know for certain the one thing that is NOT in this recipe. If you have just yelled “BEANS!”, then you are correct (and you knew you were correct and did not need me to tell you, thank you very much). If you did not know that the chili in Texas never, ever contains beans, then you have not discussed chili with a Texan. Or, for that matter, with someone with strong opinions on the other side, who thinks beans are an integral part of chili and that Texas chili is well more like a stew.

Wait, stop, put down those pitchforks! I didn’t say it was a stew, just that I have read that other folks from other parts of the country have said such things. I think it’s chili! Really, I do! (I also think chilies with beans are also chili). Look, I’m not here to solve the great chili debate. I do know that the guys in my family

love all kinds of chili, but are happiest when it is at its meatiest. And Texas chili, also known as a “Bowl of Red,” is meaty all right.

Cook this chili low and slow so the meat can become very soft and the liquid thickens into a sauce, and doesn’t just evaporate. The sauce that binds this chili together is thick - if it gets too thick, stir in 1/2 to 1 cup water toward the end, especially if it starts to stick to the bottom of the pot. I also like to shred some of the big cubes of super-tender beef at the end to give the sauce more texture. We eat our Texas Red Chili over rice with what I think of as traditional chili toppings - cheese, sour cream, avocado - which I gather are also acceptable toppings in Texas.



TEXAS RED CHILI

Ingredients

Servings 6-8

Start to finish: 4 hours

3 pounds cubed (1 to 1 1/2-inch) stew meat, such as beef chuck
 1 to 2 tablespoons vegetable or canola oil
 2 red or yellow onions, chopped (about 2 cups)
 5 garlic cloves, minced
 1/4 cup chili powder
 1 (28-ounce) can crushed tomatoes or tomato puree
 3 cups less-sodium beef broth, plus more as needed

Preparation

Season the beef with salt and pepper. In a large soup pot, or a Dutch oven, heat 1 tablespoon of the oil over medium high heat. Add the beef in batches and brown a few sides, about 8 minutes per batch (not every side has to be browned; it’s better to caramelize a few sides well and let the rest just be). Add more oil between batches as needed. Transfer the meat with a slotted spoon to a plate as it finishes browning.

Drain off all but 1 tablespoon of the fat from the pot, if needed, and add the onions. Saute them over medium heat for 5 minutes, until the onions are tender. Add the garlic and saute for one more minute, until you can smell the garlic. Add the chili powder, give

it a stir, then stir in the crushed tomatoes and the beef broth. Return the browned beef cubes to the pot and bring to a simmer over medium high heat.

Reduce the heat and simmer very gently, partially covered, for about 3 hours, until the beef is very tender. Add 1/2 to 1 cup of water toward the end if the sauce is too thick or the mixture looks too dry. When it is all tender, you can remove a cup or two of the beef cubes and shred them with two forks, then stir that back into the pot to thicken up the sauce a bit, if desired. Serve hot over rice in bowls, with the accompaniments of your choice.

Robust grilled cheese sandwiches for adults, not just kids

By America's Test Kitchen

Grilled cheese has a kids' menu reputation, but just a few tweaks make it a sophisticated dinner option. To create a sandwich with more robust flavor and personality without going overboard on toppings and additions, we focused on the cheese. Our recipe began by mixing flavorful aged cheddar with a small amount of Brie and some wine in a food processor. Those two ingredients

helped the cheddar melt evenly without becoming greasy. A little bit of shallot increased the sandwiches' complexity without detracting from the cheese, and a smear of mustard-butter on the bread added a sharp bite. Look for a cheddar aged for about one year (avoid cheddar aged for longer; it won't melt well). To bring the cheddar to room temperature quickly, microwave the pieces until warm, about 30 seconds.

Ingredients

Servings: 4
 Start to finish: 30 minutes
 7 ounces aged cheddar cheese, cut into 24 equal pieces, room temperature
 2 ounces Brie cheese, rind removed
 2 tablespoons dry white wine or dry vermouth
 4 teaspoons minced shallot
 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
 8 slices hearty white sandwich bread

Preparation

Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 200 F. Process cheddar, Brie, and wine in food processor until smooth paste forms, 20 to 30 seconds. Add shallot and pulse to combine, 3 to 5 pulses; transfer to bowl. In separate bowl, combine butter and mustard.

Brush butter-mustard mixture evenly over 1 side of each slice of bread. Flip 4 slices over and spread cheese mixture evenly over second side. Top with remaining 4 slices bread, buttered side up, and press down gently.

Heat 12 inch nonstick skillet over medium heat for 2 minutes. Place 2 sandwiches in skillet, reduce heat to medium-low, and cook until both sides are crisp and golden brown, 6 to 9 minutes per side. Transfer sandwiches to wire rack set in rimmed baking sheet and keep warm in oven. Wipe out skillet with paper towels and cook remaining 2 sandwiches. Serve.

Variations

- Grown-Up Grilled Cheese with Comte and Cornichon: Substitute Comte for cheddar, minced cornichon for shallots, and rye sandwich bread for white sandwich bread.
- Grown-Up Grilled Cheese with Gruyere and Chives: Substitute Gruyere for cheddar, chives for shallots, and rye sandwich bread for white sandwich bread.
- Grown-Up Grilled Cheese with Asiago and Dates: Substitute Asiago for cheddar, finely chopped pitted dates for shallot, and oatmeal sandwich bread for white sandwich bread.
- Grown-Up Grilled Cheese with Robiola and Chipotle: Substitute Robiola, rind removed, for cheddar; 1/4 teaspoon minced canned chipotle chili in adobo sauce for shallots; and oatmeal sandwich bread for white sandwich bread.

Nutrition information per serving: 566 calories; 298 calories from fat; 33 g fat (20 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 90 mg cholesterol; 840 mg sodium; 45 g carbohydrate; 0 g fiber; 6 g sugar; 20 g protein.



**GROWN-UP GRILLED CHEESE
WITH CHEDDAR AND SHALLOT**

Comic

Word Search

Old TV Shows 1

Find and circle all of the old TV shows that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell the name of an additional old TV show.

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

- | | | | |
|---------------------|--------------|----------------|-----------------|
| ALICE | FLYING NUN | L.A. LAW | ODD COUPLE |
| BEN CASEY | FUGITIVE | LASSIE | PEYTON PLACE |
| BEVERLY HILLBILLIES | GOMER PYLE | LOVE BOAT | RAWHIDE |
| CHIPS | GOOD TIMES | MAD ABOUT YOU | RIFLEMAN |
| CANNON | GREEN ACRES | MAUDE | RIN TIN TIN |
| CAPTAIN KANGAROO | GREEN HORNET | MEDICAL CENTER | SOAP |
| DOBBIE GILLIS | HOWDY DOODY | MIAMI VICE | ST. ELSEWHERE |
| DONNA REED | I SPY | MOD SQUAD | TAXI |
| DR. KILDARE | IRONSIDE | MOONLIGHTING | THREE'S COMPANY |
| EMERGENCY | JETSONS | MURPHY BROWN | WALTONS |
| FLIPPER | KOJAK | | |

Yesterday's Solution

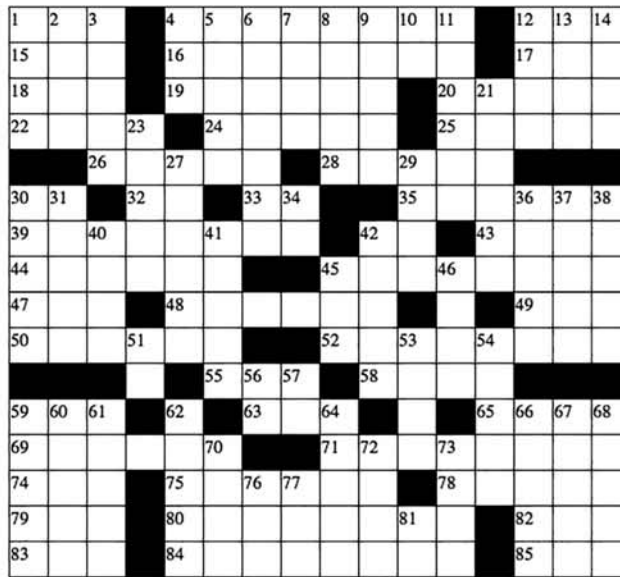
Nursing Home 3

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

- | | | | | |
|------------|-------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|
| AGED | ELDERLY | ICE CREAM | PARTIES | SHAMPOO |
| ALZHEIMERS | ENEMA | ILLNESS | PERSONAL CARE | SHOTS |
| ATTENDANTS | EXERCISES | KITCHEN | PHYSICIAN | SHOWERING |
| BATHTUB | FALSE TEETH | LIBRARY | PHYSIOTHERAPY | STETHOSCOPE |
| BEDROOM | FAMILY | LUNCH | PLAYING CARDS | SYRINGES |
| BINGO | FATHERS | MEDICATION | QUILT | TOOTHBRUSH |
| BREAKFAST | FOOD | MOTHERS | RAILINGS | VISITORS |
| CARDS | FRACTURE | MUSIC THERAPY | RECREATION | WALKER |
| CHAIRS | GAMES | NAPS | REPORTING | WASH HAIR |
| CHRONIC | GARDEN | NEWSPAPER | RESTRAINT | WOUND CARE |
| DEPRESSION | GLASSES | NURSES | ROOMS | |
| DINING | GLUCOMETER | OXYGEN TANK | SAFETY | |

The hidden message is: ONLY A LIFE LIVED FOR OTHERS IS A LIFE WORTHWHILE

Crossword 2090



ACROSS

- A condition (mostly in boys) characterized by behavioral and learning disorders.
- City in central Iran.
- American prizefighter who won the world heavyweight championship three times (born in 1942).
- A cut of pork ribs with much of the meat trimmed off.
- Fermented alcoholic beverage similar to but heavier than beer.
- At a great distance in time or space or degree.
- A republic in central Europe.
- A city in central New York.
- According to the Old Testament he was a pagan king of Israel and husband of Jezebel (9th century BC).
- Tall perennial herb of tropical Asia with dark green leaves.
- Valuable fiber plant of East Indies now widespread in cultivation.
- A military trainee (as at a military academy).
- A saying that widely accepted on its own merits.
- A very poisonous metallic element that has three allotropic forms.
- A colorless odorless gaseous element that give a red glow in a vacuum tube.
- The blood group whose red cells carry both the A and B antigens.
- Perversely irritable.
- Moths whose larvae are cutworms.
- The basic unit of money on Malta.
- A worker who attaches something by nailing it.
- An extension at the end and at right angles to the main building.
- Someone who cuts and delivers ice.
- The syllable naming the sixth (submediant) note of a major or minor scale in solmization.
- Remove or make invisible.
- Austrian composer known for his compositions for voice and piano (1797-1828).
- A light touch or stroke.
- A member of a North American Indian people speaking one of the Hokan languages.
- The basic unit of electric current adopted under the System International d'Unites.
- One-thousandth of an equivalent.
- The basic unit of money in Bangladesh.
- Solid excretory product evacuated from the bowels.
- Not made with leavening.
- A man who is much concerned with his dress and appearance.
- The French-speaking part of the Canadian Maritime Provinces.
- Jordan's port.
- The bureau of the Treasury Department responsible for tax collections.
- A system of timekeeping that defines the beginning and length and divisions of the year.
- (British) Your grandmother.
- Denoting a quantity consisting of 12 items or units.
- (architecture) Not arcuate.
- A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.

DOWN

- A Chadic language spoken south of Lake Chad.
- Pompous or pretentious talk or writing.
- English theoretical physicist who applied relativity theory to quantum mechanics and predicted the existence of antimatter and the positron (1902-1984).
- Of southern Europe.
- Small usually single-celled reproductive body produced especially by certain bacteria and algae and fungi and non-flowering plants.
- Relating to or lying near the palate.
- The biblical name for ancient Syria.
- Close-fitting pants of heavy denim for casual wear (usually in the plural).
- Type genus of the Ardeidae.
- A hard malleable ductile silvery metallic element that is resistant to corrosion.
- A bay on the Mediterranean Sea in northern Egypt.
- (Old Testament) Cain and Abel were the first children of Adam and Eve born after the Fall of Man.
- Type genus of the Alcidae comprising solely the razorbill.
- Lacking or deprive of the sense of hearing wholly or in part.
- (Mexican) Corn and cornmeal dough stuffed with a meat mixture then wrapped in corn husks and steamed.
- Obvious and dull.
- The quality of being fraudulent.
- Being two more than ninety.
- A river that rises in central Germany and flows north to join the Elbe River.
- A soft silvery metallic element of the alkali earth group.
- Cause a floating log to rotate by treading.
- Eurasian rose with prickly stems and fragrant leaves and bright pink flowers followed by scarlet hips.
- An expensive vessel propelled by sail or power and used for cruising or racing.
- Unstratified soil deposited by a glacier.
- (architecture) Forming or resembling an arch.
- (law) The seat for judges in a courtroom.
- The state of matter distinguished from the solid and liquid states by.
- An open-air market in an Arabian city.
- Angular distance above the horizon (especially of a celestial object).
- A blind god.
- A dyed fabric.
- Before noon.
- A light strong brittle gray toxic bivalent metallic element.
- The Oceanic language spoken by the Maori people in New Zealand.
- Pepsi Cola is a trademarked cola.
- Show a response or a reaction to something.
- United States philosopher and logician (1908-).
- (Hindu) A manner of sitting (as in the practice of Yoga).
- Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
- A city in southern Turkey on the Seyhan River.
- A mark left by the healing of injured tissue.
- A quantity of no importance.
- A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
- A flat wing-shaped process or winglike part of an organism.
- A young woman making her debut into society.
- A highly unstable radioactive element (the heaviest of the halogen series).

