

Friday Times

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Holiday thoughts



Local Spotlight

By Muna Al-Fuzai

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We are a few days away from welcoming a new year with hopes for a future full of success to end all the pain and failure that we may have come across. I wish you all a good holiday as the world celebrates two occasions - Christmas and New Year. In Kuwait, it seems to me there is modest interest in the New Year. We have a public holiday on Tuesday, January 1 and will resume normal business on Wednesday, although I expect absenteeism among employees and students will rise because there is a good chance of short trips out of Kuwait to participate in New Year celebrations.

I think traveling during these days is tiring and expensive, because I see that ticket prices are rising unjustifiably, as well as the prices of hotel reservations. Congestion at the airport and the possibility of flight delays are very troublesome, so usually I avoid traveling during the holiday season.

It is also natural that this period is an occasion to look at the past and the future and think about the achievements we want to accomplish this year. But it is certain that a person often feels nostalgic for family meetings and gatherings, especially if they are expatriates and far from family and friends. This is an evident reason why many expats head to their countries at this time to be close with their families, aiming to spend a few days in peace and harmony.

But 2018's events and issues will not end with the passage of a year. Will Arab communities be kept waiting for miracles to change their conditions? Societies must set goals and plans for themselves, and every year they need to carry out an assessment of what has been achieved, monitor the causes of success and identify what has not been done to address weaknesses.

It is exciting that we have the same hopes every year for peace and love as the world ignites in violence and the rate of the unemployed and borrowers who are sinking in debts is rising, with many issues of concern such as human rights, freedoms and the acceptance of others' opinion still unresolved. We are still suffering from the same daily concerns, so we are not moving forward. It is regrettable that many European countries today are now suffering from an increase in the number of homeless persons and incidents of violence that place their identity and international reputation at stake.

All these issues mean that the world is heading for more violence and a few days of the holidays will not lead us to forget the loss of a family member, friend or right. There is little space for real hope for peace. The holiday season has already begun and for those who could not afford to travel, maybe it is time to spend these days planning for the future and a better tomorrow.

Happy holidays!

PHOTO OF THE DAY



KUWAIT: A goose staring into the photographer's lens. — Photo by Mohammad Sobhi (KUNA)

What's our excuse, Kuwait?



IN MY VIEW

by Nejouad Al-Yagout

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By Nejouad Al-Yagout

The Black Eyed Peas, Enrique Iglesias and David Guetta in Saudi Arabia? Oh my! We are used to hearing about concerts in the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, even Oman, but in Saudi Arabia? Here, like in the kingdom, culture has often been the reason for "banning" concerts, but now that Saudi Arabia is moving with the times, what is our excuse, Kuwait? Culture? Do we not share the same culture as our fellow GCC members? Aren't the majority of Kuwaitis originally from Saudi Arabian tribes? What now, Kuwait? Are we still going to hold on to a past that is slipping from our fingers, or should we make a gentle transition or even an abrupt one like our brothers and sisters in KSA?

Isn't it time we stop pretending that we don't enjoy music, that we don't enjoy entertainment, that we don't enjoy spirituality, that we don't enjoy meditation and yoga, and all the other beautiful facets of life we are denying ourselves and others in the process? Why does everything we do here have to be done behind closed doors? Why do we have to travel to attend spiritual seminars and workshops, or concerts of our favorite artists? Why do we have to travel for book signings by authors who are censored here? When are we going to learn that what our ancestors said was, in fact, true: What is forbidden is desired. Are we going to raise children who are perverted and secretive or a future generation that is healthy and able to enjoy life's beauty by being authentic and free?

Music is beautiful. It makes us happy, especially in a world that is filled with uncertainty. Music is a natural high and to consider it forbidden or taboo is unfair. If we don't

want to head-bang at a heavy metal concert, we don't have to buy tickets, but why can't others? If we don't want to dance or sway to hip-hop, we don't have to. It's up to us though if we want to, or if we choose to sit in the front row of a classical concert, one leg crossed over another, clapping while looking over our shoulder, making sure nobody is looking.

The same with books and censorship. Is reading not a part of our heritage? When did we allow a group of men to berate us for what we read? Isn't that reminiscent of Fahrenheit 451? Understandably, ratings are there to protect children from violence and adult content, but to censor a book for adults is preposterous. Especially since it's no secret that banned books are bestsellers in our community! And apart from sating our curiosity to read what we shouldn't, literature is a carpet ride to a magical realm. It takes us to worlds far away and increases our tolerance and understanding of those who are misunderstood. Censoring books is detrimental to our society and robs us of opportunities to connect with fellow humans. It's no wonder why we are so fearful of change and foreigners.

And so, here we are, reticent to take any step into a future that is already here, whether we like it or not. Perhaps what we have not yet understood in our community is that culture is not fixed, no matter how much we glorify it. Change is inevitable. And we either resist it and suffer or accept it and peacefully allow change to flow. Bob Dylan reminded his peers in the sixties that the times they are a-changing, and this is a phrase still applicable today, tomorrow, and the day after. Oh, and it's not just time that is changing. We are too.

Kuwait Times

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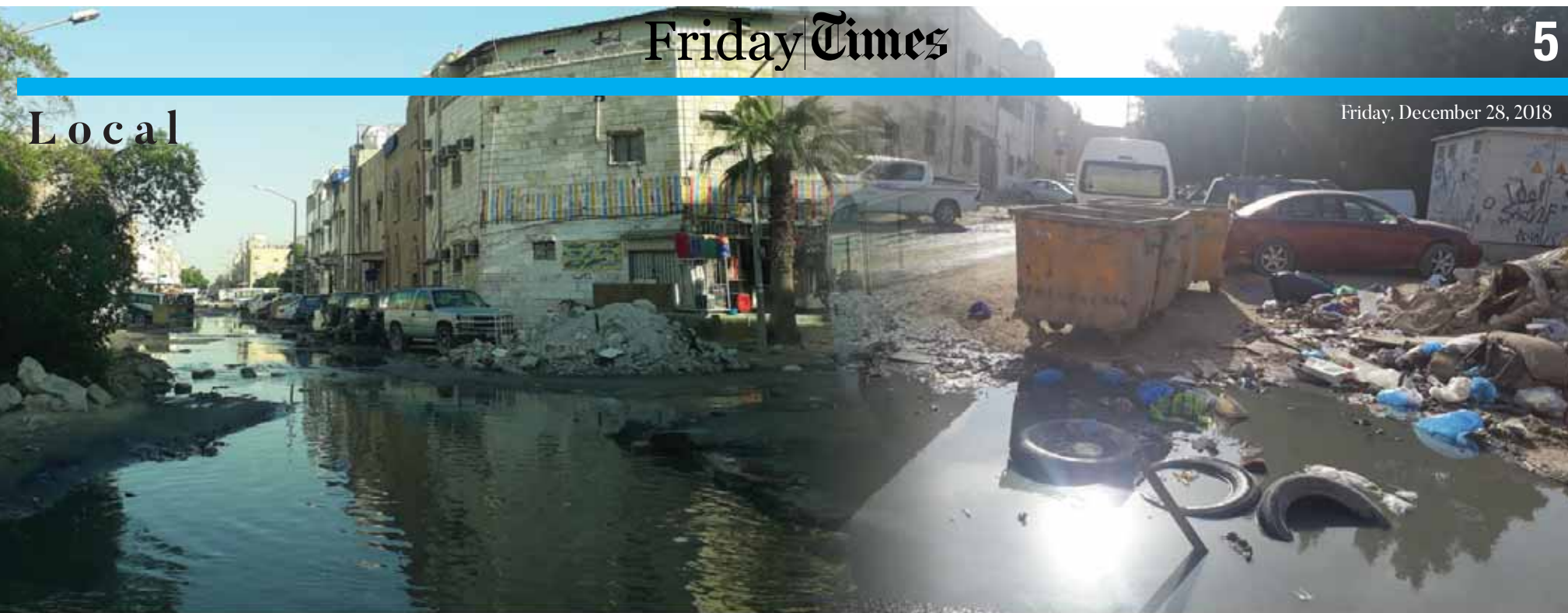
Jleeb: The cesspool of Kuwait

By Shakir Reshamwala

The recent rains and flooding swamped many parts of Kuwait, leading to widespread disruption and damage. These areas have now mostly returned to normal, with the waterlogging seen as an inconvenience that has passed. But for residents of Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh, particularly block 3, flooded roads are a perennial problem - the streets here are inundated not by rainwater, but raw sewage. Their predicament is exacerbated by mounds of uncollected garbage and other waste, which could become a public health hazard if left unchecked.



Local



The common theme among residents of the area - colloquially known as Hasawi - is one of abandonment. "There are no services provided here. After the new university is built in Shadadiya, it seems this entire area will be razed to the ground. So why bother developing it?" an Egyptian resident told Kuwait Times. "The government has abandoned us because we are poor," echoed a Bangladeshi resident.

A Pakistani compared the situation of residents of the area to that of Pashtuns in the tribal frontier areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan. "They were told they were brave like lions and were exhorted to fight against the Soviets. But after the Soviets were driven out, they were labeled as terrorists and left to fend for themselves," he rued. Residents repeatedly mentioned the case of a woman who died after being electrocuted when rising rainwaters came in contact with exposed electric cables.

Thriving

The canopy of the iconic Jaber Stadium in Ardiya peeks over the dilapidated buildings in the area, a juxtaposition that is both jarring and poignant. The air hangs heavy with the putrid stench of garbage rotting under the sun and the continuous flow of sewage water from the open drains. Swarms of flies are everywhere. But surprisingly, for a place that looks completely uninhabitable, tens of thousands of expats call it home. Ironically, thousands of street cleaners also have accommodations here, overlooking streets and yards overflowing with rubbish.

The signboards of many shops in Jleeb are in Bangla (mostly in Hasawi) and occasionally Malayalam (in another part of Jleeb informally known as Abbasiya), reflecting the nationalities of the expats residing in these parts. Business is brisk, both legal and illegal.

On one side of a "rivulet" of sewage water in Hasawi, some enterprising women have set up semi-permanent stalls selling used clothing. On the other "bank", hawkers sell fruits and vegetables. A modern mosque towers by the side of the yard, flanked by a squat building that has a branch of a popular supermarket chain, a bunch of exchange shops thronged by expats remitting money home, restaurants, a salon, mobile accessory shops and other retail outlets.

