



Premier reshuffles Cabinet after four ministers resign

New ministers have no political background; will take oath in Assembly today

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah yesterday made a limited reshuffle to his Cabinet after four ministers resigned, including the oil minister, and their resignations were accepted by HH the Amir. An official statement said the Amir accepted the resignations of Minister of Oil and Electricity and Water Bakheet Al-Rasheedi, Minister of Social Affairs and Labor Hind Al-Sabeeh, Minister of Public Works Hossam Al-Roumi and Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs Adel Al-Khorafi.

All the resigned ministers were under the threat of being grilled by lawmakers over allegations of corruption and mismanagement. The prime minister appointed four new members to the Cabinet to replace the outgoing ministers and moved



Khaled Al-Fadhel



Fahd Al-Rasheedi



Mariam Al-Aqeel



Saad Al-Kharraz

some portfolios to existing ministers.

The new ministers are: Minister of Oil, Electricity and Water Khaled Al-Fadhel, an academic and a newcomer to the political field; Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs and State Minister for Municipality Fahd Al-Rasheedi, who is also a newcomer to the political field and hails from the Rasheedi tribe, one of the

largest bedouin tribes in the country. Saad Al-Kharraz was appointed Minister of Social Affairs and Labor while Mariam Al-Aqeel was appointed Minister of State for Economic Affairs. All the members are newcomers to the Cabinet as well as to politics.

In addition, Minister of Commerce and Industry Khaled Al-Roudhan

was also given the services ministry and Minister of State for Housing Jenan Bushehri was given the public works portfolio, while Justice Minister Fahd Al-Afasi was given responsibility for the ministry of state for National Assembly affairs. The new changes will spare the prime minister threats by lawmakers to grill those ministers because all the

resigned ministers have been threatened to be grilled by MPs.

Sabeeh, Khorafi and Rasheedi were all grilled - the first two more than once - while Roumi was under the threat of being questioned over his ministry's failure to face heavy rains. A number of MPs gave a cautious welcome to the new ministers and reshuffled Cabinet, but they

warned that they will continue to monitor the performance of the Cabinet.

MP Riyadh Al-Adasani welcomed removing some ministers but said that he will continue to see how the new ministers carry out their duties. MP Omar Al-Tabtabaei praised the prime minister for accepting the resignation of the oil minister and warned that the new oil minister has a big task ahead of him. Tabtabaei and MP Abdulwahab Al-Babtain grilled Rasheedi in May over alleged squandering of public funds by top oil executives. The government formed an independent committee to probe the allegations and found some of them were true, the lawmaker said. Tabtabaei also warned the commerce minister that a senior official in the ministry was dealing with suspicious people and urged him to investigate.

News in brief

Bahrain summons Iraqi diplomat

DUBAI: Bahrain's Foreign Ministry summoned the deputy charge d'affaires of the embassy of Iraq yesterday to denounce footage of former Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Al-Maliki criticizing Manama's crackdown on the Shiite opposition. Maliki who now heads an Iraqi coalition called "the State of Law", attended a meeting last week organized by the February 14 movement, a Bahraini activist group which Manama designated a terrorist group in 2014. Bahrain described Maliki's statements as "blatant and unacceptable interference in the internal affairs of Bahrain". — Reuters

UAE princess living with family

DUBAI: The UAE said yesterday Princess Sheikha Latifa bint Mohammed Al-Maktoum, daughter of Dubai's ruler, was at home and living with her family. Rights groups had called on the UAE to disclose the whereabouts and condition of Sheikha Latifa, following reports in the international media that she was forcibly returned after fleeing the state. "At the request of the family, on 15th December 2018, Mary Robinson, former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and former President of Ireland, met with Her Highness Sheikha Latifa in Dubai," the UAE foreign ministry said. "Photographs taken during the afternoon they spent together have been shared, with their consent." — Reuters (See Page 24)

Shabaab bomber executed

MOGADISHU: The mastermind of militant car bombs that killed 26 people and injured nearly 40 others in Mogadishu in 2017 was executed in Somalia yesterday, the prosecutor of the military court said. Abdulle Bule said Al-Shabaab member Abdikadir Abukar was convicted of being behind a hotel bombing that killed 10, one near the ministry of sport that killed nine, and a car bomb near an Italian restaurant in the capital that killed seven. Al-Shabaab wants to overthrow the weak, UN-backed Somali government and impose strict Islamic law. — Reuters

Turkmenistan launches messaging app

ASHGABAT: The repressive central Asian nation of Turkmenistan, where the likes of Facebook and WhatsApp are banned, yesterday launched its first messaging app. The privately developed BizBarde app will "allow the exchange of messages, files, photos and videos," the state Yaslyk television station said. "The dream to create the first Turkmen messenger came to me a long time ago," CEO Eziz Beknazarov said. The service was tested for several months before its launch and some 5,000 people have already downloaded the app, he added. The application is available via the Google Android platform as well as Apple's iOS and Microsoft Windows. — AFP

Pilgrims gather in Bethlehem on Christmas Eve

BETHLEHEM: Pilgrims from across the world gathered in Bethlehem yesterday for Christmas Eve, queuing to see the grotto where Jesus (PBUH) is believed to have been born and taking in a festive parade. Midnight mass was to be held in Bethlehem later, while Pope Francis was also due to hold mass at the Vatican as Christians celebrate the traditional day of Jesus' birth after a tumultuous year.

Much of that tumult has come from Washington, and the festive spirit was dampened there as the national Christmas tree went dark on the third day of a US government shutdown. The US National Park Service said that it would remain unlit and closed to the public "until further notice," with checks being made for damage following an attempt by an intruder on Friday to climb the tree. The tree, whose spectacular lights were switched on at a ceremony attended by Trump earlier this month, became a forlorn symbol of the dysfunction gripping Washington two years into his presidency.

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BETHLEHEM: Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem Pierbattista Pizzaballa is greeted by a crowd as he arrives at Manger Square in front of the Church of the Nativity yesterday. — AFP

Sharif handed seven years in jail for graft

ISLAMABAD: Former Pakistani leader Nawaz Sharif was sentenced to seven years in prison for corruption yesterday, state media reported, the latest conviction in a series of allegations which saw him ousted from power last year. Sharif, a three-time prime minister, has denied all the charges against him and claims he is being targeted by the country's powerful security establishment.

Yesterday's conviction, centered on

family businesses in the Middle East, is his second stemming from a corruption investigation spurred by the Panama Papers leak, and comes as new Prime Minister Imran Khan has vowed to tackle endemic graft in Pakistan. He was taken into custody and will be sent to a prison in Lahore, and was also fined 1.5 billion rupees (\$10.8 million), according to state-run Pakistan Television.

Security was tight at the court, with some scuffles breaking out between Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) supporters and security forces, who responded with tear gas. Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, who succeeded Sharif as prime minister last year, said the PML-N would appeal the verdict but

Continued on Page 24



ISLAMABAD: Supporters of Pakistan's former prime minister Nawaz Sharif shout slogans against the court decision outside the anti-corruption court yesterday. — AFP

Indonesia hunts for survivors of volcano tsunami

CARITA, Indonesia: Dozens of filled body bags were hauled away from buildings flattened by Indonesia's volcano-triggered tsunami yesterday, as the death toll climbed to 373 and search teams pushed on with the grim hunt for corpses. Rescue teams used their bare hands, diggers and other heavy equipment to haul debris from the stricken area around the Sunda Strait, as thousands were evacuated to higher ground.

Experts warned that more deadly waves could slam the devastated region

after Saturday night's disaster, as questions swirled over why the killer wave caught a disaster-prone country's monitors completely off guard. The powerful tsunami swept over popular beaches on southern Sumatra and western Java and inundated tourist hotels and coastal settlements. Some 1,459 people were injured with another 128 missing, disaster agency spokesman Sutopo Purwo Nugroho said, giving an updated toll late yesterday.

"The lack of a tsunami early warning system caused a lot of victims because people did not have the time to evacuate," he said. Hundreds of buildings were destroyed by the wave that left a tangled mess of corrugated steel roofing, timber and rubble at Carita beach, a popular spot for day-trippers on the west coast of Java.

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This aerial picture taken on Dec 23, 2018 shows the Anak Krakatoa volcano erupting in the Sunda Straits off the coast of southern Sumatra and the western tip of Java. — AFP

Local

Amir receives new undersecretary, municipal officials, Qatar's envoy

Amir invited to attend opening of new building of Qatar Museum



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Minister of State for Housing Affairs Dr Jenan Ramadan Boushehri and the newly assigned Undersecretary of Ministry of Communications Kholoud Al-Shehab. —Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives a book of Kuwait's Municipal history since 1932, presented by Municipal Council Chairman Osama Al-Otaibi.



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives an invitation from Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, delivered by Qatar's Ambassador to Kuwait Bandar Al-Attiya.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah met yesterday at Bayan Palace Minister of State for Housing Affairs Dr Jenan Ramadan Boushehri, who introduced the newly assigned Undersecretary of Ministry of Communications Kholoud Al-Shehab. Minister Boushehri also introduced the new undersecretary to His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah yesterday.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir met Municipal Council Chairman Osama Al-Otaibi and Deputy Chairman Abdullah Al-Mehry, who presented His Highness with a special edition book of Kuwait's Municipal history since 1932. His Highness the Amir also met with Qatar's Ambassador to Kuwait Bandar Al-Attiya, who handed His Highness the Amir a written letter from Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, inviting him to the opening of the new building of Qatar Museum in Doha next March. The meetings were attended by Minister of Amiri Diwan affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah. —KUNA



KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Minister of State for Housing Affairs Dr Jenan Boushehri and the newly assigned Undersecretary of Ministry of Communications Kholoud Al-Shehab.



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with Minister of State for Housing Affairs Dr Jenan Boushehri and the newly assigned Undersecretary of Ministry of Communications Kholoud Al-Shehab.

Amir's representative offers condolences to Saudi Royal Family



RIYADH: Representative of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Deputy Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah (right) offers condolences to Prince Al-Waleed bin Talal bin Abdulaziz. —Amiri Diwan

RIYADH: Representative of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Deputy Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah yesterday offered condolences to Prince Al-Waleed bin Talal bin

Abdulaziz and the Royal Family on the demise of Prince Talal Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud. His Highness the Amir's representative was accompanied by Amiri Diwan's Advisor DrYousef Al-Ebrahim and Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah. —KUNA

Parliament to discuss credit info, mental health laws

KUWAIT: The National Assembly is scheduled to hold its regular session today and tomorrow to discuss a number of items on its agenda, including a second deliberation on drafting a law to manage credit infor-

mation exchange, in addition to a draft law on mental health and patient care. It will kick off the session with ratifying amendments, questions, and messages, in addition to reviewing the Amiri speech at opening of the third session of the 15th legislative term in order to refer it to the parliamentary committee tasked with a response to the speech. The two-day session will also discuss parliamentary committees' reports on investigation requests regarding health ministry's financial, legal, and administrative violations, and infrastructure deficit to deal with effects of the heavy rains that hit the country recently. —KUNA



The National Assembly.

Deputy FM hosts envoys of Croatia, Cuba



KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah meets with Cuban Ambassador to Kuwait Fernando Perez Maza.



KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah meets with Croatian Ambassador to Kuwait Amir Muharemi. —KUNA photos

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah yesterday met with Croatian Ambassador to Kuwait Amir Muharemi on bilateral relations and the latest regional and international developments. Jarallah then received Cuban Ambassador to Kuwait Fernando Perez Maza and discussed ties between both countries, along with the current situations in regional and international domains. Assistant Foreign Minister for the Deputy Foreign Minister's Office Ambassador Ayham Al-Omar was present at the meeting.

Separately, Kuwaiti Minister of Finance Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf discussed on Sunday with his Bahraini counterpart Sheikh Salman bin Khalifa Al-Khalifa economic relations between the two countries. The meeting also tackled views and joint ambitions by the two countries, and the latest financial developments in the region, a statement by the finance ministry said. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Minister of Finance Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf meets with his Bahraini counterpart Sheikh Salman bin Khalifa Al-Khalifa.

Local

Labor unions slam early retirement bill: 'Undermines citizens' rights'

Minister sets prices for 41 medications, pharmaceutical products, food supplements

By Meshaal Al-Enezi and A Saleh

KUWAIT: A number of labor unions yesterday strongly rejected the early retirement bill the parliament recently voted on and initially passed pending a second discussion. Oil and Petrochemical Industries Workers Federation (OPIWF), Kuwait Trade Union Federation (KTUF), as well as the employees syndicates at Kuwait Oil Company (KOC), EQUATE, Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) and Kuwait Oil Tankers Company (KOTC) yesterday held a press conference to discuss the bill they described as "undermining citizens' rights." Speaking at the conference, OPIWF Chairman Mohammed Al-Hajeri stressed that the bill undermines the rights of citizens and strongly condemned how quickly decisions related to the fate of tens of thousands of Kuwaitis are made.

Hajeri also expressed surprise on excluding a bill proposed and agreed upon last year to be substituted with one far "below the aspirations" of citizens working in both the public and the private sectors, who ought to be consulted in such matters. "MPs are the voice of the people who elected them to protect their rights," he said, noting that the current bill will only benefit 6,000-6,500 employees.

Chairman of EQUATE employees syndicate Mohammed Hassan Al-Ajmi urged both the government and the parliament to reconsider the bill to help citizens overcome the impact of soaring prices and the high cost of living. Ajmi also called for reducing the age of retirement to 50, especially in tough jobs such as oil sector ones. Chairman of KNPC employees syndicate Obaid Farhoud labeled the new bill as 'unfair' and called for adopting the one agreed upon last year. KTUF Deputy Chairman Ahmed Al-Daihani totally rejected the new bill and called for making pensions equal to retirees' total salaries.



Ministry increases work hours to seven

Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah yesterday issued a new ministerial resolution on setting a fixed list of prices for 41 medications, pharmaceutical products and food supplements with the aim of keeping their prices at minimal rates. The new resolutions were made upon recommendations by the medicine pricing committee headed by Ministry of Health's assistant undersecretary for medicine and food control Dr Abdullah Monjed Al-Bader, which had studied various items and original price documents endorsed by Kuwait's embassies in the countries of origin with the ultimate goal of fulfilling GCC leaders' desire to keep the prices of medicine in GCC states the lowest.

Meds prices

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Fire extinguishers

Outgoing Minister of State for Municipal Affairs Hossam Al-Roumi rejected a proposal by the Municipal Council to mandate the presence of fire extinguishers in private residences. In a letter he sent to the council concerning the minutes of a meeting held on Nov 26, Roumi approved all resolutions except a proposal made by member Meshaal Al-Hamdhan on safety precautions at private residences that call for installing smoke and gas detectors and having fire extinguishers in all houses.

vehicles, adding that the applications are categorized because the value varies from one application to another. He said around 2,700 applications are being currently studied and classified and that applicants will be compensated soon.

Work hours increased

The Ministry of Electricity and Water increased working hours based on Civil Service Commission decisions with regards to setting work hours - from 7:30 am until 2:30 pm. The decision will go into effect from Jan 2 for all ministry employees. Al-Anbaa reported yesterday. Informed sources said this decision goes along with the commission's decisions to extend working hours, leaving the setting of time to authorities to suit each department. They said all logistics will be adjusted to agree with the decision.

Rain compensation

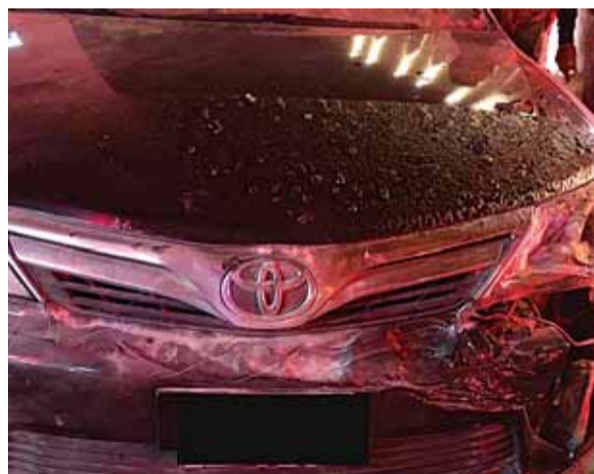
Finance Ministry Undersecretary Saleh Al-Sarawi said 80 victims of the recent heavy rains have received compensation for the damage they suffered from. Sarawi added that compensations included damage to houses, furniture and

Worker hurt in Farwaniya laundry shop fire

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: The public relations and information department at Kuwait Fire Service Directorate (KFS) said fire broke out in a laundry shop in Farwaniya. Farwaniya firemen found there was an explosion and a fire that injured a worker. The fire also spread to a vehicle across the store. The blaze was put out.

Meanwhile, KFS held a meeting with the entities that will participate in 'Shamel 5' exercises on earthquakes and natural disasters, and how each side will confront accidents. Head of the 'Shamel 5' exercise team Colonel Muath Al-Hammad opened the meeting and explained the problems in the exercises and informed each side of its duties. The bodies participating in the exercise are: Defense, interior, health information, public works, electricity and water ministries, National Guard, KFS, Kuwait Municipality, Environment Public Authority, Kuwait Oil Company, Kuwait National Petroleum Company, EQUATE, Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research and Kuwait Red Crescent Society.



Fatal accident

A citizen was killed when his car flipped over on Mutlaa Road. Police responded to a call about the car that caught fire. The citizen was rushed to hospital but was pronounced dead on arrival. An investigation was opened to determine what caused the accident.

Investigation

Deputy Premier and Interior Minister Lt Gen Sheikh Khalid Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah ordered the formation of a fact finding committee to investigate a video clip in which a person accuses interior ministry personnel of abusing their authority after they beat him.



Man raped in Sulaibiya farms area

KUWAIT: A man was sent to the public prosecution for kidnapping and raping another man. The victim, Egyptian, went to the police station and told police that as he was walking, a car stopped and the driver asked him to get in, saying that he wanted to give him rice and oil. The suspect then drove to Sulaibiya farms area, raped the victim and left. Detectives were able to identify the suspect, a Syrian man in his 50s, and found him in a Dhajeej cafe. They waited next to his car and before getting in, he was arrested and later identified in a line up by the victim.

Reckless driver arrested

Farwaniya police arrested an adolescent who was showing off in his car in front of a girls' school. His car then flipped over. The youth escaped with the car's license plates, but he was identified. The car was taken to the police station, while the suspect was arrested. He handed in the license plates and was sent to the juvenile department.

Suspected thief held

Facilities detectives arrested a man in Burqan oilfield area with 57 pieces of copper he is suspected of stealing. Detectives who were on patrol spotted an SUV, but the motorist attempted to escape when they approached him. The man, Indian, was arrested and sent to Ahmadi police station.

Collapse

A citizen found the spot where his car was parked had collapsed and the rear side of the car had fallen in the hole. An informed source said investigations are being made to find out the reason of the collapse.

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Local

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A bee rests on a flower in a garden in Kuwait. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

ACICO Group sponsors 'BE STRONG' initiative for women empowerment

line with '16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence' campaign

KUWAIT: In line with the international campaign '16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence', ACICO Group sponsored the 'BE STRONG' initiative: a functional, self-defense training program for women. The initiative was launched by Balsam International, represented by Kuwaiti fencing champion, Balsam Al-Ayoub, in cooperation with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) regional office and the US self-defense training program 'Divas in Defense'.

'BE STRONG' was launched on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, which is managed by UN Women. This year's advocacy theme was Orange the World with the hashtag #HearMeToo; the theme symbolized a brighter future and a world free of violence against girls and women.

This local initiative is part of a global development project that aims at ending violence against women by offering free of cost self-defense courses, using sport as a tool for change, development and spreading peace; thereby driving true sustainability and advancing gender equality.

On this occasion, Deputy Chief Executive Officer of ACICO Group, Ghosson Al-Khaled, said: "ACICO Group always strives to support and encourage community events such as these that have a positive impact on the community, particularly initiatives that focus on women and important international and national issues. Our sponsorship of this particular initiative aims at supporting their goals of providing a platform to empower women, as it focuses on fostering women's innate strength and empowering girls to face life's challenges and any violence they might come up against."

Khaled added that, as a Kuwaiti born and bred company, ACICO Group has always sought to be socially-conscious, set a positive example and impact real change

in order to actively contribute towards building a stronger local community. Accordingly, ACICO Group seeks to best serve its community, by engaging directly with people on matters of social importance and creating a safe environment that is conducive to self-expression and social development.



Part of global development project

Balsam Al-Ayoub lauded ACICO Group for its sponsorship of this initiative as well as its ongoing support of community-based issues. Ayoub further noted that 'BE STRONG' was launched as a vital service to the community to become a part of the solution to stop violence against women and girls in Kuwait by empowering women and girls both physically and mentally and raising awareness of domestic violence.

Ayoub added that, following the remarkable success of last year's 'BE STRONG' self-defense workshops, where 647 women and girls from 35 nationalities were trained, this year's initiative featured free certificated workshops for women and girls at the Kuwait Sports Club, schools, universities and at both private and public venues as requested. ACICO Group remains strongly



committed to its positive role within the community. For this reason, the Group's leading social responsibility program strategically focuses on making a significant social and national impact. ACICO Group works to har-

ness its expertise and resources to support individuals and groups, in addition to offering its support to many deserving and far-reaching local organizations, initiatives and programs.

Commercial Bank, 'Green Hands' clean beaches around Kuwait

KUWAIT: In collaboration with the Kuwait Green Hands Environmental Team, the Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK) recently launched a beach cleaning campaign to clean beaches around Kuwait from waste and protect wildlife. Commenting on the campaign, CBK's deputy director for corporate communication Amani Al-Wer'a stressed that the campaign reflects the bank's keenness on protecting various beaches and marine life. Notably, the Kuwait Green Hands Environmental Team is a voluntary team with a clear vision towards creating more environment-friendly and sustainable areas as well as spreading the culture of professional environmental voluntary activities. It includes over 80 members from various nationalities and ages.



Local

Palestinian Embassy honors Kuwaiti fencer who refused to play against an Israeli player

Ambassador thanks Shatti for 'noble Arab national action'



KUWAIT: The Ambassador of Palestine to Kuwait Rami Tahboub honors Kuwaiti fencer Abdul Aziz Al-Shatti at the Kuwait Fencing Federation yesterday. — Photos by Joseph Shagra



A group photo after the honoring.

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The Palestinian Embassy honored Kuwaiti fencing champion Abdul Aziz Al-Shatti yesterday at the Kuwait Fencing Federation in Daiya. Shatti, who recently withdrew from the World Fencing Championships in Switzerland, refused to play against an Israeli player.

Ambassador of Palestine to Kuwait Rami Tahboub appreciated such actions by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Kuwait's govern-



The Ambassador of Palestine to Kuwait Rami Tahboub presents a medal on behalf of the Palestinian community in Kuwait to Kuwaiti fencer Abdul Aziz Al-Shatti.



Very big step by a Kuwaiti citizen and champion

his refusal to fight the Israeli player stems from his Arab convictions. Secretary of the Kuwait Fencing Federation Thuini Al-Hajeri stressed that Palestine and its cause is the first priority of Kuwait led by His Highness the Amir, and will remain so until the Palestinian people have full rights and independence.

At the end of the ceremony, Tahboub presented a commemorative gift to Shatti. He was also given a medal by members of the Palestinian community in Kuwait in recognition of his heroic position. The event was attended by the media, President of the Kuwait Fencing Federation Abdullah Al-Mutairi, Secretary Hajeri, members of the federation and a number of members of the Palestinian community in Kuwait.



The Ambassador of Palestine to Kuwait Rami Tahboub presents a commemorative plaque to Kuwaiti fencer Abdul Aziz Al-Shatti.

WHO appreciates Kuwait's aid to cancer patients in Syria



a time when public health services were disrupted in Syria. In a statement, the organization expressed its gratitude to Kuwait for its contribution of \$1 million for cancer care in Syria, which immediately influenced health situations of vulnerable families in Syria.

Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the UN and

International Organizations Ambassador Jamal Al-Ghunaim said that Kuwait is proactive in funding programs of WHO to vaccinate Syrian children against polio, as well as programs in Yemen, Iraq, Afghanistan and others for health care. Ghunaim said that the upcoming visit of WHO's Director General Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus will open new horizons for cooperation between Kuwait and international organizations of health care.

WHO assessment of cancer care services in eight hospitals in various Syrian governorates in 2016 revealed a sharp decrease of equipment, staff and can-

cer care. With Kuwait's donation, WHO has obtained cancer medications and supplies distributed to Syria's main hospitals.

"WHO has worked with the oncology units in Syria's public referral hospitals to develop a list of high-value, specific cancer medicines," WHO Representative in Syria Elizabeth Hoff said.

"Through this carefully tailored approach and close collaboration with hospital staff, WHO has been able to procure enough medicines to cover 40,000 treatment courses and help fill critical gaps in cancer care," she explained. — KUNA

VIVA wins 'Advertising Creativity Award' at Arab Media Forum



This award reflects VIVA's core strategy to strengthen its ties to the community, as VIVA's Ramadan TVC 2018 commemorated the late legend Abdul-Hussain Abdul-Redha who made

Kuwait and its people laugh and happy, and it was a tribute to the contributions he left behind in the hearts of the Kuwaitis and the people in the entire region.

KUWAIT: VIVA, Kuwait's fastest-growing and most developed telecom operator, has been recognized with an award during the 'Advertising Creativity Awards Ceremony' as first place in the category of 'Most Influential Ad' for the Ramadan 2018 TV Ad at the Arab Media Forum's event.

On this occasion, Andrew Hanna, CCO at VIVA said: "Reaping such accolades proves our exceptional performance and the high quality standards our professionals are providing to our customers. We endeavor at VIVA to consolidate our leadership in the telecom market with our innovation and creativity to meet our customers' expectations and provide them with best-in-class products and services."

Commercial Bank provides chairs to Farwaniya mosques

KUWAIT: As part of its social responsibility activities and in collaboration with Farwaniya Governorate, the Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK) recently provided various mosques in the governorate with special chairs for worshippers. In this regard, Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Faisal Al-Humoud Al-Malek Al-Sabah hailed CBK's initiative and contribution in providing the needs of worshippers who have special health conditions and face difficulties to pray while standing. Meanwhile, CBK's deputy director for corporate communication Amani Al-Wer'a stressed that the bank is ready to support the state in serving various community sects, adding that this contribution was part of the bank's humanitarian initiatives.



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Queen calls for Xmas calm in Brexit storm

From US, 'friends of Modi' to blitz India with calls

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ARBIN: A Syrian man drives past destroyed buildings in Arbin. Retaken in the spring by forces loyal to President Bashar Al-Assad during a brutal offensive to capture the Eastern Ghouta area, Arbin is everything but festive. Rubble from razed buildings spills out into deserted streets lined with burned-out cars. — AFP

Xmas joy missing in rubble of Syria town

Town looks more apocalyptic than merry

ARBIN: With Christmas approaching, Nabil al-Aash dusts off religious books as he attempts to tidy up the war-scarred Saint George Church in the town of Arbin, northeast of the Syrian capital Damascus. Retaken in the spring by forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad during a brutal offensive to capture the rebel stronghold of Eastern Ghouta, Arbin is anything but festive.

Rubble from razed buildings spills out into deserted streets lined with burned-out cars and twisted scraps of metal. The town looks more apocalyptic than merry. Arbin's only church, Saint George's flame-scorched walls and empty nave are a testament to the seven-year conflict that has left more than 360,000 people dead and displaced millions. "There's no celebration here. Christian homes are destroyed and their church is destroyed," says Aash. The restoration of the Greek Orthodox church, built in 1873, "will take a lot of time, money and effort", he adds.

"There's not a single icon left—all of them were either burned or stolen," said the 55-year-old, approaching the altar. "We also found broken crosses." Aash fled Arbin in 2012 as fighting engulfed the town, plagued afterwards for years by violence and a crippling siege imposed by Damascus. But after regime forces retook the area, he decided to return home. "I grew up in this church, I spent all of my Christmases here... it was once overflowing with joy," he remembers. "I almost collapsed when I saw it." For him, the festive spirit "won't return until the residents and parishioners do".