Yesterday's Solution

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

Daily SuDoku

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

Yesterday's Solution

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

TV Listings



01:30 Iron Man 3
03:45 Battleship
06:00 The Fast And The Furious
07:30 Countdown
09:05 The Bodyguard
10:40 Iron Man 3
12:50 Battleship
15:00 Shanghai Knights
16:55 The Tuxedo
18:35 S.W.A.T.: Under Siege
20:05 Harsh Times
22:00 The Big Hit
23:35 Code Of Honor



00:50 The Crocodile Hunter: Best Of Steve Irwin
01:45 North Woods Law
02:40 Monsters Inside Me
03:35 Great White: The Impossible Shot
04:25 Running With Wolves
05:15 North Woods Law
06:02 Wildest Middle East
06:49 Pit Bulls & Parolees
07:36 Vet On The Loose
08:00 Vet On The Loose
08:25 Wild Africa: Rivers Of Life
09:15 Animal Cops Houston
10:10 Running With Wolves
11:05 The Crocodile Hunter: Best Of Steve Irwin
12:00 Wildest Middle East
12:55 Pit Bulls & Parolees
13:50 Great White: The Impossible Shot
14:45 Groomer Has It
15:40 Big Cat Tales
16:35 Monsters Inside Me
17:30 Wild Africa: Rivers Of Life
18:25 Animal Cops Houston
19:20 Jaws Comes Home: Return Of The Great Whites
20:15 Vet Gone Wild
21:10 Dr. Jeff: Rocky Mountain Vet
22:05 Wildest Middle East
23:00 Monsters Inside Me
23:55 Pit Bulls & Parolees



00:15 Mum
00:40 Friday Night Dinner
01:05 Friday Night Dinner
01:30 Holby City
02:25 Doctors
02:55 Doctors
03:25 Father Brown
04:15 Death In Paradise
05:10 Stella
06:00 Doctors
06:30 EastEnders
07:00 Holby City
07:55 Casualty
08:50 Father Brown
09:40 Death In Paradise
10:35 Casualty
11:30 Casualty
12:25 Holby City
13:20 Father Brown
14:10 Death In Paradise
15:05 Casualty
16:00 Doctors
16:30 Doctors
17:00 Doctors
17:30 Doctors
18:00 Doctors
18:30 The Coroner
19:20 The Coroner
20:10 Line Of Duty
21:15 Maigret
22:55 Father Brown
23:45 Doctors



00:00 Who Killed Tupac?
01:00 The Harvey Weinstein Scandal
02:30 It Takes A Killer
02:55 Bill Cosby: The Women Speak

03:50 Marcia Clark Investigates
05:30 Live PD: Police Patrol
05:55 Live PD: Police Patrol
06:15 Crimes That Shook Britain
07:00 Evil Up Close
08:00 It Takes A Killer
08:20 Live PD: Police Patrol
08:45 Live PD: Police Patrol
09:05 Crimes That Shook Britain
09:50 Cold Case Files
10:35 Marcia Clark Investigates
12:25 Live PD: Police Patrol
12:55 Live PD: Police Patrol
13:20 Crimes That Shook Britain
14:16 Evil Up Close
15:10 It Takes A Killer
15:40 It Takes A Killer
16:05 Homicide Hunter
17:00 Marcia Clark Investigates
19:00 Escaping Polygamy
20:00 Escaping Polygamy
21:00 Homicide Hunter
22:00 It Takes A Killer



00:05 South Park (Digital)
00:30 Broad City
00:55 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah
01:20 Takeshis Castle Thailand
01:45 South Park (Digital)
02:10 Real Husbands Of Hollywood
02:35 Broad City
03:00 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah
03:25 Broad City
03:50 Broad City
04:15 Sweat Inc.
05:00 House Of Food
05:50 Ridiculousness Arabia
06:15 Ridiculousness Arabia
06:40 Ridiculousness Arabia
07:05 Friendszone
07:30 Friendszone
07:55 Lip Sync Battle
08:20 Lip Sync Battle
08:45 Sweat Inc.
09:30 Takeshis Castle Thailand
09:55 Takeshis Castle Thailand
10:20 Takeshis Castle Thailand
10:45 Friendszone
11:10 Friendszone
11:35 Key And Peele
12:00 Key And Peele
12:25 Key And Peele
12:50 Takeshis Castle Thailand
13:15 Takeshis Castle Thailand
13:40 Workaholics
14:05 Workaholics
14:30 Key And Peele
14:55 Key And Peele
15:20 Key And Peele
15:45 Impractical Jokers
16:25 Impractical Jokers
16:50 Impractical Jokers
17:15 Takeshis Castle Thailand
17:40 Takeshis Castle Thailand
18:05 Takeshis Castle Thailand
18:30 Lip Sync Battle
18:55 Lip Sync Battle
19:20 Friends
19:45 Friends
20:08 Friends
20:35 Corporate
21:00 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah
21:30 Nick Kroll: Thank You Very Cool
22:20 Roast Battle UK
22:45 Tosh.0
23:10 Tosh.0
23:35 Nick Swardson: Seriously, Who Farted?



00:30 Weather Top Tens
01:20 How It's Made
01:45 How It's Made
02:10 My Cat From Hell
03:00 Tanked
03:50 Ultimate Survival
04:40 Weather Gone Viral
05:30 Weather Top Tens
06:20 How It's Made
06:40 How It's Made
07:00 Destroyed In Seconds
07:25 Kids Do The Craziest Things
07:50 My Cat From Hell

08:40 How It's Made
09:05 How It's Made
09:30 Tanked
10:20 Ultimate Survival
11:10 Destroyed In Seconds
11:35 Kids Do The Craziest Things
12:00 Mysteries At The Museum
12:50 Weather Gone Viral
13:40 Weather Top Tens
14:30 How It's Made
14:55 How It's Made
15:20 My Cat From Hell
16:10 Xtreme Waterparks
16:35 Xtreme Waterparks
17:00 My Cat From Hell
17:50 Tanked
18:40 Destroyed In Seconds
19:05 Kids Do The Craziest Things
19:30 Penn & Teller Tell A Lie
20:20 The Carbonaro Effect
20:45 The Carbonaro Effect
21:10 How It's Made
21:35 How It's Made
22:00 Xtreme Waterparks
22:25 Xtreme Waterparks
22:50 Ultimate Survival
23:40 Penn & Teller Tell A Lie



00:50 Jonestown Massacre: People Magazine Investigates
01:45 Someone You Thought You Knew
02:40 American Monster
03:35 Broken Trust
04:30 The Perfect Murder
05:25 Heartbreakers
06:20 Evil Online
07:10 I Almost Got Away With It
08:00 California Investigator
08:25 On The Case With Paula Zahn
09:15 Disappeared
10:10 Grave Secrets
11:05 Evil Online
12:00 Blood Relatives
12:55 On The Case With Paula Zahn
13:50 I Almost Got Away With It
14:45 Heartbreakers
15:40 Evil Online
16:35 The Perfect Murder
17:30 On The Case With Paula Zahn
18:25 Disappeared
19:20 I Almost Got Away With It
20:15 Heartbreakers
21:10 Evil Online
22:05 Swamp Murders
23:00 The Devil Speaks
23:55 American Monster



00:10 Sabrina: Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
00:35 Binny And The Ghost
01:00 Alex & Co.
01:25 Alex & Co.
01:45 Disney Mickey Mouse
01:50 Evermoor Chronicles
02:15 Sabrina: Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
02:40 Sabrina: Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
03:05 Binny And The Ghost
03:30 Binny And The Ghost
03:55 Hank Zipzer
04:15 Disney Mickey Mouse
04:20 Hank Zipzer
04:45 Alex & Co.
05:10 Alex & Co.
05:35 Sabrina: Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
06:00 Sabrina: Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
06:25 Binny And The Ghost
06:45 Disney Mickey Mouse
06:50 Rolling With The Ronks
07:00 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug And Cat Noir
07:25 Raven's Home
07:50 Tsum Tsum Shorts
07:55 Stuck In The Middle
08:20 Bunk'd
08:45 K.C. Undercover

09:10 Bizaardvark
09:35 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug & Cat Noir
10:00 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug & Cat Noir
10:25 Tangled: The Series
10:50 Tangled: The Series
11:15 Bizaardvark
11:40 Bizaardvark
12:05 Liv And Maddie
12:30 Liv And Maddie
12:55 K.C. Undercover
13:20 K.C. Undercover
13:45 Hotel Transylvania: The Series
14:10 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug & Cat Noir
14:35 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug & Cat Noir
15:00 Hotel Transylvania: The Series
15:15 Bunk'd
15:40 K.C. Undercover
16:05 Disney Mickey Mouse
16:10 A.N.T. Farm
16:35 Bizaardvark
17:00 Tangled: The Series
17:25 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug And Cat Noir
17:50 Raven's Home
18:15 Stuck In The Middle
18:40 Stuck In The Middle
19:05 K.C. Undercover
19:30 Bizaardvark
19:55 Descendants Wicked World
20:00 Raven's Home
20:25 Liv And Maddie
20:50 K.C. Undercover
21:15 Disney Mickey Mouse
21:20 A.N.T. Farm
21:45 Bizaardvark
22:10 Hotel Transylvania: The Series
22:35 Stuck In The Middle
23:00 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug And Cat Noir
23:25 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug And Cat Noir
23:50 Lolirock



00:00 PJ Masks
00:25 PJ Masks
00:50 The Hive
01:00 Zou
01:15 Zou
01:30 Henry Hugglemonster
01:55 Henry Hugglemonster
02:20 The Hive
02:30 The Hive
02:40 Zou
03:25 The Hive
03:35 The Hive
03:45 Henry Hugglemonster
04:30 Minnie's Bow-Toons
04:35 The Hive
04:45 PJ Masks
06:00 Disney Muppet Babies
06:20 Puppy Dog Pals
06:35 PJ Masks
06:55 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
07:29 Vampirina
07:44 Vampirina
08:00 Sofia The First
08:30 Elena Of Avalor
09:00 Puppy Dog Pals
10:00 Disney Muppet Babies
10:20 Paprika
10:30 Paprika
10:40 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
11:10 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
11:40 PJ Masks
12:40 Paprika
12:50 Paprika
13:00 Claude
13:20 Claude
13:40 Trulli Tales
13:55 Trulli Tales
14:10 Paprika
14:20 Paprika
14:30 Vampirina
15:25 Disney Muppet Babies
15:40 Paprika
15:50 Paprika
16:00 Claude Shorts
16:25 Vampirina Ghouls Rock!
16:30 Puppy Dog Pals
17:00 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
17:30 Vampirina
17:45 Vampirina

18:00 PJ Masks
18:15 PJ Masks
18:30 The Lion Guard
19:00 Sofia The First
19:25 Disney Junior Music Nursery Rhymes
19:30 Elena Of Avalor
20:00 Puppy Dog Pals
20:30 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
20:45 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
21:00 Vampirina
21:40 PJ Masks
21:55 PJ Masks
22:15 The Lion Guard
22:45 Sofia The First
23:10 Minnie's Bow-Toons
23:15 Zou
23:30 Henry Hugglemonster



00:15 Fast N' Loud
01:05 Cooper's Treasure
01:50 The Island With Bear Grylls
02:35 Man v Expert
03:20 Fast N' Loud
04:05 Alaskan Bush People
04:50 Deadliest Catch
05:35 Storage Hunters UK
06:00 The Caravan Show
06:23 Dallas Car Sharks
06:45 Storage Hunters UK
07:10 How Do They Do It?
07:35 Alaskan Bush People
08:20 The Caravan Show
08:45 Dallas Car Sharks
09:10 Deadliest Catch
09:55 Alaskan Bush People
10:45 Deadliest Catch
11:30 Fast N' Loud
12:20 The Caravan Show
12:43 Dallas Car Sharks
13:05 Storage Hunters UK
13:30 How Do They Do It?
13:55 Deadliest Catch
14:40 Fast N' Loud
15:30 Cooper's Treasure
16:15 The Island With Bear Grylls
17:05 Man v Expert
17:50 Abandoned Engineering
18:40 How Do They Do It?
19:05 How Do They Do It?
19:25 Fast N' Loud
20:15 Fast N' Loud
21:00 Diesel Brothers
21:50 Trans Am
22:40 Race Night At Bowman Gray
23:30 Gold Rush



00:15 Randy Cunningham: 9th Grade Ninja
00:35 Boyster
01:00 Boyster
01:25 Counterfeit Cat
01:45 Counterfeit Cat
02:10 Randy Cunningham: 9th Grade Ninja
02:35 Randy Cunningham: 9th Grade Ninja
03:00 Boyster
03:20 Boyster
03:45 Dude That's My Ghost
04:10 Dude That's My Ghost
04:35 Counterfeit Cat
05:00 Marvel's Guardians Of The Galaxy
05:29 Marvel's Avengers Assemble
06:00 Marvel's Spider-Man
06:29 Big Hero 6 The Series
07:00 Milo Murphy's Law
07:29 Big City Greens
08:00 Phineas And Ferb
08:29 Supa Strikas
09:00 Supa Strikas
09:29 DuckTales
10:00 Big City Greens
10:29 Phineas And Ferb
11:00 Phineas And Ferb
11:29 Furiki Wheels
12:00 Big Hero 6 The Series
12:29 Big Hero 6 The Series
13:00 Gravity Falls
13:29 Phineas And Ferb
14:00 Phineas And Ferb
14:29 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
15:00 Milo Murphy's Law

15:29 Furiki Wheels
16:00 DuckTales
16:31 Space Chickens In Space
16:45 Space Chickens In Space
17:00 Big City Greens
17:29 Big Hero 6 The Series
18:00 Disney 11
18:29 Lab Rats Elite Force
20:00 Marvel's Spider-Man
20:31 Space Chickens In Space
20:45 Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verses
21:00 Furiki Wheels
21:29 Star Wars Resistance
22:00 Phineas And Ferb
22:15 Furiki Wheels
22:30 Big City Greens
22:45 Phineas And Ferb
23:00 Dude That's My Ghost
23:25 Dude That's My Ghost
23:50 Randy Cunningham: 9th Grade Ninja



00:05 Revenge Body With Khloe Kardashian
00:55 Revenge Body With Khloe Kardashian
01:50 E! News
02:50 WAGs
05:30 Celebrity Style Story
06:00 Revenge Body With Khloe Kardashian
06:55 E! News Middle East
08:10 E! News: Daily Pop
09:10 Botched
10:05 Celebrity Style Story
10:30 My Fabulous Me
12:00 E! News Middle East
12:15 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
15:00 E! News Middle East
15:15 E! News: Daily Pop
16:15 Hollywood Medium With Tyler Henry
19:00 E! News
20:00 Very Cavallari
23:00 E! News Middle East
23:15 Model Squad



00:10 One Night With My Ex
01:00 Emmerdale
01:30 Coronation Street
02:30 The Chase
03:25 Paul O'Grady: For The Love Of Dogs
04:20 Wedding Day Winners
05:25 One Night With My Ex
06:15 Guess This House
07:10 The Chase
08:05 Paul O'Grady: For The Love Of Dogs
08:35 Paul O'Grady: For The Love Of Dogs
09:00 Wedding Day Winners
10:05 One Night With My Ex
10:55 Guess This House
11:50 The Chase
12:45 Emmerdale
13:45 Coronation Street
14:15 Guess This House
15:10 The Chase
16:00 The Voice Kids 2018
18:50 Emmerdale
19:45 Coronation Street
20:10 The Chase
21:00 The Voice Kids 2018
23:40 Coronation Street



00:00 Clash Of Warriors
01:00 Modern Marvels
02:00 Cities Of The Underworld
03:00 Hangar 1: The UFO Files
03:50 Ancient Aliens
04:40 The Universe
05:30 Clash Of Warriors
06:20 Modern Marvels
07:10 Hangar 1: The UFO Files
08:00 Cities Of The Underworld
09:00 Hangar 1: The UFO Files
10:00 Ancient Aliens
11:00 The Universe
12:00 Clash Of Warriors
13:00 Modern Marvels
14:00 Cities Of The Underworld

Stars



Aries (March 21-April 19)

It seems as if your sexual needs are one of the issues you seem to place great focus on today. You desire power and control. These desires may lead to greater interest in healing and investing. The great mysteries of life and death seem to intrigue you. You may feel much support and harmony in your life now. Surrounded by friends and loved ones is the place for you. You may find yourself having a great time this evening surrounded by the children and younger people in your life. It seems these younger people look at you with much admiration and strive to be more like you. Continue to set a good example for these children, Aries. Great reward could come from investing in the lives of others.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

This is a wonderful time for a quiet evening spent alone with your special someone. Keep to yourself today. This is not a great day for getting your point across to others. You may find your mind lost in your own memories. A great escape for you. This could be a very emotional day as you think back on lost love and lost loved ones. A walk down memory lane may bring your own mortality into focus. Life is short, Taurus. Live it to the fullest. Live, Laugh, and love hard. We are not promised tomorrow, so make today count.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Don't be surprised if you find someone challenging your values or your good taste. To each his own. This is why they make chocolate and vanilla. Do not take offense to this. You are unique and the only person you are responsible for pleasing is yourself. You may find you are being too strict on yourself. Loosen up and let your hair down. Life is short and you should remember to take time to relax and enjoy yourself every now and then. It seems the nature of time is something you have really had on your mind. You are starting to see just how short life is.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Your stubbornness could be an asset today. You know what you want and you are willing to work to get it. Compromise is not your strength, but you find it is a need when it comes to a romantic issue. Find a middle ground that you can learn to live with. This may restore the peace and happiness you have been longing for.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

We are not promised tomorrow. This is weighing heavy on your mind. Time is ticking. You are fully aware that time seems to be passing by at a high rate of speed. This is a day you decide to live each day to the fullest. To live, love, and laugh. From this point on you will live your life to the fullest and spread joy in every direction you can.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

You have a reputation for not offering information unless you know it to be true. If you argue, which is rare, you are sure of your premise. You present your case as facts, leaving little room for disagreement. Most people trust you because they know what you say is true. Some may see this as arrogance. But, in most cases you are able to make your point without offending. You have a knack for telling people what they don't want to hear, but in most cases making them like it.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

The sky is the limit. You have set your goals high and by this point you may be look down on them as you soar above and beyond all expectations you had for yourself. You are on fire. You filled with optimistic feelings and on top of the world. This is a great day for your relationship wise as well as in the workplace. You exude confidence today that so many will find as attractive. Your desires are leading you to crave something new. You are willing to try anything today with your "bring it on" attitude. High energy and happiness fill your world today.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

You may need to loosen up a bit. You seem to be taking life extremely serious now. You are too strict with yourself. All work and no play isn't a good thing. Sure you are getting a lot accomplished but at what cost? You will burn out. You will not be the person others want to spend time with. You have to realize there is more to life than money and sometimes your health is not worth the price. Take some time for you. Sit back and learn to relax, Scorpio. This will help you more than being overworked.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

No one likes to be stood up. This may be the action you take that puts strain on your relationship with friends. Though you would love nothing more than to be out with friends socializing and have some fun, your more responsible side knows where your priorities lie and are unable to go through with plans you have made. Your mind is sharp, and you find yourself very productive which is the reward you need to make up for having to miss out and play adult today. You may find your experience leaves you with a great sense of sympathy for those close to you.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Something seems to be leading you toward a healthier lifestyle. You are ready to take life seriously. You know you are what you eat, or so they say. You are ready to feel better about your health. Today finds you getting serious about making some major lifestyle changes. You may want to join the gym, or start counting calories. You know you are ready to get up and get moving. Life will not pass you by. Your high energy and positive attitude will be determining factors in your quest for health. This is a great time for you, Capricorn. You will succeed.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

It seems as if you have a greater understanding of time and the fact life is short. Facing the day with this attitude, gives you inspiration to accomplish your goals. You are more passionate about all you do. You are making a decision to live as if each day is your last and enjoy all this world has to offer. This is a drastic change for you as you have been too strict on yourself in the past. You have no tolerance for anyone or anything that doesn't contribute to your long-term goals. You are full of ambition and will not allow anyone to stand in your way.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

You are loving and sensitive when it comes to others. Even though you tend to give from your heart with no expectations, you may be longing to feel some sense of appreciation for what you do for others. Taking a chance now could bring great rewards in the future.