A few hundred meters away, a mini-roundabout leads to another flooded street. The accumulated water hides the potholes underneath, so cautious motorists try to skirt the narrow road, leading to traffic jams. Patrons of a cafe on the side of the roundabout sit around open-air tables, eating, smoking and chatting, seemingly oblivious to the streets and buildings crumbling around them.

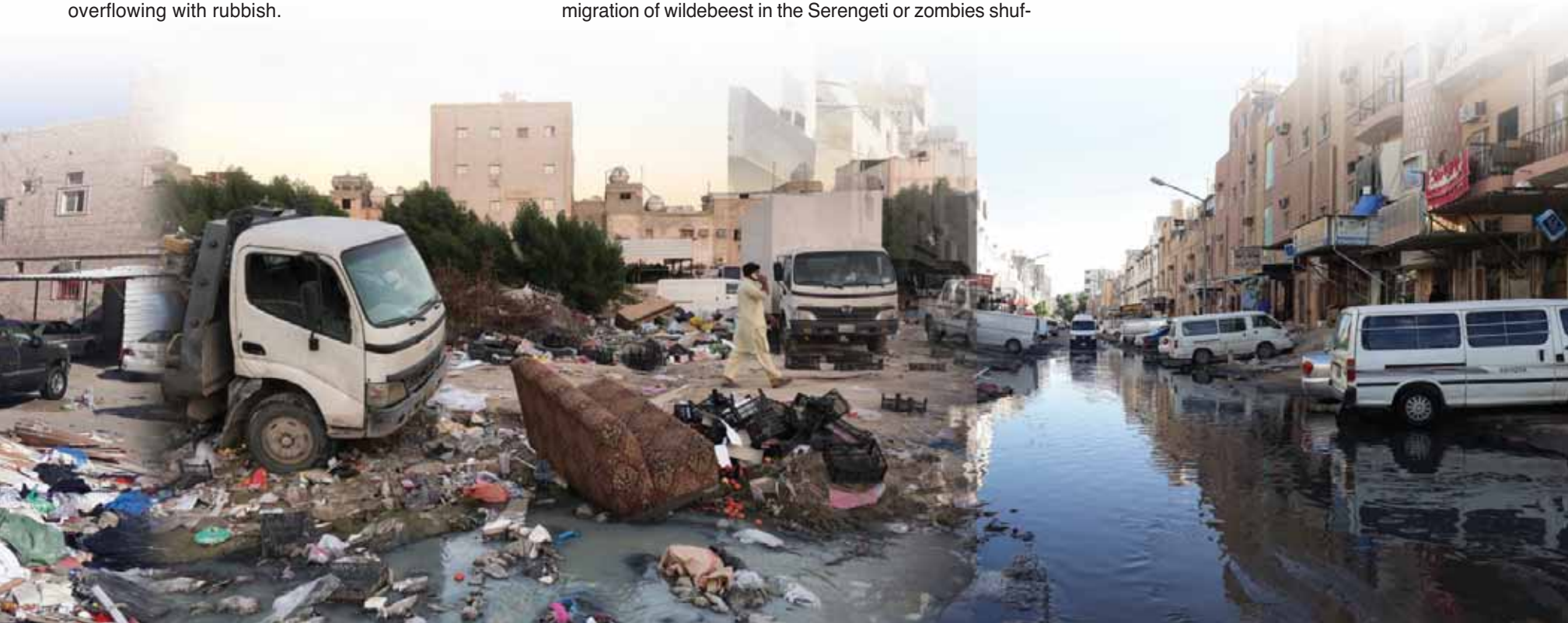
Otherworldly

The dystopian atmosphere of Jleeb is best witnessed before dawn, when hordes of menial workers emerge from the bowels of the area and walk towards the Sixth Ring Road to board buses that will take them to their worksites. Many are "loose" laborers hoping to find casual work. The surreal sight is reminiscent of the great migration of wildebeest in the Serengeti or zombies shuf-

fling in the dark in the "Thriller" video. Public buses and "one-eight" pickups stop in the middle of the road and do not budge until they find enough passengers, with nary a traffic police car in sight. "There's jungle raj here," an Indian expat said, using a popular South Asian term to refer to a lack of the rule of law.

The area has become so notorious that the US Department of State specifically mentions in its Kuwait travel advisory Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh - along with Jahra - as places Americans should avoid visiting. "The Kuwaiti ministry of interior has identified the neighborhood of Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh on the outskirts of Kuwait International Airport as a high-crime area. Violent crimes such as assault, armed robbery and sexual assault in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh is common," it reads.

But residents beg to differ, arguing that although the area is dirty, it is not dangerous. Despite the poor infrastructure and dearth of public services, Jleeb has a large number of schools and clinics, along with branches of all major banks and supermarkets, jewelry shops, malls and government establishments. The expats who live here know their stay in Kuwait is transient, so they put up with many indignities in their bid to survive cheaply, and soldier on. Or as Oscar Wilde said: "We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars."



Local

On festive seasons, barbershop business is booming

By Faten Omar

Mostly located in heavily-populated areas, barbershops are thriving in Kuwait. Many salons have expat owners, but there are some with Kuwaiti owners too, or both. Only Kuwaitis can own the license of the barbershops though. Salons run by Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi barbers are cheaper and affordable, while those staffed by Filipino, Egyptian or Lebanese hairdressers are on the expensive side. A regular haircut by South Asian barbers usually costs 500 fils, while a Lebanese coiffeur can charge up to KD 35 depending on the services offered. Most of the time, if the barber is not too busy, he will offer a relaxing head massage free of charge, or for a small fee.

December is one of the busiest months of the year for hairdressers due to Christmas and New Year festivities. Many customers get a new haircut to attend gatherings and parties. Despite the abundance of salons, many people have a favorite barber. Preferred haircuts include the classic cut, which can be smooth on top or "textured", or the "varsity" side part cut - trimmed at the sides and back and groomed on top. Or for a rather more radical look, there's the "fusey" cut - shaved sides and long on top - favored by many men in Kuwait.

Kuwait Times spoke with several female and male hairdressers to learn more. "On holidays, customers head to salons not only for haircuts, but also for other work such as skincare, waxing and hair straightening," said

Suad Ali, a 46-year-old women's salon owner. "To me, cutting hair for different people is interesting and makes me close to my customers. You get to hear a different story every day and you feel like you're a part of their lives," she added.

She pointed out that many customers visit salons around a week or less before the holidays because most of them are expatriates who will travel to spend time with their families in their home countries, while citizens travel to enjoy the holidays outside Kuwait. "This makes us declare a state of emergency to serve as many clients as we can and as quickly as possible," she exclaimed.

Ali says she is constantly booked - she receives 20 to 30 customers daily, while during the holidays it can reach up to 50 women. "Most of my clients come for my offer of KD 5 each for 10 types of works that also include a haircut, or they can pay for each service separately. The cost ranges from KD 5 to KD 60," she explained.

Lamita Mahdi, 38, a female hairdresser, said prices depend on the services you get. "You can get a haircut for KD 3 to 5, but it will not be as good as one from a decent salon with expert stylists who will charge you more," she argued. She said the number of customers on holidays can reach up to 30 daily. "Our prices range from KD 10 for a haircut and higher depending on the service required. Our staff are experts and have long experience in this field. We make sure our cus-



KUWAIT: Barbers attend to customers at a barbershop in Kuwait in this file photo. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

tomers are satisfied to the max."

Fixed prices

Barber Mohamed Faik, 40, stressed that the price for shaving is fixed with no increases, because most of the customers of his shop are known to the barbers and they have been dealing with them for years. "We cannot change the list of prices in order to preserve the reputation of the shop and protect the customer," he said. He added that

his barbershop offers haircutting services for KD 5, a shave for KD 2, and skincare for KD 10. "Prices are not different during regular days and holidays, but some customers are more generous and give tips for my extra care." Faik said he receives 10 customers on regular days and 30 to 40 during festive days. "On holidays, we do not prefer bookings. Customers must wait because there are too many others also waiting for a haircut," he noted.

Mahmoud Salim, 39, said prices can be different from one person to another. "I charge KD 8 for the hair and beard, but other services' prices can differ from person to person. But we give more care to our customers during the holidays to look their best," he said. "We receive on regular days 10 to 20 customers and up to 30 during holidays. We prefer that clients make a reservation before they come to my salon."

Hairdresser's job helped realize his dreams

By Ben Garcia

Dulal, a 32-year-old Bangladeshi barber from Comilla, came to Kuwait in 2004 to realize his dreams for his family. He has managed to build a house from his hairdressing job. Dulal started cutting hair when he was 15. He worked at a barbershop in Bangladesh but barely saved anything. He was 18 when he landed in Kuwait to work as a cleaner and tea boy at the ministry of foreign affairs. "I applied and got the job in 2004. I paid the recruiter KD 500. I sold some of my cows and horses to pay the amount," he told Kuwait Times.

From 2004 to 2010, he worked eight hours a day for a monthly salary of KD 20. He also worked on the side, earning more than KD 300, a lot more than his official pay. "The most important thing in Kuwait is your legal status. If you do not have this in Kuwait, you are illegal and you will be deported. I worked at the ministry because I needed the iqama," he said. He juggled his time as a tea boy and barber at two barbershops in Jleeb and Farwaniya. "I can earn KD 20 in Bangladesh and even more, but I needed the visa, so I agreed," Dulal said.

After six years, he got an opportunity to run a bar-

bershop, grabbed it and ran the salon until 2015. "I found that even if I was running the shop, all the money I earned was taken by my boss. I only got KD 250. I could earn more by merely being an employee and not a manager. So I told my boss that I couldn't stay on the same salary, and asked him to release me, which he did. Now I just work and get 50 percent of the amount charged. I can earn up to KD 350 per month or even more depending on the flow of customers. There is less stress because I am not managing people," Dulal said.

Dulal and three of his colleagues work at the barbershop, which is fully owned by another Bangladeshi. All of them work on a 50-50 basis. The owner pays KD 500 in rent and KD 150 to his sponsor per month. "If you work hard, you can earn more money. If you work lazily, you will get a smaller share," he reasoned. Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays are the busiest days of the week, since these are days off for many domestic workers, cooks and drivers. The salon is open every day from 9 am to 11 pm. Customers are offered additional services apart from a haircut, which costs 500 fils. Prices are relatively low compared to other places in Kuwait, because of the shop's location in Mirqab.



Dulal attends to a customer at his barbershop.