Contrast

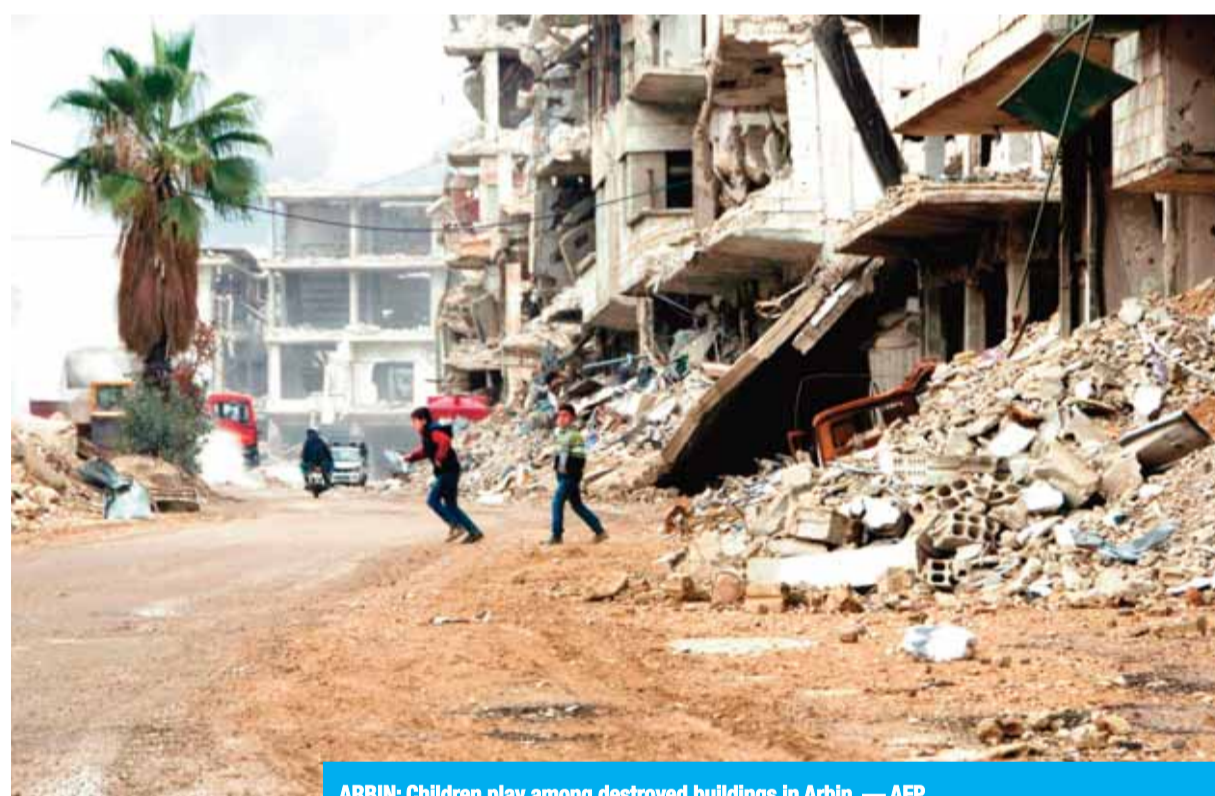
After a blistering offensive backed by Russian air power, government forces in April retook Eastern Ghouta, a key rebel foothold at the gates of Damascus. The military push and years of shelling flattened large swathes of the area and forced most of its pre-war population to flee. Before the war, Arbin was home to some 3,000 Christian residents, according to Mayor Khalil Tohme. But despite the return of relative

calm to the capital and its surroundings, Arbin residents are still hesitant to come back. "We are only five Christians who regularly visit the town, the others go from time to time... most of their homes are destroyed," says Aash. A few dozen meters away from the church, Joseph Hakimeh directs a worker on a ladder as he puts the final touches to a freshly painted wall of a restored home.

The contractor is getting ready to hand the keys back to the owner, and is working on three other homes in addition to his own. "We're preparing to return as soon as services and infrastructure are ready, but that needs time," he says. Sitting on a can of paint, the 39-year-old yearns for the way things once were. "I hope that next year everything will return to the way it was before—Christmas trees, decorations, carols and prayers," he says. The mood is gloomy in Arbin, but just a few kilometers away, bright colored lights illuminate the streets of Damascus. A giant tree decorates Abbasiyyin Square, long avoided due to its proximity to the frontline with the former rebel stronghold.

'Roots'

Festive lights and garlands also decorate homes in the predominantly Christian neighborhood of Kassaa in eastern Damascus. But not everyone is in the Christmas spirit. Since Riad Rajiha's family arrived to the area after fleeing Arbin in 2012, they have not had the heart to celebrate. "We left our Christmas tree behind, so we missed out on decorating," says Rajiha, his eyes brimming with tears. "What's the meaning of decorating a tree in a house that's not yours?" Leafing through an old photo album, he revisits pictures of the Saint George Church in all its former glory. Large chandeliers hang from its high ceilings, its wooden pews packed with parishioners. "Our roots are there and our memories are there," says the 66-year-old, who dreams of celebrating the holiday in Arbin with his grandchildren. "I was born in Arbin, I lived in Arbin, and I hope to be die and be buried there." — AFP



ARBIN: Children play among destroyed buildings in Arbin. — AFP

Funerals held for pop group killed in Indonesia tsunami

JAKARTA: Funerals were held yesterday for several members of an Indonesian pop band killed when a tsunami slammed into a stage where they were performing an open-air concert. Relatives of Muhammad Awal Purbani-bassist for the group Seventeen-sobbed and hugged each other at a service in Indonesia's cultural capital Yogyakarta, including a three-year-old daughter and his wife who was several months pregnant. The group's road manager Oki Wijaya, guitarist Herman Sikumbang and crew member Rukmana Rustam were also buried yesterday in separate services in their hometowns. Local media have reported that Wisnu Andi Darmawan, the band's missing drummer, had been found dead yesterday.

Seventeen's frontman Riefian Fajarsyah-whose wife is still missing two days after the disaster-posted a picture of the band online and suggested that Darmawan had been killed. That would leave Fajarsyah as the only surviving member of the group, which has released a half dozen albums and commands a large fan base in their native country. "So long my beloved drummer Andi Seventeen, Allah loves

you," he wrote. "Be at peace my friend. Endless prayers for you, Bani (bassist) and Eman (guitarist). It's been an honor and a pride to share a stage with you. We were not just work partners, we were family in life and death."

A visibly distressed Fajarsyah told local broadcaster NET TV that was praying his wife would be found alive. "Please pray so Allah can give us a miracle." On Sunday, the band's lead singer posted a picture online of him and his wife kissing in Paris with the Eiffel Tower in the background. "Today is your birthday-I want wish you a happy birthday in person. Come home soon, honey," he wrote in the caption of the photo. The funerals were among dozens of services held across the country for some of at least 281 people killed by Saturday night's disaster.

With no warning, the powerful tsunami swept over popular beaches on southern Sumatra and the western tip of Java and inundated tourist hotels and coastal settlements. The band was playing Saturday night to a crowd at a company-sponsored event at the Tanjung Lesung Beach Resort on the western tip of Java when the wall of water hit. Dramatic video posted online showed the tsunami smashing into the concert, hurling band members from the stage and slamming into the audience. On the video, fans can be seen clapping and cheering before a wave rips under the stage, sending the band members and their equipment crashing into the men and women dancing at the front. The shocking video then suddenly stops. — AFP

Another tsunami could hit Indonesia, experts warn

PARIS: Another tsunami could strike Indonesia, experts have warned, after nearly 300 people were killed by a wave triggered by a volcanic eruption.

What caused the tsunami?

While tsunamis are often triggered by earthquakes, in this case experts believe the deadly waves were generated by an eruption of the Anak (or "child of") Krakatoa volcano, which could have caused a large undersea landslide or flow of molten rock into the water. The tsunami "appears to have been caused by an underwater collapse" of part of the volcano, said David Rothery, a professor of planetary geosciences at Britain's Open University. Anak Krakatoa is a new island that emerged around 1928 in the crater left by Krakatoa, whose massive 1883 eruption killed at least 36,000 people. The tsunami that struck on Saturday was the third natural disaster to hit Indonesia in six months. The country has 127 active volcanoes and lies on the Pacific Ocean's "Ring of Fire" where earthquakes and volcanic eruptions are frequent.

Why was it so deadly?

Anak Krakatoa, located in the Sunda Strait between Java and Sumatra islands, is close to densely populated areas. The volcano has been particularly active since June, noted Jacques-Marie Bardintzeff at the University of Paris-South. "We were helpless given how sudden" the event took place, Bardintzeff said. "The time between cause and effect was a few dozen minutes, which was too short to warn the population".

The killer wave struck at night, sweeping across tourist beaches and low-lying settlements on both sides of the Sunda Strait and catching both residents and disaster monitors totally unawares. "Signs that a tsunami was coming weren't detected and so people did not have time to evacuate," said Indonesia's disaster agency spokesman Sutopo Purwo Nugroho, who blamed vandalism, technical problems and limited budgets for the lack of warning buoys. But the Open University's Rothery said such buoys, normally positioned to monitor earthquakes at underwater tectonic plate boundaries, would still have had limited efficacy.

"Even if there had been such a buoy right next to Anak Krakatoa, this is so close to the affected shorelines that warning time would have been minimal given the high speeds at which tsunami waves travel." Simon Boxall of Southampton University said the region was in spring tide, "and it would appear that the wave hit some of the coastal areas at the highest point of this high tide, exacerbating the damage done." While the tsunami was relatively small, Richard Teeuw, a disaster risk reduction expert at the University of Portsmouth in England said: "Such waves-laden with debris-can be deadly for coastal communities, especially if there is no warning."

Could more tsunamis be coming?

"Devastating tsunami caused by volcanic eruptions are rare: one of the most famous (and deadly) was caused by the eruption of Krakatoa in 1883," Teeuw said. "The likelihood of further tsunamis in the Sunda Strait will remain high while Anak Krakatoa volcano is going through its current active phase because that might trigger further submarine landslides," he said. Sonar surveys would now be needed to map the seafloor around the volcano, but "unfortunately submarine surveys typically take many months to organize and carry out," he added. Bardintzeff warned "we must be wary now that the volcano has been destabilized". — AFP

International

Trump, Erdogan vow to avoid Syria power vacuum after US forces leave

Order signed for US military's controversial Syria exit

WASHINGTON: The US military has confirmed that the order to withdraw American troops from Syria had been signed, after President Donald Trump held talks with his Turkish counterpart to negotiate a pullout that has stunned Washington's allies. Trump announced Wednesday that the roughly 2,000 US troops would leave civil war-racked Syria, where they have been deployed to assist in a multinational fight against the Islamic State (IS) jihadist group. "The executive order for Syria has been signed," a US military spokesperson told AFP on Sunday in response to a query, without providing further details. Turkey was a rare ally that lauded Trump's decision on Syria, a country where it will now have a freer rein to target Kurdish fighters who were armed and trained by the US and played a major role in the war against IS but are deemed terrorists by Ankara.



US exit would allow Turkey to move against Kurdish fighters

'We've won'
Trump and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan spoke by telephone on Sunday and "agreed to ensure coordination between their countries' military, diplomatic and other officials to avoid a power vacuum which could result following any abuse of the withdrawal and transition phase in Syria," the Turkish presidency said in a statement. Trump tweeted that he and Erdogan "discussed (IS), our mutual involvement in Syria, & the slow & highly coordinated pullout of US troops from the area."

White House aides cited by The Washington Post said Trump's advisors have persuaded him to withdraw the troops more slowly than he would like in order not to jeopardize their safety. A withdrawal could have extraordinary geopolitical implications, and it runs counter to long-established US policy for the region. Thousands of IS jihadists are thought to remain in Syria, but Trump on

Wednesday declared that "we've won against ISIS," using another acronym for the extremists. Late Sunday he tweeted that Erdogan had assured him that any IS fighters remaining will be eliminated. "President @RT_Erdogan of Turkey has very strongly informed me that he will eradicate whatever is left of ISIS in Syria," Trump said in a Tweet.

An already devastated region
Repeating a pattern of admiring comments towards global strongmen, Trump added that Erdogan "is a man who can do it." The US president concluded: "Our troops are coming home!" US politicians—including those from his own Republican party—and international allies fear the withdrawal is premature and would further destabilize the already devastated region. A US pullout, said Mutlu Ceviroglu, a Kurdish affairs analyst, will open the way "for Turkey to start its operations against the Kurds, and a bloody war will begin." French President Emmanuel Macron on Sunday said he "deeply regretted" Trump's decision, and that "an ally must be reliable."

Turmoil
Israel has been careful to point out that it respects the US decision, but analysts say that beneath those public pronouncements are concerns over whether its main enemy Iran will have a freer hand. US troops will leave under the auspices of a new Pentagon chief set to start next month, after Jim Mattis resigned from the post citing major differences, including on Syria, with the often-impulsive Trump. Several US politicians from both parties rejected Trump's claim that IS had been defeated. The decision also caused alarm and dismay in the US military over the prospect of suddenly abandoning Washington's Kurdish partners.



JARABULUS, Syria: A Turkey-backed Syrian fighter sits atop a truck-mounted heavy machinegun in the town of Krata, near the rebel-held border town of Jarabulus yesterday. Residents and fighters in territory held by pro-Turkish rebels in northern Syria cautiously welcomed Washington's decision to pull out troops, viewing it as a chance to push further into Kurdish territory. —AFP

Trump's sudden decision sparked turmoil within his administration, prompting the resignation of Brett McGurk, the special envoy to the anti-IS coalition, as well as Mattis. Plans for the troop pullout will now be overseen by Deputy Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan, who Trump on Sunday said would replace Mattis starting January 1.

Mattis, 68, had said he would leave at the end of February to allow a smooth transition for the next chief of the US military—but a reportedly angry Trump accelerated

his departure by two months. "And now Trump gets rid of SecDef Mattis almost immediately. No smooth transition. No effort at reassurance to allies. Just vindictive," Carl Bildt, a former Swedish prime minister and now co-chair of the European Council on Foreign Relations, said on Twitter. According to US media, Trump voiced resentment over news coverage of Mattis' stinging resignation letter that laid bare his fundamental disagreements with the president. —AFP

Famous Turkish actor quizzed over 'threats to Turkish President'

ISTANBUL: A famous Turkish actor testified to Istanbul prosecutors yesterday after authorities opened a probe into whether comments he made on television threatened President Recep Tayyip Erdogan with death, local media reported. Metin Akpinar, also a well-known comedian in Turkey, is accused of making "insulting" statements that alluded to Erdogan.

"If we do not reach this (democracy), like what happened to all forms of fascism, the leader might be hung from his feet or maybe poisoned in the cellars or meet the same end as other leaders in the past," he reportedly said on television on Friday. The Istanbul public prosecutor said on Sunday that Akpinar was being investigated over "insulting comments that targeted the Turkish president with coup and death threats".

Akpinar, 77, and another Turkish actor, Mujdat Gezen, had been taken by police officers separately to give testimony in the same investigation. Akpinar had also claimed on opposition Halk TV that any leader who "turned to Russia except Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk) left office" through coups. Ataturk was the founder of modern Turkey. Turkey has witnessed three military coups in 1960, 1971 and 1980. In 1997, an army-led campaign forced the government to resign and then in July 2016, there was an attempted overthrow of Erdogan blamed on a US-based Muslim preacher.

Akpinar said democracy was the "only option to save Turkey from polarization". Gezen, 75, was more direct in his remarks against Erdogan on the same



ISTANBUL: Turkish Theater and film Actor Mujdat Gezen (right) leaves Anatolian courthouse with his wife in Istanbul said after a hearing as part of a probe opened by Turkish authorities against him for 'insulting' statements to Erdogan during a television program. —AFP

program: "He tells the people 'know your place'. Look Recep Tayyip Erdogan, you cannot test our patriotism. Know your place." The investigation into the men came after the president said on Sunday: "They should be brought to account for this by the judiciary." Erdogan hit out at the "so-called artists" during

a speech in Istanbul. "We cannot leave this business without giving a response, they will pay the price." Thousands of Turks including artists and journalists have been prosecuted in recent years over allegedly insulting Erdogan, although most have not been imprisoned. —AFP

PM on top in battle of the Bangladesh Begums

DHAKA: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina heads to the polls in Bangladesh this week on course for a historic victory, while her ailing opponent faces an uncertain future in a colonial-era Dhaka jail. Bangladesh's "Battling Begums" have been fighting each other for three decades, but the 71-year-old Hasina is set to extend her record as the country's longest serving leader after dispatching Khaleda Zia, her chief rival. The two women have been political royalty-begums—since the 1980s. Zia, 73, is the widow of a military dictator and Hasina's father was the country's founding leader.

They joined forces to dethrone military dictator Hussain Muhammed Ershad in 1990 and restore democracy. But they became arch-foes after Zia was elected prime minister in 1991, and the duo have alternated in power ever since in the South Asian nation. Hasina is now seeking a fourth term and opinion polls indicate she will have little problem at the December 30 poll despite criticism of her government's slide towards authoritarian rule. Zia meanwhile is serving a 17-year jail term on graft charges that her Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)

insists were "politically motivated". The convictions mean Zia cannot contest the poll, which the BNP says will be neither free nor fair. It claims thousands of activists have been jailed in recent months. Zia suffers from arthritis and diabetes, has had knee replacement surgery and can barely move one of her hands. Western diplomats have written off her chances of a comeback. "She is politically finished," said one diplomat based in Dhaka, adding Zia's only chance for escape would be if she is offered medical leave abroad. The fallout has spread to the Zia dynasty. Her youngest son died in exile in Bangkok in 2015. Her eldest child, Tarique Rahman, who masterminded his mother's return to power in 2001, went into exile in London in 2008.

In October, he was sentenced to life in prison for his alleged role in a 2004 grenade attack on a Hasina rally in which at least 20 people were killed. Analysts say that even though she is out of the limelight, Zia still casts a huge shadow over the election. "It is fair to say that the conventional portrayal of Bangladeshi politics as the 'Battle of the Begums' has taken a back seat, for the moment," said Illinois State University political science professor Ali Riaz. "But it is too early to write the political obituary of Khaleda Zia. Although she is not on the ballot, her name and influence is not diminished."

Boycott campaign
Zia's woes started with her decision to boycott the 2014 election, which the



DHAKA: Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina speaks during an election campaign rally in Dhaka yesterday. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina heads to the polls in Bangladesh this week on course for a historic victory, while her ailing opponent faces an uncertain future in a colonial-era Dhaka jail. —AFP

BNP said was rigged after Hasina scrapped a caretaker government system used for previous polls. Dozens were killed in subsequent violence. A nationwide road and railway blockade the following year, aiming to force Hasina into an early election, left up to 150 more dead. Many people were angered by the campaign and analysts said it allowed Hasina to launch a crackdown on the BNP.

"The decision to boycott the election and then enforcing the blockades were suicidal," said Ataur Rahman, a political science professor in Dhaka. "They weak-

ened the party and handed Hasina a big opportunity to target her opponents and create what has since emerged as a one-party dominant political system." Few believe that the Zia family will lose its grip on the BNP, especially in a region where political dynasties are a way of life. Zia's son, the acting party head, interviewed aspiring candidates for the party by video conference from London. "These all are indications that the Zia dynasty is still very strong and maintains strong authority over the party," said Oslo University lecturer Mubashar Hasan. —AFP

Thousands evacuated after 'loud crack' in Sydney tower

SYDNEY: Australian police evacuated thousands of people in west Sydney late Christmas Eve, after residents reported hearing a "loud crack" from a 38-storey building. About 3,000 people from inside the tower and in nearby buildings were told to leave late yesterday, with engineers investigating after the apartment complex moved "one or two millimeters".

"Police received a call to a loud crack on level 10 of the building located behind us," New South Wales Fire and Rescue acting superintendent Greg Wright said from outside the Opal Tower complex. Police "identified there was a crack in the building", he added, alerting emergency services. "Firefighters will be moving through the building with engineers and paramedics to assess what the damage is, and a way forward," he told reporters. It was unclear when residents would be allowed back into the building, with a temporary shelter set up at a nearby hall.

"I have been told by engineers it (the building) has moved one or two millimetres," detective superintendent Philip Rogerson told reporters, without going into detail. A police spokesperson said the building was 38 storeys high. The apartment tower located in Sydney's Olympic Park complex was recently built, opening this year with 392 apartments, according to national broadcaster the ABC. "We are aware of the concerns that have arisen with the Opal building and confirm that the builder has been notified," a spokesman from the development company told the ABC. —AFP

Russian women's jail chief sacked over slave labor

MOSCOW: The head of a Russian women's prison has been fired after inspectors discovered a regime of forced labor that saw inmates work for up to 18 hours a day, officials said yesterday. Women in the penal colony in Mordovia, central Russia, stitched garments for prison head Yuri Kupriyanov as well as his children, friends and businessmen he knew, the penitentiary service said. Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, a member of the Pussy Riot protest group, was held there until 2013 when she went on hunger strike to protest what she described as slave labor and other serious abuses.

Valery Maximenko, deputy head of the Federal Penitentiary Service, told Interfax news agency inspectors had carried out a surprise inspection. "Following the results... Yuri Kupriyanov and several of his subordinates have been suspended from their duties," Maximenko said. "Women were threatened with isolation and being deprived of food for the slightest transgression," he added. Inmates would start working around 7 am and finish by 1 am, according to penitentiary service figures published by Russian news agencies.

President Vladimir Putin addressed the notorious conditions of Russian prisons during his annual end-of-year press conference last week. "Any violation of the law, especially torture, is a crime. These crimes should be punished," he said, referring to brutality by prison guards towards inmates. Independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta this summer published a video of around a dozen guards beating a cuffed prisoner in a Yaroslavl facility, some 150 miles (250 km) northeast of Moscow. The report encouraged other Russians to speak out about their experiences of prison violence. —AFP

International

Barcelona on alert; US warns of possible Christmas attack

'Terrorists may attack with little or no warning'

BARCELONA: Barcelona was on alert yesterday after the US State Department warned of the risk of a terrorist attack in Spain's second-largest city during the Christmas holidays. "Exercise heightened caution around areas of vehicle movement, including buses, in the Las Ramblas area of Barcelona during Christmas and New Year's. Terrorists may attack with little or no warning, targeting tourist locations, transportation hubs, and other public areas," the State Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs said in a tweet on Sunday. Asked about the warning during an interview with Ràdio 4 yesterday, Catalonia's regional interior minister Miquel Buch said police "were working on this threat". "We take seriously all threats, all of them are investigated," he added, without giving further details.

Top-selling Spanish newspaper El País, citing anonymous police sources, said the authorities were looking for a 30-year-old Moroccan man with a licence to drive buses. Barcelona-based daily El Periódico de Catalunya said Catalan regional

police had circulated an internal note that the man could try to drive a bus into crowds in Barcelona. Contacted by AFP, a spokesman for the regional police force in Catalonia did not confirm police were seeking a Moroccan man but said a "temporary reinforcement of security measures in areas of high concentration of people" was in place.

Spain has kept its terrorist alert unchanged at the second-highest level despite the US State Department warning, although security measures were boosted in December for the Christmas holiday period, a Spanish interior ministry spokesman said. On August 17, 2017 a van rammed into crowds on Barcelona's tree-lined Las Ramblas boulevard, killing 14 people. The 22-year-old Moroccan driver then stole a car after killing the driver and fled. Several hours later five of his accomplices mowed down pedestrians on the promenade of the seaside resort of Cambrils south of Barcelona before stabbing a woman to death. The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for the attack, Spain's deadliest in over a decade. —AFP



BARCELONA: Protesters pile torches during a demonstration demanding the release of jailed separatist leaders and other political prisoners in Barcelona. —AFP

Fake Colombian priest unmasked after 18 years

MADRID: A Colombian man who pretended to be a Roman Catholic priest for 18 years hearing confessions and celebrating weddings, was exposed just before Christmas, the diocese in Spain where he was preaching said Monday. Marriages and baptisms carried out by Miguel Angel Ibarra remain valid but confessions are not even though the "grace of God acted" on the faithful who were deceived, the spokeswoman for the diocese of Cadiz and Ceuta told AFP.

Ibarra moved to Spain from Colombia in October 2017 and had been in charge of the church in the village of Medina Sidonia, which is home to some 11,000 people, in the southern region of Andalusia. He had pretended to be a priest for the past 18 years, she added. Colombian church officials informed the diocese on December 13 that it had received a complaint that Ibarra had forged his ordination documents and that after carrying out a "thorough investigation" they had concluded that he had never been ordained, the Spanish diocese said in a statement.

He was ordered to go back to his archdiocese of origin in Colombia, Santa Fe de Antioquia, it added. The diocese of Cadiz and Ceuta said it regretted that "events like this could overshadow the work of parishioners and ordained priests, who serve the Church every day in an exemplary way." Like in other increasingly secular European countries, Spain is finding it difficult to attract new recruits to the priesthood in recent years and has had to resort to importing priests, often from its former colonies in Latin America. —AFP

UK police scramble for clues in London airport drone chaos

LONDON: British police scrambled for answers yesterday after releasing their only suspects in the London Gatwick Airport drone mystery that brought Christmas getaway flights to a standstill. Nearly 140,000 passengers were affected over three days of disruption Wednesday through Friday as Britain's second-busiest airport shut down because of repeated reports of drone sightings.

A damaged drone found near the airport was being forensically examined, police said, but it was not immediately clear whether it was connected to the sightings.

Police admitted there was a possibility that no drones had in fact hovered over the airport as they were relying on eyewitness accounts. Police arrested a 47-year-old man and a 54-year-old woman from the town of Crawley, near Gatwick, on Friday after a tip-off but released them without charge on Sunday. "Both people have fully cooperated with our enquiries and I am satisfied that they are no longer suspects in the drone incidents at Gatwick," said Sussex Police detective chief superintendent Jason Tingley.

'Persons of interest'

"We are not back to square one," he said, adding that officers were looking at "persons of interest". He said that the detectives were investigating 67 reports of drone sightings from the public, police officers and airport staff. They were also conducting a forensic examination of the damaged drone found near the airport perimeter, close to the location of the last reported sighting, Tingley said. Asked about speculation that there never was a drone over the airport, he said: "Of course, that's a possibility. We are working with human beings saying they have seen something." He added: "Our inquiry continues at a pace to locate those responsible for the drone incursions." The dangers posed by drones include the possibility of a device smashing into a passenger plane or being



POTSDAM: A surveillance drone silhouettes against the cloudy sky during the handover of 50 new vehicles and equipment to the federal police in Potsdam, eastern Germany. —AFP

sucked into an engine where its highly flammable lithium battery could cause a catastrophe.

Cash reward

The airport has offered a £50,000 (\$63,000, 56,000 euro) reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of those responsible for the disruption. Tingley said the two arrests came after a tip-off from a member of the public, adding that he appreciated the released pair's cooperation in the investigation. Pictures of the Crawley couple were splashed across Sunday's newspapers, with headlines including "Are these the morons who ruined Christmas?" While the man was a model helicopter enthusiast, reports inside quoted his astonished boss as saying he could vouch for him having actually been at work throughout the drama. Under recently introduced laws in Britain, drones cannot be flown near aircraft or within a kilo-

meter (about half a mile) of an airport, or at an altitude of over 400 feet (120 meters). Violators face up to five years in prison for endangering an aircraft. Gatwick, around 30 miles south of London, is Europe's eighth-busiest airport.

Gatwick's website said its runway was open and it aimed to run a full schedule, but passengers were warned to expect some delays and cancellations. "Safety is Gatwick's top priority and we are grateful for passengers' continued patience as we work to get them to their final destination in time for Christmas," the airport said. The main opposition Labor Party has called for an independent inquiry after accusing the government of failing to act on the risks posed by drones. But a Department for Transport spokesman dismissed claims of missed opportunities to prevent the Gatwick incident as "a combination of nonsense and gross misrepresentation". —AFP

Elite force formed in Ethiopia to protect leaders

ADDIS ABABA: An elite force has been created in Ethiopia responsible for protecting officials including Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, after a deadly blast while he addressed a crowd in June, Fana radio said yesterday. Troops in the new Republican Guard unit began training six months ago for "protecting higher government officials and their family, from any form of aggression by ill-intentioned forces," Fana announced on its website.

The formation of the specialized unit followed the explosion of a hand grenade in the middle of a huge crowd of people who had gathered in the capital Addis Ababa to hear Abiy speak on June 23. Two people were killed and scores injured. Some observers believe the prime minister was the intended target of the grenade attack, but he was not harmed. After taking office in April, Abiy gained public support with promises of reform to promote national unity after years of hardline rule. He has freed thousands of jailed dissidents and journalists and cemented peace with neighboring Eritrea, after a 1998-2000 war that left a legacy of distrust.

Ethiopia had an Imperial Guard during the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie, but that military unit was disbanded after he was ousted in an army coup in September 1974. A recent upsurge in the number of ethnic confrontations in Addis Ababa and of clashes in remote regions has aroused fears that the second most populous nation in Africa after Nigeria faces renewed violence. According to a 2017 estimate by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the population is about 102.4 million. The Horn of Africa nation is home to dozens of distinct ethnic groups. —AFP

Queen calls for Xmas calm in Brexit storm

LONDON: Queen Elizabeth II will call for respect and civility in a Christmas message delivered with Britain badly divided over its impending exit from the EU. Today's annual television appearance gives the 92-year-old monarch a rare chance to share some personal thoughts about Brexit. British royalty traditionally steer well clear of politics—a unifying position that puts them above the daily fray of Westminster and Downing Street.

The queen will not make an overt reference to Britain's departure from the European Union after 46 years on March 29, according to extracts released by Buckingham Palace. But she will note that "even with the most deeply held differences, treating the other person with respect and as a fellow human being is always a good first step towards greater understanding." Her address caps a stormy month that saw Prime Minister Theresa May survive a leadership challenge attempt staged by her party's most hardened foes of the EU. May's entire Brexit strategy is in danger of falling apart at the finish line when parliament debates it next month.