Country Codes

Afghanistan	0093	Jordan	00962
Albania	00355	Kazakhstan	007
Algeria	00213	Kenya	00254
Andorra	00376	Kiribati	00686
Angola	00244	Kuwait	00965
Anguilla	001264	Kyrgyzstan	00996
Antigua	001268	Laos	00856
Argentina	0054	Latvia	00371
Armenia	00374	Lebanon	00961
Australia	0061	Liberia	00231
Austria	0043	Libya	00218
Bahamas	001242	Lithuania	00370
Bahrain	00973	Luxembourg	00352
Bangladesh	00880	Macau	00853
Barbados	001246	Macedonia	00389
Belarus	00375	Madagascar	00261
Belgium	0032	Majorca	0034
Belize	00501	Malawi	00265
Benin	00229	Malaysia	0060
Bermuda	001441	Maldives	00960
Bhutan	00975	Mali	00223
Bolivia	00591	Malta	00356
Bosnia	00387	Marshall Islands	00692
Botswana	00267	Martinique	00596
Brazil	0055	Mauritania	00222
Brunei	00673	Mauritius	00230
Bulgaria	00359	Mayotte	00269
Burkina	00226	Mexico	0052
Burundi	00257	Micronesia	00691
Cambodia	00855	Moldova	00373
Cameroon	00237	Monaco	00377
Canada	001	Mongolia	00976
Cape Verde	00238	Montserrat	001664
Cayman Islands	001345	Morocco	00212
Central African Republic	00236	Mozambique	00258
Chad	00235	Myanmar (Burma)	0095
Chile	0056	Namibia	00264
China	0086	Nepal	00977
Colombia	0057	Netherlands (Holland)	0031
Comoros	00269	Netherlands Antilles	00599
Congo	00242	New Caledonia	00687
Cook Islands	00682	New Zealand	0064
Costa Rica	00506	Nicaragua	00505
Croatia	00385	Nigar	00227
Cuba	0053	Nigeria	00234
Cyprus	00357	Niue	00683
Cyprus (Northern)	0090392	Norfolk Island	00672
Czech Republic	00420	Northern Ireland (UK)	0044
Denmark	0045	North Korea	00850
Diego Garcia	00246	Norway	0047
Djibouti	00253	Oman	00968
Dominica	001767	Pakistan	0092
Dominican Republic	001809	Palau	00680
Ecuador	00593	Panama	00507
Egypt	0020	Papua New Guinea	00675
El Salvador	00503	Paraguay	00595
England (UK)	0044	Peru	0051
Equatorial Guinea	00240	Philippines	0063
Eritrea	00291	Poland	0048
Estonia	00372	Portugal	00351
Ethiopia	00251	Puerto Rico	001787
Falkland Islands	00500	Qatar	00974
Faroe Islands	00298	Romania	0040
Fiji	00679	Russian Federation	007
Finland	00358	Rwanda	00250
France	0033	Saint Helena	00290
French Guiana	00594	Saint Kitts	001869
French Polynesia	00689	Saint Lucia	001758
Gabon	00241	Saint Pierre	00508
Gambia	00220	Saint Vincent	001784
Georgia	00995	Samoa US	00684
Germany	0049	Samoa West	00685
Ghana	00233	San Marino	00378
Gibraltar	00350	Sao Tome	00239
Greece	0030	Saudi Arabia	00966
Greenland	00299	Scotland (UK)	0044
Grenada	001473	Senegal	00221
Guadeloupe	00590	Seychelles	00284
Guam	001671	Sierra Leone	00232
Guatemala	00502	Singapore	0065
Guinea	00224	Slovakia	00421
Guyana	00592	Slovenia	00386
Haiti	00509	Solomon Islands	00677
Holland (Netherlands)	0031	Somalia	00252
Honduras	00504	South Africa	0027
Hong Kong	00852	South Korea	0082
Hungary	0036	Spain	0034
Ibiza (Spain)	0034	Sri Lanka	0094
Iceland	00354	Sudan	00249
India	0091	Suriname	00597
Indian Ocean	00873	Swaziland	00268
Indonesia	0062	Sweden	0046
Iran	0098	Switzerland	0041
Iraq	00964	Syria	00963
Ireland	00353	Taiwan	00886
Italy	0039	Tanzania	00255
Ivory Coast	00225	Thailand	0066
Jamaica	001876	Toga	00228
Japan	0081	Tonga	00676

CLINIC PAGE



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DR. MOHAMMAD AL HAJRY
Canadian Board of Otolaryngology
Head & Neck Surgery and Facial Plastics.
Fellow of Royal College of Surgeons-Canada
A rare Subspecialty in Microscopic Ear Surgery, Cochlear implant & Ear diseases

- ◆ Diagnosis/ Treatment of General Ears, Nose, and Throat conditions in adults & pediatrics
- ◆ Minimally invasive Endoscopic sinus surgery including Balloon sinuplasty
- ◆ Minimally invasive Microscopic & Endoscopic Ear surgery
- ◆ Diagnosis & treatment of Otolaryngology and Audiology (Hearing loss, Tinnitus & balance disorders)
- ◆ Facial Plastic and reconstructive surgeries (Rhinoplasty, Otoplasty, Fillers & Botox injections)
- ◆ Diagnosis & treatment of snoring & obstructive sleep apnea in clinic without surgery
- ◆ Diagnosis & Treatment of voice and swallowing disorders.
- ◆ Diagnosis & Treatment of Head and Neck benign & malignant tumors.

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DR. FAHAD S BUHAIMED
Consultant Cosmetic Dermatologist & Hair Transplant, NY

ACADAMIC CERTIFICATES:

- o Dermatology board certified.
- o Fellowship training program in cosmetic dermatology and hair transplant, New York, USA.
- o Member of American cosmetic dermatology society.
- o Referee reviewer of international journal of Dermatology.

SPECIALIZED IN:

- o Dermatology & Cosmetic Treatments.
- o Laser Treatments.
- o Hair Transplant & Restoration.
- o Body & Face Contouring.
- o Injectable Fillers & Botox.

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DR KHALED ALMERRI
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Specialized in:

- 1-Diagnostic and therapeutic cardiac catheterization (Angiography and Angioplasty). Aortic valve implantation.
- 2- Diagnosis and treatment of coronary artery diseases
- 3- Diagnosis and treatment of heart failure, cardiomyopathies and valvular diseases.
- 4-Diagnosis and treatment of high blood pressure and high cholesterol.
- 5- Diagnosis and treatment of syncope, palpitations and cardiac arrhythmias.
- 6- Non-invasive diagnostic procedures echocardiography, exercise stress test, and 24 hour blood pressure and Holter monitoring

Know your Doctor
Otorhinolaryngology (E.N.T)
Dr Hamoud Abdullah Alarouj
ENT Specialist

- ◆ Laryngology Fellowship - Canada
- ◆ Fellow of the European Board Otolaryngology - Head & Neck Surgery
- ◆ Member of the American Academy of Otolaryngology Head & Neck Surgery
- ◆ Member of the British Laryngological Association
- ◆ Member of the Canadian Society of Otolaryngology Head & Neck Surgery
- ◆ Member of the European Laryngological Society

Specialized in:

- ◆ Management of benign and malignant vocal cord lesions.
- ◆ Vocal cord augmentation.
- ◆ Treatment of spasmodic dysphonia.
- ◆ Adenotonsillectomy using latest techniques.
- ◆ Thyroid surgery.
- ◆ Surgery for the deviated nasal septum.
- ◆ Endoscopic sinus surgery.
- ◆ Treatment of allergic rhinitis.
- ◆ Treatment of snoring.
- ◆ Treatment of vertigo.

Scope of Clinical Practice:

- ◆ General & Laparoscopic Surgery
- ◆ Single Port Surgery
- ◆ Treatment of Colo-Rectal Diseases, Including Colorectal Cancer
- ◆ Surgical Treatment of Inflammatory Bowel Abscess
- ◆ Treatment of Perianal Fistula & Complex Perianal Fistula (complications)
- ◆ YAAT Procedure (Treatment of Fistula through Fistuloscope)
- ◆ Treatment of Irritable Bowel Symptoms
- ◆ Colonoscopy & Gastroscopy
- ◆ Stomach Balloon Insertion & removal
- ◆ Bariatric Surgery - Lap Sleeve Gastrectomy
- ◆ Gallstones & Abdominal Hernias Surgery

◆ Colonic Hydrotherapy & Fecal Incontinence Treatment
◆ Laparoscopic mini bypass
◆ Transanal minimally Invasive surgery

Academic Certificates, Trainings & Fellowships:

- ◆ American Board of General Surgery
- ◆ Fellow of American College of Surgery
- ◆ Canadian Board of General Surgery
- ◆ Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians & Surgeons of Canada
- ◆ American Board of Colo - Rectal Surgery
- ◆ American Board of Surgical Critical Care

Dr. Abdullah Al Haddad
Surgery Department
Consultant General Surgery, Laparoscopic & Colo - Rectal Surgeon

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Dr. Ahmad Alaeddine
Head of Cardiology departmenta at Dar Al Shifa hospital

- Consultant Interventional and conventional cardiologist.
- Specialised in the Diagnosis and treatment of all adult cardiac diseases, including those cases that need urgent intervention in Cath lab (primary angioplasty).

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- ◆ Hernia repair
- ◆ Surgery for reflux disease
- ◆ Minor surgeries (lipoma, sebaceous cyst, ingrowing nail)
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- ◆ Breast surgeries
- ◆ Thyroid & adrenal surgeries
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Health

Scientists catalog the Amazon's genetic wealth

TORONTO: In a bid to stop “biopiracy”, researchers are building a giant database to catalog genetic material from the world’s largest rainforest. From the rubber in car tires, to cosmetics and medicines, genetic material contained in the Amazon region has contributed to discoveries worth billions of dollars. Communities living there, however, have rarely benefited from the genetic wealth extracted from their land - a form of theft that legal experts call “biopiracy”.

Instead, forest-dwellers often remain impoverished, which can drive them to find other ways to make money, such as illegal logging, according to Dominic Waughray, who heads the Amazon Bank of Codes project for the World Economic Forum. “At the heart of the conservation debate is: how do you find a way for a person in the forest to get more

cash in their hand right now from preserving that habitat rather than cutting it down?” said Waughray.

One solution involves compelling investors to pay royalties to local communities when using genetic sequences from organisms extracted from the forest, he said. The Amazon Bank of Codes will facilitate those payments.

But first those genetic sequences need to be mapped and stored online, which is what the project backers aim to do as early as 2020. Smart phones and digital payment tools will make it possible for outside investors to directly pay local residents to use genetic material extracted from their land, Waughray said.

Spread across nine countries, including Brazil, Colombia and Peru, the Amazon is home to one in 10 known species on earth,

according to the World Wildlife Fund, a conservation group.

That makes the region vulnerable to biopiracy, which is the unlawful appropriation or commercial use of biological materials native to a particular country without providing fair financial compensation to its people or government. “The history of biopiracy runs deep in the Amazon basin,” Waughray said, citing early colonialists taking rubber trees from the region to create lucrative plantations in Malaysia.

In a more recent case, Brazilian prosecutors launched an investigation into a California-based company earlier this year, accusing it of using genetic components of the tropical acai berry in its nutritional supplements without paying for them.

Pharmaceutical companies have also used

the yellow-and-green Kambo frog to create anti-inflammatory drugs without distributing benefits to local residents, Brazil’s environmental enforcement agency said in 2011.

In India, attempts to patent products such as basmati rice and properties of the spice turmeric, for medical use, have sparked protests.

“The phenomenon has given rise to a huge outcry to have a more ethical approach to the use of biological resources,” said Ikechi Mgbeoji, a professor of intellectual property law at Toronto’s York University.

Internationally, the Nagoya Protocol, which came into force in 2014, governs how companies and researchers should equitably share benefits from genetic material, said Valerie Normand, an official from the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. — Reuters

WELCOME

Dr Tamam Abou Ali
Consultant ENT, Head & Neck, Facial Plastic Surgeon.

Fellowship of the royal college of surgeons in UK and Ireland.
10 years work experience in Zain Hospital MOH Kuwait.
In Head of ENT department in Forensic Hospital MOH Kuwait
10 years work experience in UK and Ireland.

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DR. WALEED S BUHAIMED
Consultant of General Surgery
Laprosopic and Bariatric Surgery

Academic Certificates – Training

- ◆ Kuwait Board of General Surgery.
- ◆ (IFSO) member .
- ◆ Faculty member of (BEST).
- ◆ Member of Kuwait Surgical Association.

Scope of clinical Practice.

- ◆ Bariatric surgeries.
- ◆ Gallbladder stones surgeries.
- ◆ Abdominal wall and hernia surgeries.
- ◆ G.I. surgeries.
- ◆ Thyroid and para - thyroid surgeries.
- ◆ Anal surgeries.

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-Board Certified Urologist.
-Endourology Society-Approved Fellowship In Endourology And Robotic Surgery At Western University, Ontario, Canada.

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- 4- Tumors And Malignancies Of The Urinary Tract (Kidney, Adrenals, Ureter, Bladder And Testes)
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American Airlines	22087425	Royal Jordanian	22418064/5/6
	22087426	British Airways	22425635
Jet Airways	22924455	Air France	22430224

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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Visibility will decrease due to fog and it will improve gradually and Partly cloudy with light variable wind to light to moderate south easterly wind, with speed of 06 - 28 km/h .

BY NIGHT: Cool and Partly cloudy with light to moderate freshening at times south easterly wind changing to north westerly wind, with speed of 10 - 40 km/h with a chance for fog forming over some areas.