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Local

Assembly panel rejects citizenship for non-Muslims

Panel nods to social, civil rights for Bedoons



KUWAIT: Interior Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah (left) and other officials attend the parliament's interior affairs and defense committee meeting yesterday. — KUNA

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The National Assembly's interior and defense committee yesterday rejected a draft law to allow authorities to grant Kuwaiti citizenship to non-Muslims which is prohibited under the law, head of the committee said. MP Askar Al-Enezi said the rejection was based on a constitutional provision which states that "Islam is the official religion of the state."

Kuwait's nationality law issued for the first time in 1959 allowed the naturalization of non-Muslims but this provision was amended

by the National Assembly in 1981 thus prohibiting granting citizenship to non-Muslims.

The legal and legislative committee less than a month ago approved the draft law, saying it did not violate the constitution. But Islamist and conservative lawmakers strongly opposed the move and vowed to reject when it comes for voting in the assembly.

Enezi said that the government also rejected the draft law, supporting the opinion of the committee. Interior Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah attended the meeting.

The lawmaker said the interior minister informed the commit-

tee that the government will submit a draft law proposing amendments to the nationality law. The amendments will allow granting citizenship to wives and widows of Kuwaiti men and the foreign children of Kuwaiti women after reaching the legal age.

In the meantime, the assembly's human rights committee yesterday approved a draft law granting civil and social rights for Bedoons or stateless people, head of the committee MP Adel Al-Damkhi said. Damkhi said the bill provides comprehensive rights to tens of thousands of Bedoons in the country. The bill needs to be passed by the National Assembly in a vote.

FM receives new Venezuelan envoy's credentials

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received yesterday the credentials of Venezuela's new ambassador to the State of Kuwait. During the reception, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled wished the new ambassador best of luck and more developed relations between Kuwait and Venezuela. The meeting was attended by Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah, Assistant Foreign Minister for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, Assistant Foreign Minister for Protocols Ambassador Dhari Al-Ajran, and several other senior officials of the Foreign Ministry. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah receives the new Venezuelan Ambassador's credentials. — KUNA

Kuwait hosts Arab Robotics Championship

KUWAIT: Head of the Arab Robot Championship Amir Abdul Ghafoor announced yesterday that the 12th Arab Open Robotics Championship kicks-off on January 8th in Kuwait under the patronage of Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education Dr Hamed Mohammad Al-Azmi.

The competition, which runs until January 10th, is organized by Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity (SACGC), an affiliate of Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science (KFAS) and in cooperation with Arab Robotics Society at Sabah Al-Salem Theater in Kuwait University (KU). Abdul Ghafoor said in a press statement.

The contest, hosted by Kuwait for the second time after hosting the first Arab Open Robotics Championship in 2008, will be participated by several student teams from different age groups starting from 9 years old and above, he added. There will be around 500 participants in the aim of re-shaping the interests of science and technology, to develop skills in; engineering, creativity, electronics, programming, teamwork and artificial intelligence, Abdul Ghafoor explained. — KUNA



Amir Abdul Ghafoor

Sheikh Khaled meets Saudi Deputy Interior Minister



KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah meets with Saudi Deputy Interior Minister Dr Nasser Al-Dawoud. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah met yesterday with Saudi Deputy Interior Minister Dr Nasser Al-Dawoud and the accompanying delegation, discussing with them issues of mutual concern. The Interior Ministry said in a press release that the meeting focused on topics pertinent to security cooperation. Both Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah and Saudi Arabia's Dr Dawoud stressed the importance of developing the strong bilateral ties especially within the security domain. —KUNA

More than 300,000 public sector employees unneeded: Senior official

Local market recruits 30,000 graduates annually: Akbar

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: A supreme planning council member dropped a bombshell recently when she declared that the state only needs 80,000 employees out of over 380,000 workers in the public sector. Once the government reduces its dependence on oil-based economy, the problem of unemployment would be solved, Member of the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development Sarah Akbar said, adding that the local market annually recruits around 30,000 graduates

Further, Akbar said that the state's revenues of KD 16 billion are far less than its expenditure of KD 21 billion, which would hinder executing development projects in the coming years unless the state's foreign investment revenues were used. "The state does not have enough funds to execute the requirements of the development plan's projects," she underlined, pointing that the 'New Kuwait' apparatus was currently preparing a bill on its vision, but remarked that means to review the vision are crippled by some sensitive 'popular' considerations. "Reform is painful and many bodies lack the full courage needed to display all the vision's details," she added.

"There will be no such things as 'natives' in Failaka or elsewhere in the future. Native residents will be those productive ones needed for a diversified economy. Each productive Kuwaiti will be a native resident," she concluded.

Behind schedule

The Public Authority for Housing Welfare is currently working on catching up with the orig-



State expenditure far exceeds revenues

inal schedule of executing Al-Mutlaa residential city project after the delay caused by the contractor carrying out the infrastructure works, said informed sources, noting that 26 percent of the project is behind schedule so far. The sources added that a special committee was formed to follow up solving the problems be-

tween the main contractor and subcontractors to resume the construction process in an attempt to meet the contract's deadlines. Moreover, an official source at the housing authority stressed that it would not give up its right in implementing all penal clauses in the contract, and explained that what is being currently done is an attempt to get the work resumed before collecting the penal fines.

Business environment

Minister of Commerce and Industry (MOCI) Khaled Al-Roudhan stressed that the ministry has proposed to the parliament 14 bills set to improve the business environment in and outside Kuwait, adding that only four of them were passed so far while the other ten are still subject to studies and discussion in relevant parliamentary committees. "We are proud that MOCI comes first in terms of proposing bills and laws," he underlined.

Roudhan added that MOCI had issued more licenses in one year than the total number of licenses issued in previous years. "We issued 12,000 commercial licenses," he elaborated, adding that the control and consumer protection sector works relentlessly to protect citizens and prevent unjustified price increases and

commercial fraud through inspection campaigns and receiving citizens' reports and complaints at 21 consumer protection centers and endless teams of inspectors. Further, Roudhan hailed the Municipal Council's role in supporting the issue of food truck licenses to help Kuwait entrepreneurs invest in small projects.

Charity project

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor's (MSAL) charities department has already finished 90 percent of its electronic platform project which will be launched in collaboration with Al-Najat Charity in a bid to regulate charity work using modern technology, ministry sources said. The sources added that three other charities had already expressed their wish to join the project, adding that the platform would closely monitor local and foreign charity projects and activities and make sure that MSAL laws and regulations are adhered to. Further, the source explained that an experimental phase of the project was recently launched to trained employees and staff members in both the ministry and Al-Najat charity on using it to provide more transparency and governance in terms of collecting donations and executing local and foreign charity programs.

Car crashes into restaurant, three hurt

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Three people; a female citizen and two Asian women, were slightly injured in Nozha yesterday when the female citizen lost control over her vehicle and it collided into a famous restaurant in the area. Medics rushed to the scene and took the injured to Amiri hospital for treatment, the Interior Ministry's relations and security media department said in a statement.

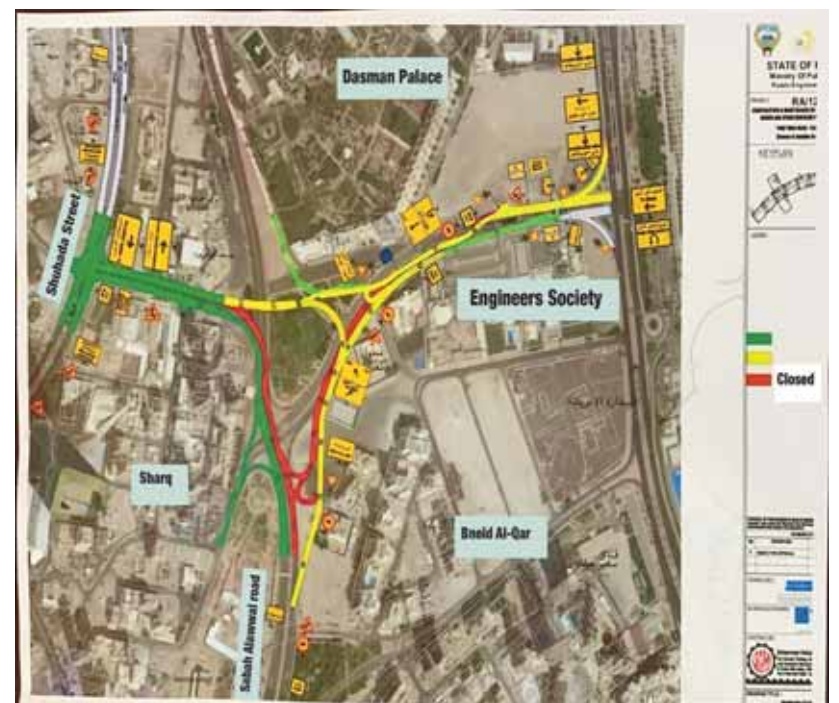


Health officials, academics questioned on corruption charges

KUWAIT: Former and current officials and academics at the Ministry of Health and Kuwait University (KU) were referred to the public prosecution on corruption charges, said an official at the Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) yesterday. The charges involved the said officials' abuse of power and finances, in addition to suspicion of forgery, Dr Mohammad Bouzuber, Nazaha's Assistant Secretary General for Investigations and official spokesman, said in a press release. The referral was carried out after extensive investigation in the matter, said the official who affirmed that witnesses to the violations would be protected by Nazaha according to the law. The public prosecution will look into the charges and issue suitable verdicts, said Dr Bouzuber. — KUNA

First Ring Road tunnel opens tomorrow

KUWAIT: The Interior Ministry's traffic department announced opening a tunnel on Sabah Alawwal Road (First Ring Road) tomorrow morning, in cooperation with the Ministry of Public Works. Accordingly, the traffic department urges all motorists to drive cautiously and observe speed limits and traffic guiding signs, the ministry's relations and security media department said in a statement.





Trump declares an end to US 'policeman' role in Iraq visit

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Divisive Bangladesh election campaign ends in frustration



DAMASCUS: The United Arab Emirates embassy is pictured in the Syrian capital Damascus on December 27, 2018 after its reopening. —AFP

UAE reopens Damascus embassy

Effort to bring Syrian government back into the Arab fold

DAMASCUS: The United Arab Emirates reopened its embassy in Damascus yesterday, the latest sign of efforts to bring the Syrian government back into the Arab fold. The UAE broke ties with Syria in February 2012, as the repression of nationwide protests demanding regime change was escalating into a devastating war. Nearly seven years later, the Emirati flag was raised again during a ceremony attended by diplomats and journalists.