'Never out of date'

The prime minister was forced to pull a scheduled December vote on her deal with the EU after admitting that it would badly lose. May penned a Christmas opinion piece in which she urged lawmakers to end the saga and let people "focus on what really matters". "The sooner MPs agree the right Brexit deal, the sooner we can all get back to dealing with those issues and building a country that works for everyone," May wrote. Opposition Labor party leader said in his own pre-recorded address that Christmas was a time to ponder how "we can build a fairer society which works for everyone".

Britain's split from the EU without a trade



LONDON: Passengers collect their luggage from the baggage reclaim area of Terminal 5 at London Heathrow Airport. Britain published proposals for EU immigration curbs after Brexit as business groups warned the UK economy was not ready for the country to crash out of the bloc with no divorce deal in place. —AFP

agreement threatens to unleash economic doom over the short term. Those who back Brexit say it is a price worth paying for regaining sovereignty from officials in Brussels who subject Britain to their own rules. The debate over the whole thing is as emotional and personal for many as it was the day Brexit was backed by a 52-48 margin in a 2016 vote. The nation has been holding an unending argument ever since. The queen will say that the message of peace carried by the birth of Jesus in the Christmas story was particularly relevant now. "I believe his message of peace on earth and goodwill to all is never out of date. "It can be heeded by everyone; it's needed as much as ever," the queen will say. The queen's 66-year reign has

seen her government run by 13 prime ministers dating back to Winston Churchill.

Her longevity and good humor have made the queen into one of the most popular people in a country that loves to poke fun at other royals. But her age has forced inevitable thoughts about the transition that will see Prince Charles—the queen's less popular 70-year-old son—take charge of Buckingham Palace. The queen will say that she drew strength from her family as times changed and the political sands shifted. "Through the many changes I have seen over the years, faith, family and friendship have been not only a constant for me but a source of personal comfort and reassurance," the queen will say. —AFP

International

From US, 'friends of Modi' to blitz India with calls in re-election drive

Overseas Friends of BJP organizes phone, social media campaigns

CLARKSBURG: On a chilly Sunday morning in this quiet American suburb, IT consultant Madhu Bellam scoured a spreadsheet with contact details for over 1,500 Indian voters. He punched numbers into his phone and rang his hometown of Hyderabad, a tech hub in southern India about 8,800 miles away. Bellam emigrated to the United States around two decades ago, and then renounced his Indian passport to become an American in 2011. He now runs his own tech consultancy.

But the 47-year-old, convinced that the ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will unlock India's economic potential, is part of an army of activists seeking to propel Prime Minister Narendra Modi to a second term in next year's general election, due to be held by May. "I am requesting you to vote for BJP and spread the word in the constituency," Bellam says in his phone calls to people in India whose numbers were provided to him by the party. He then extols Modi's policies, including his flagship "Make in India" plan. Bellam and fellow BJP supporters also lobby their own networks in India, calling acquaintances, cousins and old schoolmates with the same message.

The US chapter of the Overseas Friends of the BJP has some 4,000 members, although its president Krishna Reddy estimates the broader network includes up to 300,000 supporters. Many

cannot travel home to vote, so ardent BJP backers are channeling their energy into phone campaigns and a blitz of social media messages to people in India. To be sure, this kind of campaigning may only have a modest impact on the nearly 900 million voters in India, where hot-button issues centre on a lack of jobs for young people and distress in heartland farming states because of low crop prices.

Vijay Chauthaiwale, the head of the BJP's foreign affairs cell, said Modi supporters in 20 countries will be helping out in the campaign. Besides the United States, these include Britain, Canada, Australia and parts of Africa, where there are large Indian communities. But Indian-Americans, who number around four million, have perhaps the most influence. As one of the most educated and prosperous minorities in the United States, the community is admired in India - an asset the BJP has seized on. "They are shocked to be getting a call from the United States," Bellam said of the people he phones. "We call some rural people too. They look at us as very successful people, so that's the good thing for us to convince them. They think that we speak the truth."

Identity politics

US-based BJP supporters said they back Modi because they believe he is ushering in policies that will turn India, already the

world's fastest-growing large economy, into a powerhouse. But identity politics also help explain BJP success overseas. US-based supporters often have roots in the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu nationalist group that is the ideological parent of the BJP. Also helping Modi, who governed the western state of Gujarat from 2001 to 2014, is the large Gujarati community in the United States.

Modi moved to the federal government after winning the general election in 2014 with a thumping majority, when he was widely supported by the Indian diaspora overseas. Although he remains popular and is largely expected to win another five-year term, the 2019 election will likely be tougher, with some voters feeling let down by his campaign promise of "development for all."

But there is no indication that the enthusiasm of Modi's overseas supporters has waned. From his sofa in Maryland, Bellam was trying to woo voters ahead of local elections this month, in which the BJP lost control of three major heartland states to the opposition Congress party. But he and other Modi supporters already have their sights set on the general election. US supporters will likely make around 500,000 calls next year, according to Reddy, the president of the group. Members will target India's biggest states and their own hometowns, given they can campaign in the

local language and have a good grasp of community issues.

Devesh Kapur, a political scientist at John Hopkins University who has written two books on Indian-Americans, said calls from the United States are unlikely to change voters' minds but they could help rally support. "My impression is that their effect is at the margin, and more on turnout rather than changing voting preferences per se," said Kapur. Amid the buzz around the BJP abroad, the Congress party, which ruled India for most of its post-independence era after 1947, is trying to drum up support from the diaspora, too. During a tour of the United States last year, Congress president Rahul Gandhi praised emigres as the "backbone" of India.

For the 2019 election, members are asked to support Congress on social media and speak to friends and family back home - but not to call voters, said Sam Pitroda, the chairman of the Indian Overseas Congress Department. "I am not going to force you. I am not going to tell you: 'I'm great and successful, listen to me.'... How can I tell some poor little farmer that I am successful?" said Pitroda, who was an adviser to then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in the 1980s and now lives in Chicago. "All you can tell them is: Do you believe in freedom? Do you believe in inclusion? Then the Congress party is the party you want to vote for." —Reuters

'Everything's gone': Indonesia villagers recount the horror

CARITA: Asep Sunaria heard a loud "whoosh" just seconds before a wall of water threw him off his motorbike, swallowing his house and the village he called home until Saturday night. As rescuers hunted for survivors of the volcano-triggered tsunami that killed at least 281 people along Indonesia's coast, 42-year-old Sunaria was trying to come to grips with a disaster that struck without warning. "The water came from over there with a sound like the wind-'whoosh'," he recounted to AFP. "I was shocked. I didn't expect it at all - there was no warning ... At first I thought it was just a tidal wave but the water rose so high." He and his family sprinted from Sukarame village to higher ground, leaving them with only the clothes on their back. But they were among the lucky ones. Some villagers perished when the powerful tsunami struck on Saturday night, sweeping over popular beaches of southern Sumatra and the western tip of Java and inundating tourist hotels and coastal settlements. Experts say it was likely triggered by a massive underwater landslide following an eruption of the Anak Krakatoa volcano in the Sunda Strait.

"My family are safe but my house has been destroyed - everything's gone," said Sunaria. "Now I'm looking for bodies that have not been found. We only found one yesterday and we're looking for spots where more bodies could still be buried." Another villager, Sunarti, waded through knee-deep water as she searched for belongings outside her destroyed house.



CARITA, Indonesia: Indonesian policemen search for victims at the Villa Stephanie accommodation in Carita, Banten province yesterday, two days after a tsunami - caused by activity at a volcano known as the 'child' of Krakatoa - hit the west coast of Indonesia's Java island. —AFP

"We found two dead bodies over there yesterday," the 61-year-old indicated. Sunarti said her 100-year-old mother survived and was staying at higher ground until they could be sure there would be no more killer waves - something experts have warned remains a serious risk.

"My life was already tough," Sunarti, who like many Indonesians goes by one name said. "We're very poor and now this happens" Down the road in Cilurah village, survivor Ade Junaedi said he witnessed nature's

fury firsthand. "It happened very quickly," he said. "I was chatting with a guest at our place when my wife opened the door and she suddenly let out a panicked scream. I thought there was a fire, but when I walked to the door I saw the water coming." Back in Sukarame village, Sunarti and her hungry neighbors waited for outside aid to arrive in their stricken community. "There's been no help at all so far," she said. "Some people are starving." —AFP

catching both residents and disaster monitors totally unawares.

In a series of tweets later deleted with a stricken apology, the national disaster agency had stated there was "no tsunami threat" even as the wave crashed over parts of southern Sumatra and the western tip of Java. "The lack of an early warning system is why the tsunami was not detected," acknowledged disaster agency spokesman Sutopo Purwo Nugroho.

"Signs that a tsunami was coming weren't detected and so people did not have time to evacuate," he added. Indonesia is one of the most disaster-prone nations on Earth due to its position straddling the so-called Pacific Ring of Fire, where tectonic plates collide. A quake-tsunami that struck Palu on Sulawesi island in September killed around 2,200 people, with thousands more missing

and presumed dead. Tide-monitoring stations and data-modeling are the main tools Indonesia monitoring agencies use to predict tsunamis - usually in the wake of an earthquake.

But even if all the country's stations are working, the network is recognized to be limited and in any case gives people little time to flee as they only detect waves once they are close to shore. Efforts to improve systems have been beset by problems, from a failure to properly maintain new equipment to bureaucratic bickering. Experts say Saturday's disaster was most likely caused by a moderate eruption of the Anak Krakatoa volcano in the Sunda Strait that triggered either a large and very fast moving flow of molten rock into the sea or a sudden and massive submarine landslide. In either case, large volumes of water would have been displaced, resulting in a tsunami. —AFP

Myanmar Reuters journalists appeal 7-year sentence

YANGON: Lawyers lodged an appeal yesterday to free two Reuters journalists jailed for their reporting on Myanmar's Rohingya crisis, decriing the sentence as a "mistake" that has already resulted in the pair being locked up for a year. Wa Lone, 32, and Kyaw Soe Oo, 28, were arrested in December 2017 and later sentenced to seven-year prison terms for what prosecutors said was a breach of official secrets law for the possession of classified material on security operations.

Reuters disputed the charge and said the two were set up by police after probing the massacre of 10 Rohingya Muslims during a military crackdown. Their conviction in September sparked widespread global condemnation, including from US Vice President Mike Pence, who asked civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi to intervene. But calls for their release have fallen flat inside Myanmar, where Suu Kyi has yet to speak up for the reporters publicly.

Their trial was criticized by rights groups as a sham and payback for uncovering the September 2017 massacre in Inn Din village in Myanmar's Rakhine state. During the trial a whistle-blowing policeman told the court his superior ordered a sting to entrap the reporters. Yesterday lawyers for the pair submitted an appeal to the High Court. "This seven-year jail sentence is a mistake," the journalists' lawyer L. Khun Ring Pan told the bench, in a hearing attended by embassy officials and free media advocates as well as the wives of the jailed journalists. "They were trying to find out who was involved with the (Inn Din) case. That's why they tried to meet the police... they did not ask for anything secret."

'We hope for fairness'

More than 720,000 Rohingya have fled Rakhine state to Bangladesh since the military's crackdown last August, bringing accounts of rape, arson and mass killings. UN investigators have said the evidence warrants charges of genocide against the country's top generals, but the army maintains it was defending itself against Rohingya militants. "We hope for fairness. We want them to be free," Wa Lone's wife Pan Ei Mon told AFP while a second lawyer Than Zaw Aung said "we hope to hear good news" when the appeal judge rules over coming days. —AFP

No warning meant no escape from Indonesia tsunami

JAKARTA: An unpredictable chain of events and an inadequate early warning system combined to deadly effect with the tsunami that slammed into coastal areas of Indonesia killing nearly 300 people, disaster officials and experts said yesterday. The killer wave struck tourist beaches and low-lying settlements on both sides of the Sunda Strait with devastating force on Saturday night,

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Israel sees limits of Trump support with Syria pullout

Israeli leaders have lauded Donald Trump for his list of decisions in support of their country since taking office, but the mercurial president's withdrawal of US troops from Syria will not rank among them. After Trump's surprise announcement of the pullout last week, Israel is concerned over whether its main enemy Iran will have a freer hand to operate in the neighboring country, analysts say. Israel's response to the announcement has been measured - careful to point out that it respects the US decision, coupled with pledges to continue to defend its interests in Syria.

But beneath those public pronouncements are worries over whether Iran will seek to take advantage of the US absence from the war-torn country and if Russia will respond to Israel's calls to limit it. Beyond that, the manner in which the decision was taken and announced - and US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis's resignation in response - may also give Israeli leaders pause, some analysts say.

"Since it's our major ally, we want the United States to be strong ... and we want an ally which is being perceived in the region as strong and effective," said Eyal Zisser, vice rector of Tel Aviv University and who has written extensively on Syria. "And I think that what worries some Israelis is what message does this decision - the way it was taken, what stood behind it - send to the region?"

'Even expand our activities'

The United States has only around 2,000 troops in Syria focused on fighting the Islamic State group, but they have been deployed in two areas along the Iraqi border, helping keep Iranian movement into the country in check. There have been warnings from Israel and others that Iran is seeking to form a "land bridge" across to the Mediterranean, and some analysts have said that the US withdrawal could help that effort.

With Iran supporting Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad in his country's civil war, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has long pledged to keep it from entrenching itself militarily next door. Israel has repeatedly taken action, carrying out hundreds of airstrikes in Syria against what it says are Iranian military targets and advanced arms deliveries to Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed Lebanese group.

With the United States pulling out, Israel may look more to Russia, which is also backing Assad, to use its influence to limit Iran, some analysts say. But that is not a given, and a friendly fire incident in September that led to a Russian plane being downed by Syrian air defenses during an Israeli strike remains an issue. The incident angered Russia and complicated Israel's operations in Syria, particularly after Moscow's delivery of the advanced S-300 air defense system there in response.

Netanyahu and Israel's military chief of staff, Gadi Eisenkot, on Sunday sought to tamp down concerns over the withdrawal. The Israeli premier has indicated he was not taken off-guard, saying he had spoken with Trump two days before the December 19 announcement as well as US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo the previous day. "The decision to remove the 2,000 US soldiers from Syria won't change our consistent policy," Netanyahu said Sunday. "We will continue to act against Iran's attempt to establish a military presence in Syria, and if the need arises, we will even expand our activities there."

'A free ride'

Yaakov Amidror, a former national security adviser to Netanyahu and ex-military intelligence official, noted US troops were not directly involved in Israel's fight against Iran's presence in Syria. But he said concerns over whether Iran will take advantage of the US withdrawal were legitimate. "From now on, it will be a free ride for the Iranians and they will use the corridor logistically to enhance their capabilities to build the military forces in Syria and to help Hezbollah afterwards," he told AFP.

An analysis by the US-based Centre for Strategic and International Studies think tank said "Israel is among the most important losers" of the withdrawal, along with the United States' Kurdish allies in Syria. But Netanyahu has vowed that Israel will continue to "defend ourselves" and Eisenkot, the military chief of staff, called it "a significant event but it should not be overstated". "For decades we've been handling this front alone," said Eisenkot. — AFP



Singapore plans an underground future

From its towering "supertree" vertical gardens to a Formula 1 night race, Singapore is known for many attractions; underground space is not one of them. But that may soon change, as the city-state prepares to unveil an Underground Master Plan in 2019. With some 5.6 million people in an area three-fifths the size of New York City - and with the population estimated to grow to 6.9 million by 2030 - the island nation is fast running out of space.

Singapore has been reclaiming land for decades, but that is increasingly unsustainable due to rising sea levels and other impacts of climate change. So the city is going underground. Singapore has already moved some infrastructure and utilities below ground, including train lines, retail, pedestrian walkways, a five-lane highway and air-conditioning cooling pipes. It also stores fuel and ammunition underground.

Now, the city wants to go further. "Given Singapore's limited land, we need to make better use of our surface land and systematically consider how to tap our underground space for future needs," said Ler Seng Ann, a group director at the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA). "Currently, our focus is on using underground space for utility, transport, storage and industrial facilities to free up surface land for housing, offices, community uses and greenery, to enhance liveability," he said.

The Underground Master Plan will feature pilot areas, with ideas including data centers, utility plants, bus depots, a deep-tunnel sewerage system, warehousing and water reservoirs. There are no plans to move homes or offices below ground. Singapore joins only a handful of cities that are mapping their subterranean space, said Peter Stones, a senior engineer with the consultancy Arup, which did a study for URA comparing its use of underground space to other cities. "Globally, underground spaces are still back of mind; it's a Wild West of development, with a first-come, first-served system," he said. "Singapore wants to look at it holistically and have a master plan so it can plan and manage the use of its underground space, and avoid potential conflicts," he said.

Heat, humidity

From the catacombs of ancient Rome to step wells in

medieval India and World War Two bunkers, underground spaces have been used for a variety of reasons. Helsinki and Montreal are considered leaders in underground urbanism, a movement focused on innovative ways to use underground spaces. Arup's study found Singapore's underground rail density is slightly behind Tokyo's, and that it has the lowest density for underground pedestrian links.

The study also found Singapore trailed Hong Kong and Tokyo in underground road density as of 2014. Of 180 km of urban rail, nearly half are located below ground, as is about 10 percent of Singapore's expressway network. Besides the space crunch, the other driver for tapping underground space in Singapore is the weather, said Stones. "You have rising heat and humidity, and increasingly heavy rainfall. People want to avoid that," he said. "Plus, utility networks are subject to more wear and tear in these conditions, so placing them underground is a viable option," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Advanced technologies and careful design also mean planners are able to alleviate the monotony and claustrophobia of underground spaces, he said. But since building underground is generally more expensive and complex than on the surface, Singapore will only do so "where it is meaningful and practical", URA's Ler said. "In many cases, it does make sense to build underground, considering benefits such as land saving, improving the quality of the environment and better connectivity," he said. "Our underground MRT (mass rapid transit) network and expressways in the city area are some examples where the benefits of going underground outweigh the higher construction cost and technical challenges." Storing fuel in rock caverns freed up more than 60 hectares, or 84 football fields, of space. The city's reservoirs occupy about 5 percent of Singapore's land, so moving them underground could create more space.

Full potential

By 2050, more than 70 percent of the world's population will live in cities, according to United Nations estimates. In developing countries, where most of this growth will take place, it will strain infrastructure and resources,

and stoke conflict over scarce land, analysts say. Meanwhile, ageing populations in wealthier nations will make other demands of city planning and infrastructure. "With rising urban populations and demands for a better quality of life, there is a need to integrate the underground cityscape to keep our cities livable," said Wout Broere, an assistant professor at Holland's Delft University of Technology.

But moving infrastructure and other facilities underground is often considered as a last resort only when surface space is exhausted and no other options exist, said Broere, a specialist in underground space technology. This makes it more expensive than it would be if the space above and below ground are developed simultaneously, he said. "So making an underground master plan and assigning zones for different functions will help integrate the underground early on, and ultimately help to realise the full potential of a compact and livable city," he said.

Singapore has among the highest percentages of public green spaces in the world. Under its Land Use Plan 2030, one-third of surface land is allocated for industrial, transport infrastructure and utilities. The government in 2015 made legislative changes that enable it to buy land beneath private blocks, and limit private owners to 30 m of space below their properties. That will help avoid potential conflicts, and make it easier to move some "nuisance neighbors" underground, Stones said.

The Underground Master Plan uses 3D technology, allowing the visualization of space that otherwise cannot be seen. It is part of the "Virtual Singapore" plan, a 3D model that will be fed by big data, and could assist in everything from urban planning to disaster mitigation. It is not just Singapore that is interested in its underground space. Last week, billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk unveiled a 1.83 km tunnel segment as a breakthrough in low-cost, fast-digging technology, and a first step in developing a high-speed subterranean network in Los Angeles. The launch of Singapore's Underground Master Plan next year may be less glamorous, but no less significant. "The space is there, it's an asset, and we should use it. Having a detailed and rigorous plan is crucial," said Stones. — Reuters

Italian toy story: Retired mechanic carves old favorites

With his portly frame, bushy white beard and twinkling eyes, Italian toy-maker and puppeteer Mario Collino could be a stand-in for Father Christmas. But while he too carts around bags of toys made in his workshop, Collino, who performs under the name "Prezzemolo" (Mister Parsley), is more of a Mister Geppetto, the fictional carver and father of the fairytale hero Pinocchio. Collino, a retired Michelin tyre factory mechanic, has spent nearly 30 years touring old-age homes in his native Piedmont region, asking residents to share memories of their childhood playthings.

He sketches the objects they describe, builds them from odds and ends in his Aladdin's cave of a workshop near Cuneo in northern Italy, and then goes back to the retirement home with the finished product. "I ask them if it matches up and then ask their permission to put their name on it," he said. His bag of antiquated tricks now runs to 138 toys, puppets and assorted curiosities which he uses in performances in schools, retirement homes and on street markets that leave viewers, young and old, entranced.

Nothing bought, nothing sold

Spinning tops, jumping jacks, a tea towel that becomes a rabbit with flapping ears, a piece of paper that, after a few folds, turns into a frog - the tools of Collino's trade are simple objects brought to life by his wizardry. Every toy comes with a story or fairytale in Italian or Piedmontese, the Romance language of his region. Some are set to the strains of a homemade barrel organ, with a monkey wrench serving as a handle. Not for Collino the Xboxes and other newfangled, high-tech gizmos that many children have on their Christmas wish lists. Nothing in his grotto is bought or sold.

All that is needed is a penknife, a diagram and a vast trove of discarded objects, from umbrella canes to springs, plastic pulleys and wire brushes, to create a toy collection to rival any high-street superstore. His performances, which regularly take him across the border to France, are free of charge for spectators, with any compensation coming from festivals or other host institutions. Such is his inventiveness he was invited to give a seminar for aspiring architects at Turin's Polytechnic University.

A devout man, who regularly embarks on pilgrimages to the Santiago de Compostela shrine in Spain, Collino sees it as his Christian duty to nurture his inner child. "The Lord said if you do not become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. I took that at face value and so I'm still playing!" — AFP



Mario Collino, aka "Prezzemolo" ("Parsley" in English) poses in a cornfield on Dec 13, 2018 in Busca, near Cuneo in northern Italy. — AFP



Collino plays a "Baudetta", a traditional musical instrument made with spanners, in his workshop. — AFP

Business

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2018

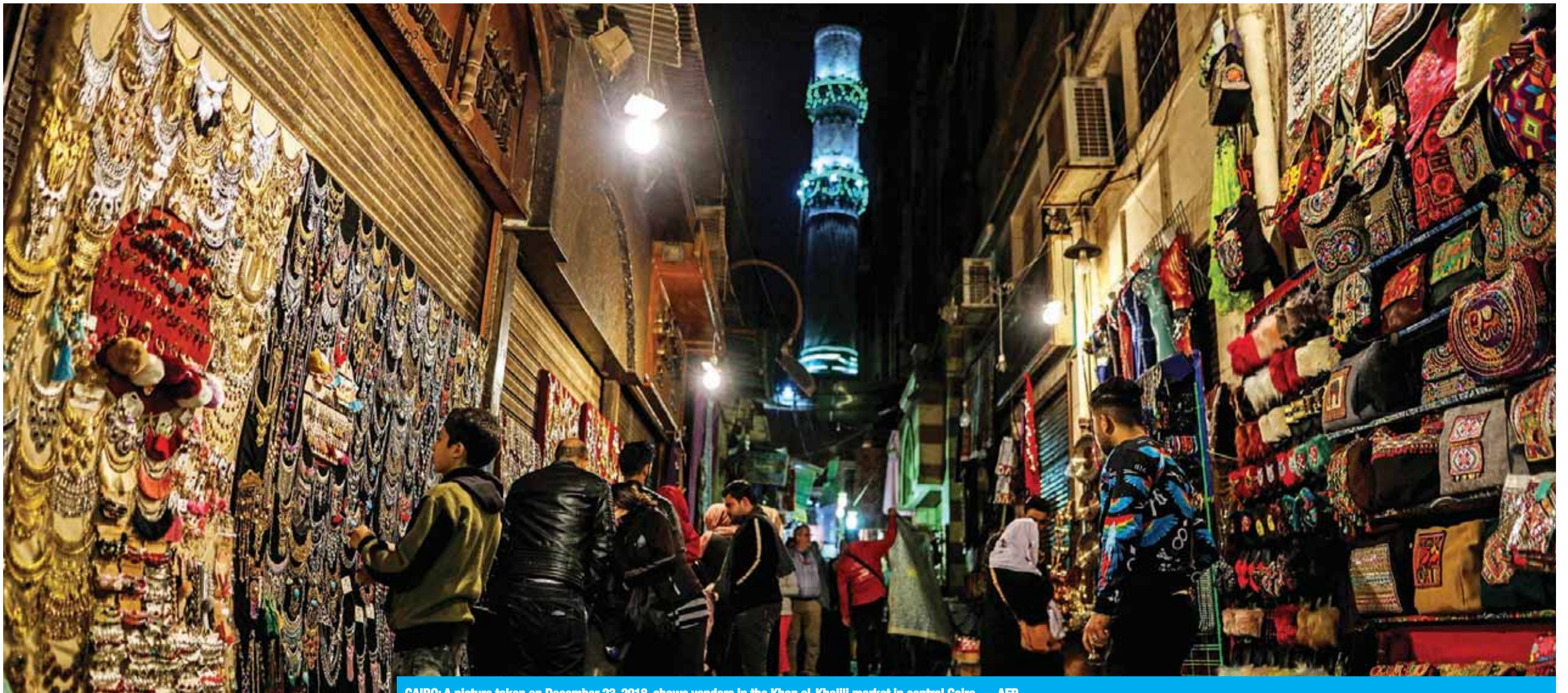
12 Markets far from merry as stock losses extend into seventh day



13 Political stumbles and savvy activists knock Canada's oil sector to its knees



14 The all new QX50 brings numerous features and benefits to customer



CAIRO: A picture taken on December 23, 2018, shows vendors in the Khan el-Khalili market in central Cairo. — AFP

Protests hit B'desh clothing manufacturers

Worries sporadic violence could spread ahead of elections

DHAKA: Bangladesh's clothing manufacturers, which dominate the southern Asian nation's economy, are worried sporadic violence that has affected some factories ahead of Sunday's election will spread. Workers have been demanding higher minimum pay than proposed in September by the government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who is seeking her third straight term in power. She has the support of many textile factory owners, and that can also make them a target for those opposed to the government.



Police say they are ready for trouble

Around the last election in 2014, which the main opposition party boycotted, months of violence hit operations at many factories, leading to millions of dollars in lost sales. Many foreign buyers curbed orders at the time. In recent

days, workers have gone on strike and taken to the streets in places including Mymensingh, about three hours north of Dhaka, and towns around the capital where textile factories are concentrated, three garment exporters told Reuters.

The garments industry generates around \$30 billion of exports a year, about 80 percent of Bangladesh's merchandise export earnings, making it the second largest in the world behind China. The government said in September the minimum wage for garments workers would rise by up to 51 percent from December, payable in January, to 8,000 taka (\$95.60) a month, the first increase since late 2013.

Workers, though, say that's not enough. "We want at least 12,000," Meem, who goes by just one name, said outside the Dhaka factory where she works, as co-workers gathered around her by the dozens. "There's ever increasing work pressure on us but our wages do not rise as fast."

Police say they are ready for trouble. "We have a definite intelligence report that a section of people want to create unrest in the sector, but that won't be possible as we are alert," police spokesman Mohammad Sohel Rana said, without elaborating. The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association has asked workers to remain calm and promised to make representations about wages to the government after the election, instead of each company negotiating with employees.

country looks to tighten its patent framework, state media reported yesterday. It was presented on Sunday at a meeting of the NPC Standing Committee. Under the draft law, victims of IP theft can claim for damages, the official Xinhua news agency reported. "It is necessary to significantly increase the financial penalties for IPR infringements to better exert the deterrent effect of the law," said Shen Chunyao, deputy head of the NPC Constitution and Law Committee when presenting the draft to lawmakers. China and the US have been locked in a bruising trade war, with the US 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. —AFP



BEIJING: In this file photo taken on December 05, 2018, a Chinese and US national flags hang on a fence at an international school. — AFP



DHAKA: A Bangladeshi man sits on his rickshaw van as posters of the ruling Bangladesh Awami League election candidates hang over a market yesterday. — AFP

Its president, Siddiqur Rahman, said he backed Hasina's Awami League. "I am really worried because everything was OK until recently but due to political reasons they are doing this," Shahidul Haque Mukul, another Awami League supporter, whose factory was vandalized yesterday morning, told Reuters by phone.

Busy time

December is typically the garment industry's busiest time. "I have buyers from countries like Japan, France and Portugal. They are placing smaller orders than normal for this time of year," Mukul said, blaming opposition groups for the trouble. Mahmud Hasan Khan, a textile factory owner and a leader of the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), declined to comment on the protests or violence.