WEATHER WARNING			Fog		
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	SFC. CHART 20/12/2018 0000 UTC		
KUWAIT CITY	23 °C	14 °C			
KUWAIT AIRPORT	24 °C	10 °C			
ABDALY	21 °C	08 °C			
BUBYAN	--- °C	--- °C			
JAHRA	24 °C	11 °C			
FAILAKA ISLAND	21 °C	14 °C			
SALMIYAH	21 °C	16 °C			
AHMADI	20 °C	16 °C			
NUWAISIB	24 °C	10 °C			
WAFRA	25 °C	09 °C			
SALMY	24 °C	10 °C			

4 DAYS FORECAST

DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Friday	12/21	Clouds will decrease gradually	22 °C	13 °C	NW	10 - 32 km/h
Saturday	12/22	Mostly Sunny	20 °C	11 °C	NW	12 - 32 km/h
Sunday	12/23	Sunny	20 °C	10 °C	NW	12 - 32 km/h
Monday	12/24	Sunny	20 °C	09 °C	NW-VRB	15 - 35 km/h

PRAYER TIMES

Fajr	05:12
Sunrise	06:37
Zuhr	11:45
Asr	14:35
Sunset	16:53
Isha	18:16

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT

MAX. Temp.	19 °C
MIN. Temp.	12 °C
MAX. RH	99 %
MIN. RH	59 %
MAX. Wind	N 28 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

Required Immediately Senior Accountant

Skills...

- Has a high organizational and multitasking skill.
- Strong English and Arabic communication skills. (verbal & written)
- High problem-solving skills.
- Ability to work under pressure.
- University Degree in Finance, Accounting or equivalent.
- 5 years proven working experience as similar position & GCC country work experience is an advantage.

applynowkw@gmail.com

CHANGE OF NAME

Arwa Mithawala. (C 5439)
20-12-2018

I, **Batul**, holder of Indian Passport No. S2091663 and Civil ID no. 297122301821, has changed my name to **Batul Khojema Kanchwala. (C 5439)**

I, **Santhosh Theruparambil** (House), S/o. Bhaskaran, Kariyannoor, Erumappetty (PO), Thrissur, 680584, holder of Indian Passport No: J5238774, Civil ID No: 277021014999, converted to Islam and has changed my name and address to **Muhammed Suhail, S/o. Bhaskaran, Theruparambil** (House), Kaippuram (PO), Thiruvegapura, Naduvattam, Palakkad, Kerala-679308, hereinafter in all my dealings and documents. (C 5438)
17-12-2018

I, **Hozefa**, holder of Indian Passport No. Z3201289 and Civil ID no. 277021101304, has changed my name to **Hozefa Mithawala. (C 5439)**

I, **Arwa**, holder of Indian Passport No. L6663051 and Civil ID no. 2822012002028, has changed my name to

Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

Business

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LONDON: A woman walks in front of Christmas decorations outside retailers in central London. —AFP

World gloom overshadows US holiday season

American retailers hit by drop in British consumer confidence

NEW YORK: A slowdown in global consumer confidence threatens to overshadow the holiday shopping season in the United States, which despite a strong start is not immune to developments in Europe. Super Saturday, the last before Christmas and the biggest shopping day of the US holiday season, is likely to bring in more than \$26 billion in revenue, retail consultancy Customer Growth Partners (CGP) said, up from \$24.5 billion a year ago.

But shares in US retailers including Amazon.com Inc were hit on Monday after a profit warning from British online fashion retailer ASOS, showing that even previously high-flying, online-only retailers were vulnerable to deteriorating consumer sentiment.

The US Federal Reserve is expected to raise interest rates again on Wednesday and with European retailers reporting weaker sales and Chinese consumers holding back, there are concerns that US consumers could turn skittish too. US package delivery company FedEx Corp on Tuesday cut its

2019 profit forecast after Europe's economy weakened and the US trade row exacerbated a slowdown in China.

"Many people are worried that this is as good as it gets, when it comes to spending and consumer confidence," Shawn Kravetz, Esplanade Capital LLC's chief investment officer, said.

A global index of retailers has fallen by more than 17 percent in the past three months. European gloom deepened on Wednesday after Ceconomy, Europe's biggest consumer electronics retailer, said it expected profit to fall again. The continent's retailers are grappling with uncertainty over Britain's exit from the European Union, slow economic growth and protests over fuel taxes in France and other factors.

Gas price fuels spending

Consumers in the United States continue to spend for now and despite a sharp rise in online orders hurting spending in stores during the Thanks-

giving weekend, bricks-and-mortar locations have since gained momentum.

Holiday traffic to J.C. Penney stores increased 10 percent year-on-year from Black Friday through Dec. 10, according to data from Orbital Insight, which analyses satellite imagery such as the number of cars in a retailer's parking lot.

Traffic was 7 percent higher at Target Corp stores for the period and up 5 percent at Walmart Inc. A drop in the price of gasoline could insulate US retailers from some of the pain felt elsewhere, with data from the American Automobile Association (AAA) on Dec. 17 showing the national gas price average of \$2.37 is the cheapest seen during the month of December since 2016.

"Consumers will definitely notice they have a little more money in their pockets and buy an extra gift or two," said James Bohnaker, associate director, US macro and consumer economics at financial data company IHS Markit. However, he expects the impact on retail spending to be limited.

Others expect a bigger bump. According to CGP, every dime of gasoline price increase or decline adds or takes away about \$1.5 billion every month in discretionary spending. Of this, about \$500 million, or a third, converts to retail spending.

Last year holiday spending was depressed by about \$2.5 billion after a rise in gas prices, but this year the drop in prices is likely to free up about \$3 billion in spending, Craig Johnson, president at CGP said.

Johnson said this was particularly a factor for those on lower incomes, adding that "for the first time in three years, gas prices are going to add to spending and not hurt it."

Many on social media expressed excitement at lower gas prices. "I'm an Uber driver, so with gas prices being lower, it's awesome," Keyhanna (@Keyhanna_J) wrote in a Twitter direct message to Reuters. "I can save a lot more to travel home for the holidays and spend spend spend or pay off some debt before the new year," she said. —Agencies

Business

Ghosn could win bail as court quashes bid to extend detention

Move as unexpected as auto tycoon's sudden arrest

TOKYO: Carlos Ghosn could soon be freed on bail after a Japanese court yesterday threw out a bid by prosecutors to extend his detention, in a move nearly as unexpected as the auto tycoon's sudden arrest.

The 64-year-old Franco-Brazilian-Lebanese executive has languished in a Japanese detention center since his November 19 arrest for alleged financial misconduct sent shockwaves through the business world. But in another stunning twist in the case, the Tokyo District Court said prosecutors had filed a bid to extend his detention on December 20, but it was "rejected".

In the Japanese system, it is extremely rare for the court to turn down prosecutors' request to continue the detention of someone who denies the allegations as Ghosn does, and the decision wrong-footed everyone.

The move paved the way for a potential release on bail as early as today, according to public broadcaster NHK. However, there are still many legal battles to be fought and Ghosn's release is by no means certain with prosecutors already lodging an appeal against the court decision.

Deputy chief prosecutor Shin Kukimoto declined to comment on the particular case, telling reporters only "we will handle this appropriately."

Kukimoto said that as far as he knew, Ghosn's lawyers had not yet filed a request for bail. NHK reported that prosecutors could also press further charges, which would further drag out his detention. It is also not clear what bail conditions would be set in Ghosn's case.

Yasuyuki Takai, a former official at the prosecu-

tor's office, told AFP: "The court now needs to decide whether or not to free him on bail. He could also be arrested on suspicion of a third crime. We do not know."

Ghosn 'combative'

Prosecutors formally charged Ghosn on December 10 with financial misconduct for allegedly under-declaring his income by some five billion yen (\$44 million) between 2010 and 2015. At the same time, they re-arrested him on suspicion of also under-reporting his income by a further four billion yen over the past three years. He has not formally been charged over this allegation.

Ghosn's detention threw the spotlight on the Japanese legal system where suspects can be detained for long periods. He is being held in a one-man cell in northern Tokyo measuring just three tatami mats-around five square meters (54 square feet) — a far cry from the lavish lifestyle that had previously attracted criticism.

Ghosn has told embassy visitors he is being well treated but has complained of the winter cold and the rice-based food.

Nevertheless, sources at French car giant Renault have described his frame of mind as "combative" as he fights the charges against him.

'Personal effects'

In addition to charges against Ghosn and his right-hand man Greg Kelly, prosecutors had also indicted Nissan itself, as the company submitted the official documents that under-reported the income.

November and 50.1 in January, which makes its the biggest shift out of stocks in a calendar year since Reuters started its survey in 2013.

"Investors are doubting global growth and fearing a recession with uncertainty over the direction of trade wars at a time when most global central banks have entered or (are) about to enter the tightening cycle," head of multi asset at Liontrust Asset Management John Husselbee said.

A total of 45 funds took part in the poll conducted from Dec. 7 to Dec. 19. Fixed income holdings rose to 39.3 percent, a touch higher than October, while cash levels — a key gauge of investor caution — rose to their highest since November 2016 at 6.1 percent. It means that cash holdings have risen more than 2 percentage points since the start of this year and it will be the first year since 2013 that there has been any kind of rise in cash levels at all.

Across equity portfolios, fund managers have cut back hardest over the last month on UK stocks as the Brexit process has been thrown into fresh chaos.

UK holdings have fallen below 8 percent for the first time in the poll's lifetime and slipped by more than 2 percentage points over the year. A separate question in the poll also shows that most investors still expect Brexit to happen. —Reuters



TOKYO: Motonari Otsuru, lawyer of Nissan's arrested former chairman Carlos Ghosn, is surrounded by the media as he leaves the Tokyo Detention House in Tokyo yesterday. —AFP

Nissan and Mitsubishi Motors promptly sacked the tycoon as chairman but Renault kept him on and appointed an interim boss as it waited to assess the legal procedures against him.

The Japanese firm said: "Since this particular decision is exclusively between the court and the prosecutors, Nissan is not in a position to comment." It said the company decision to fire Ghosn was "based on the substantial and convincing evidence" from an internal investigation. "Both Ghosn and Kelly have violated their director duty of care," the firm added

in a statement. Ghosn's arrest on November 19 unleashed a firestorm through the three-way car alliance of Nissan, Renault and Mitsubishi Motors—which together sold more vehicles than any other group last year.

On Monday, Nissan failed to agree a replacement as chairman amid growing tensions with the French firm. Renault owns 43 percent of Nissan but the Japanese company now makes more money, leading to rifts within the tie-up that Ghosn forged and was credited with holding together. —AFP

Spooked global funds drive up cash and bond holdings

LONDON: Spooked by another worldwide stocks selloff, global investors have piled up cash to a more than two-year high this month, hoovered up bonds and cut back property holdings. Brexit worries have also made the UK stocks more unpopular than a long-running Reuters poll has ever seen, though there has been a tentative move back into US and Asian equities despite the two region's rumbling trade tensions. The moves show how much confidence in the world economy has soured since the start of the year.

The combination of the US-China trade tensions, central banks turning off the money taps and cooling growth will see world stocks suffer their first double-digit loss in any year since the 2008 global financial crisis. Fund managers around the globe reduced their exposure to equities to 47.2 percent from 47.7 percent in No-

World stocks suffer as Fed heightens recession fears

LONDON: World equity markets slipped yesterday after the US Federal Reserve dashed investor hopes of a more dovish policy outlook, worsening worries of a recession as signs grow that global economic growth is stuttering. Jitters over the Fed's move to largely keep guidance for additional hikes over the next two years spread from Asia to Europe, where major indexes fell to their lowest in two years and investors flocked to the relative safety of government debt.

European shares fell 0.9 percent, with bourses in Germany, Britain and France all hitting their lowest levels since late 2016. MSCI's global equity index fell to its lowest since May 2017, shedding as much as 0.7 percent as it headed for a fifth straight day of losses. By midday GMT it was down 0.3 percent.

The Fed on Wednesday stuck by a plan to keep withdrawing support from an economy it views as strong, hiking key overnight lending rates, as expected, by 0.25 percent points.

It said "some further gradual" rate hikes would be needed in the year ahead, with policymakers projecting two rises on average next year instead of the three predicted in



NEW YORK: The closing numbers are displayed after the closing bell of the Dow Industrial Average at the New York Stock Exchange on Friday in New York. —AFP

September. Although largely in line with expectations, that tweak failed to soothe a cocktail of market fears over slowing world growth, US trade tensions with China, and tightening monetary conditions for companies in the world's biggest economy. In Asia, MSCI's broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan fell 0.8 percent.

Indexes in Japan and South Korea fell into a bear market, defined as a 20 percent decline from the highest point of the last year, joining bourses in Shanghai and Hong Kong.

"It appears that risky asset markets wanted a stronger 'put' from the Fed given the ongoing recession obsession taking over the market sentiment," said Salman Ahmed, global investment strategist at Lombard Odier Investment Managers. —Reuters

Business

Lawsuit adds to Facebook woes on data protection

150 companies could access detailed information about Facebook users

WASHINGTON: Facebook's woes mounted Wednesday as it faced a lawsuit alleging privacy violations related to data leaked to a consultancy working on Donald Trump's 2016 campaign, and as a new report suggested it shared more data with partners than it has acknowledged.

Facebook shares already sagging under the weight of the social network's troubles ended the trading day down 7.25 percent to \$133.24 and slipped even lower in after-market trades.

The suit filed by the attorney general for the US capital Washington is likely the first by an official US body that could impose consequences on the world's leading social network for data misuse.

"Facebook failed to protect the privacy of its users and deceived them about who had access to their data and how it was used," said Attorney General Karl Racine in a statement.

"Facebook put users at risk of manipulation by allowing companies like Cambridge Analytica and other third-party applications to collect personal data without users' permission."

The suit filed in Superior Court in Washington seeks an injunction to make sure Facebook puts in place safeguards to monitor users' data and makes it easier for users to control privacy settings, and demands restitution for consumers. Facebook said it was reviewing the complaint and looked forward to continuing discussions with attorneys general in DC "and elsewhere."

The social network has admitted that up to 87 million users may have had their data hijacked by Cambridge Analytica, which shut

down weeks after the news emerged on its handling of private user information. A whistleblower at the consultancy, which worked on Trump's presidential campaign, said it used Facebook data to develop profiles of users who were targeted with personalized messages that could have played on their fears.

The scandal has triggered a series of investigations and broad review by Facebook on how it shares user data with third parties.

Sharing with 150 partners

The New York Times reported that some 150 companies—including powerful partners like Amazon, Microsoft, Netflix and Spotify—could access detailed information about Facebook users, including data about their friends.

According to documents seen by the Times, Facebook allowed Microsoft's Bing search engine to see names of Facebook users' friends without consent and gave Netflix and Spotify the ability to read private messages. The report said Amazon was able to obtain user names and contact information through their friends, and Yahoo could view streams of friends' posts.

While some of the deals date back as far as 2010, the Times said they remained active as late as 2017 — and some were still in effect this year.

Facebook late Wednesday pushed back against critics, saying it had carefully negotiated deals with select partners to explore features such as friends sharing what they were listening to on Spotify or watching on Netflix.

on its earnings. Earlier this year it disclosed that US authorities had requested information on the operations being investigated by Britain and France "that could fall with US jurisdiction."

If the Justice Department inquiry leads to a criminal court case against Airbus and it is found guilty of corruption, it could be excluded from bidding on international contracts for five years, *Le Monde* said. At around 13:20 pm (1220 GMT) Airbus shares were down more than five percent at 82.34 euros, having lost 9.6 percent at one stage on the Paris stock exchange, which was 1.5 percent lower overall.

High stakes

The use of middlemen to secure contracts is authorised under guidelines set by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, as long as they are clearly identified and their compensation fully disclosed. *Le Monde* reported that Airbus had recently dissolved its Strategy and Marketing Organization (SMO) department, whose directors oversaw the management of middlemen used to facilitate the deals from 2009 to 2013 being probed.