An acting charge d'affaires has already started working, an Emirati statement said, stressing that the UAE was "keen to put relations back on their normal track". It said that the resumption of ties aimed to "support the sovereignty and independence of Syria" and face "the dangers of regional interferences". Rumors of the Emirati embassy reopening had circulated in recent days as renovation work was spotted getting under way at the building. A visit to Damascus by Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir

earlier this month had been interpreted by some observers as a sign of regional efforts to end Assad's diplomatic isolation.

Pariah no more?

Syria was suspended from the Arab League in November 2011, as the death toll was escalating and several regional powers bet on Assad's demise. The conflict has now killed more than 360,000 people. Assad's seat at the helm, which he inherited from his father in 2000, appeared to be hanging by a thread until Russia's 2015 military intervention turned things around.

Government forces and allied militia have since steadily regained significant ground. They now firmly control the Damascus region and several key trade routes in the country. The past few days have seen a flurry of diplomatic activity that looks set to continue until the next summit of the Arab League, due in Tunis in March.

"Recent discussions on this issue have not

yielded a consensus," Hossam Zaki, the League's deputy secretary general, told reporters in Cairo on Monday. "This does not rule out a possible change of the Arab position in the future," he added. Ali Mamluk, Syria's intelligence chief and a key figure in the Assad regime, travelled to Egypt last week on an official visit. With military operations winding down in several parts of the country and the capital fully secure, Damascus is also working on breaking its physical isolation.

Saudi money

Trade with Jordan resumed in recent weeks after the reopening of a border crossing and Thursday saw the first commercial flight to Tunisia in years. A Cham Wings Airlines jet completed the first flight between the two countries since 2011. "This trip is the reopening of tourism links between Syria and Tunisia," Moataz Tarbin, the head of the tourism firm that organized the flight, told AFP.

It is not yet clear if other Arab countries, several of which were accused by Assad of once supporting jihadists and rebels, will follow in the UAE's footsteps. The UAE is one of six Gulf Cooperation Council nations that took a tough stance on Damascus in 2012 and eventually recognized an opposition umbrella group as the representative of Syria. Warming up to Assad is seen by some regional powers as a way of luring Syria away from the exclusive regional influence of Iran.

Tehran has been a staunch supporter of Assad's government and has expanded its military footprint in Syria throughout the course of the conflict. US President Donald Trump claimed on Monday that Saudi Arabia, Iran's regional archfoe, had agreed to finance Syria's huge reconstruction needs. "Saudi Arabia has now agreed to spend the necessary money needed to help rebuild Syria, instead of the United States," Trump said on social media. —AFP

International

Israel's 'King Bibi' on top, but storm clouds ahead

'He believes he can beat the charges against him'

JERUSALEM: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's long reign atop Israeli politics has seen him outlast opponents with deft maneuvering and right-wing leadership, but his latest gamble has many wondering whether it will be among his last. Israel is headed for snap elections on April 9, and while polls show Netanyahu is likely to again prevail, a series of corruption investigations have led to speculation over whether he will later be forced to step down.

He will not be legally required to resign if indicted, but political pressure will surely be intense and any future coalition partners will have to decide whether to stick with him. The attorney general's decision on indictments is expected in the coming months. A range of analysts believe he pushed for elections seven months early at least partly to combat potential charges with a fresh mandate from voters. It would not be wise to bet on his downfall yet.

Should he win in April, he will be on track to surpass founding father David Ben-Gurion's record of more than 13 years in office, and Netanyahu is no doubt aware of that weighty milestone. "He has no plan in resigning and no plan in stepping down, and he believes he can beat the charges against him," said Anshel Pfeffer, a journalist at Israeli newspaper Haaretz and author of a recently-published Netanyahu biography.

'No exaggeration here'

The burly 69-year-old with his familiar grey comb-over has entrenched himself at the top so firmly he has been labeled "King Bibi",

his nickname dating to childhood. Few doubt his political effectiveness, and supporters say the proof is seen in his opponents struggling to mount a major challenge to his leadership.

Much of his popularity has to do with another nickname — "Mr. Security" — in a country where such issues are always on voters' minds. He has often sought to avoid talking about the Palestinians apart from security operations, with Israel's continued occupation of the West Bank. There were no surprises in how Netanyahu began his election campaign, mentioning Israeli strikes in Syria against what it says are Iranian military targets and an operation to destroy Hezbollah tunnels. He also touched on another frequent talking point, highlighting economic growth despite a high cost of living that remains a concern.

"We have turned Israel into a rising world power. There is no exaggeration here," Netanyahu said with familiar bombast. Netanyahu was born in 1949 in the then-nascent state of Israel around a year and a half after it was created. He and his wife Sara have two sons, and he has a daughter from a previous marriage.

The son of a history professor active in Israeli right-wing politics, Netanyahu grew up partly in the United States. He attended the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and with his fluent, American-accented English would appear on television speaking forcefully in defense of Israel. While in the United States, he changed his last name to Nitay — not to reject his roots but because Americans had difficulty pronouncing Ne-



JERUSALEM: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stands next to Israel's former defense minister Avigdor Lieberman during a Knesset (parliament) session. — AFP

tanyahu, Pfeffer writes. He performed his Israeli military service with an elite unit and was wounded in combat, but another family member's service may have affected him more deeply. In 1976, his brother Yonatan died in an Israeli commando raid to rescue hostages in Uganda. Netanyahu has called the operation "a very dramatic national experience" and

"one of great personal consequence." Israeli politics in its early years was dominated by the Labour party, but the first victory by Likud, then led by Menachem Begin, in 1977 helped lay groundwork for Netanyahu's political future. His career took off when he was posted to Israel's Washington embassy and was later ambassador to the United Nations. —AFP

Sudan journalists strike as more protests urged

KHARTOUM: A network of Sudanese journalists went on strike yesterday in the wake of deadly protests sparked by a hike in bread prices, while opposition groups called for further rallies. Angry crowds have taken to the streets in the capital Khartoum and several other cities since December 19, leading to a crackdown in which a number of protesters have been killed.

"We declare a three day strike from December 27 to protest against the violence unleashed by the government against demonstrators," said the Sudanese Journalists' Network which advocates free speech. Sudanese authorities say eight protesters have been killed in clashes, but Amnesty International has put the death toll at 37. The Popular Congress Party, which is part of President Omar Al-Bashir's government, says that 17 people have been killed and 88 wounded in clashes.

Journalists in Sudan frequently complain of harassment from the authorities, and the African country has a dire rating on international press freedom rankings. Entire print runs of newspapers are often confiscated over articles deemed offensive by the powerful Na-

tional Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), which is spearheading the current crackdown on protesters. Police and security officers remained deployed in several parts of the Sudanese capital on Wednesday, but for the first day in a week no new demonstrations were reported.

Activists and opposition groups have called on people to take to the streets again over the next few days. "We urge the Sudanese people to continue their demonstrations until success is achieved by overthrowing the regime," the Sudanese Communist Party said in a statement. Several members of the party have been arrested by security agents since the protests started. "We also call on all opposition parties to unite and work together to coordinate this movement." Protests initially started in towns and villages and later spread to Khartoum, as people rallied against the government tripling the price of a loaf of bread from one Sudanese pound to three (from about two to six US cents).

Demonstrators have also been marching against Sudan's dire economic situation and some have called for the president to resign. After the protests erupted Bashir, who has been in power since a 1989 coup, vowed to "take real reforms" to tackle the country's financial difficulties. Sudan is facing an acute foreign currency crisis and soaring inflation, despite the lifting of an economic embargo by Washington in October 2017. Inflation is running at 70 percent and the Sudanese pound has plunged in value, while shortages of bread and fuel have regularly hit several cities. — AFP

Dubai princess 'troubled': Former UN human rights chief

LONDON: A princess who tried to flee the United Arab Emirates months ago is "a troubled young woman", a former UN human rights chief said yesterday after meeting her this month. Mary Robinson told BBC radio 4's Today program that she had been invited by Princess Haya, the wife of Dubai ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, to help with his daughter, Sheikha Latifa.

Latifa has not been seen in public since she was allegedly captured at sea off India in March after leaving the UAE. In a YouTube video at the time, she said she was leaving because of restrictions imposed on her by her family. Robinson, who was seen alongside Latifa in photographs released by the UAE authorities earlier this month, said that she had been asked to "help with a family dilemma". "The dilemma was that Latifa is vulnerable, she's troubled. She made a video that she now regrets and she planned an escape, or what was part of a plan of escape," she said. "I had lunch with her. She's a very likeable young

woman but clearly troubled, clearly needs the medical care that she is receiving," said Robinson, adding that her family "don't want her to endure any more publicity".

She said that Latifa was suffering from "a serious medical situation" and was receiving "psychiatric care" but did not give further details about her condition. Robinson served as Ireland's president between 1990 and 1997 and later served as the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights from 1997 to 2002.

The 74-year-old said she had spoken to current UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet, as well as Human Rights Watch executive director Ken Roth about her meeting with Latifa and would be returning to Dubai in March. Accounts by people involved in Latifa's escape attempt said that she fled first to Oman, before boarding a yacht which was surrounded by the Indian navy and then towed back to the UAE. A source close to the Dubai government told AFP in April the princess had been "brought back" to Dubai. — AFP

International

Trump declares an end to US 'policeman' role in Iraq visit

Trump seeks to defend his 'America First' policy

AL-ASAD AIR BASE: President Donald Trump used a lightning visit to Iraq — his first with US troops in a conflict zone since being elected — to defend the withdrawal from Syria and declare an end to America's role as the global "policeman." Trump, accompanied by his wife Melania, landed late Wednesday at Al-Asad Air Base in western Iraq after what he described as a stressful, secrecy shrouded flight on a "pitch black" Air Force One.

He spoke to a group of about 100 mostly special forces personnel and separately with military leaders before leaving a few hours later after a visit that sparked controversy in Iraq. A planned meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi was scrapped and replaced by a phone call, the premier's office said. Trump invited Abdel Mahdi to visit Washington and he accepted, according to the White House.

The president was seen shaking hands with camouflage-clad personnel, signing autographs and posing for photos at the base. Morale-boosting presidential visits to US troops in war zones have been a longstanding tradition in the years following the September 11, 2001 terror attacks. Trump has been soundly criticised for eschewing such a trip in the first two years of his presidency. But speculation had been mounting that he would finally make the gesture following his controversial plan to slash troop levels in Afghanistan and his order to withdraw entirely from Syria.