The BNP's leader and former Prime Minister, Khaleda Zia, is in jail on what the party calls trumped-up corruption charges. Several workers outside the six-storey building of Mukul's Adams Apparel in Dhaka told Reuters they would continue to press for higher wages but were not involved in stone pelting that smashed windows yesterday. They said the protests had so far been spontaneous, though there was a risk of people taking advantage of them.

"There was a fear that something like this would happen around the election," said Mohammed Murad, a machine operator at Adams Apparel. "Hopefully things would be under control." Mohammad Mujibul Haque, the junior minister for labor and employment, said there was no reason for unrest after the wage hike announcement. "There's some incitement from a quarter to destabilize the environment ahead of the election," he said, without elaborating. — Reuters

Fresh bread price protests hit Sudan

KHARTOUM: Fresh protests against bread price hikes rattled Sudan Sunday, as riot police deployed around the capital Khartoum five days into demonstrations that have claimed at least eight lives. Residents in Um Rawaba, 200 kilometers southwest of Khartoum, told AFP that some 600 people gathered in the market chanting the slogan "the people want the fall of the regime". Protesters burnt tyres and branches in the streets and attempted to storm a government building before being rebuffed by security officials, witnesses said. In Atabara, 300 kilometers northeast of the capital, riot police and plain-clothed operatives deployed tear gas against hundreds of protesters, a witness said.

Late Sunday evening, hundreds of people poured out of a football stadium after a match in Khartoum's twin city of Omdurman calling for "freedom, peace and justice", according to witnesses. They were met by riot police who fired teargas at the crowds. A wave of unrest has rocked Sudan since Wednesday after the government hiked the price of a loaf of bread from one Sudanese pound to three (from about two to six US cents). Clashes with riot police killed at least eight people - two in Atbara and six in Al-Qadarif to the south-east of the capital, according to official figures. A high-

er death toll of 22 has been given by Sudan's main opposition leader Sadiq al-Mahdi, who blamed "armed repression" for the casualties.

'Cell of saboteurs'

There was a tense calm in the streets of Khartoum on Sunday as schools and universities were shuttered and riot police equipped with batons and tear gas guarded buildings. "We were asked to leave this morning," said a university student from northern Khartoum. Frustrated Sudanese queued outside bakeries in the city, where vendors were refusing to sell more than 20 loaves of bread per person. "I have a big family and this bread is not enough for three daily meals," a local resident told AFP. A bakery worker said a security guard standing nearby was not allowing the shop to sell any more.

Sudan's foreign ministry summoned Kuwait's ambassador to Khartoum Bassam Mohammed al-Qabandi after the Gulf state issued a travel warning and called on its citizens living there to leave. Sudan's official news agency SUNA reported Sunday that authorities had arrested a "cell of saboteurs" that planned "acts of vandalism in the capital". The official outlet said the "cell" includes members opposition groups, but did not elaborate. Sadiq Youssef from the opposition coalition, National Consensus Forces alliance, had said earlier that 14 members of his group, including its president Farouk Abu Issa, were arrested as they left a meeting. —AFP

Business

Political stumbles and savvy activists knock Canada's oil sector to its knees

'Made-in-Canada crisis' for world's fourth largest oil producer

WINNIPEG /VANCOUVER: A decade ago, Canada's oil sector was growing so fast it was predicted to become a global energy superpower, but a series of political missteps and formidable environmental activism has created a dysfunctional system requiring OPEC-style government intervention to move its oil to market. Canada produces 4.9 million barrels per day (bpd), more than any country other than the United States, Saudi Arabia and Russia, but the world's fourth largest producer has had to nationalize a pipeline and the province of Alberta is exploring buying trains to handle a glut of oil sitting in storage.

Canada's crisis coincides with big producers taking market share away from OPEC members, mostly clustered in the Middle East. Global oil demand is expected to surpass 100 million bpd in 2019. The United States has driven exports to record highs on growing demand from China, India and other developing countries.

But Ottawa has failed under two governments to effectively counter the strategy of environmental activists to attack the oil sector's heart by choking its arteries - pipelines. Roughly 35 million barrels, twice the normal amount, of Western Canadian crude used to produce diesel, gasoline and jet fuel is stuck in storage. The energy sector accounts for nearly 11 percent of Canada's gross domestic product. However, Canadian oil trades at a fraction of global prices, costing the economy C\$80 million per day, the Alberta provincial government said.

Alberta took the unusual step this month of temporarily curtailing 325,000 bpd starting in January - in the aftermath of a retreat from the oil sands by global companies including ConocoPhillips and Statoil ASA. "It's become dire now because the writing is clearly on the wall. The issue is market access," said Jihad Traya, manager of energy advisory service HSB Solomon. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's government, facing an election next year, offered the oilpatch this week C\$1.6 billion in aid. In May, Ottawa agreed to buy the Trans Mountain pipeline in hopes of pushing through an expansion to nearly triple capacity as other proposed lines languished.

Politicians and activists

In 2006, then-Prime Minister Stephen Harper boasted Canada would soon become an "energy superpower." Canada was producing 2.6 million bpd, which moved smoothly to US refineries through pipelines. Since then, production has nearly doubled, but pipeline growth has stalled. Both Conservative Harper and Liberal Trudeau

squelched opportunities to complete pipelines just as opposition to more lines multiplied. Two projects were killed, and legal setbacks have stymied the development of TransCanada Corp's Keystone XL and the government-owned Trans Mountain expansion.

A year after taking office in 2015 Trudeau proposed a bargain aimed at satisfying both environmentalists and the oil industry - a national carbon-pricing plan to reduce Canada's emissions while approving pipeline expansions. The strategy has inflamed both sides. When a court overturned Ottawa's approval of the expansion of Trans Mountain in August, the deal was off and Alberta Premier Rachel Notley yanked support for Trudeau's carbon plan just hours later.

Indigenous and environmental opposition to pipelines has forced Trudeau to push for tighter regulations on future pipelines. The changes are necessary to "depoliticize" the system, Natural Resources Minister Amarjeet Sohi said. "We need to fix the broken system that we have now so we are able to build the pipeline capacity that is so necessary." But Trudeau has already shelved Enbridge's Northern Gateway proposal, which would have run through northern Alberta to the Pacific coast, and the National Energy Board in 2017 toughened its review of TransCanada's Energy East pipeline while it was underway. Both projects are now dead. Alberta is seeking to buy rail cars to reduce the glut, and earlier this month, the province ordered producers to cut output after its oil fell to a discount of \$52 per barrel from US oil in October. Notley told reporters on Tuesday that people in Alberta can make profits from oil and gas, "but they need Ottawa to take the handcuffs off. We need rail. We need long-term support for getting that pipeline built."

Environmental opposition

Alberta's oil sands, a mixture of sand, water, clay and thick, heavy oil, became a compelling target for environmentalists as production expanded dramatically in the early 2000s. The mining process scrapes away trees and vegetation across huge tracts of land, leaving a path of destruction captured in aerial images, while a different production method using steam consumes huge amounts of natural gas.

Clayton Thomas-Muller, an indigenous activist, said environmentalists grew frustrated trying to stop the industry's expansion through the Alberta Energy Regulator, but found a new strategy of opposing the pipelines. They built



FORT MCMURRAY: In this file photo taken on June 14, 2007, the Syncrude extraction facility in the northern Alberta oil sand fields is reflected in the pool of water being recycled for re-use in the extraction process in Fort McMurray, Alberta, Canada.

wider coalitions, tapping into anger of Nebraska ranchers and drawing the attention of Hollywood celebrities such as director James Cameron. Opponents of TransCanada's Keystone XL began protests at the White House in 2011, seeking arrest and attention. Then-U.S. President Barack Obama finally rejected the project in 2015.

"Full credit to climate-change advocates, they kicked the snot out of Corporate Canada," said Tim Powers, a Conservative political strategist. He said Canadian resource companies have been too focused on the regulatory process, while climate-change advocates "laid out a better, more compelling narrative" to win public opinion. US President Donald Trump resurrected Keystone XL

in 2017. But both KXL and Trans Mountain remain in regulatory limbo after courts ruled in recent months that the U.S. and Canadian governments failed to properly do their jobs. The cases that overturned approvals for Northern Gateway and Trans Mountain led companies to question investment in Canada. The end result is a Canadian oil patch in retreat.

"My main fear is that other nations will continue to produce at market price and Canada will be left behind," said Duncan Au, chief executive of CWC Energy Services Corp. The well drilling company has cut about 70 employees, or nearly 10 percent, since the beginning of 2018. "This is a made-in-Canada crisis," Au said. — Reuters

Brazilians' optimism over economy shoots up: Poll

RIO DE JANEIRO: Brazilians' optimism that their economy, Latin America's biggest, will soon improve has shot up dramatically, according to a poll released Sunday just over a week before a new far-right president, Jair Bolsonaro, takes office. The Datafolha survey showed 65 percent of respondents believed the economy - which is still limping after a record-busting recession that ended two years ago - would be doing better within months. That was a huge jump over the Brazilian polling firm's last survey in August, when only 23 percent thought an improvement was coming.

The survey was released ahead of the January 1 inauguration of Bolsonaro. The formerly obscure politician found electoral success in October on a pro-business agenda promising to cut Brazil's towering debt, usher in privatizations and back powerful agricultural and mining interests over environmental concerns. He also won voter support by railing against the leftwing Workers Party which ruled Brazil from boom to bust between 2003 and 2016, and which has been marred by multiple corruption scandals.

The Folha de Sao Paulo newspaper said the optimism rating was the highest recorded since Datafolha started polling on it in 1997. It added that while public optimism usually spiked before a new president took over, the sense of buoyancy ahead of



BRASILIA: Supporters (R) of Brazilian former president (2003-2018) Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and (L) of Brazilian President-elect Jair Bolsonaro are divided by a line of police as they demonstrate respectively for and against Lula Da Silva's possible release outside the Federal Supreme Court. — AFP

Bolsonaro's presidency was higher than for his predecessors.

Sky-high popularity

Datafolha polled 2,077 people across the country on December 18 and 19 for the survey. The margin of error was two percentage points. According to the survey, two-thirds of Brazilians believe their personal financial situation will improve in 2019 and nearly half reckon unemployment will decline. Bolsonaro enjoys 75 percent popularity in Brazil, according to a survey published December 13 by another polling firm, IBOPE.

Analysts say that public backing could help Bolsonaro push economic reforms through Congress, where he is relying on ad-

hoc alliances with deputies sharing his base's views. Those lobbies are described as "Beef, Bible and Bullets," representing agribusiness, a burgeoning evangelical movement and pro-gun interests. But analysts say expectations are so high for Bolsonaro's presidency that he could face a precipitous drop in public support if he stumbles politically.

The 63-year-old former army captain, an admirer of US President Donald Trump, is relying heavily on a free-market advocate, Paulo Guedes, to implement the reforms at the head of an economy ministry with sprawling powers. Yet a third of Bolsonaro's cabinet is made up of ex-military men, who traditionally object to changes that could allow key state assets to come under foreign control. — AFP

S Korea to fine BMW \$10m over engine fires response

SEOUL: South Korea said yesterday it will fine German automaker BMW 11.2 billion won (\$10 million) for allegedly dragging its feet in recalling cars with faulty engines linked to dozens of engine fires. BMW vehicles bursting into flames made headlines in South Korea earlier this year, with local media reporting more than 40 cases in 2018 and some parking lots refusing to accept BMW cars over fears they could catch fire.

The auto giant recalled more than 170,000 vehicles in South Korea with a faulty exhaust gas recirculation (EGR) cooler, which the firm blamed for the fires. In August, it announced a recall for Europe and some Asian countries - including South Korea - of 480,000 cars affected by the same problem, before expanding it to more than one million additional diesel cars two months later.

"BMW announced earlier that it had become aware of the connection between the faulty EGR cooler and the fire only on July 20 this year," the South Korean transport ministry said in a statement, announcing the results of a five-month probe. "But we discovered that... BMW's German headquarters had already formed a special team in October 2015 tasked with solving the EGR cooler problem."

In addition to the fine, the ministry will also ask prosecutors to investigate BMW for allegedly delaying acknowledgement of the issue on purpose and dragging its feet on the recall. In South Korea, six out of 10 imported cars are from Germany, with BMW selling nearly 39,000 in the first six months of this year, according to the Korea Automobile Importers and Distributors Association. — AFP



SEOUL: Parts of a burnt BMW car are displayed on a table during a press conference announcing the result of a five-month joint probe into BMW car engine fires, held at the South Korean government complex. — AFP

UK retail sector axed 150,000 jobs in 2018

LONDON: Troubled UK high-street retailers shed almost 150,000 jobs this year, hit by high business property taxation, flagging growth and rising online sales, a study showed yesterday. Some 148,132 jobs were axed as 20,000 shops and restaurants closed, according to Britain's Press Association news agency which published data from the Centre for Retail Research (CRR). And more gloom is

forecast next year as retailers continue to struggle in anticipation of Britain's departure from the European Union.

"While parliament is obsessed with Brexit, business rates and low growth are killing the high street," said Professor Joshua Bamfield, who is director of the CRR consultancy. "We feel that 2019 is going to be a repeat of these dire figures unless or until the government takes action to provide a level playing field for both online retailers and the high street." This year, a string of major British retailers fell victim to fierce online competition, rising business taxes and stretched household budgets - all coming amid Brexit uncertainty. One major casualty, British budget chain Poundworld, collapsed earlier this year with the loss of some 5,100 jobs. — AFP



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Business

The all new QX50 brings numerous features and benefits to customers

Hurry to reward yourself with an exclusive package during purchase

KUWAIT: Abdulmohsen Abdulaziz Al Babtain Co (AABC), the sole authorized dealer of Infiniti vehicles in the State of Kuwait, announced the launch of a brand new package deal that customers are entitled to when purchasing the new Infiniti QX50 at the Al Rai showroom. When buying the new Infiniti QX50, customers can be guaranteed a benefit package of a two year full insurance, free maintenance or 60,000 KM, 5 year warranty open mileage, 24/7 road side assistance, a replacement car and free registration and 3rd party insurance.

The new INFINITI QX50 is the world's first variable compression ratio engine in a production vehicle which was created to fully meet the needs of today's premium car buyers and to deliver on their desire to own the latest masterpiece of technology. The VC-Turbo engine delivers the strong and convincing performance of a V6 and the fuel economy of a 4-cylinder engine - transforming on demand and based on the input of the drivers. Instantly adapting to their needs, the VC-Turbo lets them harness

the exhilarating performance of 268 hp and 380 nm at 4,400 rpm of torque. The QX50 appeals to buyers who require the unique combination of interior space, power, efficiency, hand-crafted quality, and modern design, along with effortless on-road performance.

Developed on an entirely new platform, the QX50 features the sophisticated and assuring INFINITI Intelligent All-Wheel Drive. Drive Assist technologies react instantaneously to critical driving situations, supporting the drivers with a range of empowering 'co-pilot' features, and enabling them to always be in total control. Driver-centric, yet passenger-minded, the QX50 offers a package of technologies to enhance the driving experience, while a calm, connected, and relaxing cabin features an asymmetric layout - designed to meet different needs of the driver and the passengers. Infiniti Al Babtain encourages its customers to explore the advantage of the exclusive deal by visiting the designated showroom located in Al Rai.



KIB sells four state properties in public auction

KUWAIT: KIB organized a public auction on Wednesday, December 19, for the sale of 15 properties (vacant land) owned by the State of Kuwait represented by the Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA). Held at Safir International Hotel - Kuwait, a total 4 properties were sold at the auction, after completing all necessary legal procedures and contracts to complete the sales transactions.

On his part, Yousef Al-Ajeel, Head of the Property Management Department (PMD) at KIB, said: "The auction included 15 state properties with varying specifications, during which a total 4 properties were sold. The first property was a vacant private property overlooking a side street in Fintas. The second property was a vacant private property overlooking a side street in Fintas. The third property was a vacant private property overlooking a side street off the main street in Fintas. The fourth property was a vacant private property in Oqaila."

Al-Ajeel added that the PMD at KIB organizes public auctions as per the request of property owners, in line with real estate conditions and requirements. Additionally, the PMD also manages a large number of commercial complexes, residential buildings, as well as private properties owned by customers, and both the public and private sectors.

Moreover, Al-Ajeel noted that the PMD offers key services at competitive prices through different units, including a unit for marketing and managing properties, as well as a unit responsible for emergency and routine maintenance services to ensure proper upkeep and safety of properties. Additionally, the PMD offers legal services to advise clients on property transactions and resolve legal disputes related to the property; accounting services to prepare financial statements and accounting reports; and rent collection services to collect rent on behalf of property owners and provide online payment services. Services also include holding public auctions at the request of property owners, in line with local real estate laws and regulations.

Burgan Bank names winners of Yawmi account draw

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced the names of the daily draw winners of its Yawmi account draw yesterday. Each took home a cash-prize of KD 5,000.

- The lucky winners are:
1. Hamad Neamah Saheeb Jeedaa
 2. Mohammed Aman Allah Abu Alhashim
 3. Jassim Hajeya Abdulla Ashkanani
 4. Ibrahim Abdullah Trad
 5. Abdul-Hameed Ali Mohd Al-Qabandi

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

Burgan Bank encourages everyone to open a Yawmi account and/or increase their deposit to maximize their chances of becoming a winner. The higher the level of the deposit, the higher the likelihood to win. For more information on opening a Yawmi account, the new quarterly draw or on any of the bank's products and services, customers are urged to visit their nearest Burgan Bank branch, or simply call the bank's Call Center. Customers can also log on to Burgan Bank's www.burgan.com for further information.

KFH awarded with 'Best Performing Cobranded Card Program in GCC'

KUWAIT: Mastercard, a leading technology company in the global payments industry, awarded Kuwait Finance House (KFH) "The Best Performing Cobranded Card Program in GCC" for the Oasis Club cobranded Mastercard and Kuwait Airways prepaid card. Nimer Yasin, Group Deputy General Manager Cards at KFH, received the award from Girish Nanda, General Manager, Mastercard, at an award ceremony held in Dubai, UAE. On receiving the award, Yasin said: "We are proud to have received this prestigious award from Mastercard, which will serve as an additional incentive for us to continuously explore rewarding programs with our partners, and offer KFH customers added value with each one of our products."

Yasin continued: "It is great to have reached this milestone within five years of our partnership with Kuwait Airways and launching the Oasis Club Mastercard card. Designed especially for our customers' shopping and traveling needs, the card allows our cardholders to earn extra miles with Oasis Club for every local or international transaction, and enjoy a wide range of privileges and discounts. The accumulated miles can be exchanged for special promotions and privileges from Kuwait Airways."

"The KFH-Kuwait Airways cobranded offering has built an attractive new consumer value proposition by becoming one of the most preferred cards for customers looking to add benefits on everyday payments in line with their lifestyle needs," he added. The card's overseas spend has grown by 55% on a year over year (YoY) basis. Similarly,



Nimer Yasin receiving the award from Mastercard.

the number of cards issued has surged by 75% YoY.

Yasin affirmed that KFH will continue to strengthen its partnership with Kuwait Airways to launch customer reward programs such as the "Journey of 6 Million Miles Begins with A Card" campaign launched earlier this year. As part of the campaign, cardholders were entered into a draw to win one of the following prizes: one winner received 1,000,000 Miles, 5 winners were awarded 500,000 Miles each and 100 winners received 25,000 Miles each. KFH is keen to ensure that its services and products support the activities of national companies in order to develop the Kuwaiti economy and meet the evolving needs of customers in the country.

Meanwhile, Girish Nanda - General Manager, Mastercard, shared: "Mastercard congratulates KFH on winning the 'Best Performing Cobranded Card Program in GCC' for its Oasis Club Card and commends the bank's efforts in creating new products that effectively meet consumers' evolving needs. Co-branded cards like the Oasis Club card with Kuwait Airways provide cardholders with an exciting variety of lifestyle rewards and privileges along with the peace of mind they have come to associate with Mastercard. The high level of convenience and the added benefits they offer make our cobranded cards an excellent choice for simple, fast and safe payment experiences."

Are we moving towards an app-less world?

Mobile is king in 2018 - people are spending more time on the move and on their phones. You'd think app use would also be on the rise, but this may not be the case. As of 2016, Com Score found that more than half of US smartphone users download zero apps per month. Whether this be for lack of need or lack of storage - it's undeniable users are engaging less with applications than most people would expect. On average, people have begun to focus only on about three apps they use most frequently. That doesn't mean app development isn't on the rise. According to Statista, the growth rate of Android apps in June 2017 was more than 1,300 new applications a day. However, ComScore noted that uninstalling apps is also on the rise.

Why is this the case? Well, apps are stagnant - they often serve just one purpose and only improve when some behind the scenes players choose to release an update based on what they think the user will want or need. AI, on the other hand, is constantly learning. Usage will become faster and more fluid as AI gets to know your preferences, resulting in a more timely - and personal - experience.

With the abundance of apps available, it's getting harder to download, set up and manage them all. IDC research found that knowledge workers specifically spend about 30 percent of the workday searching through different apps to find the information they need. Having more advanced assistants means there's no need to house multiple apps on your phone - with a single command you can order a pizza, pay for it and set a timer for its delivery. What would have taken three or four apps can now be done without looking at a screen.

Think about what an AI assistant can do - tell you the news (goodbye CNN app), send text-messages directly (clear out WeChat, WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger), even edit photos and enhance videos! No need for VSCOCam when built in AI - like Master AI on the Huawei Mate 20 series - can gauge scenes in real time and optimize settings to ensure photos are social media-ready right when they're taken. Don't worry if you're one of those who appreciate images that are au naturale - Master AI can be turned off with a quick tap on the on-screen prompt, or disabled completely in the settings menu.

Camera AI has even more capabilities to usurp common apps - with innovative technology like Huawei's HiVision, users can translate text directly through their lens, eliminating the need for an extra translation app. It can also tell how many calories your food has just by looking at it-talk about being



handy. And while HiTouch currently requires the Amazon App to be installed to generate direct links to products, soon AI software will be able to direct users to online retailers with absolutely no help from secondary applications.

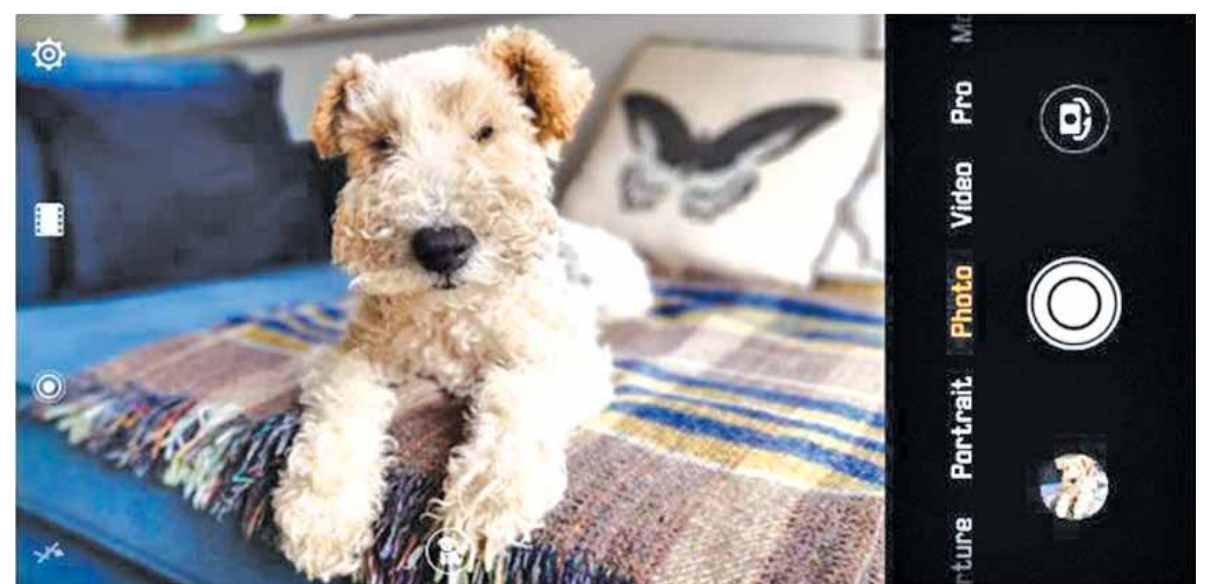
Additionally, the market for native mobile apps is segmented - businesses need a separate app structure for Apple and Android devices. This siloed effort is less efficient and requires more expenditure on the side of the developer. In 2017, Gartner reported that 52 percent of interviewed business leaders claimed their enterprises had begun piloting the use of bots, chatbots or virtual assistants, as opposed to standard mobile apps.

It seems businesses are taking the plunge developing this kind of technology in an effort to future-proof their systems. We hear day-in and day-out about the expected growth in 5G and we're closer than ever to seeing it happen. And with the rise of

5G, most anticipate that adoption of IoT and AI are set to boom.

When it comes to expanding AI, the priorities lie with improving the Natural Language Processing (NLP) of on-device assistants. With a better ability to comprehend users' voices, the assistants can provide more accurate, relevant and timely responses. Once again, this kind of technology takes years and heavy investment in R&D, which is why companies like Huawei have been heads down making major developments in centers around the world.

Huawei's goal is to provide users with the best and most natural and proactive experience, and thanks to this continuous and effortful improvement, AI technology will soon go from simply seeing and recognizing, to seeing and understanding. And as AI has the ability to do more than hear users, to begin really understanding them, there's a good chance the relevance of mobile apps could fall to the wayside.



Health & Science

Chinese court sentences 20 in care centre scandal

Series of deaths at a care centre

BEIJING: A court in southern China yesterday sentenced over 20 people in connection with a series of deaths at a care centre, where 21 people including a 15-year-old autistic boy perished under squalid conditions in 2016. The director of the centre, Li Cuiqiong, was given a suspended death sentence with a two-year reprieve, while another official who worked closely with Li was given a life sentence, state-run Xinhua news

agency reported. The two men, who worked for the civil affairs department in Xinfeng County had "used their power to set up and illegally operate the care center," Xinhua said.

Supervisory authorities in Guangdong have also taken "disciplinary action" against 107 civil servants for their role in the scandal, Xinhua said, without offering details. An expose in March 2017 by state-run Beijing

News found that poor conditions at Lianxi care agency for the homeless, elderly and mentally ill in Shaoguan, Guangdong province had led to the deaths within a span of a few months.

Accounts of crowded, unsanitary conditions at the facility triggered widespread outrage in China, with people pouring scorn on the government's treatment of vulnerable members of society. "Was it murder? Did the

[centre] pocket government subsidies instead of spending money on the patients?" a commenter on the Twitter-like Weibo asked at the time. Lei Wenfeng, the autistic teenager, who had wandered away from home and got lost, died in December 2016 after staying at the centre for just over a month. The centre was privately run, but financed by the local government, according to the state-run China Daily. — AFP

Australia to beef up technology for drone 'crackdown'

SYDNEY: Australia will introduce new surveillance technology for a "crackdown" on drones next year, aviation authorities said yesterday, as concerns mount over their increasing prevalence in public areas. Australia's Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) plans to roll out new monitoring equipment at major airports across the country next month. The technology has the ability to identify a drone, its serial number and the location of the controller while in flight, CASA communications manager Peter Gibson told AFP. "We can identify therefore who is flying it," he said.

The technology, coupled with new registration requirements, will "dramatically" change the way rules relating to drones are enforced, Gibson added. "2019 will be a drone safety crackdown," he said. While the new equipment has been in planning for some time, the incident last week at London's Gatwick airport—which saw nearly 140,000 passengers affected by three days of disruption after reports of drone sightings—"highlights the importance of having this capability", Gibson said.

Officials will also roll out a drone registration scheme in mid-2019, so that authorities can better track who is flying them and advise of proper safety precautions. The new mobile tracking technology will be used in "known drone hotspots" like the Sydney Harbor Bridge, which has seen a concerning rise of drones operating in a restricted area, Gibson said. Authorities will have greater powers to conduct safety checks, he said, and increased ability to issue fines of up to A\$10,000 (USD\$7,000) for those in breach of the rules. "In 2019 it could be very expensive doing the wrong thing with your drone," Gibson said. — AFP



PORT-LA-NOUVELLE: Photo shows a drone used by technicians above the future site of a wind farm off Port-la-Nouvelle, in the Mediterranean sea, southern France. — AFP

'Smart' uniforms track students in truancy fight

BEIJING: Schools in southern China are using chip-powered "smart" school uniforms to track their students in a bid to tackle truancy and boost attendance, according to state media. The uniforms use chips to monitor the location of students and can record their exit and entry into school, according to the tech firm behind the tracking devices. "When students enter the school, the smart uniforms help take a photo or video of them," explained principal Ran Ruxiang, whose elementary school in Guizhou province started rolling out smart uniforms last November. More than half of the school's 1,400 students were wearing the smart uniforms, he told AFP. At least 10 schools in Guizhou and neighboring Guangxi have adopted the technology, according to a Thursday report by the Global Times. If students walk out of the school without permission, an automatic voice alarm will activate, the report said.