By showing authorities it is taking drastic action in response to the alleged irregularities, it is hoping the US Justice Department will join the British and French inquiries, *Le Monde* said. In that case, Airbus might be able to spread the fine among the three agencies, instead of facing a huge US penalty as well as potentially crippling court cases. —AFP



WASHINGTON, DC: Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg arrives to testify before a joint hearing of the US Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee and Senate Judiciary Committee on Capitol Hill, in Washington, DC. — AFP

"In the past day, we've been accused of disclosing people's private messages to partners without their knowledge," Facebook vice president of product partnerships Ime Archibong said in a blog post. "That's not true."

To exchange messages or complete tasks such as sharing files or sending money, apps being used require the relevant technical access.

"Why did the messaging partners have read/write/delete messaging access?" Archibong asked rhetorically. "That was the point

of this feature."

The experiences at issue were publicly discussed, and only available when people used Facebook to log into services, according to the social network.

"No third party was reading your private messages, or writing messages to your friends without your permission," Archibong said. Facebook's head of developer platforms and programs, Konstantinos Papamiliadis noted most of the features are now gone. —AFP

Airbus shares plunge on reported US corruption probe

PARIS: Shares in European aircraft maker Airbus tumbled more than nine percent yesterday after French daily *Le Monde* reported it could face record fines of several billion dollars in a US corruption inquiry. The newspaper said the US Department of Justice had opened a probe for "improper practices" at the end of 2017 and informed Airbus it was under investigation at the end of the summer.

In a statement, the company said it was cooperating with US authorities.

The inquiry stems from Airbus's disclosure in early 2016 that it had neglected to inform authorities about payments to middlemen in securing several contracts, in particular in Asia.

A few months later Britain's Serious Fraud Office opened a fraud, bribery and corruption inquiry over alleged "irregularities concerning third-party consultants." It was cooperating with France's Financial Prosecutor's Office (PNF), which also launched an inquiry into the deals. Airbus warned in October 2017 that the investigations could have a "material impact"

Shares in SoftBank mobile unit rebound after earlier plunge

TOKYO: Shares in the mobile unit of Japanese technology giant SoftBank rebounded after steep early declines on a rollercoaster second trading day yesterday, after a bruising debut saw stocks close 14.5 percent lower. In early exchanges, shares in SoftBank Corp were down 7.6 percent at 1,183 yen as heavy selling dominated at the opening bell. The IPO price was 1,500 yen. The shares were 8.3 percent down at their lowest point — 22 percent below the IPO price. But buyers were found at that level and shares erased all of their early losses, eventually closing in positive territory at 1,296 yen, up 1.09 percent.

The stock in fact bucked the trend on a day of heavy selling on the wider Tokyo market, with the benchmark Nikkei 225 down more than three percent and plunging to a 15-month low.

The volatile trading came after the firm raised some \$23.5 billion in an initial public offering that was Japan's biggest and the second-largest globally after Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba's debut in 2014. The money raised will swell the

coffers of CEO Masayoshi Son's Vision Fund, which has invested in some of the hottest tech firms, including Uber and WeWork. Analysts said the stock had underperformed for several reasons: a weaker market in general, concerns over increased official intervention in the Japanese mobile sector, and a humiliating technical glitch in the run-up to the IPO. But "after the dips, some are buying partly because they are attracted to expected high dividend yields of the shares," said Hiroaki Hiwata, strategist at Toyo Securities.

'Tough start'

The benchmark Japanese market, the Nikkei 225, also opened down nearly one percent and ended the yesterday session down 2.84 percent as traders fretted over the pace of US Federal Reserve rate hikes next year. Speaking to reporters after Wednesday's stock plunge, Ken Miyauchi, CEO of the SoftBank Corp mobile division, acknowledged it was "unfortunate that the share price ended down". "But this is only the beginning. Many things will happen. We are off to a tough start of our journey... but I see this as a new start for our business," Miyauchi said. SoftBank took more than one-third of its mobile unit public and was able to sell the full offering of 1.76 billion shares at the IPO price of 1,500 yen, beating the previous national records set by NTT in 1987 and its subsidiary NTT Docomo in 1998. —AFP

Business

Under pressure: Clock ticks for China in trade negotiations

Xi's trade war strategy getting more complicated

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping's trade war strategy is getting more complicated, with slowing growth and disagreements about his approach within the Communist Party adding new battle-fronts, according to analysts. With the clock ticking since December 1 on a 90-day deadline to reach a deal with the United States, China has only made superficial peace offerings as it tries to buy time to shore up its economy, analysts said.

The lack of a clear direction suggests dissent from within the party leadership "since the summer", Jean-Pierre Cabestan, a political science professor at Hong Kong Baptist University, told AFP. There are "fierce divisions" in the leadership on "how to handle the trade war with the US and how to relaunch reforms, and whether to relaunch reforms or not," he said. "I don't think they've settled the disputes." Xi vowed Tuesday to press ahead with reforms as the party celebrated the 40th anniversary of its landmark "reform and opening up" policy.

But Xi, who has accumulated titles to become China's most powerful leader since Mao Zedong, warned that no one would "dictate" China's development path and that it would "resolutely not reform what shouldn't and can't be changed".

Steve Tsang, head of the China Institute at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, said the lack of a regular autumn plenum of the party's Central Committee—a platform to discuss reforms—signalled Xi was "avoiding such issues" and "suggest Xi is feeling pressure over the trade war and the slowing economy."

"As Xi takes charge of practically all major policy areas, discomfort in the upper echelons of the party over the trade war and the economy cannot but imply discomfort with the direction he was leading China."

Government not trustworthy?

Data last week showed that consumer spending grew at its slowest pace in 15 years in November while factories eased up. Growth is expected by the government to ease to around 6.5 percent this year, down from 6.9 percent in 2017. Over the weekend, a prominent economist told a university forum that the lack of clear trade strategies have led to an uncertainty among investors. "What is the fundamental problem? Fear of policy uncertainty, fear that the government is not trustworthy," said Xiang Songzuo, an economics professor at the elite Renmin University. Censors have since taken the speech off Chinese social media and references to it can no longer be found on the Twitter-like Weibo.

Measures to stabilise growth are expected to top the agenda this month at the party's annual Central Economic Work Conference, which sets the policy direction for next year, the state-run Global Times reported. Tsang said plans to reduce risks in the financial system and tackle pollution and poverty-priorities set for 2018 — have been shelved, at least in part, to support economic stability and growth, due to the roiling trade spat. The US is seeking a massive reduction in its trade deficit with China as well as deeper reforms in Beijing to stop the alleged theft of intellectual property and further open the economy to foreign companies. China has been promising changes for years, but reform has been slow. As the two sides prepare for face-to-face talks, China has resumed soybean purchases and has suspended extra tariffs on US cars that were imposed as part of tit-for-tat measures. But those steps are merely reverting to pre-tariff trade patterns rather than actual reforms, financial advisory firm Northern Trust wrote in a research note.



BEIJING: US President Donald Trump (left) and China's President Xi Jinping leaving a business leaders event at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. —AFP

'Pain threshold'

The United States has also voiced concern about "Made in China 2025", an ambitious plan to dominate key high-tech industries. While Beijing has toned down the rhetoric about the program, the government is likely reluctant to put its pet project on the negotiating table. "There are some cosmetic changes being made to the language of 'Made in China 2025', but it remains to

be seen to what extent fundamental changes will be made to this development strategy," said Louis Kuijs, head of Asia economics at Oxford Economics Ltd.

The truce has put a temporary halt to an increase in tariffs on \$200 billion worth of Chinese goods and a threat of duties on the remaining \$246 billion in Chinese products the United States imports each year. —AFP

Italy hints 'yellow vest' demos weighed on EU debt row

ROME: Italy's prime minister suggested yesterday the "yellow vest" protests marked by violent clashes in France could be partly to thank for Rome resolving its budget dispute with the European Union.

Brussels had threatened to fine Italy for spending plans that EU officials said broke Rome's deficit and debt-reduction commitments. The sides finally called a truce on Wednesday after Italy backed down from two of its key spending policies.

The French protest movement "could

have weighed" on the matter, "even if that is difficult to quantify," Italy's Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte was quoted as saying by the newspaper *Corriere della Sera*. In France, protesters have staged mass demonstrations against government fuel-tax rises and high living costs, leading to clashes with police.

France's government responded to the protests by last week announcing a new wave of spending for 2019.

That sparked suggestions of double standards since France's plans, like Italy's, risk breaking EU finance limits. Conte said he "explicitly mentioned the revolt of the yellow jackets" in his talks on the deficit dispute with EU Economic Affairs Commissioner Pierre Moscovici, a former French finance minister.

Italy is governed by an alliance of populist and far-right groups who chose Conte, a lawyer and political newcomer, as their figurehead. —AFP

Trump tariff war with China sends US retailers on buying binge

CHICAGO: In the nearly 40 years she has spent in trade, Amy Magnus has never seen retailers hoarding so much inventory.

Warehouses throughout the United States are at record capacity with Chinese imports of all kinds - microwaves, vacuum cleaner filters, swimwear, furniture - stacked to the ceiling, according to Magnus, who heads the National Customs Brokers & Forwarders Association of America, whose members work with over 250,000 importers and exporters.

"My office is right on a land border and I can see the trucks just coming across non-stop from my window," Magnus said, referring to her birds-eye view from Champlain, New York, of trade on the border between Canada and the United States. "Even with Christmas, it's been notably busier this week and last week than it's ever been before."

She is one of over a dozen customs brokers, retailers, vendors, analysts and supply chain experts who told Reuters that retailers have been stockpiling inventory from China to avoid higher tariffs that may kick in next year.

The buying binge is also evident in recent data from the National Retail Federation (NRF) and Hackett Associates, which show imports at major US retail container ports surged 13.6 percent to a record 2.04 million containers in October. This helped push the US trade deficit with China to a record high. Stores including Walmart Inc, Target Corp, TJX Companies Inc and Macy's Inc raced to buy Chinese products in September, the sources said, the same month the Trump Administration announced 25 percent tariffs would go into effect on Jan. 1 on \$200 billion of Chinese imports.

The US and China have since agreed to a 90-day trade war truce until March 2, but supply chain firms and vendors said this has not slowed buying or forward orders because the tariffs could still be hiked. "We have been tactical and pulled some orders forward," Walmart spokeswoman Marilee McLinnis told Reuters in an emailed statement. The other major retailers, including Target, TJX and Macy's would not comment for this story on the part tariffs played in their approach to buying inventory this year. —Reuters

Business

US Fed raises lending rate, signals slower pace ahead

Despite Trump tirade, Fed reiterates independence

WASHINGTON: The US Federal Reserve raised the benchmark interest rate on Wednesday, staking its independence despite repeated attacks by President Donald Trump, but it also sent a clear signal it expects take it slow next year in the face of plateauing growth.

The Fed's fourth rate increase of the year, which sent Wall Street tumbling, moved the central bank squarely into the crosshairs of the president, who had said earlier a rate hike would be "foolish." Asked about the dangers of Trump's twitter rants disrupting decision-making, Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell told reporters political considerations played "no role whatsoever" in the central bank's deliberations. In a unanimous decision, the Fed delivered on what some economists called a "dovish hike," raising the target range for the federal funds rate by 0.25 point, with 2.5 percent at the high end, while providing the clearest signal to date of a cautious stance moving forward, especially as it keeps an eye on potential international risks.

Despite generally healthy growth, Powell acknowledged the increased sense of caution due to "developments that may signal some softening, relative to what we were expecting a few months ago." "Growth in other economies around the world has moderated somewhat over

the course of 2018, albeit still solid levels," he told reporters.

Since inflation has remained moderate, that allows the Fed "to be patient" in raising rates moving forward. And central bankers now expect just two increases next year in the key rate used to set the cost of borrow for everything from cars to homes. The less upbeat outlook sent shares tumbling and Wall Street closed down sharply, while the dollar advanced against the euro.

"Faced with political pressure from the president to stop raising rates and panic on the part of investors who were seeing their massive capital gains disappear, the Fed could have punted. Instead, it decided to continue trying to win the game," economist Joel Naroff said.

While he highlighted Powell's focus on solid growth prospects, Naroff said the markets may have wanted the Fed to keep rates on hold next year. "You would think that continued good growth and inflation under control would be good news for the markets. Wrong again."

International risks?

After the two-day policy meeting said the central bank said it "will continue to monitor global economic and financial developments and assess their implications for the economic out-

look." The US is facing potential challenges from Trump's trade war, a slowing Chinese economy and the potential economic and financial turmoil that could come in the wake of Britain's exit from the European Union.

Increasing signs the US economy may have peaked have caused stock markets to crumble in recent weeks, with Wall Street wiping out all of its 2018 gains. The policy-setting Federal Open Market Committee also released its quarterly forecasts showing officials see economic growth moderating so that they now expect to increase the benchmark interest rate only twice next year rather than three times, as forecast in September.

Five Fed officials slashed their outlook for interest rates, and now expect two or fewer hikes rather than four or more in the coming year. The Fed's median forecast for GDP growth was cut to 2.3 percent for 2019 from 2.5 percent, which in turn brought the inflation outlook once again below the Fed's two percent target, even with unemployment remaining at a 50-year low of 3.5 percent next year.

Even with the continued strong job gains, wages have not accelerated, and prices have crept up only gradually, removing pressure on the central bank to put the brakes on the US economy.



WASHINGTON, DC: Federal Reserve Board Chairman Jerome Powell speaks during a news conference on Wednesday in Washington, DC. —AFP

Powell cautioned that the forecasts were individual views, not a definite plan for the Fed, and that officials would revise their assessments as new data came in. However, economists and analysts view them as a clear signpost for Fed action. "The change to the Fed's tone is a nod to the increased uncertainties, slower global growth, (and) lower inflation," said Mickey Levy of Berenberg Capital Markets. —AFP

BoJ maintains monetary easing policy

TOKYO: Japan's central bank yesterday maintained its ultra-loose monetary easing policy and said it was not looking for an exit strategy, even as the US central bank hikes interest rates. As the Bank of Japan continues its battle against deflation in the world's third-biggest economy, it vowed to keep short-term rates at minus 0.1 percent "as long as necessary" to hit its two-percent inflation target.

The bank is far from achieving this, with inflation currently hovering around one percent.

"We don't plan on looking for an exit strategy at the moment. It's too early to discuss its details," BoJ chief Haruhiko Kuroda told reporters after the decision. The BoJ has struggled for years to reach the two-percent inflation rate thought necessary to turbocharge Japan's economy, and has defended its decision to maintain its monetary easing even as other central banks tighten policy.

Thursday's BoJ decision came after the Federal Reserve hiked rates for the fourth time this year but signalled a slower pace of rate rises in 2019.

As for external risks, Kuroda said it is "necessary to carefully monitor moves related to protectionism including the US-China trade war".

"If the trade row continues for a long time,



TOKYO: Bank of Japan governor Haruhiko Kuroda speaks during a press conference in Tokyo yesterday. —AFP

this could broadly affect the economy... But its impact on our country is limited," he added. "We should monitor various risks, but our forecasts that (the) Japanese economy will expand moderately will not be changed."

The bank has been criticized for the consequences of its policy, including concerns that its massive purchases of government and corporate bonds are skewing bond and financial markets.

In a nod to those concerns, it said in July it would seek to keep yields on the benchmark 10-year government bond at around zero percent. But there are no expectations that it will follow the lead of the US Federal Reserve and European Central Bank and move towards tightening.

In September, Kuroda said the bank had no plans to raise long-term interest rates "for quite a long time". —AFP

BoE holds rate awaiting Brexit deal

LONDON: The Bank of England has voted to keep its main lending rate at 0.75 percent faced with "intensified Brexit uncertainties", minutes of its latest regular monetary policy meeting revealed yesterday. As widely expected, the BoE's Monetary Policy Committee decided against lifting borrowing costs, also as tumbling oil prices help to push down inflation.