Trump sought to defend his "America First" policy of pulling back from multinational alliances, including what to many Americans seem like the endless wars in the Middle East. "It's not fair when the burden is all on us," he said. "We

don't want to be taken advantage of any more by countries that use us and use our incredible military to protect them. They don't pay for it and they're going to have to." "We are spread out all over the world. We are in countries most people haven't even heard about. Frankly, it's ridiculous," he added.

'Enough time'

Trump told reporters he had overruled generals asking to extend the Syria deployment, where about 2,000 US forces, joined by other foreign troops, assist local fighters battling the Islamic State jihadist group (IS). "You can't have any more time. You've had enough time," he said he told the top brass. Trump's visit appeared to take Iraqi authorities by surprise and prompted criticism including from former prime minister Haider Al-Abadi.

The way in which Trump visited was "not commensurate with diplomatic norms and relations with sovereign states", Abadi said. "Dealing with Iraq and its sovereignty in this way will harm Iraqi-US relations," he said. Iran-backed groups that make up a key bloc in the Iraqi parliament reacted angrily. Shiite movement Harakat al-Nujaba said the presence of US forces in Iraq was a "violation of the country's sovereignty" and it was "now the duty of the government to expel American forces".

"Trump's disrespect of Iraq's sovereignty will not go unpunished," it said, adding it would "not allow Iraq to be a base used to threaten other countries". The head of the Asaib Ahl al-Haq pro-Iran paramilitary group, Qais Al-Khazali, tweeted that "Trump's visit to a US military base without regard for diplomatic



US President Donald Trump and First Lady Melania Trump arrive to speak to members of the US military during an unannounced trip to Al Asad Air Base. — AFP

norms reveals the reality of the American project in Iraq". The Iraqi response, he said, "would be the parliament's decision to remove your military forces" unilaterally.

Trump's troop drawdowns — and the abrupt way that they were announced — helped trigger the resignation of his defense secretary, Jim Mattis, who has been one of the administration's heavyweights. But the president has made disentangling America from its wars a priority since his 2016 election and he said in Iraq that the US

would no longer be treated as "suckers." IS, which once controlled swaths of territory in Iraq and Syria, has been driven mostly into hiding. On Wednesday, Trump said "we've knocked them out," although he added Iraq might be used as a future base "if we wanted to do something in Syria." According to a transcript released by the White House, he thanked troops for the "near-elimination" of IS, and said some US troops from Syria "will come here for a stay, but a lot of them are going to be going back home". — AFP

Civilian exodus from IS's last Syria bastion

BEIRUT: Thousands of civilians, mostly relatives of jihadist fighters, are fleeing the Islamic State group's last stronghold in eastern Syria, a war monitor said yesterday. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 11,500 people have fled the area since Kurdish-led forces broke IS defenses and took the jihadists' main hub of Hajin two weeks ago. "The past fortnight saw the biggest exodus" since the launch in September of a broad offensive against IS by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the monitoring group said.

The outfit is an alliance of the Kurdish militia which controls northeastern Syria and local Arab fighters that operates with backing from a US-led military coalition. The jihadist group had already lost all of its major urban centers earlier in 2018 but was clinging to the remote area in the Euphrates River Valley. The SDF launched

an operation involving more than 15,000 fighters to smash the jihadists' last redoubt, known as the Hajin pocket, on September 10.

They took the town of Hajin on December 14, after months of an offensive slowed by Turkish threats against the Kurds further north as well as fierce counter-attacks by IS fighters with little to lose. "Most of the displaced are IS relatives," said Rami Abdel Rahman, the head of the Britain-based Observatory. He added however that fighters were attempting to blend in with the civilians to save their lives and that the SDF had managed to detain 700 so far.

He said that since the loss of Hajin, the last town of note in the area, the jihadists have been unable to defend their positions and were quickly falling back. IS still controls the villages of Al-Shaafa and Sousa as well as a handful of hamlets dotting the eastern bank of the Euphrates. Abdel Rahman said he expected the last rump of what was once a sprawling "caliphate" straddling swathes of Iraq and Syria to collapse in the coming days.

While it could soon lose its last fixed positions, IS remains a threat, with roving units still carrying out attacks from their desert hideouts and cells reportedly regrouping in several parts of Iraq and Syria. — AFP

Key French jihadist Peter Cherif set to return behind bars

PARIS: One of France's most wanted jihadists, considered a potential source of valuable information by Western intelligence agencies, is set to return to prison yesterday following seven years on the run. Peter Cherif, 36, was close to the brothers who massacred the staff of French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo in 2015. He later became a high-ranking member of Al-Qaeda in Yemen.

French authorities have been seeking him since he disappeared in 2011 on the final day of his trial in Paris for fighting in Iraq alongside Al-Qaeda in 2004. Cherif, who was sentenced to five years in prison in the trial, was arrested on December 16 in Djibouti after arriving from Yemen carrying fake ID, according to the presidency of the Horn of Africa country. He arrived back in France on Sunday and has since refused to speak to investigators, according to a source close to

the probe. Cherif is set to appear before a judge yesterday to start serving his sentence and prosecutors are also seeking fresh charges against him for "terrorist conspiracy". Investigators opened a new investigation in 2017 probing his activities in Yemen where he joined the senior ranks of the local branch of Al-Qaeda known as AQAP, according to a source close to the case. The United States considers AQAP to be the jihadist group's most dangerous branch, with US drone strikes on the outfit increasing since President Donald Trump took office in January 2017. Cherif, also known as Abou Hamza, was placed on the US blacklist of foreign terrorists in 2015. He has been a figure of interest for French police investigating a trio of attacks in January 2015 that left 17 people dead, including at Charlie Hebdo's offices and a kosher supermarket in Paris. But despite media reports suggesting he may have played a role in the attacks, he is not the subject of an arrest warrant in the Charlie Hebdo probe.

The attack on the magazine marked the start of a wave of jihadist attacks in France which have claimed more than 240 lives. After his arrest in the Iraqi city of Fallujah in 2004, Cherif was sentenced to 15 years in jail in Baghdad before escaping in 2007 and heading to Syria. He was extradited to France before slipping away again during his trial. — AFP

Romania politics: Tug-of-war between two powerful men

BUCHAREST: For the past two years, politics in Romania — which takes over the EU's rotating presidency on January 1 — has effectively been a tug-of-war between the country's two most powerful men. The two protagonists are centre-right president Klaus Iohannis and Liviu Dragnea, head of the Social Democratic PSD party, who is prime minister in all but name.

Liviu Dragnea, puppet master
It was Dragnea's deep-seated ambition to become prime minister after his PSD party won the general election at the end of 2016. But the 56-year-old was prevented from doing so because of a previous suspended jail sentence for electoral fraud. But even if he has had to content himself with only being president of the chamber of deputies, it is effectively Dragnea who pulls the strings of power in Romania.

He toppled two prime ministers in just seven months, before nominating Viorica Dancila to the post in January 2017. Her detractors described her as a "perfect puppet". Over the past two years, the slim, moustachioed leader of the PSD, the successor party to the communists, has courted voters largely

in the poor and rural areas of the country with generous political promises. But he has also focused on relaxing the criminal laws to curtail the activities of country's anti-corruption agency.

His argument is that he wants to "put an end to the abuses suffered by millions of Romanians". His political rivals suspect this is more about him trying to save his own skin, as he is caught up in two other criminal cases. In one of them, he is already appealing a prison sentence for abuse of power handed down in June. European officials also accuse him of undermining a much-needed anti-corruption drive in what is considered one of the bloc's most graft-prone states. Dragnea has repeatedly attacked the EU, which he accuses of "interfering" in Romania's affairs and its sovereignty.

His position echoes similar sentiments from Hungary's nationalist-conservative prime minister Viktor Orban. Dragnea's increasingly authoritarian style of leadership has also angered critics within his own party. "Dragnea is no longer the man I knew," said one deputy, Marcel Ciolacu, recently. "He is blinded by power, by pride and by imaginary fears."

Klaus Iohannis, firefighter

In the other corner is Klaus Iohannis, who surprisingly beat off a PSD favourite to be elected president in 2014. Iohannis has, from the very beginning, been forced to share power with the left, whom he accuses of undermining the rule of law. Of imposing physical build, the 59-year-old likes to project an image of rigour and seriousness. He has swapped the quiet life of a mayor in the central town of Sibiu for "grand politics". For some observers, that took him some time to master.

Once considered even by some of his supporters to be too reticent in his resistance to Dragnea's policies, he has since come out of his shell to oppose a range of different government initiatives. In January 2017, he did not hesitate to join crowds of demonstrators protesting against the ruling PSD party's initial attempts to ease criminal legislation.

Since then, he has been engaged in trench warfare with the PSD, filing lawsuits with the constitutional court and rejecting the government's nominations for ministers and prosecutors. "I will do everything I can to prevent Romania from taking a step backwards... in terms



BUCHAREST: Leader of the Romanian Social Democrat Party (PSD) Liviu Dragnea (C) is pictured next to Romanian Prime Minister Viorica Dancila (L) during the PSD national convention at the Parliament Palace. — AFP

of the independence of its judiciary," he said earlier this month. He has also criticized what he says is the government's "lack of preparedness" for its imminent EU presidency. Even Iohannis' supporters have sometimes complained that he has reacted too slowly or not forcefully enough. This has given the PSD the

upper hand in several battles over crucial legislation, they argue. In contrast, the Social Democrats have complained that he oversteps the mark. They accuse the president of preventing the government from functioning, of "violating the constitution", and have repeatedly threatened to suspend his powers. — AFP

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International

Brazil's new far-right leader sees guns as answer to crime

Allow 'good' people to dispense justice themselves

RIO DE JANEIRO: Jair Bolsonaro, Brazil's new president from next Tuesday, persuaded voters in Latin America's biggest country to elevate him to leader on extreme-right vows to restore security that eclipsed his record of racism, misogyny and homophobia. The 63-year-old former paratrooper and veteran lawmaker is openly nostalgic for the 1964-1985 military dictatorship that imposed calm in the streets. But he denies being a threat to democracy, saying he will be a "slave to the constitution" who will govern "with authority but not authoritarianism."

The man with the sharp blue gaze has vowed to ease gun laws to allow "good" people to dispense justice themselves. "If a truck driver is armed when someone tries to steal his cargo, the robber is killed," and the driver will go unpunished, he said the day after his election. "That will cut violence in Brazil for sure." Bolsonaro himself was the victim of violence. On September 6, as he was campaigning, he was stabbed in the stomach by a mentally unbalanced lone assailant in a crowd, nearly costing him his life. That only burnished his image as a "legend" — the nickname his most ardent supporters have given him.