Paired with facial recognition devices installed on school doors, the smart uniforms can also sense if students swap uniforms. "We choose not to check the accurate location of students after school, but when the student is missing and skipping classes, the uniforms help locate them," Guizhou province school principal Lin Zongwu told the Global Times. But so far, it's not clear how effective smart uniforms are at preventing students from playing hooky. The high-tech uniforms have helped increase the attendance rate, "but not much", according to Ran, who added that the school chose the uniforms mainly as a way to send notifications and homework to students through an app connected to the uniform chips. — AFP

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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 Otolology 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.

Salmiya, Belajat Street, Tel: 1881122
@Malhajry

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.

SHARQ, Ahmad Alieber st., Building b8, Floor 13.
Tel.: (+965) 22060777.
@Drbuhaimed, @Renovabb, @dardonaab
Email: drbuhaimed@beautybeyond.com.kw
www.beautybeyond.com.kw

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Dr. Marzouq Al-Bader
Consultant vascular and general surgery

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- All methods of treating varicose
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**Global Medical Center, Bneid Al-Qar
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www.globalmed-center.com

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).

**مستشفى دار الشفاء
Dar Al Shifa Hospital
Tele:1802 555**
@daralshifa

DR KHALED ALMERRI
Consultant interventional Cardiology
Department: Heart & Vascular Center

Specialized in:

- 1-Diagnosis 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

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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 Eurpean Laryngological Society

Specialized in:

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- ◆ 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.

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Member of the Society of American Gastrointestinal & Endoscopic Surgeons (SAGES)
Higher specialization in Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary surgery & Organ Transplantation
Member of many prestigious surgical societies.

- ◆ Day case surgeries
- ◆ Minor surgeries (lipoma, sebaceous cyst, ingrowing nail)
- ◆ Diagnosis, treatment and follow up of all surgical emergencies
- ◆ Hemorrhoids, fistula & anal fissure surgeries
- ◆ Surgery for morbid obesity (sleeve, gastric bypass)
- ◆ Breast surgeries
- ◆ Hernia repair
- ◆ Thyroid & adrenal surgeries
- ◆ Surgery for reflux disease
- ◆ Cholecystectomy & laparoscopic appendectomy
- ◆ Liver, pancreas & bile ducts surgeries

Dr. Hani Haider
General Surgery Consultant
http://www.international-clinic.com
Tel: 1886677 ic_kwt

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)
- ◆ VAAFT 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

**مستشفى دار الشفاء
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DR. FAHAD AL-MUKHAIZEEM
Consultant Pediatrician

Consultant Pediatrician-Canadian & American Board in Pediatrics-Canadian Board in Pediatric Emergency

Tel.: 22269369 - Fax: 22269368
Al-Jabriya - Block 1A - St.1 - Mazaya Building - 15th Floor - Clinic B

DR. WALEED S BUHAIMED
Consultant of General Surgery
Laposcopic 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.

email: wbuhaimed@gmail.com Tel.: 965 22269411/ Mob.: 965 99212228 Jabriya, 4th Ring Road,Block 1A Floor 9 -Clover Center Mazaya Building

What's On



GUST's Gulf Financial Center hosts industry experts

Gulf University for Science and Technology's (GUST) Gulf Financial Center (GFC) hosted industry experts to deliver a pre-incubation module to GUST 440 Practicum students. The module titled "Writing Business Plan-Financials" was scheduled every Monday and Wednesday from October 29th to November 7th, 2018. The instructors facilitating the sessions came from Cubical Services Business Incubator, a Kuwaiti-based company founded in 2009 with experience in arrange of fields including entrepreneurship and finance. Cubical Services have worked with close to 1,000 entrepreneurs and on over 600 projects with startups in numerous industries.

Being a social enterprise, Cubical Services is also Kuwait's first officially licensed, one-stop business incubator, and was also the first to be qualified by the National Fund. Cubical Services strives to actively encourage current and potential entrepreneurs to successfully execute their business ambitions by offering all-inclusive services and support in every part of an entrepreneurs' business cycle to create a healthy ecosystem where entrepreneurs can fulfill their business potential in order to enrich the Kuwaiti economy and elevate its talents regionally and internationally.



The instructors come from diverse backgrounds related to entrepreneurship such as investment, marketing, economics, and finance. The session began with an introduction by Maysoon Al-Attar, the Vice President of the Marketing & Sales Department with previous experience working for marketing agencies and international youth organizations locally and internationally. Al-Attar opened the sessions with engaging ice-breakers, and relevant information about defining a business incubator, what Cubical Services does and what its purpose is.

The session was then taken forward by the CEO and Founding Partner of Cubical Services, Abdulrahman Al-Fawaz, who covered topics such as sources of start-up funding locally and internationally, credit ratings, pricing, and cash-flow budgets. Al-Fawaz developed the concept of the company and has overseen its operations since inception. Al-Fawaz comes from a private equity and finance background and has served on board of numerous subsidiary & sister companies in the investment, logistics, real estate and industrial sectors. He has extensive experience in analyzing feasibility studies, business planning and operational control.

CEO and Founding Partner of Cubical Services, Abdulrahman Al-Fawaz, said: "The students were so appreciative of the practical learning opportunity in entrepreneurship to support their theoretic knowledge, and this was evidence in itself of how ambitious they are, and how much potential they have. It was also great to have discussions with them at such early stages for what may come when they are out in the "real-world" when they start their SME's. We are looking forward to growing future collaborations with GUST and their students!"

The session closed off with Fay Al-Zouman, the Entrepreneurship Programs Divisions Business

Development Officer, who introduced Cubical Services CSR Program, and the Fikra Program: a 6-month training program that takes on 15 business ideas, gives them all the appropriate tools, knowledge, mentoring, networking opportunities and more, to ensure that they are ready to operate successfully.

The following sessions were hefty with content and interactive for students with hands on material and practice, delivered by Cubical Services SME Division Manager, Salem Al-Mutawa who covered topics such as preparing basic financial statements: Identifying types of expenses for startups; and identify the break-even point for the business.

Director of the Gulf Financial Center and Associate Professor of Economics, Dr Fida Karam, said, "The GFC is proud to have collaborated with such a highly regarded entity in the local market to support our students and provide them with the right tools and hands-on experience to establish their business." The GFC continuously works on collaborating with local and international experts to create mentorship and apprenticeship opportunities for GUST students, as well as provide them the opportunity to gain valuable information from experienced individuals and industry leaders.

LOYAC, MOH, KU organize stroke awareness campaign

In collaboration with Ministry of Health (MOH) and the faculty of medicine, Kuwait University (KU), LOYAC recently organized a public awareness campaign on strokes on December 10 and 12, 2018 at Kuwait Sheraton Hotel. The campaign was then resumed on December 22, 2018 at the Avenues. "8.6 percent of deaths in Kuwait are caused by

strokes according to WHO statistics," said Osama Al-Methan the head of the guidance and awareness section at the medical emergencies department, during a lecture where he spoke about the standard procedures to be followed in such cases.

On his part, neurological system consultant and the head of strokes department at the Amiri hospital, Dr Khaled Al-Hassan spoke about treatment and ways of preventing strokes. Speakers also included Ibn Sina hospital's brain and nerves radiology consultant, Dr Peter, brain surgeon, Dr Tareq Al-Shaikh, casualty department consultant, Dr Yasser Bader Abul Hassan, modern physiotherapy specialist Amina Al-Rashid, Dr Fahad mane', Maraheeb Al-Qallaf and ex stroke patient Salah Al-Beraidi.



Zuma Q8 Garden Restaurant opens at Arabella complex

The Opening of Zuma Q8 Garden Restaurant promotes a greener Kuwait. The ceremony was held at Arabella complex in the presence of Mohsen Boshehri the General Manager of Osaka Restaurants and Food Supply Company, as well as a large number of media delegates and "Zuma Q8" customers.

The Zuma Kuwait Garden sets new standards in the hospitality industry in Kuwait and the Gulf region as it provides a wide selection of scrumptious platters in a green, breath-taking surrounding, enabling guests to dine out in a one-of-a-kind atmosphere. The restaurant also offers a lavish menu, which includes a variety of mouth-watering dishes carefully prepared from fresh ingredients such as salads, appetizers and soups, not forgetting the main course such as grilled steaks, pastas and sweets. The menu also features a wide variety of fresh juices, cocktails, coffees and Tea.

Tony Lteif, Executive Manager at Osaka Restaurants and Food Supply Company stated, "Our aim is to promote the green concept in Kuwait, we opened "Zuma Q8 Garden" to welcome guests who want to enjoy a unique dining experience in a calm and green environment, that hosts more than 300 different trees, plants and flowers that can be easily moved around to complement the venue decoration. In addition to that, the roof top offers an outstanding visual experience due to its one of the widest projected screens in Kuwait that spread on a 12 meters' mounted wall, while listening to background oriental/ occidental music in a place that is simply unique".

He added, "Zuma Kuwait Garden is a VIP Lounge especially dedicated for customers who are looking to live an exceptional and luxurious dining experience, where bookings are made in advance to ensure top-notch service at all times". He went on to say, "We aim to provide the best in town dining experience to customers. We are glad to take the lead and be a good example for others to promote green Kuwait".



Last but not least, Lteif gave a summary about Osaka Restaurants and Food Supply Company.

Osaka Restaurants and Food Supply Company is one of the leading companies in managing restaurants and catering services in Kuwait, which operates four renowned brands: Thai restaurant, Marina Thai, the Japanese cuisine "Osaka" and "Zuma Q8" with a new branch out to include "Zuma Q8 Garden" and "Weekend" that will be opened soon. Besides, Marina Thai was renovated and reopened at Souq Shark, and the second branch in Jabriya. Zuma Q8 was opened in Arabella in 2014 and was one of the famous restaurants; thanks to its diversified, lavish international menu. Finally, Osaka Japanese Restaurant will be opening its exquisite branch in Kuwait City, Al Sour Street in the 1st quarter of 2019.



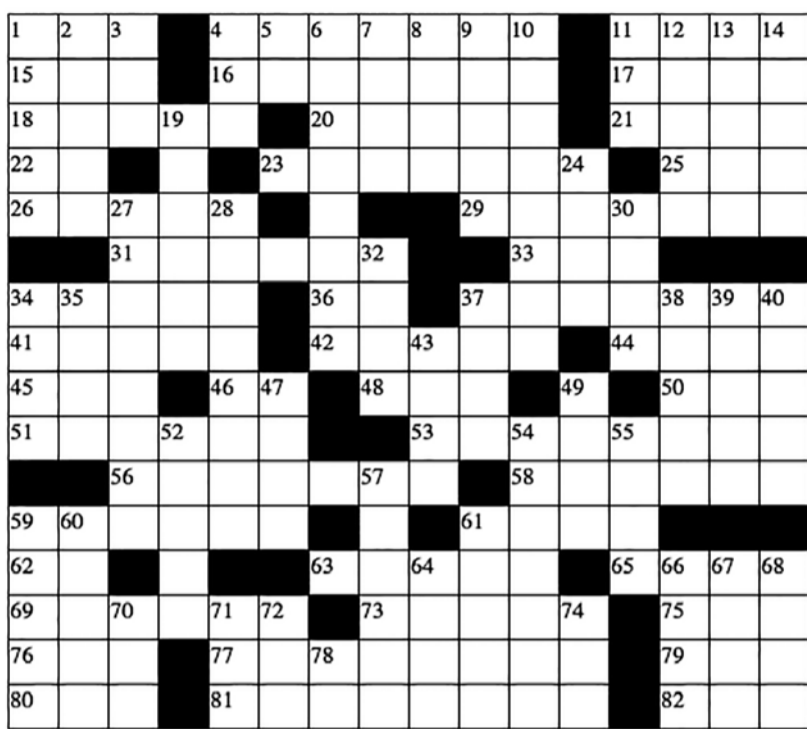
OPM organizes Christmas carol

As part of the Christmas celebration, the Omega power Ministry Church organized its Christmas carol in a grand style. The event attracted lots of dignitaries and Christians from other Christian organizations. The host pastor Godwin Ebhoma urged Christians to be good ambassadors of Christ. He lauded the Amir and Kuwait government for promoting religious tolerance and peace in the region.



Stars

CROSSWORD 2093



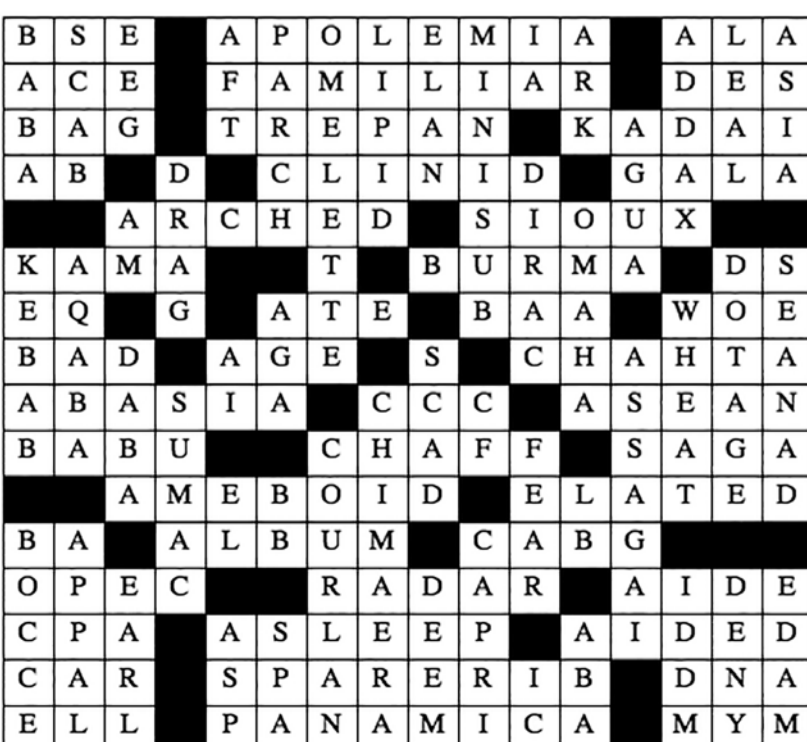
ACROSS

- Aircraft landing in bad weather in which the pilot is talked down by ground control using precision approach radar.
- A republic in southeastern Europe on the Adriatic coast of the Balkan Peninsula.
- An island in the Netherlands Antilles that is the top of an extinct volcano.
- 300 to 3000 megahertz.
- Concealing something under the ground.
- Divulge information or secrets.
- Of a pale purple color.
- A worker who oils engines or machinery.
- Lean and sinewy.
- A silvery ductile metallic element found primarily in bauxite.
- A ceremony at which a dead person is buried or cremated.
- (computer science) A computer that is running software that allows users to leave messages and access information of general interest.
- Tropical American tree bearing a small edible fruit with green leathery skin and sweet juicy translucent pulp.
- A genus of Psocidae.
- Any of various herbaceous plants of the genus Atriplex that thrive in deserts and salt marshes.
- A plant hormone promoting elongation of stems and roots.
- A manicurist who trims the fingernails.
- An associate degree in nursing.
- The capital and largest city of Jordan.
- Antipsychotic drug (trade name Mobic) used in the treatment of schizophrenia.
- The form of RNA that attaches the correct amino acid to the protein chain that is being synthesized at the ribosome of the cell (according to directions coded in the mRNA).
- An independent agency of the United States government responsible for collecting and coordinating intelligence and counterintelligence activities abroad in the national interest.
- A state in northwestern North America.
- The syllable naming the sixth (submedian) note of a major or minor scale in solmization.
- An ugly evil-looking old woman.
- Analgesic drug (trade name Talwin) that is less addictive than morphine.
- Hindu sacred text instructing the Brahmins to perform the Vedic rituals.
- Alternatively, a member of the family Nymphaeaceae.
- Put (things or places) in order.
- United States space station.
- The branch of computer science that deal with writing computer programs that can solve problems creatively.
- Any spatial attribute (especially as defined by outline).
- The (prehensile) extremity of the superior limb.
- French novelist.
- Scale-like structure between the base of the wing and the halter of a two-winged fly.
- The cry made by sheep.
- A column of light (as from a beacon).
- A cut of pork ribs with much of the meat trimmed off.
- A container.
- Goddess of criminal rashness and its punishment.
- A large estate in Spanish-speaking countries.
- Large northern deer with enormous flattened antlers in the male.

DOWN

- A Russian prison camp for political prisoners.
- (Mexican) Ground beef and chili peppers or chili powder often with tomatoes and kidney beans.
- A federation of North American labor unions that merged with the Congress of Industrial Organizations in 1955.
- The elementary stages of any subject (usually plural).
- A trivalent metallic element of the rare earth group.
- Light carriage.
- The 16th letter of the Hebrew alphabet.
- World's longest river (4187 miles).
- Unable to move or resist motion.
- "an agrarian (or agricultural) society".
- The compass point that is one point west of due south.
- (law) A defense by an accused person purporting to show that he or she could not have committed the crime in question.
- Found along western Atlantic coast.
- A bottomless gulf or pit.
- South American cavy.
- The provision of money temporarily (usually at interest).
- Being within certain limits that define the range of normal functioning.
- A river in northeastern Brazil that flows generally northward to the Atlantic Ocean.
- A United Nations agency created by a multinational treaty to promote trade by the reduction of tariffs and import quotas.
- An organic compound that contains a hydroxyl group bonded to a carbon atom which in turn is doubly bonded to another carbon atom.
- Type genus of the Amidae.
- Of a temperature scale that registers the freezing point of water as 32 degrees F and the boiling point as 212 degrees F at one atmosphere of pressure.
- A Buddhist who has attained nirvana.
- Complacently or inanely foolish.
- Goods (or wreckage) on the sea bed that is attached to a buoy so that it can be recovered.
- A small cake leavened with yeast.
- A rounded projection or protuberance.
- Fertility goddess in ancient Greek mythology.
- Music composed in triple time for waltzing.
- (zoology) Relating to or belonging to or characteristic of any worms of the phylum Annelida.
- The eleventh month of the Hindu calendar.
- The Indic language spoken in Bihar (and by some people in Pakistan and Bangladesh).
- Deciduous South African tree having large odd-pinnate leaves and profuse fragrant orange-yellow flowers.
- Reject with contempt.
- On or toward the lee.
- A French abbot.
- Horny plate covering and protecting part of the dorsal surface of the digits.
- Unpleasantly cool and humid.
- A strong solution of sodium or potassium hydroxide.
- The residue that remains when something is burned.
- An accountant certified by the state.
- A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
- A radioactive element of the actinide series.

Yesterday's Solution



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

You are experiencing an unrealistic feeling today. You may be having to really resist the urge to daydream. Focusing on the tasks set before you seem impossible. You may find your friends and co-workers become frustrated when dealing with this side of you. A bit of soul-searching may be in order. You need to force yourself to snap back to reality and pick up where you left off. Get to the root of the matter that has you preoccupied so you will be able to push forward. Once you realize what caused this mood you should be able to push on and lead a more productive day.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Today may find you a bit unsatisfied with your surroundings. It may be someone or the physical place you are in that is just not sitting right with you. You may feel as if someone or something is holding you back or may just feel frustrated by your life in general. This may be a great time for an evening out and about. Change your surroundings. Clear your head but choose your company wisely to avoid any conflict as this is a time you need to have fun. You have to find a comfortable balance between work life, family, and social life. Taurus, remember it is good for you to get out and enjoy yourself from time to time.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

No problem is too big for you today. This is a great day to make decisions and solve problems. You will find a way around any obstacle that is placed in your path today. This is a day you are in total control and guide yourself easily through the day. You may find an awesome opportunity comes your way today. With your sense of direction this will be a perfect deal for you, Gemini. Jump on this offer.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Remember to count to ten and take deep breaths. Buckle up. Today will be one of those days. You will need to exercise patience and self-control today. This will be a day you may feel pushed beyond your breaking point. You will easily be able to make clear decisions regarding others today. This is a time even frustration and anger will not effect your ability to remain in control of business.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Do you know the difference in sympathy and empathy? This is a day you find yourself you are empathic of others. You are starting to look beneath and beyond the surface what others expose of their self. Call it intuition or whatever you would like. You know how to read people. This may be a talent and curse all rolled into one. The level of empathy you are starting to feel for others may be dragging you down. You have to learn to care for others without emotionally taking their problems on as your own. You are loved and admired for your caring nature.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Resist the need to be "wonderful." Such a reputation may sound good at first, but it's a trap. It sets up unrealistic expectations. It leads to a need to please. And that leads to conflict-inner and outer. Don't punish by trying to maintain an unrealistic reputation. Be yourself. Do what's natural. Remind yourself that you are enough just the way you are.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

As clearly as you are thinking now it is a great time to focus on love, start that diet, or begin that exercise routine again. It is the perfect time for things to be all about you. Physically and spiritually you desire to feel good about yourself again. Libra, you may hit a bump in the road when dealing with someone younger than you today. Your values may be at odds, but this will be a temporary problem. Problems for you are easily solved and you will end the day with much peace in perfect harmony.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

You are experiencing an unrealistic feeling today. You may be having to really resist the urge to daydream. Focusing on the tasks set before you seem impossible. You may find your friends and co-workers become frustrated when dealing with this side of you. A bit of soul-searching may be in order. You need to force yourself to snap back to reality and pick up where you left off. Get to the root of the matter that has you preoccupied so you will be able to push forward. Once you realize what caused this mood you should be able to push on and lead a more productive day.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

A difficult path may lay ahead. You may find that career opportunities could hinder your need for change and self-growth. What may be best for your personal life may totally interfere with your career. Now is a great time to understand those around you. This could be a special time for you and someone you love. Keep your priorities straight and do what is best for your future. Remember, they say money can't buy happiness.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

How do you feel about your position in life? If you answer this in any way other than positive then now is the time for change. You are able to see things very clearly now. Set a goal and make any necessary changes in your life to help accomplish it. With your strength and determination, nothing can hold you back. You are in a great position to be able to communicate your feelings to others. You will find support for your dreams and ideas from those closest to you. Reach for the stars.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

This is a time you may begin to see and truly appreciate the beauty in all that surrounds you. Times when you feel like this, it is best if you steer clear from the mall. These are the times you tend to overindulge and bring home everything in sight. You love it and have to have it are words you would be hearing yourself say. Focus on your family and nature and the beauty all of these things possess. You may find yourself overspending if you focus on material possessions.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

What a wonderful day! Today finds you full of love and appreciation for life. You may have a new outlook on life and a deep gratitude for all that is around you. This mood could leave you showing much affection to those close to you. You find a great sense of peace and fulfillment as you receive this affection in return. You are radiant today. Others will feel attracted and drawn to your warm presence. You may find yourself doing a bit of soul searching as you have found peace in your world and this is a place you want to remain.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Old TV Shows 4

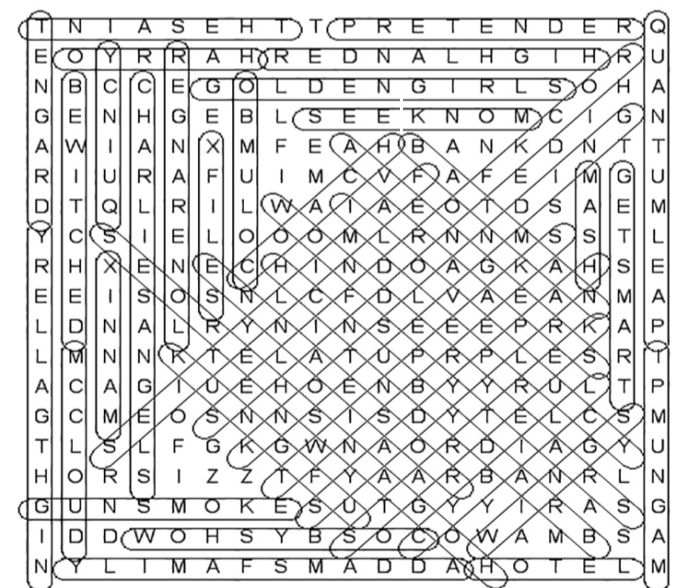
Find and circle all of the old TV shows that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell the name of an additional old TV show.



- | | | | |
|--------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|
| ALIEN NATION | DUE SOUTH | HERE'S LUCY | PERRY MASON |
| ALLY MCBEAL | ELLEN | IN LIVING COLOR | PEYTON PLACE |
| AMEN | EMPTY NEST | LARAMIE | RHODA |
| BANACEK | F TROOP | LOST IN SPACE | RYAN'S HOPE |
| BAYWATCH | FALL GUY | LOU GRANT | SEA HUNT |
| BLOSSOM | FAMILY | MAJOR DAD | SPIN CITY |
| CHICAGO HOPE | FELICITY | MARTIN | THE ROOKIES |
| CHINA BEACH | FRAGGLE ROCK | MATLOCK | VEGAS |
| COACH | HART TO HART | MR BELVEDERE | WISEGUY |
| DEAR JOHN | HAZEL | NASH BRIDGES | ZORRO |

Yesterday's Solution

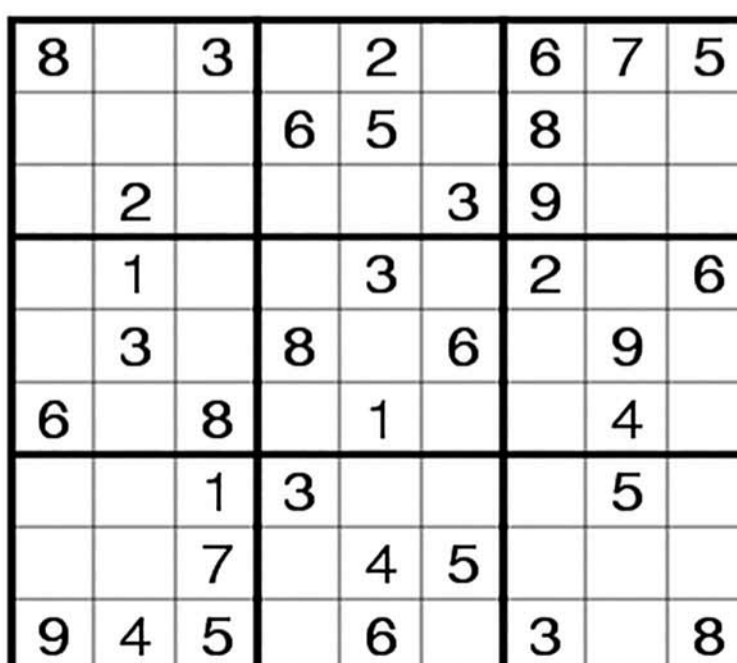
Old TV Shows 3



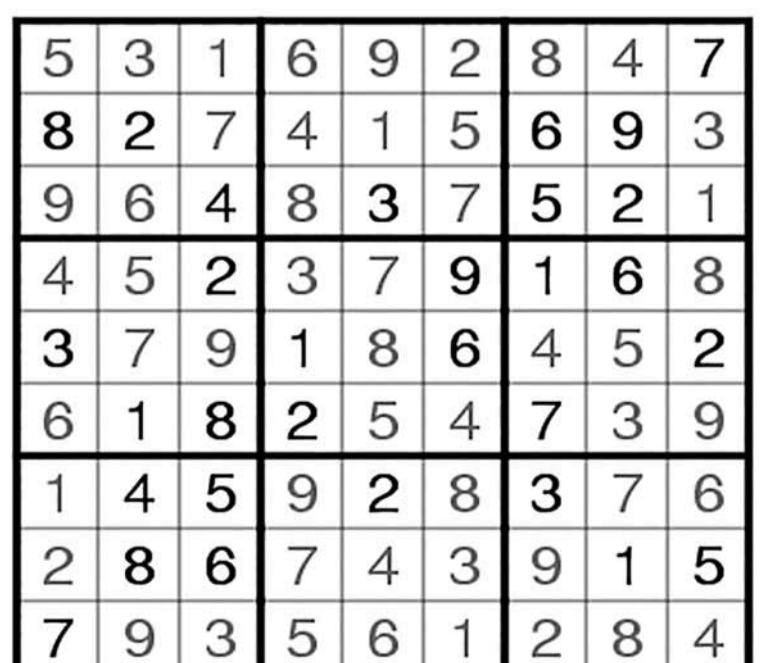
- | | | | |
|------------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|
| ADDAMS FAMILY | FAMILY TIES | KNOTS LANDING | QUANTUM LEAP |
| AVENGERS | GET SMART | KUNG FU | QUINCY |
| BATMAN | GOLDEN GIRLS | LONE RANGER | ROCKFORD FILES |
| BETWICHD | GUNSMOKE | MAGNUM P.I. | ROSEANNE |
| BRADY BUNCH | HAPPY DAYS | MANNIX | STAR TREK |
| CHARLIE'S ANGELS | HARRY O | MASH | THE SAINT |
| COACH | HIGHLANDER | MCLOUD | TWIN PEAKS |
| COLUMBO | HOGAN'S HEROES | MONKEES | WINGS |
| COSBY SHOW | HOTEL | NIGHT GALLERY | WONDER YEARS |
| CYBILL | I LOVE LUCY | PRETENDER | X FILES |
| DRAGNET | | | |

The hidden TV show is: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF GRIZZLY ADAMS

Daily SuDoku



Yesterday's Solution



Lifestyle

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2018



South Korean volunteers in Santa Claus outfits throw Santa hats during a ceremony before the delivery of Christmas gifts in Seoul. — AFP

Santa Claus begins *Christmas* journey from Lapland home



A man dressed as Santa Claus, also known as Father Christmas, reads to helpers before leaving. — AFP photos



A man dressed as Santa Claus, also known as Father Christmas, waves from his sleigh before leaving on his long Christmas journey in temperatures of -26 celsius from Santa's Village at the Arctic Circle in Finnish Lapland.