"Brexit uncertainties have intensified considerably since the committee's last meeting" on November 1, the minutes said. Since that meeting seven weeks ago, the BoE has warned that a no-deal Brexit could trigger a financial crisis in Britain, while the pound could plunge by as much as 25 percent. Meanwhile minutes of the latest meeting that concluded Wednesday said that "the further intensification of Brexit uncertainties, coupled with the slowing global economy, has... weighed on the near-term outlook for UK growth".

They added: "Business investment has fallen for each of the past three quarters and is likely to remain weak in the near term. "The housing market has remained subdued. Indicators of household consumption have generally been more resilient, although retail

spending may be slowing."

British retail sales did rebound strongly in November, however, as shoppers bagged Black Friday bargains, official data showed yesterday. Total sales jumped 1.4 percent compared to October, the Office for National Statistics calculated, with non-food items helped by heavy price discounts.

That beat analysts' consensus forecast for a modest 0.3-percent increase.

Meanwhile with less than 100 days until Britain is set to officially depart the European Union, British MPs head off for Christmas, leaving a country in limbo with no divorce deal in place and total confusion over what happens next. "The broader economic outlook will continue to depend significantly on the nature of EU withdrawal, in particular: the form of new trading arrangements between the European Union and the United Kingdom; whether the transition to them is abrupt or smooth; and how households, businesses and financial markets respond," the latest BoE minutes said.

"The appropriate path of monetary policy will depend on the balance of the effects on demand, supply and the exchange rate.

"The monetary policy response to Brexit, whatever form it takes, will not be automatic and could be in either direction," the minutes added. At its latest meeting, BoE policymakers voted also to maintain the central bank's quantitative easing stimulus policy, under which it has pumped £445 billion (\$564 billion, 492 billion euros) around the UK economy. —AFP

Sports

Buccaneers stand between Cowboys and NFC East title

Colts on playoff course, face Giant threat

DALLAS: Last week, the Dallas Cowboys had a chance to wrap up the NFC East title. Instead, they absorbed their first shutout defeat in 15 years, as the Indianapolis Colts ended Dallas' five-game winning streak with a 23-0 decision. With the Washington Redskins (7-7) and the Philadelphia Eagles (7-7) recording wins last weekend, Dallas (8-6) saw its division lead shrink to one game with two weeks left in the season. However, a visit Sunday from a lesser team, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers (5-9), gives the Cowboys a second chance to punch their playoff ticket. The sting from last week's loss, which saw Dallas reach Indianapolis territory no fewer than seven times without even a field goal to show for it, was evident in the words of running back Ezekiel Elliott. "That was just a very embarrassing performance by us," he said. "In all phases of the game, we got beat."

Elliott had a decent game statistically with 87 yards on 18 carries and seven receptions for 41 yards, but he couldn't get a yard when it might have turned the game. Cowboys coach Jason Garrett eschewed a 20-yard field goal attempt in the second quarter to go for a fourth-and-1 at the Indianapolis 3-yard line with his team down 7-0. Elliott took the ball and never had a chance. Margus Hunt and Matthew Adams made the first hits, Pierre Desir popped the ball loose, and Jabaal Sheard recovered it for the Colts at the 5. "They won the line of scrimmage," Garrett said. "Ultimately, it wasn't a good game for us in any phase of our team."

That includes a run defense that was carved

up for 139 yards on 27 carries by Marlon Mack. It also branches out to an offensive line that gave up three sacks of quarterback Dak Prescott, and to Prescott himself. His 39 passes netted 24 completions but just 206 yards. Tampa Bay's defense has been much more pliable than Indianapolis', ranking 30th in the NFL in points allowed per game at 28.8. That and the Buccaneers' tendency to turn the ball over—they lead the league with 32 giveaways, 25 of them interceptions—helps explain why they have gone 3-9 after a 2-0 start.

Buccaneers coach Dirk Koetter might not survive a second straight disappointing season. One report on Sunday suggested he would be fired at season's end and replaced by an offensive-minded coach similar to Koetter. Tampa Bay offensive tackle Demar Dotson seemed ambivalent about Koetter's situation. "It's every man for himself at the moment," Dotson said. "I'm not going to worry about saving Dirk's job, I'm worried about saving my own."

Colts face Giant threat

The Indianapolis Colts were headed toward a disastrous season when they lost five of their first six games. Now they are two victories away from landing a possible playoff spot. The Colts look to take another step toward being part of the postseason when they host the New York Giants (5-9) on Sunday. Indianapolis (8-6) has the same record as the Baltimore Ravens and Tennessee Titans with two weeks left in the regular season. The Ravens currently hold the edge for the final AFC wild-card spot but the

Colts are bullish about their chances. Winning seven of eight games after a 1-5 start tends to grow the confidence level. Coach Frank Reich kept the team from crumbling and the Colts have prevailed by more than 20 points on three occasions during the hot stretch. "When you look at a season where you start 1-5, a lot of questions can easily start coming up around the building," Indianapolis linebacker Najee Goode told reporters. "People start looking around, wondering what's going on. You start getting confused and there's easily a chance you could stay off track and not get back on."

"Frank didn't let any of that happen. That's who he is, somebody who does not get rattled. It's cool to play for him and see him never change." The return of stardom for quarterback Andrew Luck and the impressive play of rookie outside linebacker Darius Leonard certainly have aided the turnaround. Luck has thrown for 3,951 yards and 34 touchdowns against 13 interceptions after missing the entire 2017 season due to shoulder surgery. Leonard leads the NFL with 146 tackles and also has 7.0 sacks and four forced fumbles after being a second-round selection out of South Carolina State.

What may not be good news for the Giants is that Leonard is peeved after not being named to the Pro Bowl on Tuesday. He has pledged to record 40 tackles on Sunday—which is 16 more than the NFL record—and scoffed when a reporter told him 40 was impossible. "Impossible? There's nothing impossible," Leonard said. "If you play a lot of snaps, you just get on every play." The Giants have their

own hot-shot rookie in running back Saquon Barkley, who ranks third in the NFL in both rushing yards (1,155) and scrimmage yards (1,809).

Barkley is looking to bounce back after having just 31 rushing yards and a season-low 56 total yards in last Sunday's 17-0 loss to the Tennessee Titans. The No. 2 overall pick insists his workload (223 carries, 82 receptions) isn't wearing him down. "Physically, I feel pretty good. I'm not going to sit here and lie to you and say I feel 100 percent," Barkley told reporters. "No one feels 100 percent at this point. That's just the nature of the game, especially the position I play, but any position in football at this stage of the season. They're going to feel a little banged up, but that's where you got to grind it out."

New York could be without Odell Beckham Jr. (77 catches, 1,052 yards) for the third straight game due to a quadriceps injury. Coach Pat Shurmur said he doesn't plan to shut down the star receiver despite the team being out of playoff contention. Giants quarterback Eli Manning (18 touchdowns, nine interceptions) is 311 yards away from his seventh 4,000-yard season. He is interesting in making the Colts' path to the playoffs a lot tougher. "You're chasing wins. Obviously, you want to finish the season strong," Manning said. "We've been playing good football and just have to get back to it. Opportunity to go against a good team and to kind of see where we stand. You just want to go out there and play well." — Agencies

Jedda Ice Hockey Club defeat Bahrain Club

KUWAIT: Jedda Ice Hockey Club defeated Bahrain Club by 12-8, following a good performance - earning it its first two points. This marked the second loss for Bahrain. The match was part of the Gulf Clubs professional ICC hockey tournament. Jedda club's Chairman Sultan Salama said he is happy with their performance in its first participation outside Saudi Arabia. He appreciated the support of Deputy Chairman of the Board of Saudi Public Authority for Sports Prince Abdelaziz Bin Turki Al-Faisal.

Salama said his team seeks to continue its winning ways despite the very strong competitions. He also lauded the organization for their immense efforts. Kuwait's player Salem Al-Ajmi said his club's two wins gave it a strong boost as they head towards winning the title. He acknowledged the efforts of his teammates.



Sports

Rockets nab long-range record in a win as Warriors fall to Jazz

Thunder overpower Kings 132-113

WASHINGTON: James Harden continued his torrid scoring but received plenty of help as the Houston Rockets set an NBA single-game record by sinking 26 3-pointers in a 136-118 victory over the visiting Washington Wizards on Wednesday. Harden scored 35 points on 10-of-18 shooting, including 6-of-11 success on 3-point attempts, to lead the Rockets to their fifth consecutive victory. Houston shot 55.3 percent overall, drilling 26 of 55 3-point tries. With the outcome well in hand and Houston reserves on the floor, the partisan crowd begged for 3-pointers in the waning moments until Michael Carter-Williams sank the record-breaker with 31.1 seconds remaining. With nine assists, Harden finished just shy of posting a double-double, a feat accomplished by teammates Clint Capela (20 points, 12 rebounds) and PJ Tucker (11 points, 11 rebounds). Chris Paul added 21 points and eight assists. Bradley Beal led Washington with 28 points.

JAZZ 108, WARRIORS 103

Rudy Gobert stopped a Golden State run with a late dunk, and Utah used superior 3-point shooting to record a victory in Salt Lake City. Jae Crowder, Joe Ingles and Kyle Korver combined for 13 3-pointers, helping the Jazz outscore the Warriors 48-30 from beyond the arc en route to a win that evened the season series at a win apiece. The Jazz held the Warriors scoreless over the final 1:13, including a missed 3-point attempt by Kevin Durant that could have tied the score. Ingles finished with a team-high 20 points, Crowder had 18, and Gobert and Donovan Mitchell added 17 apiece for the Jazz, who won their fourth straight at home. Stephen Curry put up a game-high 32 points and Durant added 30 for the Warriors, who had won their previous four road games.

RAPTORS 99, PACERS 96

Fred VanVleet made a 3-pointer with 25.9 seconds to play to give injury-depleted Toronto a one-point lead, and the Raptors overcame a 17-point deficit to defeat visiting Indiana. Kawhi Leonard had 28 points, 10 rebounds, six assists and four steals for the Raptors, who had lost their two previous games. Pascal Siakam had 17 points and seven rebounds, Greg Monroe added 13 points and eight rebounds and Van-

Vleet had 11 points. Victor Oladipo scored 20 points for the Pacers, who have lost two in a row after winning seven straight.

THUNDER 132, KINGS 113

Forced into an expanded role thanks to a pair of suspensions, Paul George turned in yet another big-time performance for Oklahoma City by scoring 43 points in a win at Sacramento. While George started in his typical spot, he also served as the Thunder's backup point guard after the NBA levied one-game suspensions to Dennis Schroder and Raymond Felton earlier in the day. Russell Westbrook had his eighth triple-double of the season (19 points, 11 rebounds, 17 assists). Buddy Hield scored a career-high 37 points for Sacramento, hitting seven 3-pointers. De'Aaron Fox added 28 points and 12 assists in the loss.

SUNS 111, CELTICS 103

Kelly Oubre Jr. bombed in a 3-pointer with 49.9 seconds left in his Phoenix debut, helping the Suns hold on to beat host Boston. In running their winning streak to four games, the Suns fell immediately behind 11-2 before pulling ahead by as many as six in the second quarter and eight in the third. The win at Boston was Phoenix's first since November 2014. Kyrie Irving led the Celtics with game highs in points (29) and assists (10).

PISTONS 129, TIMBERWOLVES 123 (OT)

Blake Griffin poured in 34 points, Reggie Bullock had a career-high 33, and Detroit topped Minnesota at Minneapolis. Reggie Jackson contributed 24 points and six assists for the Pistons while Andre Drummond supplied 16 points and 16 rebounds. Drummond's basket in the final second of regulation sent the game to overtime. Derrick Rose had 33 points and seven assists to lead Minnesota. Robert Covington tossed in 22 points, Karl-Anthony Towns and Andrew Wiggins added 16 apiece.

BUCKS 123, PELICANS 115

Giannis Antetokounmpo recorded 25 points, eight rebounds and eight assists to help Milwaukee post a victory over visiting New Orleans. Malcolm Brogdon added 16 points and seven rebounds, and Khris Middleton had 14 points for the Bucks, who won for the fifth time



HOUSTON: Jordan McRae #52 of the Washington Wizards shoots the ball during the game against the Houston Rockets on December 19, 2018 at the Toyota Center in Houston, Texas. —AFP

in the past six games. Anthony Davis registered 27 points and 11 rebounds in 29 minutes for the Pelicans despite missing the second quarter and the first half of the third due to illness. Jrue Holiday had 25 points and 12 assists for New Orleans.

76ERS 131, KNICKS 109

Joel Embiid had 24 points and 10 rebounds for his 28th double-double this season, carrying host Philadelphia past New York. Ben Simmons turned in his fourth triple-double of the season with 13 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists for the Sixers, who improved to 15-3 at home. Simmons has 16 career triple-doubles, good for second place in franchise history behind only Wilt Chamberlain. Tim Hardaway Jr. paced New York with 27 points while rookie Kevin Knox added 21. Enes Kanter had 15 for the Knicks, who have lost eight of their past nine games.

HORNETS 110, CAVALIERS 99

Kemba Walker snapped out of a recent slump with 30 points, and host Charlotte ended a two-game losing

streak by beating Cleveland. Walker erupted for 17 points in the third quarter, when the Hornets outscored the Cavs 41-29 to assume control. The Hornets scored only 41 points in the first half, a season low. Charlotte has won four of its past six. The Cavaliers, who were playing the second night of a back-to-back after winning at Indiana on Tuesday night, were led by Jordan Clarkson's 20 points.

TRAIL BLAZERS 99, GRIZZLIES 92

Damian Lillard scored 24 points to lead Portland past visiting Memphis. Meyers Leonard came off the bench to chip in 12 points and eight rebounds for the Trail Blazers, who won their third consecutive game. Mike Conley scored 23 points and Marc Gasol had 14 points and nine boards for the Grizzlies, who lost their fourth straight game and fell for the sixth time in seven outings.

NETS 96, BULLS 93

Joe Harris hit the go-ahead basket with 43 seconds left as Brooklyn continued its surge with a win at Chicago. Harris' driving layup off the

glass provided the 23rd and final lead change in a gritty defensive battle that also featured 21 ties. The victory was the seventh straight for the Nets, who have the longest active winning streak in the NBA. Spencer Dinwiddie scored a game-high 27 points and Jarrett Allen had 16 points and 12 rebounds for the Nets. Dunn scored 24 points for the Bulls, who have lost two straight and 12 of 14.

SPURS 129, MAGIC 90

LaMarcus Aldridge scored 20 points on 6-for-9 shooting in just three quarters of play, and San Antonio stayed hot from 3-point territory while posting an easy victory at Orlando. San Antonio has won two straight and six of seven. The loss snapped the Magic's two-game win streak and denied Orlando a season sweep of the Spurs. Marco Belinelli scored 18 for San Antonio, while DeMar DeRozan and Bryn Forbes added 17 points each. The Spurs outshot the Magic 64.9 percent to 38.2 percent from the floor. DJ Augustin led the Magic with 17 points. —Reuters

Sports

Chinese football imposes salary cap in new spending crackdown

CFA clamps down on big spending

SHANGHAI: Chinese football yesterday imposed a salary cap of 10 million yuan (\$1.45 million) a year for domestic players and vowed to kick teams out for so-called “yin-yang contracts”. The swingeing measures are part of a ramped-up effort by the Chinese Football Association (CFA) to clamp down on big spending and get teams to toe a tougher financial line. There will also be a limit on bonuses and other financial inducements for domestic players, according to state sports channel CCTV5 and other reports on an end-of-season CFA conference in Shanghai.

Foreign players are not affected by the salary cap, which will be in place for the new Chinese Super League (CSL) season when it starts in the spring. However, each club’s an-

nual expenditure cannot exceed 1.2 billion yuan in 2019, which will decline to 900 million in 2021. Two years ago, Brazilian attacking midfielder Oscar joined CSL side Shanghai SIPG from Chelsea for an Asian-record 60 million euros and Argentine forward Carlos Tevez signed for rivals Shanghai Shenhua, both earning some of the highest wages in world football.