'Tropical Trump'

A keen social media user, with nine million followers on his Facebook page, Bolsonaro shares quite a bit in common with US President Donald Trump. Both prefer electronic messaging directly to their base without having to answer pesky journalists' questions, and both regularly mangle syntax — yet come up with pithy sayings their fans gleefully repeat.

Bolsonaro's political stance on issues other than crime is not entirely clear as he has changed direction and parties several times over the years. For instance, while he has in the past hewed to a

protectionist view of Brazil economy, he flipped around ahead of the election to bring in a US-trained economist with free-market views, Paulo Guedes, into his team. Guedes will be his economy minister, heading up a superministry in charge of finances, investment and labor.

Unlike Trump, Bolsonaro had a long political career behind him before his election, having held a seat in the lower-house Chamber of Deputies since 1991. Nevertheless, he presents himself as an outsider. "He speaks of politicians as if he isn't part of their world. He's managed to give off an image of a strongman who has a hard line and who will fight corruption," explained Michael Mohallem, a law professor at the Getulio Vargas Foundation.

He is backed by powerful lobbies in parliament, notably those representing the interests of agribusiness and evangelicals. Bolsonaro himself is Catholic, a fact that has earned him some scorn from the religious for having fathered five children from three relationships. After having four sons he said in 2017 he must have "weakened" because his last offspring was a daughter. Three of his sons are politicians. The eldest, Flavio, who was elected to the senate, has been caught up in a scandal over suspect transactions in the name of a former aide that far surpassed the aide's salary.

Bolsonaro has also had to rap the knuckles of his third-born, Eduardo, several times. For instance that son, a deputy, has said he would welcome a referendum on bringing back the death penalty, prompting his father to tweet that the issue would not even be brought up during his mandate.

Controversial remarks

Bolsonaro was born in 1955 in Campinas, a town close to the megalopolis of Sao Paulo, to a

family of Italian descent. His military career was marked by moments of insubordination, and in the 1980s he was accused of being involved in a bomb plot designed to bring about a pay rise. But he was also known in the army, where he rose to the rank of captain, for his sporting prowess, earning him the nickname of "Cavalao," or "Big horse."

Bolsonaro has spent most of his political career in Rio, where he was elected a municipal councillor in 1988 before winning his first mandate as a federal deputy three and a half years later. In Congress he earned a reputation more for his

controversial insults and remarks than for legislative work, passing only two bills in 27 years. In 2014 he created headlines by verbally attacking a leftwing deputy, Maria do Rosario, who he said was "not worth raping" because he considered her "too ugly." Two years later he created more waves by positively evoking a torturer from the dictatorship era. Bolsonaro has also multiplied anti-gay statements. In 2011, for instance, he told Playboy magazine that he would prefer to see a son "killed in an accident" than declare himself homosexual. — AFP



JUIZ DE FORA: In this file photo taken on September 06, 2018 Brazilian right-wing presidential candidate Jair Bolsonaro gestures after being stabbed in the stomach during a campaign rally. — AFP

family of Italian descent. His military career was marked by moments of insubordination, and in the 1980s he was accused of being involved in a bomb plot designed to bring about a pay rise. But he was also known in the army, where he rose to the rank of captain, for his sporting prowess, earning him the nickname of "Cavalao," or "Big horse."

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Protests in DR Congo after election delay

BENI: Police fired teargas and shots were heard as hundreds of people in eastern DR Congo protested yesterday at a move to delay upcoming elections in their region, an AFP reporter said. Demonstrations erupted a day after the Democratic Republic of Congo's national election commission announced that Sunday's nationwide vote would be postponed in several troubled areas until March.

However, the vote will continue to take place in the rest of the country as scheduled, and the next president will be sworn in on January 18, it said. In the province of North Kivu, the region most affected by the decision, several hundred demonstrators gathered in the administrative district of the city of Beni. Gunshots were heard over a roughly hour-long period, but it was unclear who was shooting or if there were any casualties. In Goma, the provincial capital, demonstrators set up barricades in the districts

of Majengo and Katimbo and at the entrance to the university. Police fired teargas and made at least half a dozen arrests, said an AFP reporter at the scene. The election postponement applies to the cities of Beni and Butembo in North Kivu, as well as to the territory of Yumbi in the south-western province of Mai-Ndombe.

Around three percent of some 40 million registered voters will be affected by the delay. The announcement by the Independent National Election Commission (CENI) blamed militia violence and an outbreak of Ebola in North Kivu, and inter-communal clashes in Yumbi. Sunday's election will be the DRC's first presidential ballot in seven years. Legislative and municipal elections are being held at the same time.

The presidential vote should have been held in 2016 when President Joseph Kabila, in power since 2001, reached a two-term limit set under the constitution. But he remained in office, invoking a caretaker clause under the constitution. The elections were twice postponed until a new date was set for December 23 — and were then delayed by another week. CENI blamed a warehouse fire that destroyed election equipment. The problems have fueled tensions in the DRC, one of Africa's most volatile countries, prompting concern among its neighbors, the UN and western powers. — AFP

Venezuelan military personnel jailed over 'Maduro plot'

CARACAS: Nine members of the Venezuelan armed forces were sentenced to up to eight years in prison for plotting to overthrow President Nicolas Maduro in 2014, the Supreme Court said on Wednesday. General Oswaldo Hernandez and retired Colonel Jose Delgado were among those sentenced to a minimum of five years, the court said in a statement.

Venezuela's top court rejected a final appeal from the nine defendants who had already seen previous motions dismissed by both a lower court and a court-martial. They were accused of "preparing in 2014 an insurrectional and destabilizing movement, called

operation Jericho, against the government." The opposition has accused the supreme court of "serving" Maduro's interests. All nine defendants were arrested between March and May 2014.

According to local press reports, the plan was for certain military detachments to arrest Maduro and other high-ranking government officials in a bid to spark a citizens' revolt to oust the regime. Maduro, who frequently denounces plots against him, insisted at the start of December that the United States was planning to overthrow him with the help of Colombia's right-wing government and Brazil's far-right president-elect Jair Bolsonaro.

The socialist leader, who has overseen Venezuela's descent into the worst economic crisis of its history, is due to begin a second mandate on January 10 after winning an election earlier this year that was branded a fraud by the US, European Union, opposition groups and the Organization of American States. According to the Foro Penal charity, there are 278 political prisoners being held in Venezuela, among them 80 military personnel. — AFP

International

60 years of revolution: 4 Cubans tell their stories

Cubans explain what the revolution still means to them

HAVANA: On January 1, Cuba will mark the 60th anniversary of the communist revolution that brought the late and enigmatic leader Fidel Castro to power. Here, AFP talks to four Cubans about what the revolution still means to them.

The ex-combatant

For 97-year-old Alejandro Ferras Pellicer, the revolution is as alive now as it ever was. He was the oldest of a group of 100 rebels, including two of his brothers, who joined Castro in an unsuccessful attack on the Moncada barracks in Santiago de Cuba in July 1953, an operation widely considered to have launched the Cuban revolution.

On January 1, 1959, Ferras Pellicer was an exile living in the United States as the US-backed dictator Fulgencio Batista fled his island homeland. Ferras Pellicer left his wife behind to take “the first plane” to Havana. “I arrived before Fidel,” who was still in Santiago, he said. “I had to come to join the revolution here,” he told AFP from the tiny museum dedicated to the Moncada operation that he built in the capital. “I’ve never left the country” since, he states with pride.

When confronted by the Batista dictatorship, “revolution was necessary” because it was about “fighting for the future.” Most of all, though, “the revolution was Fidel.” The charismatic leader died in 2016. His brother Raul had taken over as Cuba’s president from 2008 and ruled until earlier this year, when he passed the baton to the first non-Castro post-revolutionary leader, Miguel Diaz-Canel. “For us, Fidel is not dead. We’re keeping him alive,” insisted Ferras Pellicer, because “we’re continuing the revolution” which “can last another 50 years” with public support. “As long as the revolution has the people, it is secure.”

The athlete

Ana Fidelia Quiros was a two-time world champion and twice Olympic medalist in track

and field. She says she owes everything to the revolution, even her life. In 1993, she survived a stove explosion in her home that left burns over 40 percent of her body and killed the child she was expecting. The revolution “represents everything for me. It’s thanks to the revolution that I was able to train as an athlete, become a better person and, most of all, allowed me to get through what could have been a fatal accident,” the former 800-meter runner told AFP.

Two years later, the “Caribbean Storm” won her first world title in Gothenburg, before repeating the feat in Athens in 1997. Such a Lazarus moment “wouldn’t have been possible if I didn’t live in a country like this one, where medicine is free.” The revolution also helped make sport accessible “for everyone,” turning the island nation of 11.5 million people into an Olympic over-achiever, with 78 gold medals in the Summer Games. Now 55, Quiros recognizes that “many things are missing” in the country but hopes that political reforms will “improve the economy” and help “Cuba regain its place” on the world sporting landscape.

The dissident

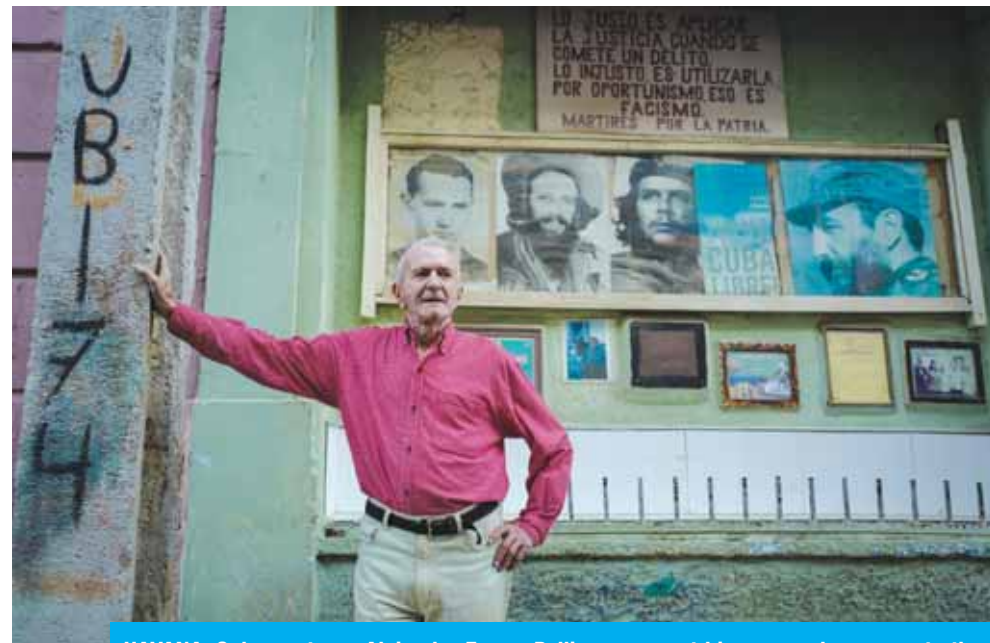
The son of a communist leader, Vladimiro Roca has nonetheless been one of the regime’s fiercest critics for many years. “The revolution died a long time ago. Now there’s a dictatorial regime,” the 76-year-old former fighter pilot told AFP. Having originally followed in his father’s footsteps — Blas Roca was a Marxist theorist and parliamentary president from 1976-81 — the son grew disillusioned with the revolution.