Santa Claus has set off to deliver Christmas presents to children around the world, with his helpers giving him a musical send-off at his Lapland home as he embarks on the mammoth trip. Families gathered in temperatures of -22 degrees Celsius on Sunday night in Rovaniemi, which calls itself Santa's official hometown, near the Arctic Circle as his helpers put on a song-and-dance performance to wish him luck.

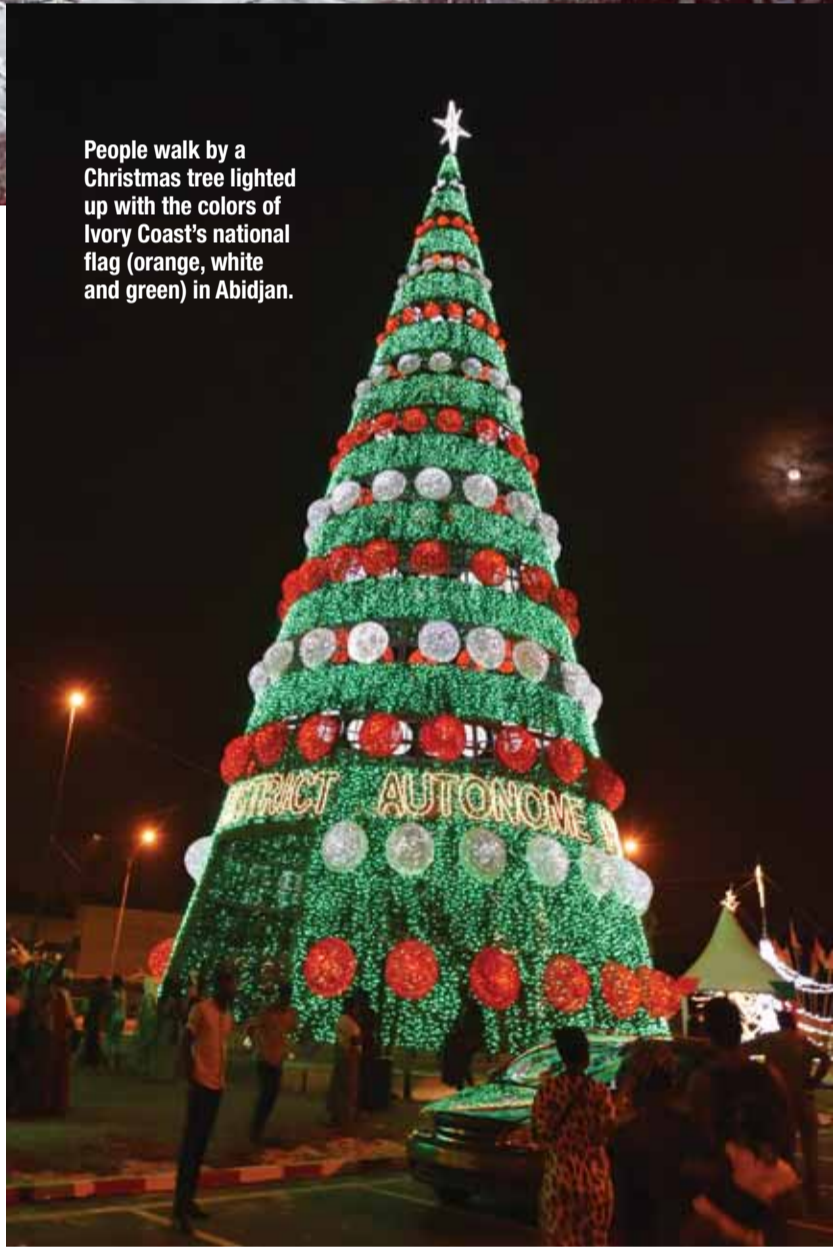
Santa briefly spoke to the crowd, wishing them a peaceful and happy Christmas before leaving on a sleigh to stock it up with presents for his Christmas Eve journey. "Hope you all have had a great year. Of course, there have been many things in the world that should have been different," he said in English. "Hopefully, Christmas would bring a little moment when the world and its people would calm down for a while to spend time with family and friends." — Reuters

Photo Feature

Christmas around the world



Red Square decorated for New Year celebrations is pictured from a roof of the Moscow GUM State Department store during Russian Figure Skating Olympics champion show 'Nutcracker' on the ice rink in central Moscow. — AFP photos



People walk by a Christmas tree lighted up with the colors of Ivory Coast's national flag (orange, white and green) in Abidjan.



The Christmas tree is displayed on St Peter's Square in The Vatican.



This photo shows people gathering around a Christmas tree in Shanghai.



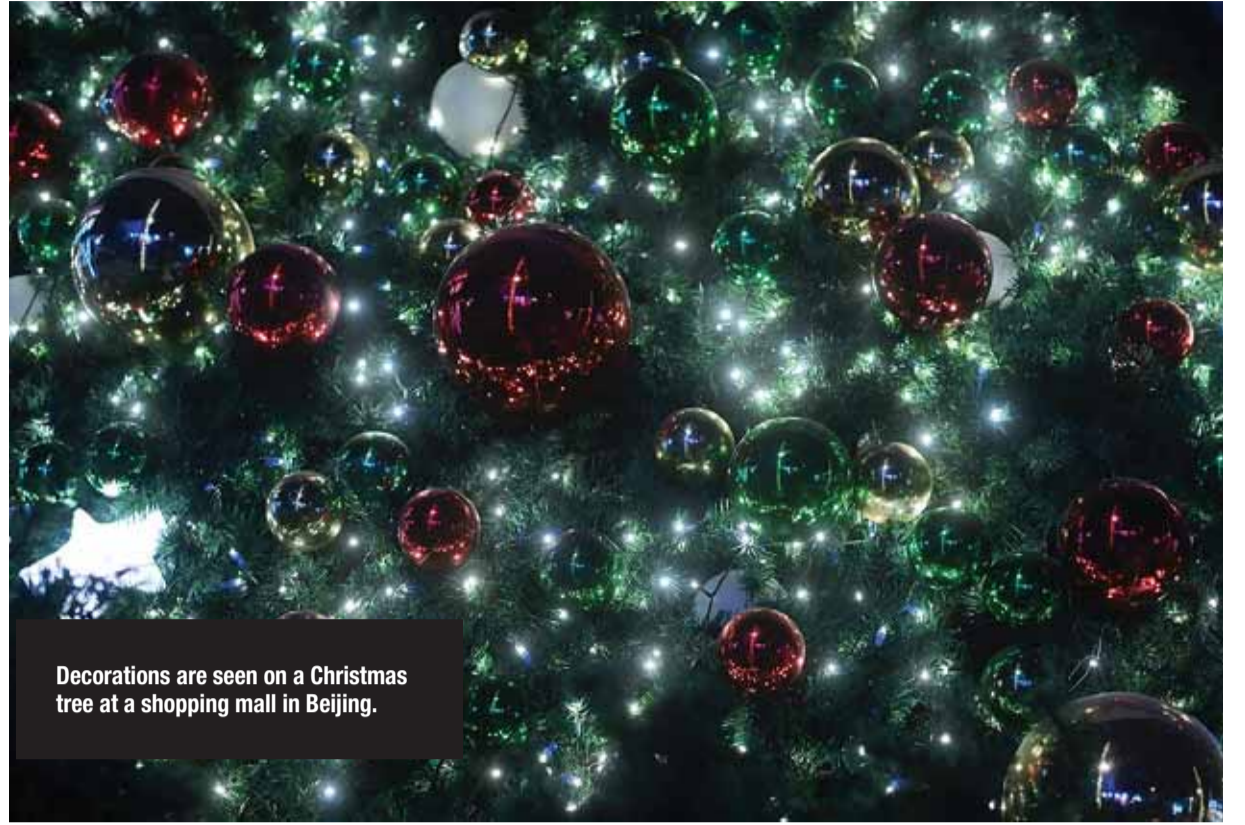
People dance during a Christmas Parade (Parad Nwel in Haitian creole) on the streets of the commune of Petion Ville, in the Haitian capital Port-au-Prince.



Syrians attend the lighting of a christmas tree at Al-Azizzieh Square in Aleppo, northwestern Syria.



A primary school choir sings Christmas carols beneath a Christmas tree in the Central district in Hong Kong.



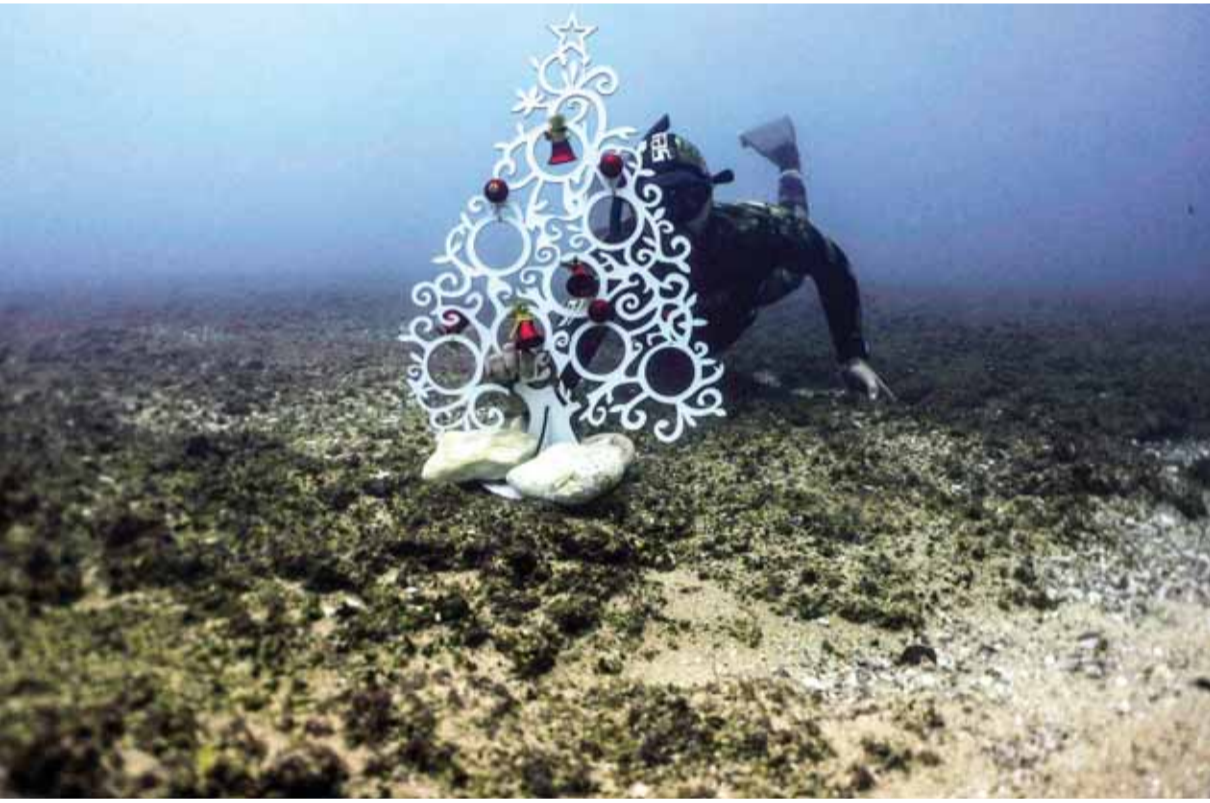
Decorations are seen on a Christmas tree at a shopping mall in Beijing.



A Vietnamese woman carries her child dressed in Santa Claus costume as they walk past the late 19th-century St Joseph's cathedral in the old quarters of Hanoi during Christmas Eve.



This photo shows an illuminated Christmas tree in central Rome's Piazza Venezia.



A freediver places an ornamental Christmas tree on the sea-floor off the coast of the northern Lebanese port city of Tripoli.



Giant Christmas tree baubles with paintings of Berlin landmarks are on display in the Potsdamer Arkaden shopping center in Berlin.



A giant Christmas tree stands in a Christmas market in front of the TV tower ahead of the holiday season in Berlin.

Lifestyle | Features



Traditional gingerbread cakes are exposed in a shop window in Torun, Poland. — AFP photos



A worker prepares traditional gingerbread cakes.



Director of Gingerbread Museum, Malgorzata Mikulska-Wernerowicz poses in the Gingerbread Museum.

Torun gingerbread: The ancient luxury with a secret recipe

Two master bakers dressed in white use a long knife to carve a heavy, thick slab of molasses-colored gingerbread dough out of a huge metal vat, where, like wine, it has been maturing for a few months, deep in the cellar of one of the world's oldest bakeries. The bakers at the Kopernik Confectionery Factory in Poland's historic central city of Torun taste the matured dough, checking whether each vat is ready for baking.

The factory has used a jealously-guarded secret mix of spices since it opened in 1763 and has been serving up its popular brand of gingerbread non-stop ever since, with the exception of a few years' hiatus during World War II. Only six of the factory's bakers know the exact proportion and types of spices that are used, according to spokesman Jakub Kopczyński.

"Cloves preserve the dough, which of course also includes flour and sugar, allowing it to develop its unique flavor as it ages," he tells AFP. Cinnamon, ginger and pepper are also in the spice mix, he adds, though he politely refuses to divulge further details.

"Like fine wine, good gingerbread must be aged and like wine making, the process requires a lot of know-how," he adds. Around him are a hundred or so vats lined up in neat rows across the factory's bottom floor, each of them weighing around 700 kilograms.

Vegan, kosher, non-GMO

The bold, inviting aroma of gingerbread spice wafts through the sprawling factory on the edge of Torun. The secret recipe draws on the city's gingerbread tradition harking back to the Middle Ages when spices from India and the Middle East first began to arrive in Torun, later a major crossroads for Hanseatic trading routes. Its origins may be ancient, but Torun gingerbread is also as trendy as it gets: the factory has acquired certification attesting that its products are

vegan, kosher, non-GMO and that they do not contain palm oil.

"It's always been our traditional standard; now we have formal recognition," Kopczyński adds, having moved to another part of the factory, where a conveyor belt feeds gingerbread hearts into a 36-metre-long oven to bake for seven minutes. The historic factory is a joint-stock company owned by current and former employees, who have shunned offers from foreign investors in order to prevent them from acquiring their prized recipe. Named after Nicolaus Copernicus, the Torun-born father of modern astronomy who is known as Mikolaj Kopernik in Polish, the factory produced 3,500 tonnes of gingerbread this year, sold in Poland and across the globe.

Luxury item

Polish high school student Jagoda presses a ball of gingerbread dough into a hand-carved wooden cookie mould in the shape of a horseshoe inscribed "szczęście", or Polish for "luck". She has come with her class from the nearby city of Bydgoszcz for a hands-on baking lesson at the state museum of Torun gingerbread, nestled in the original red-brick Kopernik factory near the city's historic central square.

"My family has a tradition of making decorated gingerbread cookies to give away as Christmas presents," the 17-year-old tells AFP, holding a heart-shaped cookie impressed with a flower motif in the palm of her hand. Shaped as knights, angels, princesses or horse-drawn carriages, large gingerbread cookies and cakes, pressed from intricately carved wooden moulds, were long among the most exclusive of gifts during the pre-industrial era up until the late 1700s.

"Because the imported spices were so expensive, gingerbread was a luxury item which only the elite

could afford," explains museum director Malgorzata Mikulska-Wernerowicz, adding that gingerbread bakers were also wealthy and stood high on the social ladder. "Kings visiting Torun received gingerbread from the city council," she says, standing next to a display with gingerbread moulds carved in applewood and pearwood dating from the 1600 and 1700s.

Pepper-bread

Invited by a local prince, knights of the Teutonic Order came from the Holy Land to found Torun, known in German as Thorn, in 1233. The knights are believed to have brought the first spices from the Middle East, triggering demand and with it, a lucrative spice trade that helped Torun become one of Europe's wealthiest cities during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Gingerbread is still big business in Torun, with dozens of bakeries, shops and even a private interactive museum capitalizing on the tradition in the city of just over 200,000 residents.

Unlike the thin, crisp gingerbread snaps popular in Sweden or Britain, Torun gingerbread is chewy and meaty. Traditionally based on honey, spirits, wheat and rye flour mixed with spices, records show that the Torun variety was already being made by local German bakers in the mid-1500s and drew its name from pepper-Pfefferkuchen-rather than ginger. The modern-day Polish term for gingerbread-"pierniki"-also refers to pepper.

Legend has it that Copernicus himself enjoyed munching on the treat. "He came from a family of wealthy merchants so there's no reason why he wouldn't have indulged in gingerbread," says Mikulska-Wernerowicz, with a twinkle in her eye. —AFP



Historical wooden form to bake traditional gingerbread cakes is exposed in the Gingerbread Museum.



Traditional gingerbread cakes are pictured in the Kopernik Confectionery Factory.

Sculptor gets laughs in New York with monuments to fake tragedies

It all started in 2016 with a bronze statue commemorating the tragic day in November 1963 when a giant octopus upended the Staten Island ferry, killing nearly 400 people in New York. Wait, what—a giant octopus? Artist Joseph Reginella smiles. Yes, you read that right. In 2017, another statue appeared in Battery Park, at the lower tip of Manhattan—a monument to the Wall Street bankers trampled to death in October 1929 when circus impresario P.T. Barnum's elephants broke into a panicked stampede while crossing the Brooklyn Bridge.

Hard to believe? Well, quite. A few months ago, strollers along the water's edge in New York found a new statue dedicated to the six crew members of a tugboat who were abducted by aliens in July 1977. The three memorials to three made-up tragedies sprung from the vivid imagination of Reginella, a 47-year-old sculptor and jokester who has made an art out of monuments commemorating non-existent victims.

Reginella—who makes his living building models and props for movies, amusement parks and department stores—realizes it's rather a peculiar hobby. He makes the bronze sculptures in his spare time, in the basement of his Staten Island home. His 2016 sculpture of the octopus sinking the ferry was such a popular hit that he decided to produce a new monument each year along the same lines—and following the same sophisticated sense of humor.



Artist Reginella poses next to a sculpture dedicated to the crew of the tugboat Maria 120 which according to the plaque on the pedestal of the statue, mysteriously vanished with the six man crew in the New York Harbor in July of 1977.



Artist Joseph Reginella poses at his Staten Island studio, New York, next to his Brooklyn Bridge Elephant Stampede memorial, a recreation in bronze of that fateful day in 1929 when P T Barnum's pack of circus elephants allegedly went rogue, trampling spectators all along the bridge.— AFP photos

Documents to lend credibility

Reginella begins by choosing the date of the invented disaster with care—and having it coincide with a real tragedy. The ferry "sank" on November 22, 1963, the day president John F Kennedy was assassinated. The elephant stampede took place on October 29, 1929, the day of the massive Wall Street crash. The tugboat crew "vanished" on the night of July 13, 1977, when a huge blackout plunged New York into darkness.

The idea is that the enormity of the real events will make people think—maybe—that they somehow missed the other tragedy that he invented. "That was my vehicle to kind of try to have people believe this," he said. "And then I took the template—I had such great success with this, it really went crazy—that I continued the tradition." Each statue comes with a plaque explaining the event in earnest tones, designed to lend a whiff of authenticity.

The elephant stampede, for example, is described as "one of the most horrific land mammal tragedies in our nation's history." And at a moment in America when everyone goes to Google to verify or look up information, Reginella pushes the joke onto the internet, conjuring up a panoply of fake documentation, including newspaper articles and online documentaries to bolster the illusion. For his latest piece on the tugboat alien abduction, there is even a tourist brochure offering boat tours to the site where the sailors were allegedly kidnapped.

A curious observer can type "octopus" and "Staten Island ferry" into YouTube and find a black-and-white documentary featuring archival footage of putative wreckage, along with witnesses and experts talking about the disaster. Each event has its own website with souvenirs on sale, including real t-shirts priced at \$25 each and reproductions of the original model for \$100 a piece.

Several thousand fans of Reginella's work, who share his quirky sense of humor, have bought a piece of his alternate history, allowing him to finance new projects, which generally take him six to nine months to complete,



A detail of a sculpture by artist Reginella depicts the Staten Island Ferry Octopus Disaster of 1963, during which one of the borough's famous orange boats was dragged below the East River's surface by an enormous, tentacle beast.

with the help of his wife and friends. Despite their size, the statues are easy to assemble and move, and Reginella unveils them in Battery Park on weekends or in his spare time.

Not 'fake news'

With such a high degree of sophistication, Reginella could pass for a pioneer of the "fake news" that has taken over social media in recent years. But he rejects the term—a catch phrase closely associated with President Donald Trump and his attacks on the media. "Mine is much more for fun, it's not malicious," he said. "I am more like the carnival barker, showing you the sideshow attraction."

Despite his growing profile, Reginella remains rather humble about it all, and sees himself as a purveyor of inoffensive "hoaxes" for entertainment purposes. The artist revels in the amused reactions of passers-by who stop to take selfies with his sculptures, some of whom wonder aloud if the events actually occurred. Of course, despite the fantastical details of the alleged events, some people actually believe they are true. But usually, that belief is quickly dispelled. If someone persists in their belief, Reginella is the first to regret it.

"Some people just look at it and they're just like, 'Huh, who knew?'" he laughed. "And I'm like, 'Are you kidding me?'" "It did not really anger me, but it really got me thinking. (...) It was kind of a letdown." He admits there is "a flip side to it. It's definitely to show people, 'Don't take things at face value, do your due diligence.'" Reginella remained coy about his next project, and said he may even take a break in 2019 from his usual production of one sculpture a year. "I really don't want to say because... it's like a magician not wanting to reveal his secrets," he says.—AFP

Kalyan Jewelers announces 'One Plus Three' festive initiative

Kalyan Jewelers, one of the most trusted and leading jewelry brands in the GCC and India is celebrating this festive season with a first of its kind offer announcement - One Plus Three. The initiative offers three diamond/uncut jewelry on purchase of one of the same. Gold coins and Scratch and Win coupons are also on offer. This initiative will run across all Kalyan Jewellers showrooms in Kuwait, from December 15, 2018 to February 9, 2019.

Customers buying one diamond or uncut jewelry worth KD 300 will get three pieces of diamond or uncut jewelry for free. Assured gold coins will also be given on every purchase of uncut or diamond jewelry worth KD 500. In addition to the above, for any jewelry purchase worth KWD250, Scratch and Win coupons will be given to redeem kitchenware, electronic appliances and branded watches.

Ramesh Kalyanaraman, Executive Director of Kalyan Jewellers says, "The One Plus Three offer is sure to delight even the most discerning customers. In addition to the exceptional quality and jewelry designs offered in store, all our patrons will be getting assured diamond or uncut jewelry and gold coins on their purchases." "We wanted to make it more special this festive season for our customers. Since our motto at Kalyan Jewellers while developing campaigns is to create unmatched shopping experiences, it was perfect timing to launch such an initiative where gifting to loved ones also becomes easier."

Kalyan Jewellers recently relocated a showroom in Kuwait at Al Khyateen Complex, Mahak Street, Fahaheel. Besides the popular house brands, this showroom has an exclusive section displaying Kalyan's new brand Muhurat which is the wedding collection spanning a wide range of exquisite bridal jewelry including stunning polki pieces.

The jewelry collections under Mahurat brand are for every bride, covering all the wedding related occasions and traditions. At present, Kalyan Jewellers has a network of 102 exclusive showrooms in India and 32 exclusive outlets in the Kuwait, UAE, Qatar and Oman. It employs over 8,000 people and has a focused approach on employee engagement and satisfaction.



Add the Kalyan Sparkle to your celebrations!

Iran says ready to respond, but US aircraft carrier no threat

LONDON: Iran is ready to respond to any hostile US action, but it does not consider the arrival of a US aircraft carrier in the Gulf last week a significant threat, an Iranian navy commander said yesterday. The USS John C Stennis entered the Gulf on Friday, ending a long absence of US aircraft carriers in the region as tensions rise between Tehran and Washington. "The presence of this warship is insignificant to us," Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari was quoted as saying by the semi-official ISNA news agency. "We will not allow this war-

ship to come near our territorial waters in the Persian Gulf," said Sayyari.

Sayyari said the US navy was allowed to sail in international waters near Iran, just as the Iranian navy could sail in the Atlantic Ocean near US waters. He said, however, that Iran was on alert for possible threats. "They do not have the courage or ability to take any measures against us. We have enough capabilities to stand against their actions and we have fully rehearsed for that."

Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards launched war

games in the Gulf on Saturday in which naval vessels, helicopters, drones, rocket launchers and commando units took part. Praising the "success" of the war games, Guards' spokesman Brigadier General Ramezan Sharif said yesterday: "The Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman has had more safety and security in the last 10 months in the absence of a US aircraft carrier."

A US-Iranian war of words has escalated since US President Donald Trump took Washington out of a world powers' nuclear deal with Iran in May, and reim-

posed sanctions on its banking and energy sectors. Iran has warned that if it cannot sell its oil due to US pressures, then no other regional country will be allowed to do so either, threatening to block the Strait of Hormuz in the Gulf. A third of the world's sea-borne oil passes through the Strait from Middle East crude producers to major markets. In recent years, there have been periodic confrontations between the Revolutionary Guards and US military in the Gulf, but the number of incidents has dropped in recent months. — Reuters

Real Christmas trees find buyers in desert among UAE expats

DUBAI: For over 25 years, expatriates celebrating Christmas in Dubai have been able to buy large, fragrant Christmas trees imported from Canada and the United States - a seasonal treat in the desert Gulf state. On a sunny day with a cool breeze, a far cry from a white Christmas but typical for winter in Dubai, plant sellers opened up their trucks in the crowded working-class Satwa district. Buyers can pay anything from 200 dirhams (\$54) for a 1.6 m tree up to 5,000 dirhams for giant ones. "Plastic trees don't affect our business," said one seller, Gulshan Gafoor. "(With) real ones, you get good smells".

But prices are rising, buyers said. Two years ago, Monica Wojciechowska, a Polish expat who has lived in Dubai for 17 years, said she bought a tree for 200 dirhams while this year the same size tree costs 450 dirhams. She tried to bargain, but seller Abdul Sanju had his arguments ready. "We don't grow in Dubai, in Dubai we don't have the climate. If it was in Dubai, I'd sell for 200," Sanju told her. Prices have gone up because of custom duties, he said.

When Sanju's boss Muyinuddin Rafi started his Christmas tree business more than 25 years ago there were only a few shops, but now buyers have more choices as supermarkets and big stores have joined the market. Customers still come to the sellers' trucks though, because "they can actually see the tree, know the thickness, know the bushiness," said Sanju. As the sun began to set, Bon Chandana, a Sri Lankan hospital worker, came to buy a Christmas tree with his son. In the past, he said, he had spent up to 600 dirhams on trees. "I'm a very small person - but (when it comes) to Christmas, very big," he said. — Reuters

Sharif handed seven years...

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would "not resort to violence". "The people of Pakistan and history will not accept this decision," he told reporters in Islamabad.

The Supreme Court disqualified Sharif from politics for life over the allegations last year, and directed an anti-corruption body to investigate three different charges regarding his family's properties and businesses. The months-long saga has seen him appear before accountability courts 165 times since Sept 2017, according to the English-language Dawn newspaper. In July this year, he was convicted in one case revolving around family properties in London, and sentenced to 10 years in prison.

He was in London at the time as his wife received cancer treatment, but returned to Pakistan days ahead of the election, only to be arrested and imprisoned on

arrival. He was released in September after a court suspended his sentence pending an appeal hearing. He was acquitted on the third charge, relating to business in Britain. Daniyal Aziz, a former lawmaker from Sharif's party, criticized the National Accountability Bureau, the watchdog that charged Sharif, and described the verdict as "the weaponization of anti-corruption". "With each passing day an expression of a double standard is coming forward from the NAB," Aziz said.

Sharif has been prime minister three times but power has been a rough ride. He was first expelled from office in 1993 on suspicion of corruption. He won an election in 1997, only to be ousted and exiled after a military coup in 1999. He returned to Pakistan in 2007 and took power once more in 2013 until his ousting last year. Five months ago, Sharif's PML-N lost a general election to the party of Imran Khan, the new prime minister whose anti-corruption campaign and street protests spurred the cases against Sharif. PML-N and other opposition politicians allege the election was rigged to favor Khan, who is seen as close to the army. Both Khan and the military have denied colluding against Sharif and the PML-N. — Agencies

Pilgrims gather in Bethlehem...