Their high-profile arrivals, along with dozens of other foreign stars such as Brazilians Hulk and Paulinho, triggered fears that Chinese clubs were distorting the international transfer market with overinflated wages and fees. But the CFA has since moved to stop the splurge and force teams to focus on youth development instead, and there is un-

likely to be serious money spent when the winter transfer window opens on January 1. The CFA last year slapped a 100 percent transfer tax on the purchase of overseas players, which significantly reined in Chinese clubs, and the organization limited the number of foreigners each team can field to three a match.

‘NOT SUSTAINABLE’

Among a raft of other new measures, teams must submit contracts for their players and coaches by the end of the year as part of a crackdown on “yin-yang contracts”. Such contracts—one for the tax man and another with the real value of the agreement—are thought to be widespread in football and

showbusiness in China. If the CFA uncovers any tax-avoidance schemes, the offending player or coach face a ban of between one and three years. Their clubs can be deducted points or even kicked out the league. “The association will draw on the experience of advanced overseas leagues to design comprehensive measures to control high wages, high bonuses, high transfer fees and other issues,” Li Yuyi, CFA vice chairman, said earlier this week, according to Xinhua news agency. Li added: “If there’s only investment but no clear idea of what the long-term returns are, Chinese football is not sustainable. “Companies (that own teams) need to understand why invest, what are the rewards and what it contributes to society.” —AFP

Celtic go top as Rangers stutter in front of goal

GLASGOW: Celtic returned to the top of the Scottish Premiership after a 3-0 win over Motherwell as Rangers were held to a goalless draw by Hibernian on Wednesday. Steven Gerrard’s side had led the top flight after beating Hamilton and their Old Firm rivals’ loss to Hibernian on Saturday. Brendan Rodgers’ side have been beaten three times in the league so far—their worst record in a single campaign since the Northern Irishman took over in 2016.

Defender Anthony Ralston opened the scoring at Parkhead in his first appearance of the season after less than half an hour of play. Ralston slotted home after a delicate through ball from forward Odsonne Edouard. A second followed four minutes later from former Chelsea and Manchester City winger Scott Sinclair. James Forrest was brought down by the visitors’ Charles Dunne and Sinclair slotted home from the penalty spot for his third goal in the league this season.

The game was over as a contest seconds before the half-time whistle as 19-year-old Mikey Johnston netted his first competitive goal for the Bhoys after coming on for Edouard. Elsewhere, Rangers failed to score for only the second time in 11 matches as they were held to a 0-0 draw in Edinburgh. Gerrard’s outfit had 19 shots on goal including efforts from the league’s top goalscorer Alfredo Morelos and veteran Northern Ireland defender Gareth McAuley. On Saturday, seven-time straight champions Celtic welcome Dundee looking to extend their advantage at the summit of the table before Rangers’ trip to St Johnstone on Sunday. —AFP

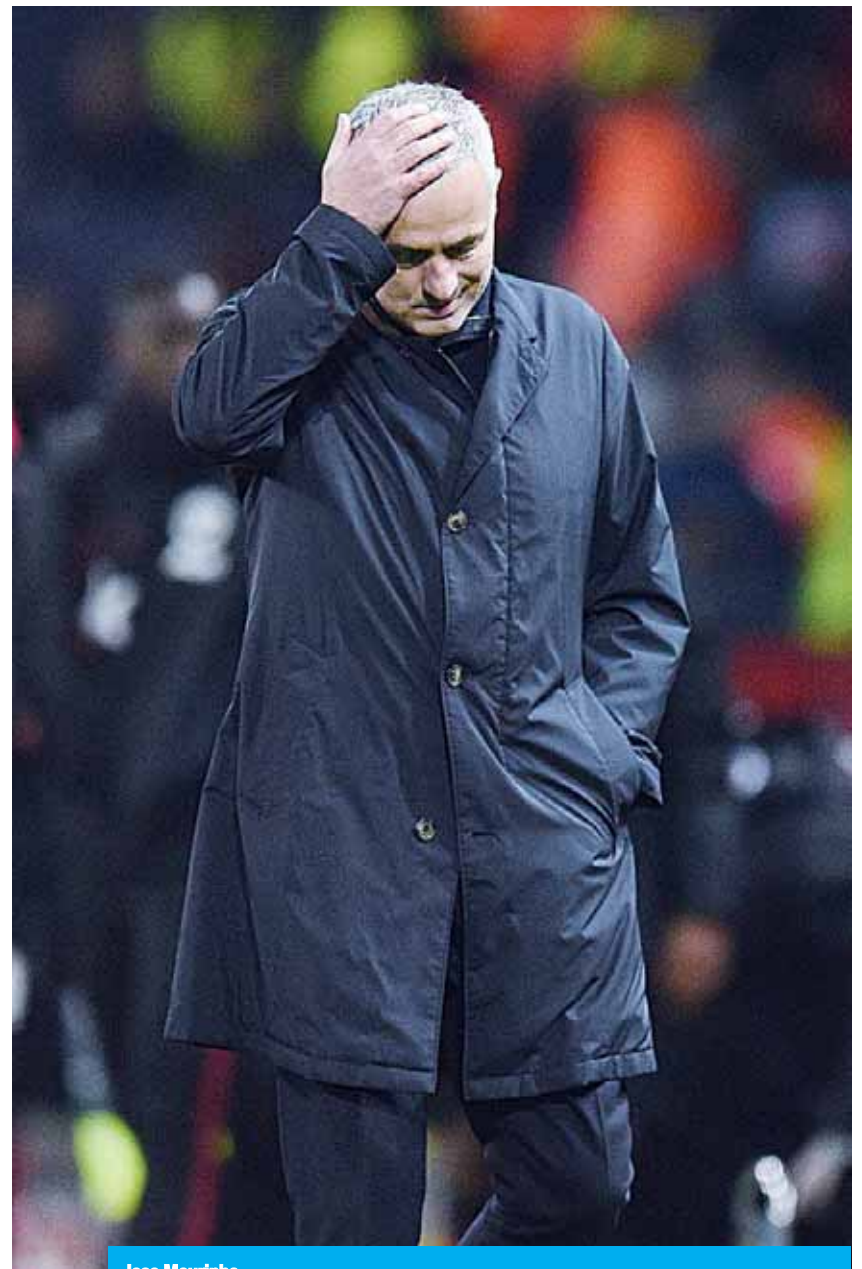
Mourinho ‘proud’ of Manchester United career

LONDON: Jose Mourinho said on Wednesday he is “immensely proud” of his time at Manchester United but refused to delve into the issues that played a part in his Old Trafford exit. Club bosses sacked the Portuguese manager on Tuesday following a 3-1 defeat at Anfield that left the 20-times champions an embarrassing 19 points behind league leaders Liverpool after just 17 matches.

Former United striker Ole Gunnar Solskjaer was announced as Mourinho’s temporary replacement on Wednesday as the club begins its search for a permanent replacement. Mourinho lifted the Europa League, League Cup and Community Shield in his first year at the club before finishing runners-up in both the league and FA Cup, but things have unravelled since the start of his third campaign at the helm. The United boss has made his frustrations about players and some of the club’s decisions clear over recent months but kept his feelings on such matters to himself in a statement released the day after his sacking.

“I have been immensely proud to wear the badge of Manchester United since the first day I arrived, and I believe all United supporters recognize this,” Mourinho said in a statement released to Britain’s Press Association. “Just as was the case with my previous clubs, I have worked with some wonderful people and I believe that some will be my friends for life. “I know that you are all aware of my professional principles. Each time a chapter is closed I show my deepest respect and I don’t make any comments about my former colleagues.”

The former Chelsea, Real Madrid and Inter Milan boss told Sky Sports News he has a future beyond United. “Manchester United has a future without me and I have a future without Manchester United, so why should I now be sharing with you or even with the supporters, any of my feelings? “It’s over. That’s me and that’s the way I’ve always been and I was always very critical of managers that leave clubs and then they come out and they speak about details of what happened and who is to blame for this kind of situation—that’s not me. I just want to finish, it happened yesterday and I’d like to say it’s game over.” —AFP



Jose Mourinho

Sports

Corruption-scarred Indonesia football grapples with a new match-fix scandal

Southeast Asian nation urged to tackle endemic problems

JAKARTA: Indonesian football's long-running struggle against corruption has been reignited with authorities promising a new crackdown after a senior official was caught trying to bribe a coach, the latest scandal in a league scarred by mismanagement and deadly hooliganism. But, dogged by years of match-fixing, violence and corruption rife at all levels of the game, analysts say the Southeast Asian country needs to do more than "lip service" to tackle the endemic problems.

Earlier this month an executive member of the Football Association of Indonesia (PSSI) resigned after a popular television talk show broadcast a recording of him offering the coach of Madura FC a bribe of approximately \$10,000 to throw a second division game. Hidayat, who like many Indonesians only uses one name, has been handed a three-year ban from football and fined by a PSSI disciplinary committee.

"Match-fixing exists everywhere, in league 1, 2 and 3. The problem is that the match-fixing issue has never been solved and (perpetrators) punished properly," football analyst Akmal Marhali told AFP. The PSSI announced the establishment of a special task force to address allegations of match-fixing following the

scandal, promising firm action against cheats. But critics like Marhali say there needs to be more than just "lip service" to solve a problem that so far seems to be out of the grasp of Indonesian authorities. "Perpetrators feel like they have impunity because there is no law enforcement," Marhali said.

'Open secret'

Allegations of match-fixing have swirled around Indonesian football for decades. Indonesian defender Mursyid Effendi was given a lifetime ban by FIFA after scoring a deliberate own goal in a Tiger Cup match against Thailand in 1998. The manager of Borneo-based Bontang FC, Camara Fode, received a lifetime ban for ordering his team to lose against PSLS Lhokseumawe, from Aceh, in a Premier League game in 2013. Players from both teams were also suspended.

The following year, several players from both PSS Sleman and PSIS Semarang were banned for life after scoring five deliberate own goals in the final minutes of the match to avoid a playoff clash. Long-time fans have become so used to mismanagement and corruption in the game that match-fixing is considered an "open secret", Dex Glenniza,

managing editor of website Pandit Football, told AFP. Players, referees, and club administrators are all involved in rigging matches, he said, adding that although gambling is illegal in Indonesia, fans often bet through international gambling websites or local bookies. Glenniza said funding shortfalls for player salaries and club operations, conflicts of interest within the PSSI and weak law enforcement have all made the game an "easy target" for crime syndicates. Azwan Karim, who served as secretary general of the PSSI between 2014 and 2016, said the PSSI could not tackle the problem alone. "The PSSI can only use its football judicial procedures," he said. "To have a deterrent effect in place, the government should be involved—the police especially."

History of problems

While it has a low international profile, Indonesia has attracted some Premier League players, including former Chelsea star Michael Essien and Tottenham Hotspur midfielder Didier Zokora. But Indonesian football has been tarnished on the global stage by a host of problems over the years—including months of unpaid wages and the deaths of at least two foreign players who were left unable to afford

medical care. An explosive row between the domestic association and government prompted FIFA to ban Indonesia from international competition in 2015. The ban lifted last year. As if to underline the game's struggle with corruption, former PSSI chairman Nurdin Halid once ran the organization from his jail cell where he was serving time on unrelated graft charges. Indonesia has in recent years also gained a reputation as Asia's most violent football nation.

In September, 23-year-old Persija Jakarta fan Haringga Sirla was clubbed to death by supporters of arch-rival Persib Bandung outside a stadium in the Javan city of Bandung. PSSI Vice Chairman Joko Driyono said the association had a zero tolerance approach to match-fixing, and was ready to work with law enforcement authorities on the issue. Yet, some observers of the Indonesian game are dubious this will result in firm action. "No more cherry-picking, anyone who breaks the ethical code and integrity of football must be punished," Marhali, who runs football watchdog Save Our Soccer, said. "The PSSI should no longer shield those who are involved in match-fixing—we know that some of those involved are PSSI members." — AFP

Juve juggernaut set to maintain record start against Roma

ROME: Cristiano Ronaldo was plastered all over the front pages of Italy's sports papers last weekend as the Portuguese talisman continued to take centre stage for Juventus as the side reached the latest landmark in a record-smashing start to the season. Gaining momentum since his high-profile move from Real Madrid in the close-season, the forward's penalty that sealed a 1-0 win for the Italian champions over local rivals Torino was also his new club's 5,000th Serie A goal.

The victory maintained their eight-point gap over second-placed Napoli and Massimiliano Allegri's side should make it to Christmas undefeated if they see off the challenge of struggling AS Roma on Saturday. The Turin derby victory was the latest evidence that this season's Juventus are not just a level above their rivals in this era, but on course to being considered one of the greatest Italian sides of all time. Juve have enjoyed domestic dominance for an extended period, winning seven league titles in a row and four consecutive Coppa Italia trophies, yet Ronaldo's arrival has helped them set a ferocious pace that has never been witnessed before.

The Turin side have made the best ever start to a Serie A season with 15 wins and a draw in 16 games, joining Manchester City (2017-18), Barcelona (2012-13) and Tottenham (1960-61) with the best openings to a campaign in Europe's top-five leagues. In Juventus' last five league games, they have traveled to AC Milan, Fiorentina and Torino, and hosted Inter and SPAL, winning all five matches without conceding a goal with a couple of Champions League group games added to the mix.

Some might argue that they have had some luck: Milan striker Gonzalo Higuain missed a penalty before being sent off, the post denied Inter, and Torino had strong penalty claims ignored. But rarely has a side had the aura of invincibility that Juventus have shown in the first half of this season. Roma's visit would have made



Juventus' Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo

for an exciting top of the table clash in seasons gone by, but with Allegri's juggernaut flattening all challengers and the capital club deep in crisis, the champions are big favourites to chalk up another win.

Coach Eusebio Di Francesco, his players and the club hierarchy were openly protested by their own fans during Roma's 3-2 win over Genoa last weekend, their first victory in six, and they travel to Turin a distant 22 points adrift of the leaders. "If anyone at the club is not committed to being part of a team effort, there's no place for them here," club president James Pallotta warned in a statement earlier this week. Earlier on Saturday, Napoli welcome SPAL and AC Milan host Fiorentina, before third-placed Inter, who ended a four-match winless run against Udinese last week, travel to bottom side Chievo, who continue to look for a first victory of the season. — Reuters

'Coal, football': Germany clubs honor last mine

DORTMUND: When Germany's last black coal mine shuts today, it is not just miners who may shed a tear—football fans too will mourn the end of a pillar of the nation's industrial wealth. "Coal, steel, football and beer are inseparable here, they permeate our culture and our community," said Borussia Dortmund chief executive Hans-Joachim Watzke ahead of the final shift in the mine at Bottrop at the heart of the Ruhr region. This industrial region—rich in coal, the basis German industry since the 19th century—is also the gritty home of some of Germany's best-loved football clubs.

"Without this mining history, we would not have the clubs we have today, which come directly from the world of mining," Manuel Neukirchner, director of the football museum in Dortmund, told AFP. Bundesliga clubs Dortmund and Schalke, the name of a suburb of the city of Gelsenkirchen, are the standard bearers of the densely populated Ruhr basin, colloquially known as the "Ruhrpott", that is home to five million people. Also here are Bochum and Duisburg, who currently play in the second division. Since World War II, the area has boasted seven professional clubs. In Europe, only London has a greater concentration of teams in such a small area.