“I fought for a democratic revolution and not for a family dictatorship, which is what has been established in Cuba,” said Roca, who was fired from his job in 1992 and sentenced to five years in prison in 1997 over his opposition to the regime. “People are afraid” of repression, according to the dissident, who insists the revolu-

sponse to the unprecedented surge of children into our custody, I have directed a series of extraordinary protective measures,” she said in a statement after the “deeply concerning and heartbreaking” death of the child. Nielsen has asked experts from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to investigate “the uptick in sick children crossing our borders” and to identify what further steps border hospitals should take in preparation, her statement said.

Nielsen added that she has asked the US Coast Guard medical corps to assess and “make appropriate recommendations” about Border Patrol medical programs, and has sought additional medical professionals from the Department of Defense. US Customs and Border Protection Commissioner Kevin McAleenan warned Wednesday that the agency was unable to cope with the thousands of arrivals, as most facilities were built decades ago for men arriving alone.

“We need help from Congress. We need to budget for medical care and mental health care



HAVANA: Cuban veteran Alejandro Ferras Pellicer poses at his personal museum to the Cuban heroes. — AFP

tion “will blow itself out.” “First of all, the youth are fed up. They don’t believe in any of that, and then there’s not much support from abroad.” “It’s possible that when (87-year-old) Raul Castro dies, everything will end because those following aren’t prepared to risk everything for something that has no future.”

The doctor

Lourdes Garces was part of the Cuban humanitarian mission to Brazil that was abruptly ended last month after Cuban authorities reacted with indignation to criticisms from Brazil’s far right president-elect Jair Bolsonaro. The 54-year-old doctor was part of previous humani-

tarian missions to Venezuela and Guatemala. She says the revolution is “developing and can still offer a lot more.”

“Since its inception... it has shown solidarity in every sector of society, whether that’s in culture, education, sport or health.” Her foreign missions meant she missed “many important events” in the lives of her two sons, but Garces is happy to have gained professional experience by “helping the poorest people.” She refutes any accusations that Cuba has been using its highly trained medics to indulge in political indoctrination known as “white coat diplomacy.” “We don’t interfere in politics or any other domain outside of health,” she insisted. — AFP

US to take ‘extraordinary’ measures in migrant surge

EL PASO: The United States will take “extraordinary” protective measures to deal with a surge of immigrant children in custody, Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen has said after a second Guatemalan child died in custody. Nielsen plans to travel later this week to the Mexico border region to witness medical screenings and conditions at Border Patrol stations, she said in a statement Wednesday, as Congress and President Donald Trump remain deadlocked over his demands for billions of dollars to fund a wall along the border. “In re-

for children in our facilities,” he told CBS News. Eight-year-old Felipe Gomez, who collapsed after running a fever, had traveled with his father Agustin Gomez from the indigenous Chuj Maya community of Nenton, in western Guatemala’s Huehuetenango department, near the Mexican border.

He was among almost 25,000 migrant children in US custody, according to McAleenan — the greatest number ever recorded. “That’s an enormous flow. That’s very different from what we’ve seen before,” he said, adding that the onset of the flu season was putting further pressure on health care services. In the last two months, Border Patrol has apprehended 139,817 people on the southwest border, compared with 74,946 during the same period a year earlier, Nielsen said.

More than 68,500 were “family units” while almost 14,000 others were unaccompanied children, she said, and the system has been pushed to “breaking point.” Augusto Mendoza, a Guatemalan migrant in El Paso with his one-

year-old son, told AFP he would “never” consider making the journey again. “It’s been very, very hard. I would never think about doing it again, I regret it for my son,” said Mendoza, who was separated from his wife at the border and released from detention on Christmas Day.

DHS officials said all children in border patrol custody would be given a thorough medical screening, reaffirming McAleenan’s commitment to “secondary medical checks” with a focus on those under 10. And Guatemala has called for an investigation into the boy’s death, which came just three weeks after a seven-year-old girl from the country died in similar circumstances. Gomez was detained with his 47-year-old father at a crossing in El Paso, Texas, on December 18 and had been transferred to a New Mexico medical center showing signs of sickness on Monday, the CBP said. Staff diagnosed him with a cold but later discovered a fever. He was discharged at midday, with prescriptions for ibuprofen and the antibiotic amoxicillin. — AFP

International

US warns travelers over security at Manila airport

Not 'consistent' with International Civil Aviation Organization standards

MANILA: The United States has warned its citizens that security at the Philippines's main airport does not meet international standards, urging travelers to exercise "increased caution". The US Department of Homeland Security issued a travel advisory on Wednesday saying security at Manila's Ninoy Aquino International Airport was not "consistent" with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) standards.

"Exercise increased caution when traveling to or from Ninoy Aquino International Airport," the US embassy in Manila said on its website citing the advisory. The advisory was based on an assessment by security experts from the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), the US homeland security department said without specifying the findings. Once derided as the world's worst airport due to leaking toilets and creaking facilities, the Ninoy Aquino International Airport is the primary gateway to the Southeast Asian nation.

A statement on the US homeland security department website said that the agency had directed airlines issuing tickets for travel between the two nations to notify passengers of the assessment. It added that TSA representatives have been working with the Philippine government "assist airport and

transportation authorities in bringing (the Manila airport) up to international security standards".

Manila International Airport general manager Ed Monreal said yesterday the Philippines would adhere to international aviation security standards. "All points raised by the transportation security administration TSA auditors have either been addressed or are in the process of being addressed," Monreal told reporters, adding that Manila airport was "very, very safe". Monreal said TSA auditors were in the Philippines in September and had observed that the Manila airport had some gates with faulty locks while security checkpoints were inconsistent.

He added the Philippines had hired additional guards and would procure x-ray machines to comply with the TSA recommendations. The Manila airport topped the list of worst airports on the travel website "The Guide to Sleeping in Airports" from 2011-2013, causing the government to make major renovations. The airport is notorious for flight delays and its security personnel had faced allegations of extorting money from passengers. In 2013, a gunman opened fire outside the airport, killing four people including a town mayor. Lawmakers then criticized the lack of functioning CCTV cameras in the area. — AFP



MANILA: This file photo taken on October 18, 2013 shows passengers arriving at Ninoy Aquino International Airport for their flights. — AFP

Taleban urge US to exit Afghanistan

KABUL: The Taleban warned the United States yesterday it would face the same fate as the Soviet Union in the 1980s if it did not leave Afghanistan, as Washington considers slashing troop numbers. In a taunting message sent on the 39th anniversary of the Soviet invasion of the war-torn country, the Taleban said US forces faced "humiliation" and could "learn a great deal" from the experience of their Cold War foe.

The Soviets pulled out of Afghanistan in 1989, ending a decade-long occupation and precipitating a bloody civil war and the emergence of the Taleban. "Take heed from the Soviet defeat in Afghanistan and abandon thoughts of testing the mettle of the already proven Afghans," Taleban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said in a statement in English, Dari and Pashto.

Mujahid said any future relations between the Taleban and the United States should be based on "sound diplomatic and economic principles" rather than conflict. The Taleban have not formally responded to the news that Trump had decided to withdraw roughly half of the 14,000 US troops in Afghanistan. But a senior commander told AFP that the group was "more than happy". The Taliban have long insisted on the withdrawal of foreign troops as a condition for engaging in peace talks.

The White House has so far not confirmed the widely-publicized move that left foreign diplomats and Afghan officials in Kabul stunned and dismayed. It came last week as US peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad met with the Taleban in Abu Dhabi, part of efforts to bring the militants to the negotiating table with Kabul. That was the latest in a series of meetings between US officials and representatives of the Taleban that began in the summer. There are fears Trump's decision could undermine Khalilzad's negotiating position, embolden the Taliban, and further erode morale among Afghan forces, which are suffering record losses. — AFP

Singaporean blogger fights back against his PM libel suit

SINGAPORE: A Singaporean blogger is fighting back after Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong sued him for defamation for sharing an article on Facebook linking the leader to a corruption scandal. Singapore has long been criticized for restricting free speech and other political rights, as well as slapping critics with financially ruinous libel suits. Observers say the government is increasingly targeting online criticism — the case against blogger Leong Sze Hian comes the same month the editor of a news portal was charged with defamation. The prime minister lodged the defamation suit against Leong earlier in December for posting on his Facebook page a link to an article alleging that Lee was the target of an investigation in neighboring Malaysia over the scandal at sovereign wealth fund IMDB.

Lee said the article, originally published in a Malaysian news por-

tal, was false and without basis and that Leong had reposted the link to smear his reputation. But Leong, a regular critic of government policies, has now lodged a countersuit against Lee for alleged abuse of the court system. "The predominant purpose of the claim is the use of the legal process to chill freedom of expression in Singapore," said Leong in his suit, which was posted on Facebook Wednesday along with details of his defence.

He said all he had done was to make the article available on his Facebook page "without embellishment or comment" for less than three days. Malaysia's ex-leader Najib Razak and his cronies are alleged to have stolen billions of dollars from IMDB in an audacious fraud that spanned the globe. The scandal led to Najib's election defeat in May to a reformist coalition led by Mahathir Mohamad. Najib has since been arrested and charged but denies wrongdoing.

Earlier this month, Terry Xu, editor of Singapore news site The Online Citizen, was charged with defamation for publishing a letter that alleged corruption among the city-state's leaders. Singapore is regularly ranked among the world's least corrupt countries and its leaders are sensitive to accusations of graft. With Singapore's media scene dominated by pro-government publications, criticism of the authorities is mostly expressed online. — AFP

Pakistani militant wanted in Chinese attack killed

QUETTA: A Pakistani separatist wanted over an attack on the Chinese consulate in Karachi in November has been killed in a suicide blast in Afghanistan, his group has confirmed. Aslam Baloch was believed to be one of the leaders of the Balochistan Liberation Army, one of a myriad of insurgent groups fighting in Pakistan's restive southwestern Balochistan province.