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In Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank, the Palestinian scouts and a bagpipe band paraded in Manger Square across from the Church of the Nativity, built where Christians say Mary gave birth to Jesus. Crowds, some wearing Santa hats or holding balloons, looked on at the square decked out with a giant Christmas tree and a manger as carols in Arabic played through speakers. The Catholic archbishop for the Holy Land, Pierbattista Pizzaballa, arrived later in the afternoon and was to lead midnight mass. Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas was to be among dignitaries attending the ceremony.

This year, visitors are able to view the Church of the Nativity's newly restored mosaics after they were recently cleaned and repaired in a major project. The first church was built on the site in the fourth century, though it was replaced after a fire in the sixth century. A newer and more spacious church, St Catherine, is located next door and is where midnight mass is held. "It's a great opportunity to be in such a symbolic location for Christmas," said Lea Gudel, a 21-year-old French student studying in Jerusalem, who was in Manger Square yesterday morning.

Bethlehem, located near Jerusalem but cut off from

the city by Israel's separation barrier, has seen an increase in visitors this season after several down years due to unrest linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Palestinian tourism officials and hotel operators have reported their strongest season in years. "This year is much more calm, much better than last year," said Abeer Nasser, a Palestinian from the nearby town of Beit Sahour who was with her son and daughter and was planning to attend midnight mass. "Every year I feel more in the mood to celebrate despite the political situation," the 37-year-old added, referring to the Israeli occupation.

Later in the day, musical groups took the stage at Manger Square in front of the Christmas tree, illuminated as night fell, to sing Christmas carols. Beyond Bethlehem, Christians worldwide were preparing to mark Christmas after a year in which leaders warned over violence against fellow worshippers. On Friday, Pope Francis said "new extremist groups spring up and target churches, places of worship, ministers and members of the faithful". "How many Christians even now bear the burden of persecution, marginalization, discrimination and injustice throughout our world," the pope said. "Yet they continue courageously to embrace death rather than deny Christ."

In Britain, Queen Elizabeth II will call for respect and civility in a Christmas message delivered with the country badly divided over its impending exit from the EU. Barcelona was meanwhile on alert after the US State Department warned of the risk of a terrorist attack in Spain's second-largest city during the Christmas holidays. — AFP

Londoners ring in Xmas with hunks of meat



LONDON: Butchers auction off cuts of meat during the traditional pre-Christmas meat auction at Smithfield market in the City of London yesterday. — AFP

LONDON: It's a Christmas Eve tradition cherished by Londoners since Victorian times: Buying a hunk of meat at a massive discount in a sprawling market tucked away near St Paul's Cathedral. Smithfield Market's annual auction is a bonanza for lovers of English beef and lamb. Sam Thompson joined hundreds of others outside the hangar-like building designed by Victorian architect Horace Jones in the 1800s in search of the freshest cut for a fraction of the supermarket price. "That's the best quality," the 39-year-old plumber said. "What you find in supermarkets is anything. Here you have good quality English meat."

Entire families - some wearing Christmas hats and others armed with sizable bags in which to bring home dinner - showed up on Monday morning to seep in the tradition and haggle. "Get your money ready," auction organizer Greg Lawrence shouted to the gathering masses as heavy slabs of ribs and plump turkeys traded hands. The market operates as a wholesaler for the top chefs of London and beyond.

Stall owners use Christmas to clear out their stock ahead of the new year. But times may be about to change. There is a plan to relocate Smithfield along with the Billingsgate fish market and the New Spitalfields fruit and vegetable market to a new site outside the city center. The City of London Corporation - the governing body for the central financial district where the meat is bought and sold - has already purchased a new space for the three. This would open up a

large area in the very heart of one of the most expensive property markets in the world.

The wholesale food market of Rungis near Paris is "a model that everybody in the world is beginning to follow," the corporation's markets director David Smith told AFP. "But we have to get legislation through parliament so it will take a long time." The final go-ahead and timeline for the move are expected in 2019.

Buyers Anne Oyewole and her brother Gabriel from London said they came for the atmosphere as much as for the cheap meat. "The auctioneer and, you know, all the other people who were helping to feed all the meat through - it's just great fun and it's really entertaining," said Anne. "It's a lot better than going to Tesco," said Gabriel, referring to the supermarket chain. Another buyer from London, John Sprange, went away a happy customer: "I got a lovely lump of rump of beef, 20 quid (pounds) - magic!"

"This is a jewel in the City of London, it doesn't happen anywhere else in the UK now, and we hope to carry it on in the foreseeable future," said Smithfield Market Tenants' Association chairman Greg Lawrence, who has worked at the market since he was 16 years old. "They'd be saving 50, 60 percent off buying at this auction compared with if they're going to buy it out in supermarkets," he said. At the end of the auction, Lawrence gives the remaining buyers a chance to win a steak if they can guess heads or tails correctly as he tosses a coin. "Heads - it's yours!" he shouts to applause from the crowd. — Agencies

Indonesia hunts for survivors of...

Continued from Page 1

Beachside cottages at one resort were flattened while the dining room's mud-caked floor was strewn with smashed chairs and tables, utensils and spilled cups of ice cream.

In the lobby, a Christmas tree remained standing, surrounded by fallen holiday ornaments and toppled-over flower pots. "The military and police are searching the ruins to see if we can find more victims," said Dody Ruswandi, a senior official at the disaster agency, adding that the rescue effort was likely to last a week.

Indonesia's disaster agency initially said there was "no tsunami threat" even as the wave crashed ashore. It was later forced to issue a correction and an apology as it pointed to the area's lack of early warning systems. Unlike those caused by earthquakes, which usually trigger alert systems, volcano-triggered tsunamis give authorities very little time to warn residents of the impending threat.

Experts say Saturday's disaster was most likely caused by a moderate eruption of the Anak Krakatoa volcano in the Sunda Strait that triggered either a large and very fast moving flow of molten rock into the sea or a sudden and massive submarine landslide - both would displace large amounts of water, resulting in a tsunami. The evidence so far suggested that a section of the volcano collapsed and slid into the ocean, triggering a tsunami, said Dwikorita Karnawati, head of Indonesia's meteorological agency.

It was the third major natural disaster to strike Indonesia in the space of six months, following a series of powerful earthquakes on the island of Lombok in July and August and a quake-tsunami in September that killed around 2,200 people in Palu on Sulawesi island, with thousands more missing and presumed dead. It also came less than a week before the 14th anniversary

of the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami, one of the deadliest disasters in history that killed some 220,000 people in countries around the Indian Ocean, including some 168,000 Indonesians. The vast archipelago nation is one of the most disaster-hit nations on Earth due to its position straddling the so-called Pacific Ring of Fire, where tectonic plates collide.

In devastated Sukarame village, Sunarti waded through knee-deep water as she searched for belongings outside her destroyed house - and waited for aid to arrive. "There's been no help at all so far," the 61-year-old AFP said from the flattened hamlet. "Some people are starving." Survivor Ade Junaedi recounted seeing nature's fury firsthand. "It happened very quickly," he said. "I was chatting with a guest at our place when my wife opened the door and she suddenly screamed in panic. I thought there was a fire, but when I walked to the door I saw the water coming."

Richard Teeuw, a geohazard expert from the University of Portsmouth in England, said the eruption and landslide may well have destabilised the volcano, heightening the risk of another tsunami. "The likelihood of further tsunamis in the Sunda Strait will remain high while Anak Krakatoa volcano is going through its current active phase because that might trigger further submarine landslides," Teeuw said.

Dramatic video posted on social media showed a wall of water suddenly crashing into a concert by pop group "Seventeen" - hurling band members off the stage and then flooding into the audience. At least two band members were killed along with its manager and a crew member, while Indonesian media said the band's missing drummer was found dead yesterday. The surviving lead singer's wife is missing. Front man Riefian Fajarsyah posted a picture online of he and his wife kissing in Paris with the Eiffel Tower in the background. "Today is your birthday - I want wish you a happy birthday in person. Come home soon, honey," he wrote in the caption of the photo, which was posted Sunday. Anak Krakatoa, which forms a small island in the Sunda Strait between Java and Sumatra, emerged around 1928 in the crater left by Krakatoa, whose massive eruption in 1883 killed at least 36,000 people and affected global weather patterns for years. — AFP



DUBAI: A handout image provided yesterday shows Sheikha Latifa bint Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum (left) having a meal with Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland, at Latifa's home in Dubai. — AFP

Sports

Bobrovsky, Blue Jackets shut out New Jersey Devils 3-0

Teravainen, Aho score twice each as Hurricanes beat Bruins

NEWARK: Sergei Bobrovsky recorded his 26th career shutout as the Columbus Blue Jackets continued their dominance of New Jersey in a 3-0 win over the Devils on Sunday afternoon in Newark, N.J. Bobrovsky, who beat the Flyers on Saturday in Philadelphia, posted 39 saves to run his season record to 16-10-1. The shutout was his second this season—and second in a week—after blanking the Vegas Golden Knights 1-0 on Monday. Artemi Panarin tallied a goal and an assist, giving him five points over the weekend. Cam Atkinson and Oliver Bjorkstrand added markers for the Blue Jackets, who won their fourth straight and are 5-0-1 in their last six.

HURRICANES 5, BRUINS 3

Teuvo Teravainen and Sebastian Aho each scored two goals and supplied two assists as Carolina defeated Boston on retro night at Raleigh, N.C. Justin Faulk also scored for the Hurricanes, who overcame a two-goal deficit while wearing jerseys honoring the Hartford Whalers. Carolina goalie Petr Mrazek made 27 saves. Ryan Donato scored twice and Steven Kampfer once for Boston. Brad Marchand had two assists, but the Bruins had a three-game winning streak snapped. Boston goalie Tuukka Rask, making his first start in four games, stopped 32 shots.

FLYERS 3, RANGERS 2 (SO)

Nolan Patrick scored to start the fourth round of the shootout and give visiting Philadelphia the win over New York. Patrick came in from the left side and then fired a wrist shot over the glove of Henrik Lundqvist for the game-winner. Michael Raffl and Wayne Simmonds scored for the Flyers in regulation. Michal Neuvirth, making just his third start of the season, stopped 32 shots. Chris Kreider and Boo Nieves had goals for New York, which fell to 5-2 in shootouts this season. Lundqvist finished with 29 saves.

PANTHERS 6, BLACKHAWKS 3

Rookie Jayce Hawryluk scored the first two goals of his NHL career, leading Florida to its first win in Chicago in 11 years. Mike Hoffman scored the go-ahead goal at 3-2, and Florida also got scores from Jared McCann, Denis Malgin and Frank Vatrano. MacKenzie Weegar

added two assists. Panthers goalie James Reimer earned the win, making 26 saves. Connor Murphy, Alex DeBrincat and Dylan Strome scored for Chicago. Strome added two assists. Cam Ward made 21 saves for the Blackhawks.

MAPLE LEAFS 5, RED WINGS 4 (OT)

Kasperii Kapanen scored his second goal of the game at 1:53 of overtime, and Toronto, which tied the game in the final seconds of regulation, rallied past visiting Detroit. Kapanen made a whirling move before sending a backhand shot that skidded between the legs of Detroit goaltender Jonathan Bernier for his 14th goal this season. Frans Nielsen gave the Red Wings a 4-3 lead 12 minutes into the third period, but John Tavares tied the game for Toronto on a tip-in with eight seconds left in regulation.

ISLANDERS 3, STARS 1

Anders Lee scored the deciding goal midway through the third period, and Robin Lehner saved 19 of just 20 shots faced as visiting New York outlasted weary Dallas. Lee's goal, a power-play score at the 8:50 mark of the final period, was on a shot taken from the point that bounced off the right post and off the right leg of Dallas goalie Anton Khudobin (25 saves) before trickling across the goal line. Casey Cizikas and Leo Komarov also scored for the Islanders. Tyler Pitlick scored for the Stars, who showed the effects of playing the second game of a road-home back-to-back.

KINGS 4, GOLDEN KNIGHTS 3 (OT)

Tyler Toffoli scored on a breakaway with 3:20 remaining in overtime as Los Angeles won its second OT game in two days by beating Vegas in Las Vegas. Michael Amadio, Alex Iafallo and Jeff Carter also scored goals for Los Angeles, which is riding a season-best three-game winning streak—including a 3-2 overtime victory at San Jose on Saturday afternoon. Cal Petersen stopped 22 shots in the win over the Golden Knights. Tomas Nosek, Reilly Smith and Ryan Reaves scored goals for Vegas, which has gone to overtime in four of its last six games, winning only one of them. Nick Holden finished with two assists while Marc-Andre Fleury, making his league-leading 34th start, finished with 28 saves.



NEWARK: Brian Boyle #11 of the New Jersey Devils screens Sergei Bobrovsky #72 of the Columbus Blue Jackets during the third period at the Prudential Center on Sunday in Newark, New Jersey. The Blue Jackets shutout the Devils 3-0. — AFP

COYOTES 4, SHARKS 3 (SO)

Alex Galchenyuk scored twice and added the lone tally in the shootout as Arizona defeated host San Jose. Conor Garland also scored for Arizona, which got its second straight win and third in the past 10 games. Goaltender Darcy Kuemper, who was 0-5-1

in his previous six starts, stopped 35 shots and all three in the shootout. Tomas Hertl scored twice for San Jose, which dropped to 0-1-2 on its four-game homestand following a five-game winning streak. Tim Heed also scored, and goalie Aaron Dell made 23 saves. — Reuters

The end of the Messi-Ronaldo era? Football rings the changes in 2018

PARIS: One of the enduring images from 2018 will remain Kylian Mbappe consoling Lionel Messi in the Russian city of Kazan, just after the final whistle in France's 4-3 win over Argentina in the last 16 of the World Cup.

This was to a large extent Mbappe's year, as the teenage superstar exploded on the world stage by scoring twice in that game, the first World Cup brace by a teenager since Pele in 1958. Still just 19 at the time, Paris Saint-Germain forward Mbappe also became the first teenager to score in a World Cup final since Pele as France won the trophy for the second time by beating Luka Modric's Croatia 4-2 in the final on a dark and damp Sunday in Moscow.

The World Cup itself was a joy to watch, a richly entertaining tournament full of memorable games and concluding with the highest-scoring final since 1966. From Spain's 3-3 draw with Portugal in the group stage, featuring a Cristiano Ronaldo hat-trick, to Belgium's 2-1 quarter-final win over Brazil and Croatia's epic semi-final defeat of England in extra time, it was studied with memorable matches.

But it was much more than that. "Maybe this is one of the weirdest World Cups," said Croatia coach Zlatko Dalic. His team's remarkable run to the final and the premature exits of Germany, Spain and Argentina showed that international football can still be unpredictable.

It will also probably be remembered as the tournament that marked the end of Messi and Ronaldo's dreams of lifting the World Cup. They were eliminated on the same day in the last 16, and 2018 could be remembered as the year when the Messi-Ronaldo era ended.

Both enjoyed prolific years, with the Argentine driving Barcelona to a Spanish league and cup double and Ronaldo winning another Champions League with Real Madrid before moving to Juventus in the transfer of the year.

MODRIC TAKES BALLON D'OR

However, their numbers are down on the

phenomenal figures of past years, and instead it was the impish playmaker Modric who won the Ballon d'Or, and FIFA's best player award, on the strength of his role in Madrid's Champions League triumph and Croatia's World Cup run. He was also the best player in Russia.

Ronaldo and Messi had shared the Ballon d'Or between them for the last decade, winning five each. Ronaldo was second this time, while Messi was fifth, behind Antoine Griezmann and Mbappe.

"Nobody has the right to compare themselves to them. They are among the best in the history of the sport," Modric told France Football. "To follow on from them is incredible, and I am proud of it."

Crowned the best young player, Mbappe will hope the future belongs to him. At club level, his PSG side are among the teams desperate to end Real's run of three straight Champions League titles. The Spaniards beat Liverpool in this year's final in Kiev with Gareth Bale scoring twice, and will hope to retain the trophy next year with the final in Madrid. Meanwhile, there is lots to look forward to at international level in 2019.

NATIONS LEAGUE FINALS

The new UEFA Nations League has been an instant hit. It will conclude with the four-team finals in Portugal in June, with the hosts facing Switzerland and England playing the Netherlands in the last four.

"We want to go beyond where we went last summer, and we're in the mix for what is a really important staging post in our development," said England manager Gareth Southgate of that competition.

However, the main international events in 2019 are elsewhere. The first 24-team Asian Cup takes place in the UAE in January and February, before Brazil hosts the Copa America and the United States defend the CONCACAF Gold Cup.

France are hoping to win another World Cup, as they host the 24-team women's tournament in June and July, with the USA the defending champions. And a decision is expected soon on whether Egypt or South Africa host the 24-nation Africa Cup of Nations in June and July after the Confederation of African Football stripped Cameroon of the tournament due to delays in their preparations. — AFP

'Sandpaper' scandal overshadows cricket year

LONDON: A ball-tampering scandal involving Australia provided the backdrop to a 2018 where Afghanistan and Ireland were elevated to Test status, England rebuilt under Joe Root and India's Virat Kohli cemented his position as one of the best batsmen of his generation.

In an age where international players' every onfield move is subject to intense television scrutiny, it defied belief that Australia's Cameron Bancroft tried to hide the tape with which he had deliberately scuffed up the ball during a Test against South Africa in Cape Town down his trousers. The ensuing fall-out was dramatic with then Australia captain Steve Smith, his deputy David Warner and Bancroft all sent home. Smith and Warner were then both banned for a year by Cricket Australia, with Bancroft given a nine-month ban.

But while Smith and Warner had solid records behind them, Bancroft now risks being remembered above all for his role in the scandal, just as another Australian Trevor Chappell is immediately associated with his brother Greg's controversial decision to have him bowl underarm at the end of a one-day international against New Zealand in 1981.

"For me in the (changing) room, I walked past something and had the opportunity to stop it and I didn't do it and that was my leadership failure," Smith said Friday, indirectly confirming reports Warner had been the instigator of the plan. "It was the potential for something to happen and it went on and happened out in the field," he added. Darren Lehmann, the Australia coach, resigned and was replaced by fellow former Test batsman Justin Langer in May, with long-serving Cricket Australia chief executive James Sutherland also standing down.

And that was not the end of it, with CA chairman David Peever resigning last month soon after being elected for a second term when a review into team culture found it "arrogant", with CA accused of doing nothing to curb a win-at-all-costs culture.

'DON'T HAVE TO TALK RUBBISH'

One good thing to emerge from the scandal was a growing realisation it was possible to play competitively without resorting to crude verbal abuse. As Tim Paine, thrust into the Australia captaincy following Smith's banishment, put it after a narrow defeat by India at Adelaide in the first match of a Test series currently level at 1-1: "We fought really hard and never gave up, and you don't have to talk rubbish and carry on like a pork chop to prove that."

That did not stop Paine from engaging in a verbal battle with India captain Virat Kohli during the second Test in Perth of the ongoing series. The combative Kohli was the only batsman to have passed 1,000 Test runs for the year at the time of writing in a 2018 where he had so far scored 11 international centuries, including six in one-dayers. England, following a 4-0 Ashes hammering in Australia, rebuilt under Root with a 4-1



The Australian cricket team has had its fair share of controversies on and off the pitch in its illustrious cricketing history!

home win against India and then ended their 17-year wait for a series win in Sri Lanka with a 3-0 whitewashing of their hosts.

New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson cemented his reputation as one of the outstanding batsmen in the world. His second-innings 139 in the third Test in Abu Dhabi was the key to the Kiwis securing a 123-run win which snared them their first away series triumph against Pakistan in 49 years.

It was a victory which would have been appreciated by the late Bev Congdon, the former New Zealand captain, who did much to raise the country's cricket standing in the 1970s. As well as Congdon, other notable cricketers who died in 2018 included Ajit Wadekar, who captained India to historic series wins in England and the West Indies in the early 1970s, as well as South Africa's Colin Bland, one of the greatest fielders the game has known.

South Africa's AB de Villiers, himself a fine fieldsmen and audacious all-round batsman retired, saying he had "run out of gas", while Alastair Cook, England's all-time leading Test run-scorer with 12,472 in 161 Tests, bowed out with a fairytale hundred at The

Oval. Sri Lanka's Rangana Herath, the most successful left-arm spinner in Test history with 433 wickets, also called it a day.

NEW BLOOD

Bangladesh made progress as the West Indies continued to struggle while Ireland and Afghanistan both arrived on the Test scene. Ireland recovered from some early nerves to give Pakistan a fright in Dublin, Kevin O'Brien providing one of the highlights of the year as he became Ireland's first Test centurion.

The Irish took much from their debut in spite of losing by five wickets. The same cannot be said of Afghanistan whose first Test ended in just two days as they suffered a chastening innings-and-262-run defeat by India, the world top-ranked side. Meanwhile a relative lack of truly outstanding batsmen and increasingly lively pitches saw bowlers hit back in the Test format as the balance between bat and ball was restored. Research carried out by The Times newspaper showed 2018 to have produced the lowest runs per wicket for any year since 1959. — AFP

All Blacks stumble with eye on WCup

PARIS: Double defending champions New Zealand will head into the 2019 World Cup in Japan as favourites, but Six Nations Grand Slam champions Ireland have proven there are chinks in the All Black armour.

Steve Hansen's team suffered a major bump on their run-in to the World Cup when they went down to a second defeat in three games by a Johnny Sexton-inspired Ireland, whose provincial side Leinster won the European Champions Cup, Munster also making the last four.

That followed the Springboks' 36-34 victory in Wellington in September that ended a 15-match winning streak for the All Blacks, who have dominated world rugby since securing their second World Cup title in England in 2015 after previous success on home turf in 2011. Excluding the 24-21 defeat by the British and Irish

Lions in the drawn series in 2017, it was New Zealand's first defeat at home since 2009. Ireland's 16-9 victory over the All Blacks in Dublin in November was built on a teak-tough defence organised by former England assistant coach and dual code international Andy Farrell—the father of England fly-half Owen—who will take over the reins from current coach Joe Schmidt post-World Cup.

"As of now they are the number-one team in the world," Hansen said. "So if you want to make them World Cup favourites, go ahead. I guess they are favourites." The bookies say not, however, with New Zealand installed above Ireland, England, South Africa and Wales. New Zealand top the world rankings, followed by Ireland, Wales and England and it is hard to envisage a World Cup like the last one when the southern hemisphere provided all four semi-finalists. England, who had a catastrophic 2015 World Cup on home soil as they failed to advance from their pool, finished 2018 with an impressive mix of forward power and stylish back-line play during a 37-18 win over Australia, the losing finalists three years ago, at Twickenham. — AFP



Lionel Messi (right) and Cristiano Ronaldo

Sports

Curry's last-second basket caps 42-point night, clips Clippers

Pacers spread points around in beating Wizards

OAKLAND: Stephen Curry scored on a drive with .5 seconds left to lift the Golden State Warriors to a 129-127 victory against the visiting Los Angeles Clippers on Sunday. Curry finished with 42 points, Kevin Durant had 35 points and 12 rebounds and Draymond Green contributed 14 points, six assists and five steals for the Warriors. Tobias Harris had 32 points and nine rebounds, and Danilo Gallinari finished with 25 points and 11 rebounds for the Clippers, who shot 18-of-23 from 3-point range. Los Angeles made a franchise-record 13 3-pointers in the first half and led by as many as 11, but watched that lead dissolve late in the second quarter and into the third.

HAWKS 98, PISTONS 95

Veteran Vince Carter came off the bench to score a season-high 18 points as Atlanta, playing without its most productive player, won in Detroit for its third straight win. The Pistons had a chance to tie the game with 23 seconds left when Blake Griffin missed two free throws. Jeremy Lin grabbed the rebound, was fouled and made two free throws to give Atlanta a 94-91 lead with 21 seconds left. The Hawks hung on from there. The Hawks were playing without forward John Collins, who was out with a left ankle sprain. Collins, the team's leading scorer and rebounder, had posted double-doubles in eight of his previous nine games.

PACERS 105, WIZARDS 89

Myles Turner finished with 18 points and 17 rebounds as Indiana used a balance scoring attack to defeat visiting Washington. Seven Pacers scored in double figures, led by Domantas Sabonis' 15 points and 10 rebounds, Bojan Bogdanovic's 14 points and Victor Oladipo's 12 points, nine assists and six rebounds. Markieff Morris led Washington with 16 points off the bench. After missing Saturday's game because of the flu/illness, Wizards guard John Wall played but scored only seven points in 28 minutes.

CELTICS 119, HORNETS 103

Kyrie Irving scored 25 points and dished out five assists to lead Boston past visiting Charlotte. Jayson Tatum added 17 points to pace four other Celtics in double figures. Marcus Morris added 12 points and eight rebounds, while Al Horford and Daniel Theis chipped in 10 points apiece. Kemba Walker (21 points), Willy Hernangomez (19), Jeremy Lamb (14) and Malik Monk (13) finished in double figures for Charlotte, which was vying for its third straight win. Hernangomez added 10 rebounds to record a double-double.

NETS 111, SUNS 103

Reserve Spencer Dinwiddie led six players in double figures with 24 points, and Brooklyn rebounded from its first loss in more than two weeks with a home victory over Phoenix. Dinwiddie scored 11 fourth-quarter points and produced his 28th straight game in double figures. He was 7 of 14 from the field, hit 8 of 9 free throws and added seven assists. D'Angelo Russell added 18 points and eight assists as the Nets rebounded from Friday's eight-point loss to Indiana and their first defeat since Dec. 5. The Suns lost their second straight following a four-game winning streak as T.J. Warren was held to four points on 2-of-11 shooting.

BULLS 112, CAVALIERS 92

Lauri Markkanen scored 31 points — 14 in the decisive third quarter — and Chicago won in Cleveland. The 21-year-old from Finland has 30-plus points in back-to-back games, following up Friday's 12-of-20, 32-point effort against Orlando with an 11-of-18 showing Sunday. After holding Toronto to 29 percent from 3-point range in a loss to the Raptors on Friday, the Cavs couldn't stop the Bulls from beyond the arc on Sunday. Markkanen made 5 of 10 from long range, and the Bulls as a team went 11-for-22.

HEAT 115, MAGIC 91

Tyler Johnson's big third quarter propelled Miami to an easy road win at in-state rival Orlando. Johnson led the Heat with 25 points — 20 in the third — and Justise Winslow had 22 points, six rebounds and five assists. The Heat made 16 of 31 3-pointers and forced the Magic into 19 turnovers. Miami has won five straight and is 9-3 in its last 12 games. Orlando failed to top 100 points for the seventh consecutive game, and Miami held its opponent below 100 points for the fifth consecutive game.

KINGS 122, PELICANS 117

Buddy Hield scored 28 points, and Sacramento overcame an early 19-point deficit to defeat visiting New Orleans. Willie Cauley-Stein had 22 points and 17 rebounds for the Kings, who scored 36 points in the fourth quarter. Bogdan Bogdanovic had 24 points and seven assists, and De'Aaron Fox had 19 points and 11 assists. Nemanja Bjelica had seven points and 10 rebounds. Anthony Davis scored 26 points and grabbed 17 rebounds for the Pelicans, who have lost four in a row, and Jrue Holiday had 27 points.

TIMBERWOLVES 114, THUNDER 112

Andrew Wiggins scored 30 points, including a key



OAKLAND: Draymond Green #23 of the Golden State Warriors shoots the ball against the LA Clippers on Sunday at ORACLE Arena in Oakland, California. — AFP

jumper with 14.3 seconds left, as Minnesota won for just the second time in eight games and ended host Oklahoma City's four-game winning streak. Wiggins didn't exactly make it easy on Minnesota, though, missing three critical free throws in the final 1:36 to help keep Oklahoma City in the game. Paul George had 31 points and 11 rebounds to lead Oklahoma City. Russell Westbrook had 23 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists for his 113th career triple-double.

TRAIL BLAZERS 121, MAVERICKS 118 (OT)

Damian Lillard scored 33 points and dished out seven assists as Portland pulled out an overtime victory over visiting Dallas. CJ McCollum added 22 points, and Jusuf Nurkic had 10 points, 12 rebounds and six assists for the Trail Blazers, who won for the fourth time in five outings.

Harrison Barnes scored 27 points, and Luka Doncic collected 23 points, 11 rebounds and six assists for the Mavericks, who lost their sixth straight game.

GRIZZLIES 107, LAKERS 99

Rookie Jaren Jackson Jr. scored 27 points, and Mike Conley added 17, including two key back-to-back 3-pointers in the fourth quarter, as visiting Memphis ended a five-game losing streak with a victory in Los Angeles. Marc Gasol also had 17 points as the Grizzlies won for the first time since defeating the Portland Trail Blazers on Dec. 12. LeBron James scored 22 points and grabbed 14 rebounds, and Brandon Ingram added 20 points as the Lakers lost for the fourth time in their last six games. — Reuters

Pant out as Karthik returns to ODI fold

MUMBAI: Experienced Dinesh Karthik has pipped young Rishabh Pant for the spot of second wicketkeeper-batsman in India's one-day international squad for their matches against Australia and New Zealand.