The Bottrop mine lies 10.5 kilometers from Schalke's Veltins Arena. As a nod to their shared heritage, Schalke on Wednesday invited 2,000 miners for their Bundesliga match against Leverkusen and the name of one of the mine shafts was printed on the players' shirts. On Saturday, Dortmund players will take their turn to wear the thank-you message "Danke, Kumpel"—a word that in German means both "miner" and "buddy"—on their chests. "These tributes to a vanished world go straight to the heart of the fans," said Hartmut Hering, a local football expert. "For the clubs, it's 80 percent marketing and 20 percent conviction, but in the end everybody is a winner." — AFP

Sports

Marseille dumped out of French League Cup

Monaco book quarter-finals, ease pressure on Henry

PARIS: Marseille's miserable run of form continued with a penalty shoot-out defeat by Strasbourg in the French League Cup last 16 on Wednesday, while Monaco reached the quarter-finals to ease some of the pressure on Thierry Henry. After this latest setback at the Stade Velodrome, Rudi Garcia's OM have lost eight of their last 11 matches, after finishing bottom of their Europa League group with just one point and slipping to sixth in Ligue 1. "We're eliminated, that's what we'll remember, but we didn't deserve it," bemoaned coach Garcia. Jonas Martin gave Strasbourg an 18th-minute lead from the penalty spot, and Dimitri Payet missed a spot-kick for Marseille midway through the second half.

Luiz Gustavo leveled for the hosts with 10 minutes remaining to force penalties after a 1-1 draw, but Payet missed again and Marseille's latest tournament exit was confirmed when Adil Rami failed to con-

vert their fourth effort. "Dimitri Payet... In the period we're in, we need players who dare to try, who take responsibility," added Garcia. "He does everything to liven up the team's game." Monaco are rooted in the Ligue 1 bottom two and staring a serious relegation battle in the face after a catastrophic season so far, but the principality outfit did at least claim their third win in 23 matches by edging out Lorient 1-0.

Despite a lengthy delay after the match was suspended in the 15th minute due to heavy rain in Monaco, 18-year-old Guilian Biancone scored a 70th-minute winner for the home side. Lyon also booked their spot in the quarters, surviving a late Amiens comeback to win 3-2 with Moussa Dembele and Bertrand Traore on the score-sheet. Holders Paris Saint-Germain saw off second-tier Orleans 2-1 on Tuesday as Edinson Cavani equalled the French League Cup goalscoring record with his 15th goal in the competition. — AFP



MARSEILLE: Marseille's French defender Adil Rami (right) shoots and misses in a penalty shoot out leading to Strasbourg winning the French League Cup round of 16 football match between Marseille (OM) and Strasbourg (RCSA) at the Velodrome Stadium. — AFP

Historic deal will allow Cuba talent to sign with MLB

WASHINGTON: Cuba's impressive baseball talent will no longer have to risk defection and human trafficking to play for American clubs under a deal announced Wednesday after three years of negotiations. Major League Baseball, its players' union and the Cuban Baseball Federation made a groundbreaking agreement that will allow players from the Communist island nation to sign with North American teams despite political strains between the US and Cuban governments.

The MLB-Cuba deal would install a posting system similar to those used by MLB with Japanese, South Korean and Taiwanese leagues when players want to jump to the richer deals of the major leagues. For decades, Cuban officials have sought to keep players on homeland sides and their powerhouse national amateur squad. Players have been forced to defect, often making deals with shady characters and forced into human trafficking to escape Cuba, forced to go to other nations before being able to sign as free agents with Major League Baseball clubs.

One of today's top Cuban-born MLB players is White Sox first baseman Jose Abreu, who defected in 2013 and hailed the new deal. "Words cannot fully express my heartfelt joy and excitement," he said. "Knowing that the next generation of Cuban baseball players will not endure the unimaginable fate of past Cuban players is the realization of an impossible dream for all of us. "Dealing with the exploitation of smugglers and unscrupulous agencies will finally come to an end for the Cuban baseball player. To this date, I am still harassed."

Under the agreement, the Cuban federation must release all players who are age 25 with six years of experience and may also release younger talent. Players can negotiate and

sign with major league teams without leaving Cuba, with the federation collecting a release fee for any players signed by MLB clubs. Players will have standard US work visas allowing players and their families to travel and return to Cuba if they choose. Players would keep the money they earn rather than seeing much of it go to Cuban officials as under past deals for Cuban talent in Asian leagues.

"The next generation of Cuban baseball players will be able to sign an MLB contract while in Cuba, they will be able to keep their earnings as any other player in the world, they will be able to return to Cuba, they will be able to share with their families, and they will be able to play the sport they love against the best players in the world without fear and trepidation," Abreu said.

No more risky defections

Prime examples of Cuban players' hunger and hardships to reach the major leagues are Livan and Orlando "El Duque" Hernandez, both star pitchers in their youth. Younger brother Livan defected in 1995, planning an escape through Mexico with recruiter Joe Cubas. In 1997, Livan would help the Florida Marlins win the MLB crown, earning World Series Most Valuable Player honors.

Orlando Hernandez, in the wake of his brother's defection, was left off Cuba's 1996 Olympic gold medal team. On Christmas Day in 1997, Orlando defected in a small boat near the Bahamas and was eventually offered asylum in Costa Rica, making him a free agent and setting up a \$6.6 million deal with the New York Yankees, with whom he won World Series titles in 1998, 1999 and 2000. He later won another in 2005 with the Chicago White Sox. "For years, Major League Baseball has been seeking to end the trafficking of baseball players from Cuba by criminal organizations by creating a safe and legal alternative for those players to sign with major league clubs," said MLB commissioner Rob Manfred.

"We believe this agreement accomplishes that objective and will allow the next generation of Cuban players to pursue their dream without enduring many of the hardships experienced by current and former Cuban players who have played Major League Baseball." Cubans need no longer risk their lives to follow their baseball dreams, said MLB Players Asso-

ciation executive director Tony Clark. "Establishing a safe, legal process for entry to our system is the most important step we can take to ending the exploitation and endangerment of Cuban players," he said. "The safety and wellbeing of these young men remains our primary concern."

'Migrated' players can return

The Cuban Baseball Federation version of the announcement emphasized it would allow Cubans to play "without discrimination, in equal terms, in the MLB, without being compelled to break their ties of any kind with their country." The Cuban announcement of the deal said it would allow for the return of Cubans who "migrated to third countries with the purpose of trying to reach the major leagues and that for several reasons haven't achieved it, saying "they will be able to be reinserted in the Cuban national competitive system." The Cuban announcement noted it will not change things for those who have already departed Cuba for the major leagues, saying the deal begins "from the moment the accord is signed. Like all agreements, it does not imply a retroactive recognition of prior circumstances." — AFP



MATCHES ON TV LOCAL TIMING

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE	
Wolverhampton Wanderers FC v Liverpool	23:00
beIN SPORTS HD 2	
SPANISH LEAGUE	
Girona v Getafe CF	21:30
beIN SPORTS HD 3	
Real Sociedad v Deportivo Alaves	23:00
beIN SPORTS	
GERMAN BUNDESLIGA	
BV Borussia Dortmund v Borussia Monchengladbach	22:30
beIN SPORTS HD 5	

Tottenham knock Arsenal out of League Cup; Alli hit by bottle

Hazard fires Chelsea into League Cup semi-finals

LONDON: Mauricio Pochettino called for Arsenal to take “responsibility” after Tottenham star Dele Alli was hit by a bottle thrown from the crowd during his side’s 2-0 League Cup quarter-final win on Wednesday. South Korea forward Son Heung-Min put Tottenham ahead and Alli increased their advantage as they won at the Emirates Stadium for the first time in 10 visits dating back to 2010. The England midfielder’s decisive contribution provoked a disgraceful reaction from an Arsenal fan, who threw a plastic bottle that struck Alli on the back of the head in the 73rd minute. Alli rubbed his head but appeared unharmed as he responded by gesturing towards the Arsenal fans to indicate the scoreline.

“It is what it is. It made the goal even sweeter, and the win,” Alli said with a smile. But Tottenham manager Pochettino wasn’t so sanguine about the missile throwing and demanded Arsenal find the “stupid person”. “Yes I saw. When we play a derby we hate each other in a good way, but that looks in a bad way when you want to damage some people,” he said. “One stupid person made a mistake. I respect the Arsenal fans. I hope that Arsenal take some responsibility. “Through the camera you can identify. It wasn’t a problem but it could be a big issue. I think they will identify the people.”

There also appeared to be other objects thrown by Arsenal supporters into the section occupied by Tottenham’s fans as the atmosphere turned toxic. The shocking incidents came after a Tottenham fan was banned for four years after being found guilty of throwing a banana skin at Arsenal’s Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang when the teams met in an acrimonious

clash earlier this month. It continued a worrying trend of fan behavior after the recent alleged racist abuse of Manchester City’s Raheem Sterling by a Chelsea supporter.

Arsenal are scanning CCTV to find the culprit and Gunners boss Unai Emery condemned the incident, saying: “If there is one situation like this, it is not good behavior.” The unsavoury issues in the stands took the gloss off a mature Tottenham performance that underlined why Pochettino has been installed as the bookmakers’ favorite to succeed the sacked Jose Mourinho as Manchester United’s next permanent manager. Pochettino has yet to win a major trophy in his four-year reign at Tottenham, or in his previous jobs at Espanyol and Southampton.

But if the 46-year-old does take charge of United at the end of the season, once Ole Gunnar Solskjaer finishes his spell as interim boss, he remains in with a chance of leaving with silverware back in the Tottenham trophy cabinet. Tottenham have not won a major prize since lifting the League Cup in 2008 and they will face London rivals Chelsea over two legs for a place in the final. Eden Hazard came off the bench to score Chelsea’s 84th-minute winner in their 1-0 victory against Bournemouth at Stamford Bridge. “Chelsea is a great team and it’s going to be very tough but we are excited,” Pochettino said. In the other semi-final, holders Manchester City take on third-tier Burton.

THRILLING SPURS

Against the run of play, Tottenham gave a thrilling glimpse of their class as they snatched the

departure earlier this season when Bayern were suffering from a dip in form. With Dortmund facing in-form Gladbach on Friday, Bayern can hope to make up further lost ground. “It is important to use such chances (from Dortmund’s defeat),” said Bayern CEO Karl-Heinz Rummenigge. “Six points are still a lot but what will be important is the points we may get in Frankfurt.”

Kovac has some concerns with wingers Kingsley Coman and Serge Gnabry picking up injuries on Wednesday and injured defender Jerome Boateng still doubtful for Saturday’s encounter. Gnabry had to be taken off with a muscle injury after 28 minutes. “We will have to see with Serge what the tests show. Hopefully there is nothing damaged in terms of muscle.” Dortmund’s shock loss against promoted Fortuna Duesseldorf has rattled the leaders who are also almost out of central defenders for the game against Gladbach. Scoring goals has been no problem for Dortmund this season. But Gladbach are almost equally efficient up front, with the league’s second best attack, and Dortmund are missing injured defenders Manuel Akanji, Abdou Diallo and Dan-Axel Zagadou. Under-23 player Amos Pieper was brought in to train with the team on Wednesday but coach Lucien Favre has not yet decided on his backline. “He (Pieper) is an option,” Dortmund coach Lucien Favre said. “But we are still thinking about all of it. I cannot tell you yet how we will play.” “It was bound to happen,” Favre said of the defeat. “It was just a game. We must now be thinking only of Friday now. We hate losing.” —Reuters



LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur’s English striker Harry Kane (left) and Arsenal’s French defender Laurent Koscielny (right) battle for the ball during the English League Cup quarter-final football match between Arsenal and Tottenham Hotspur on December 19, 2018. —AFP

lead with a lethal counter-attack in the 21st minute. When Lucas Moura’s aerial challenge deflected the ball into Alli’s path, the Tottenham midfielder instinctively clipped a superb pass over the Arsenal defense. Son anticipated the delivery with a perfectly-timed run behind the flat-footed Nacho Monreal and kept his nerve to slot a fine finish past Petr Cech. Aaron Ramsey was inches away from equalising when he met Alex Iwobi’s cross with a volley that cannoned back off a post.

Arsenal’s profligacy proved costly as Pochettino’s

men turned up the heat after half-time. Pochettino went for the kill as he sent on Harry Kane for his first appearance in the tournament since 2015. It was an inspired move as Kane played a key role in Tottenham’s second goal in the 59th minute. When Cech miskicked a clearance straight to Kane, the Tottenham striker floated a superb pass to Alli, who beat the off-side trap before clipping a majestic finish over the Arsenal keeper. Just 17 days after Arsenal’s 4-2 Premier League win against Pochettino’s team, this was a welcome early Christmas present for Tottenham. —AFP

Rejuvenated Bayern promise nail-biting yearender

MUNICH: Only a few weeks ago Borussia Dortmund looked unbeatable in the Bundesliga, with champions Bayern Munich languishing in sixth place and seemingly out of title contention. But with the final matchday of the year ahead of the winter break looming this weekend, rejuvenated Bayern could now move to within three points of the leaders, with a win at Eintracht Frankfurt on Saturday. The Bavarians, who edged past RB Leipzig 1-0 on Wednesday, have now won their last four league matches, and are level on 33 points with second-placed Borussia Muenchengladbach. Dortmund, who on Tuesday suffered their first league loss of the season, are top on 39. “We used Dortmund’s assist to close in,” Bayern coach Niko Kovac told reporters.

“We showed a will to win against Leipzig. Now we must again use all our power on Saturday and get the three points in (Eintracht) Frankfurt,” he said of the first league meeting against his former club. Kovac has every right to be brimming with confidence given he was teetering on the brink of

Suarez and Messi rekindling magic

BARCELONA: It took Barcelona forwards Lionel Messi and Luis Suarez time to adjust to the loss of their third musketeer Neymar but they have forged on as a fearsome double act more prolific than the combined efforts of most other teams in La Liga. With Messi the top scorer in Spain’s top flight with 14 goals and Suarez joint-second on 11, only Sevilla, Levante and next opponents Celta Vigo have managed to score more than the deadly South American duo. Messi has come into his own in his last two outings, putting on an exhibition of free kick taking against Espanyol and ripping Levante apart in last week’s 5-0 thrashing with a hat-trick and two assists. Suarez, who endured a long goal drought last season as he struggled without the space Neymar’s dazzling runs used to open up for him, has rediscovered the sharpness which led to him scoring a remarkable 40 league goals in the 2015/16 campaign.

He broke the deadlock against Levante by volleying in a Messi cross and also struck against Espanyol, two of seven goals he has scored in his last six league outings, including a hat-trick against Real Madrid. “Luis and Leo are the best strike partnership in the world right now,” said Barca’s Gerard

Pique last week. “Luis has goals in his veins and we’ve already said everything about Leo. We have a lot of firepower up front.” The strikers’ combined 25 goals, more than half of Barca’s haul this season, have helped lift the Catalans three points clear of Sevilla and Atletico Madrid at the top of the standings and five ahead of Real Madrid.

Ernesto Valverde’s side will expect to preserve that gap after tomorrow’s game with Celta, typically tough opponents at their Balaidos stadium but who usually bring the best out of Barca, and particularly Messi and Suarez, at the Nou Camp. It was against Celta when Messi audaciously passed to Suarez to score from a penalty in a 6-1 thumping in 2016 in which the Uruguayan scored a hat-trick, while Messi struck twice in 5-0 thrashings of the Galicians in the league and Copa del Rey in the last two years.

Even when Celta managed to hold Barca to a 2-2 draw at the Nou Camp last December, Messi and Suarez both scored. Celta sacked manager Antonio Mohamed earlier this season and have shown signs of improvement under Miguel Cardoso, rising to ninth in the standings. Second-placed Sevilla visit Leganes on Sunday, while Atletico Madrid, rocked by reports that Bayern Munich have paid the release clause of their World Cup winning defender Lucas Hernandez, host Espanyol tomorrow. Real Madrid could lose ground as they are playing Al Ain in the final of FIFA’s Club World Cup tomorrow. —Reuters



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LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur's English midfielder Dele Alli (2nd right obscured) celebrates scoring their second goal with teammates during the English League Cup quarter-final football match between Arsenal and Tottenham Hotspur on December 19, 2018. — AFP

Spurs knock Arsenal out of League Cup

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