The 21-year-old Pant was the backup to former captain and regular stumper Mahendra Singh Dhoni during India's home five-match series against West Indies. Pant played three of the five matches as a specialist batsman and scored 17 and 24 in the second and third ODIs. Karthik, 33, has played 86 ODIs and was part of India's Asia Cup squad but was left out for the West Indies matches.

"After returning from Australia post the Test series, Rishabh Pant will play for India A in the five-match one-day series at home against England Lions," the Indian cricket board said in their statement while announcing the squad.

Karthik was inconsistent and could not convert starts into big scores at the Asia Cup and finished with a total of 146 in six matches, missing the opportunity to secure the number four spot India have been looking to fill ahead of the 50-over World Cup next year.

But Karthik could well have sealed the spot with captain Virat Kohli and coach Ravi Shastri confirming recently that India's period of experimenting with their ODI side is over with five months left before the World Cup in England.

After the conclusion of the ongoing four-test series against Australia, India will play a three-match one-day international series in January. That will be followed by a five-match ODI series in New Zealand before India return home for another five-match ODI series against Australia.

India's top players will then be involved in the Indian Premier League Twenty20 tournament before the World Cup begins on May 30 in England. Manish Pandey, who has also auditioned for the middle-order spots, was also axed from the ODI squad after warming the bench against West Indies.

With the return of frontline seamers Jasprit Bumrah and Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Umesh Yadav found himself out of favour. Mohammed Shami and Khaleel Ahmed were the other quicks in the squad while all-rounder Hardik Pandya also returned to the squad after recovering from injury.

India also named their squad for the three-match Twenty20 series in New Zealand which was highlighted by the return of Dhoni after the long-serving cricketer was left out of their shortest format matches against West Indies and Australia.

Squad: Virat Kohli (captain), Rohit Sharma, Lokesh Rahul, Shikhar Dhawan, Ambati Rayudu, Dinesh Karthik, Kedar Jadhav, MS Dhoni (wicketkeeper), Hardik Pandya, Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal, Ravindra Jadeja, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Jasprit Bumrah, Khaleel Ahmed, Mohammed Shami. — Reuters

Australia skipper loving heated Kohli battle

MELBOURNE: Australia skipper Tim Paine said yesterday he is relishing his sometimes heated battle with animated Indian counterpart Virat Kohli, and promised "intense, hard" cricket in the crunch Boxing Day Test at Melbourne.

The pair had some testy exchanges in the second Test at Perth, which at one point needed the umpire to intervene. And Kohli offered only a frosty handshake at the end of the game, which Australia won to level the four-Test series 1-1, refusing to meet Paine's eye in a move blasted by some as disrespectful.

But Paine said he appreciated that Kohli never liked to lose. "A lot was made of my battle with Virat in the second Test, and for the past few years when I haven't been playing international cricket, he was one guy I loved watching," he said in a column for Melbourne's Herald Sun.

"Now to be out in the middle going head-to-head with him in a Test series is something I'm really relishing." Paine said he was not annoyed "in the slightest" by Kohli looking straight past him at the handshake.

"Virat is someone who is prepared to wear his heart on his sleeve and like all professional athletes, hates to lose," he said. "I like the way Virat plays. I don't know him personally but I've always admired—not only his obvious skill as a player—but the passion and aggression he plays with. People like to see that and he gets fans through the gates."

Kohli's antics in Perth, where he also failed to acknowledge the crowd's applause after he was controversially given out in the first innings for 123, brought a stunning rebuke from veteran Bollywood star Naseeruddin Shah.

MIDDLE-ORDER PUZZLE

He described him as "not only the world's best batsman but also the world's worst behaved player", with the mass-circulation Hindustan Times saying it articulated what many Indian cricket fans had been thinking.

His behaviour when the Melbourne Test begins on Wednesday will be closely watched, but he has the backing of coach Ravi Shastri who on Sunday called Kohli "an absolute gentleman". Australian coach Justin Langer said Monday his biggest selection headache was whether to persist with middle-order batsman Peter Handscomb or recall all-rounder Mitch Marsh to ease the pressure on pace spearheads Mitchell Starc, Josh Hazlewood and Pat Cummins.

"In a perfectly balanced side you'll have someone who can bowl some overs so Mitch becomes an attractive commodity on a wicket probably unlike Adelaide and Perth," he said, where the surface offered fast bowlers plenty of opportunities.

On the other hand, Handscomb would be an asset if the visitors opt for two spinners. India are sweating on the fitness of key spinner Ravichandran Ashwin, who was sidelined with an abdominal strain for the Perth Test.

Left-arm off-spinning all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja is also carrying a niggle but is expected to be fit, as is experienced batsman Rohit Sharma, who also missed the second Test. India's main concern is the form of openers KL Rahul and Murali Vijay, who have

Runs key as top S Africa, Pakistan bowlers square up

CENTURION: Pakistan coach Mickey Arthur identified the need for his batsmen to post good totals as a key factor in their three-Test series against South Africa, starting at SuperSport Park in Centurion tomorrow.

"The one thing we do know is that we can get 20 wickets comfortably. Our challenge is to get to 350-400 (runs)," Arthur said in a pre-tour interview.

It is a refrain that could be echoed by Ottis Gibson, his South African counterpart, ahead of a series which pits two strong sets of bowlers against potentially fragile batting line-ups in a country where conditions usually offer bowlers plenty of encouragement.

The bowling strength of both teams is formidable, despite the lack of what had been anticipated as an intriguing match-up of exceptionally accurate seamers between South Africa's Vernon Philander and Pakistan's

rising star Mohammad Abbas. Philander has a broken finger, while Abbas is recovering from a shoulder injury. Abbas did not bowl in Pakistan's win against a South African Invitation XI last week but Arthur did not rule him out of contention for Test selection.

Even without Abbas, a pace attack of Mohammad Amir, Hasan Ali and Shaheen Afridi, backed by the leg-spin of Yasir Shah, will pose a challenge for the home batsmen. South Africa will also be without fast bowler Lungi Ngidi because of a long-term knee injury but veteran Dale Steyn, needing just one wicket to become his country's leading wicket-taker, bowled with good pace and rhythm in a recent Twenty20 tournament, as did fellow spearhead Kagiso Rabada.

Duanne Olivier, who will be South Africa's third seamer, was the top wicket-taker in the T20 league and had match figures of seven for 54 in a losing cause in a franchise match last week. Familiar frailty -

Pakistan's batting showed familiar frailty when they twice collapsed in the fourth innings in losing a Test series against New Zealand in the United Arab Emirates recently. But Haris Sohail, Babar Azam, Azhar Ali and Asad Shafiq all hit centuries in the same series, while most of Pakistan's top order were in the runs against the Invitation team.

South Africa have some batting problems, exacerbated

by the retirement of AB de Villiers. Opening batsmen Dean Elgar and Aiden Markram, Theunis de Bruyn, Hashim Amla, Temba Bavuma, Quinton de Kock (wkt), Keshav Maharaj, Kagiso Rabada, Dale Steyn, Duanne Olivier

Pakistan (from): Sarfraz Ahmed (capt/wkt), Asad Shafiq, Azhar Ali, Babar Azam, Faheem Ashraf, Fakhar Zaman, Haris Sohail, Hasan Ali, Imam-ul-Haq, Mohammad Abbas, Mohammad Amir, Mohammad Rizwan, Shadab Khan, Shaheen Afridi, Shan Masood, Yasir Shah. — AFP

Teams

South Africa (probable): Faf du Plessis (capt), Dean Elgar, Aiden Markram, Theunis de Bruyn, Hashim Amla, Temba Bavuma, Quinton de Kock (wkt), Keshav Maharaj, Kagiso Rabada, Dale Steyn, Duanne Olivier



PERTH: File photo shows Australia's captain Tim Paine (R) shakes hand with Indian captain Virat Kohli after winning the second Test cricket match between Australia and India in Perth on December 18, 2018. — AFP

struggled for runs, putting an extra burden on Kohli and number three Cheteshwar Pujara. Shastri made clear on Sunday more was expected from them in Melbourne. "It's obvious and that responsibility and accountability has to be taken by the top order," he said. "They've got the experience, they've got the exposure over these last few years to get out there and deliver." — AFP

Sports

Aubameyang leads golden boot race, takes African honours in Europe

Liverpool's Egyptian king Salah continues his return to form

PARIS: Arsenal sharpshooter Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang took the African honours in Europe at the weekend by scoring twice to become the English Premier League leading scorer. A brace from the Gabonese helped see off Burnley 3-1 at the Emirates and lifted his season tally to 12 — one more than Liverpool and Egypt star Mohamed Salah and Harry Kane. Ghanaian Jeffrey Schlupp struck the goal that set Crystal Palace on the way to a stunning 3-2 victory at defending champions Manchester City.

England

MOHAMED SALAH (Liverpool)

Liverpool's Egyptian king continued his return to form by nonchalantly stabbing home the Premier League leaders' opener in a 2-0 win at Wolves that sent them four points clear at the top. Salah also set up Liverpool's second goal at Molineux as his cross was converted by Virgil van Dijk.

PIERRE-EMERICK AUBAMEYANG (Arsenal)

Despite scoring, Salah dropped to second in the race for the golden boot alongside Kane on 11 goals for the season as Aubameyang's double in a 3-1 win over Burnley moved the striker into the lead with 12. Aubameyang struck early in each half, his second strike, in particular, a fine finish that flew high past Joe Hart, as Arsenal moved level on points with Chelsea in fourth.

JEFFREY SCHLUPP (Crystal Palace)

Winger Schlupp played a big part in the surprise of the weekend as Palace stunned Manchester City 3-2 at the Etihad. City dominated the early stages and led 1-0 until Schlupp stormed past Kyle Walker and arched a low left-footed shot into the far corner to put Palace on course for a famous win.

Spain

MUBARAK WAKASO (Alaves)

The Ghanaian international midfielder helped Alaves secure a crucial second consecutive clean sheet as the season's surprise package claimed a 1-0 win at Real Sociedad to move fifth in La Liga, just one point behind Real Madrid.

Klopp taking nothing for granted despite Liverpool lead

LONDON: Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp has said the fact his side top the Premier League table heading into the busy holiday period counts for little. The Anfield club are four points clear at the summit going into their Boxing Day clash at home to Newcastle, with champions Manchester City second and Tottenham Hotspur six points adrift in third place.

Liverpool, however, have not won the English title in the Premier League era — their last domestic Championship crown came back in 1990. And with Tottenham having hammered Everton, Liverpool's local rivals, 6-2 on Sunday, Klopp does not expect to have things all his own way during the rest of the season.

"You (the media) make these stories about who is in and who is out," said Klopp. "I saw the game against Everton who played absolutely more than okay and then they (Spurs) hit pretty much everything and it was really impressive

Marin ready to go the distance to be best-ever

MUMBAI: For someone who took up badminton as a hobby, Carolina Marin has come a long way to be the reigning Olympic and world champion but the Spaniard yearns for more as she continues her journey towards becoming the best-ever in the sport.

In August, Marin became the first woman player to win three World Championships titles when she beat India's Pusarla Sindhu in Nanjing to add to her gold medals from 2014 and 2015. China's Lin Dan has won two Olympic men's singles gold medals and five world championship crowns and is widely considered the greatest shuttler.

"Well I would like to be the best player in the history of badminton," Marin told Reuters in an interview. "It's very easy to say but I know it's going to be really, really difficult. I am ready to do anything to get that."

"I would like to win one more Olympic Games and minimum two more World Championships." Dubbed the Rafa Nadal of badminton in Spain for her tenacity and fierce left-handed game, Marin ended Asia's hegemony

how Tottenham did.

"The same will happen to Arsenal and Chelsea. No decision is made, why should it be? Nobody should feel safe, no one should feel out of the race. It is not a time to think about it. "For me they (Tottenham) were never out so why should people be surprised they are now in? A lot of teams are in whatever you call the title race and that is how it should be."

The German added: "That is maybe only the difference to last year when pretty much nobody was in any more at this time and that is good for all supporters out there. "Being unbeaten in the league until December is not something I had too often in my life. We did really well so far, and we have to do even better from now on. That's the challenge for us."

Liverpool fans know only too well that being top at Christmas is no guarantee of the league title. There may have only been two occasions in the past 10 years where the team top on December 25 failed to win the Premier League but in both instances it was Liverpool, in 2008 and 2014, who could not complete the job.

Only James Milner among Liverpool's current squad knows what it's like to win the Premier League, having been a member of Manchester City's victorious

at the Olympics when she beat Sindhu in the Rio 2016 final.

Her win secured Europe a first title in 20 years and only its second since the sport's 1992 debut at the Games — something Marin could have never imagined when she started playing. "Badminton is not much popular in Spain. I just played badminton like a hobby, I didn't think too much about becoming a world champion," said the 25-year old, who represents Pune 7 Aces in the ongoing Premier Badminton League in India.

"When I moved to the national centre as a 14-year-old, then I started to think about what I would like to be... a badminton player, I just wanted to be the best in the world. "Maybe I cannot explain in words, it's impossible to explain. I had to put in so much effort to make my dream come true... I had to make so many sacrifices. It was really really difficult."

Since her Rio gold, Marin has been dogged by injuries, the latest being a niggle in her right leg which kept her out of this month's BWF World Tour Finals. Marin finds the BWF rule forcing the top 15 shuttlers to participate in at least 12 events per season too taxing and believes the governing body should do more to protect the players from injuries. "I think that may be they (BWF) have to think more about the players because the players are the main thing for the world feder-

Italy
KALIDOU KOULIBALY (Napoli)

The highly-rated Senegal centre-back helped Napoli to an eighth Serie A clean sheet of the season as Carlo Ancelotti's men edged out SPAL 1-0 to remain only eight points adrift of leaders Juventus.

HAMED JUNIOR TRAORE (Empoli)

Ivorian teenager Traore set up Francesco Caputo to score against Sampdoria, with the goal confirmed by VAR after first being disallowed for offside. Traore, 18, then missed a chance to score his first top-flight goal for the promoted Tuscany side when his daisy-cutter was fingertipped away from goal. Empoli finished 4-2 losers.

BASTOS (Lazio)

Lazio's Angolan defender elbowed Cagliari's Joao Pedro in the face resulting in a yellow card for himself and a penalty which the Brazilian converted to allow the Sardinians pull a goal back in Rome. Lazio, nevertheless, won 3-1 to move fourth and into the Champions League places.

Germany

SALIF SANE (Schalke 04)

The Senegal centre-back claimed his first goal for Schalke in a 3-1 win at Stuttgart in fortuitous circumstances as his header flew in off the shoulder of Germany striker Mario Gomez. It was Sane's first goal for the Royal Blues since joining in June and helped his team to their first Bundesliga win since early November.

AMADOU HAIDARA (RB Leipzig)

The 20-year-old Mali international is tipped to be a future Bundesliga star after the central midfielder signed a four-year deal to join RB Leipzig on Saturday and inherited the No 8 shirt vacated when Naby Keita joined Liverpool at the end of last season. "There aren't too many players of his age who have so much potential and he has all the capabilities to follow in Naby Keita's footsteps," said Leipzig coach Ralf Rangnick after signing Haidara, currently sidelined with a knee injury, from sister club Red Bull Salzburg.



LONDON: Arsenal's Gabonese striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang passes the ball during the English Premier League football match between Arsenal and Burnley at the Emirates Stadium in London. —AFP

France

NICOLAS PEPE (Lille)

A run of four straight games with a goal was ended in a 2-1 loss to Toulouse. Meanwhile, amid mounting interest from some of Europe's leading clubs, sporting director Luis Campos slapped an 80-million-euro (\$91 million) price tag on the Ivorian. However, club president Gerard Lopez added that Pepe has said on several occasions he wants to see out the season at Lille.

MAX-ALAIN GRADEL (Toulouse)

The Ivory Coast winger scored a pair of second-half penalties as Toulouse inflicted a first home defeat of the

season on Lille. Gradel equalised just after the interval and then hit the winner on 64 minutes in a 2-1 victory after he was fouled in the area by Yves Dabila. He has accounted for eight of Toulouse's 17 goals this season.

WAHBI KHAZRI (Saint-Etienne)

The Tunisian returned from suspension to bag his team-leading ninth goal this term in a 3-0 defeat of Dijon. His thumping first-time strike on 64 minutes saw Khazri match his personal best haul from the 2014/15 season with Bordeaux. His outstanding form also saw him collect the Ligue 1 player of the month award for November. —AFP



Jurgen Klopp

squads in 2012 and 2014. But Klopp, who won the Bundesliga title with Borussia Dortmund in 2011 and 2012, insisted: "I know that all players who have won the title, at one time it was their first time.

"You don't know what is more important, is it experience, potential, attitude, desire or joy, being completely fresh having never had it before? "Experience is

always good if you are young enough to use it. We have to use all experience from the last games, especially from the last season, and that's much more important.

"Character is always very important but with these boys there is no doubt about that because we achieved already in the past big things: finals, good positions in the league." — AFP

Spalletti wants more cunning from Inter Milan

MILAN: Inter Milan coach Luciano Spalletti believes there is a simple reason that his side have been dropping points over the last six weeks: they are not cunning enough. Third-placed Inter host second-placed Napoli in Serie A's new Boxing Day programme tomorrow, having slipped eight points behind their opponents.

The two sides were level in early November, but while Inter have been letting matches get away, Napoli have done exactly the opposite and have won their last three Serie A away games with a goal in the last 10 minutes. Inter dropped two more points on Saturday when they conceded an injury-time equaliser against bottom-of-the-table Chievo and were held 1-1, much to Spalletti's frustration.

"Clearly, we have to work better on these situations, as we had so many chances to kill off the game and didn't take them," said the former AS Roma and Zenit St Petersburg coach.

"We still can't manage to be determined enough but we've got quality and when we have the advantage in a match, we need to use it to bring home the result. "We need to be more cunning," added Spalletti who has also seen his side twice throw away the lead in a 2-2 draw at AS Roma and lose 1-0 at leaders Juventus despite creating more clear cut chances. "Sometimes, we don't make the right choices, therefore we don't get the most out of ourselves." —Reuters

Benitez says Newcastle need 'another miracle' to stay up

LONDON: Rafael Benitez believes it will be "another miracle" if his Newcastle side retain their Premier League status. The Spanish manager said finishing 10th last season was an extraordinary performance but added that would be matched simply by beating the drop this term give the fact that the Magpies' relegation rivals had all outspent the north-east side in pre-season.

Newcastle's position has also been complicated by owner Mike Ashley being frustrated in his wish to sell the club. "We have to be realistic and understand that we will be in the bottom half during the whole season," said Benitez ahead of the Boxing Day clash away to his former side Liverpool who are looking to cement their lead at the top of the table.

"For me, it is almost clear and if we can be better than three teams, it will be another miracle. "It was a miracle last year. People were thinking, 'Oh, you finished 10th...', but with a couple fewer wins, we could have been in the bottom five, so it was a miracle. —AFP



Carolina Marin

ation or Spanish federation or any federation," she said.

"When they force the players to play so many tournaments in a year, we cannot do that. We are human, we are not robots, so sometimes we get injured because we are being forced to play so many tournaments. If we don't play because we are injured then we have to pay a fine."

Coming from a country with no real pedigree in badminton, Marin believes she has been able to popularise the

sport with many children picking up a racquet after her Olympic success. She, however, is not too sure if Spain would see another of her kind.

"It's not easy to produce another Carolina Marin," she added. "Maybe because Carolina Marin has something special that may be another girl does not have or is difficult to be born with. "I have a special character that makes me feel special... to put in efforts to fight for my dream." —Reuters

25 The end of the Messi-Ronaldo era? Football rings the changes in 2018



26 Curry's last-second basket caps 42-point night, clips Clippers



27 Aubameyang leads golden boot race, takes African honours in Europe



NEW ORLEANS: Alvin Kamara No 41 of the New Orleans Saints scores a touchdown against the Pittsburgh Steelers during the first half at the Mercedes-Benz Superdome on Sunday in New Orleans, Louisiana. —AFP

Saints clinch top seed in NFC playoffs

Patriots, Cowboys, Texans and Seahawks make playoff

NEW ORLEANS: Taking advantage of a special teams stop on a fake punt, Drew Brees threw a 2-yard touchdown pass to Michael Thomas with 1:25 left to lift the host New Orleans Saints to a 31-28 comeback victory over the Pittsburgh Steelers on Sunday and clinch home-field advantage throughout the NFC playoffs. Pittsburgh (8-6-1) led 28-24 with little more than four minutes left when it faced a fourth-and-5 from its own 42. Fullback Roosevelt Nix took the snap and ran up the middle, but linebacker Craig Robertson stopped him a yard short of the first down at the Steelers' 46. Given the short field, Brees drove the Saints 46 yards in 10 plays for the decisive score. The Steelers had one more shot, moving into Saints territory with 41 seconds left. But after catching a pass from Ben Roethlisberger, Steelers receiver Juju Smith-Schuster lost the ball on a tackle by defensive tackle Sheldon Rankins, and the Saints (13-2) recovered to clinch the victory.

PATRIOTS 24, BILLS 12

New England pounded out 273 rushing yards to beat visiting Buffalo and clinch the AFC East title for the 10th straight season. Rookie running back Sony Michel led the way with 116 yards and a touchdown as the Patriots (10-5) found their footing after consecutive losses and extended their unprecedented run of divisional dominance. With the strong running game, New England didn't need to rely on Tom Brady against the Bills (5-10). Brady finished 13-of-24 passing for 126 yards, one touchdown and two interceptions. Brady's 48.3 quarterback rating was the seventh-lowest of his career.

SEAHAWKS 38, CHIEFS 31

Russell Wilson passed for three touchdowns, and Chris Carson rushed for two as Seattle clinched an NFC wild-card berth with a victory against visiting Kansas City. Wilson completed 18 of 29 passes for 271 yards and did not throw an interception. He also had 57 yards rushing on eight attempts, including a 26-yard scamper on a scoring drive in the fourth quarter that gave Seattle (9-6) a 31-20 lead. Carson rushed for 116 yards on 27 carries, becoming the first Seattle running back to reach 1,000 yards in a season since Marshawn Lynch in 2014. Patrick Mahomes completed 23 of 40 passes for 273 yards and three touchdowns for the Chiefs (11-4), who lost their second in a row and remained tied atop the AFC West with the Los Angeles Chargers. Damien Williams rushed for 103 yards on 13 carries in the loss.

COWBOYS 27, BUCCANEERS 20

Despite losing defensive end Tyrone Crawford to a neck injury on the game's second play, Dallas got its first defensive touchdown of the season and a touchdown pass from Dak Prescott to beat Tampa Bay in Arlington, Texas, to clinch the NFC East. Crawford was stretched off the field less than a minute into the game on what looked like an ordinary play. The team announced early Sunday night that Crawford sustained a neck strain and was released from the hospital. Without Crawford, the Cowboys (9-6) were able to close out the division crown and earn a home game in the NFC playoffs despite being outgained 383-232. Dallas played turnover-free, unlike Tampa Bay (5-10). The league leader in turnovers entering the game, the Buccaneers committed two more.

EAGLES 32, TEXANS 18

Jake Elliott hit a 35-yard field goal as time expired to deliver host Philadelphia a crucial win over Houston and preserve the defending champions' playoff hopes. Nick Foles completed 35 of 49 attempts for a team-record 471 yards and four touchdowns, winning a second consecutive start in subbing for the injured Carson Wentz (back). The game-winning, 72-yard drive came after Deshaun Watson led the Texans (10-5) on two fourth-quarter scoring marches to take a 30-29 lead with 2:04 to play. Watson finished 29 of 40 for 339 yards and four total touchdowns, including two rushing. Tight end Zach Ertz recorded 12 receptions for 110 yards and two touchdowns for the Eagles (8-7), giving him 113 catches to break Jason Witten's NFL single-season record of 110 receptions by a tight end.

BROWNS 26, BENGALS 18

Baker Mayfield threw three touchdown passes and fellow rookie Nick Chubb rushed for more than 100 yards for the fourth time this season as Cleveland defeated visiting Cincinnati. Mayfield now has 24 touchdown passes in his rookie season, two shy of the rookie record shared by Peyton Manning (1998) and Russell Wilson (2012). Cleveland (7-7-1) swept the season series from Cincinnati (6-9), with Mayfield throwing for 542 yards and seven touchdowns in the two games. The Browns' defense held the Bengals in check until the final five minutes Sunday, when Cincinnati scored a pair of touchdowns two minutes apart to make things interesting. But Cleveland iced the game when Mayfield found David Njoku for 66 yards to the Browns' 3-yard line just before the two-minute warning.

COLTS 28, GIANTS 27

Andrew Luck threw a 1-yard touchdown pass to Chester Rogers with 55 seconds left as Indianapolis rallied for a one-point victory over visiting New York to remain in the thick of the playoff race. Luck hit Rogers with a pass in the left flat to cap the eight-play, 53-yard drive and knot the score, and Adam Vinatieri kicked the extra point to give Indianapolis (9-6) the lead. Malik Hooker intercepted Giants quarterback Eli Manning with 23 seconds left to seal the Colts' eighth victory in their past nine games. New York fell to 5-10 after winning four of its previous six games.

VIKINGS 27, LIONS 9

Tight end Kyle Rudolph caught two touchdown passes from Kirk Cousins, including a Hail Mary on the final play of the first half, and Minnesota pulled away to top host Detroit. Rudolph caught nine passes for 122 yards while recording his third career two-touchdown game. Cousins completed 21 of 28 passes for 253 yards and three touchdowns for Minnesota (8-6-1), which moved closer to a wild-card playoff berth. Matt Prater kicked three field goals for Detroit (5-10). Matthew Stafford was 18 for 32 for 116 yards before being removed late in the contest. The Lions were held scoreless in the second half.

JAGUARS 17, DOLPHINS 7

Linebacker Telvin Smith intercepted a Ryan Tannehill pass and rumbled 33 yards for the game-sealing score as Jacksonville eliminated host Miami from playoff contention. Miami (7-8) lost its second straight game. Jacksonville (5-10) went to former starting quarterback Blake Bortles with 42 seconds left in the third quarter, and he led the Jaguars to a go-ahead field goal and finished the game. He completed 5 of 6 passes for 39 yards and also ran four times for 25 yards.

PACKERS 44, JETS 38 (OT)

Aaron Rodgers and Green Bay, in the midst of a lost season, salvaged some pride by rallying past New York in overtime in East Rutherford, N.J. Green Bay (6-8-1), which avoided the first 0-8 road season in franchise history, won the overtime toss and drove right down the field to win the game. The big play was a 33-yard penalty for pass interference on cornerback Trumaine Johnson on a deep pass attempt to receiver Marquez Valdes-Scantling. Offensive

holding wiped out Rodgers' touchdown run but, on the next play, Rodgers hit receiver Davante Adams for a 16-yard touchdown. Rodgers finished 37 of 55 for 442 yards with two touchdown passes and two touchdown runs. Rookie quarterback Sam Darnold had another impressive outing in a losing cause for the Jets (4-11), finishing 24 of 34 for 341 yards and three touchdowns with no turnovers.

FALCONS 24, PANTHERS 10

Matt Ryan threw for two long touchdowns in the third quarter as visiting Atlanta eliminated Carolina from playoff contention in Charlotte, N.C. The Panthers (6-9), who have lost seven consecutive games and had only a slim chance of reaching the postseason prior to the game, were playing without quarterback Cam Newton because of a shoulder injury. Ryan finished 15-for-26 passing for 239 yards and three touchdowns for the Falcons (6-9), who swept the season series from Carolina.

RAMS 31, CARDINALS 9

C.J. Anderson rushed for 167 yards and a touchdown and Jared Goff threw for 216 yards and a score as visiting Los Angeles ended its two-game losing streak with an easy victory in Glendale, Ariz. The win, after consecutive defeats to the Chicago Bears and Philadelphia Eagles, means the Rams (12-3) can lock up a first-round bye in the playoffs with a win at home against the San Francisco 49ers during the final week of the regular season. Anderson, who was making his Rams debut, was signed earlier in the week for running back depth. Rams starting running back Todd Gurley was scratched against the Cardinals (3-12) with left knee inflammation.

BEARS 14, 49ERS 9

Jordan Howard scored on a 2-yard run in the third quarter and the Chicago defense pitched a shutout in the second half as the Bears outlasted San Francisco in Santa Clara, Calif., and kept alive their hopes for a first-round playoff bye. The win allowed the Bears (11-4), who have clinched the NFC North, to stay within one game of the Los Angeles Rams (12-3) in the battle for the No. 2 seed in the NFC. A Chicago win next week at Minnesota coupled with a Los Angeles home loss to San Francisco would give the Bears the second seed and a first-round bye. The 49ers (4-11) had a two-game winning streak snapped. —Reuters