He was killed on Tuesday along with four others in a blast in Afghanistan's southern Kandahar province, the group said in a statement issued late Wednesday in which they vowed to continue their fight for Baloch independence. Kandahar police chief Tadin Khan confirmed a suicide bombing had taken place in the provincial capital, killing two civilians. Another Afghan official who spoke anonymously said Baloch and a second member of the BLA were the targets of the attack. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Four people were killed when militants attacked China's consulate in the port city of Karachi in November. The BLA claimed that assault, labeling Beijing an "oppressor" and "making it clear that China's military expansionism on Baloch soil will not be tolerated". It had warned the Chinese to leave or "be prepared for continued attacks". The BLA is just one of the militant outfits operating in Balochistan, Pakistan's largest and poorest province, which borders Afghanistan and Iran and is rife with ethnic, sectarian and separatist insurgencies.

Its residents have long complained that it does not receive a fair share of the profits made from its mineral wealth. The Pakistani military has been targeting insurgencies in the province since 2004, and has been repeatedly accused by international rights groups of abuses there. China, one of Pakistan's closest allies, has poured billions into the South Asian country in recent years as part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a massive infrastructure project that seeks to connect its western province of Xinjiang with the Arabian Sea port of Gwadar in Balochistan. Pakistan sees the project as a "gamechanger", but it presents an enormous challenge in a country plagued by weak institutions, endemic corruption and a range of insurgencies in areas slated to host the corridor. — AFP

International

Divisive Bangladesh election campaign ends in frustration

‘There is no doubt that the people will surely reject them

DHAKA: Bangladesh’s deadly election campaign entered a final full day yesterday with followers of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina parading in the streets while her opponents insisted the vote would not be free and fair. Both sides launched new salvos in their war of words ahead of Sunday’s polling. Hasina accused the opposition of organizing bomb attacks while the Bangladesh Nationalist Party said “the state” was aiding an assault on the opposition.

Thousands of flag-waving supporters of the ruling Awami League marched in Dhaka and other cities bringing the traffic-choked streets to a standstill ahead of the official close of campaigning early today. The BNP, whose leader is in jail, said it had been prevented from holding its closing rally in Dhaka. Thousands of its supporters were allowed to march through the northern city of Sylhet however.

At least six people — four from the BNP and two from the Awami League — have been killed since the campaign started on November 8. The BNP and its Islamist ally Jamaat-e-Islami say more than 11,500 of their followers have been arrested and thousand of activists, including candidates, injured in attacks by ruling party followers. Amid international concern over events, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres appealed for calm. Guterres “calls on all stakeholders to ensure an environment free of violence, intimidation and coercion before, during and after the elections, so as to enable a peaceful, credible and inclusive poll,” said a spokesman.

Top Chinese officials forced to carry out self-criticisms

BEIJING: Top Chinese leaders have been forced to undergo a self-criticism session, state media said yesterday, in a further sign of President Xi Jinping’s efforts to enforce party loyalty amid signs of internal dissent over his handling of a trade war with the United States. A tool highly favored by Mao Zedong and taken to extremes during the Cultural Revolution, self-criticism sessions are back in favor under Xi’s presidency as he seeks to consolidate power and tighten discipline in the upper party echelons.

Members of the Politburo “were asked to conduct criticism and self-criticism in light of work experience,” at a meeting held on Tuesday and Wednesday, state news agency Xinhua reported. The were also questioned on “how they have taken the lead to implement Xi’s instructions and key Party regulations and policies,” it added. The centre of power in China lies with the 25-member Politburo, though its role has lessened since Xi got the top job in 2012 and started concentrating powers in his own hands.

Analysts however say the president’s authority has been contested over the last few

‘Blind’ opposition

Bangladeshis “must feel safe and confident in exercising their right to vote. Civil society and electoral observers should be fully supported to play their role in the process,” the UN leader added through his spokesman. The United States called off an observer mission it was financing because of delays issuing visas. Human Rights Watch has said the election was being conducted in a “repressive political environment”.

Hasina, seeking a third straight term and a record fourth in all, has shrugged off opposition complaints of authoritarianism and said she needs more time to implement her ambitious economic plans. Amid a flurry of late campaign appearances on Wednesday, Hasina said the “BNP-Jamaat alliance carried out bomb attacks in 88 constituencies”. “There is no doubt that the people will surely reject them,” she said.

Hasina focused a speech broadcast by video late Wednesday to supporters in Dhaka on the impressive economic growth of the past decade. She has promised to increase annual growth to 9.0 percent from the current 7.8 percent, expand electricity coverage and put the country on course to raise average incomes to more than \$5,400 by 2030.

Hasina slammed the opposition for failing to recognize Bangladesh’s achievements. “They are blind despite having eyes,” she said. “I call upon people to continue the pace of improvement and give us more scope to serve again.” The Awami League leader won a landslide victory in

months due to an economic slowdown triggered by an ongoing trade war with the US. Xinhua’s report of the meeting does not say what self-criticisms the members of the Politburo were expected to make. Self-criticisms were regularly carried out during the Cultural Revolution — a period of intense social and political upheaval launched by Mao from 1966-76 — and have returned under Xi.

Experts said top officials appear to have wavered from the political line imposed by the strongman president. Willy Lam, a professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, described the meeting as “extraordinary” because the leadership is “admitting there is tension within its ranks”. “It means some of the Politburo members have done or said things contrary to Xi Jinping’s interests,” he added.

According to Xinhua, the leaders “were also urged to study the latest speeches given by Xi” as quickly as possible, and will have to “discipline themselves, their families and close aides at work”. Xi reportedly made a speech at the meeting, during which he lauded “democratic centralism” — one of the founding principles of Leninism in which the top leadership is all-powerful — and called for unity within the party. Since he came to power, Xi has waged a campaign against corruption, punishing more than 1.5 million officials. Some observers however say the crackdown has targeted his internal opponents in particular. —AFP



DHAKA: Supporters of Bangladesh Awami League shout slogans while taking part in a rally ahead of December 30 general election vote. —AFP

2008 and the BNP boycotted the 2014 election — saying it was not free and fair — gifting her a return to power. But since her last victory, civil society and rights groups have accused Hasina’s government of silencing dissent and muzzling the press.

BNP leader Khaleda Zia, an arch-rival of the prime minister, was jailed for 17 years this year on graft charges. “The election process has turned into a farce,” BNP spokesman Fakhrul Islam Alamgir told reporters. “All the attacks are

made on BNP people.” “It is very unfortunate and unimaginable that these attacks are being sponsored by the state itself,” he added, according to the Daily Star. The BNP-led opposition alliance has accused police of siding with the Awami League and said they were barred from holding a final rally yesterday. Police turned down their request to hold a meeting in Dhaka, an alliance spokesman Latfiul Bari Hamim told AFP. Dhaka police said they were not aware of the request. —AFP

Pakistan ex-president Zardari faces travel ban

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan announced yesterday it would ban former president Asif Ali Zardari from travelling abroad following allegations of money laundering, as the nation marked 11 years since his wife, prime minister Benazir Bhutto, was assassinated. Information minister Fawad Chaudhry told reporters in Islamabad that Zardari and his sister Faryal Talpur were among 172 people involved in cases of money laundering and use of fake bank accounts. “All the 172 names ... will be added to the ECL (Exit Control List),” he said.

Zardari, co-chairman of the opposition Pakistan People’s Party and who was president from 2008 until 2013, has long been the subject of corruption allegations, and is widely known in Pakistan as “Mr Ten Percent”. The announcement coincided with the 11th death anniversary of his spouse and two-time former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, who was killed in a gun and suicide bomb attack during

an election rally in the garrison town of Rawalpindi on December 27, 2007.

Earlier this week Chaudhry said a joint investigation team (JIT) had found evidence of how Zardari allegedly laundered money through fake bank accounts and companies. “I hope Zardari will now take the JIT seriously,” he said yesterday, adding that his government would not spare anyone involved in plundering national wealth. Prime Minister Imran Khan, who came to power in July, has vowed to squash rampant corruption and recover billions siphoned from the country as his government scrambles to shore up Pakistan’s deteriorating finances and fast-depleting foreign exchange reserves.

Zardari’s travel ban comes days after former prime minister Nawaz Sharif was sentenced to seven years in prison for corruption on Monday, the latest in a long string of court cases against him. Pakistan’s Supreme Court disqualified Sharif from politics for life over graft allegations in 2017, ousting him from power. His Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz was defeated by Khan in the July polls. A Pakistani court established a commission in September to investigate the scourge of corruption, finding that at least \$400 million had passed through “thousands of false accounts”, using the names of impoverished people. The commission said some 600 companies and individuals “are associated with the scandal”. —AFP

International

Indonesia hikes danger level for deadly tsunami volcano

Authorities raised the crater's status to high alert

CARITA: Indonesia yesterday raised the danger alert level for an erupting volcano that sparked a killer tsunami at the weekend, after earlier warning that fresh activity at the crater threatened to trigger another deadly wave. Authorities also widened a no-go zone around rumbling Anak Krakatoa to five kilometers — up from a previous two kilometers — and warned shell-shocked residents to stay away from the coast, after more than 400 were killed by Saturday night's wave.

Plumes of ash burst into the sky as pyroclastic flows — hot gas and other volcanic material — flowed down the crater, threatening anyone too close to the volcano and raising the risk of rough seas for boats in the vicinity. "There is a danger of more eruptions," said national disaster agency spokesman Sutopo Purwo Nugroho. "People (near the volcano) could be hit by hot rocks, pyroclastic flows and thick ash." Authorities raised the crater's status to high alert, the second-highest warning on the country's four-point danger scale, while aviation officials ordered flights to be redirected away from the area.

'Just pray for us'

The new flows posed no immediate danger to nearby towns as the volcano sits in the middle of the Sunda Strait between Java and Sumatra islands. But the status change sparked new fears with many residents already scared and refusing to return to their communities over fears of another tsunami. "This worries me," said Ugi Sugiarti, a cook at the Augusta Hotel in hard-hit Carita. "I've

already left." Sukma, a security guard at the shattered Mutiara Carita Cottages, added: "Just please pray for us and that everything will be okay." A section of the crater — which emerged at the site of the Krakatoa volcano, whose massive 1883 eruption killed at least 36,000 people — collapsed after an eruption and slid into the ocean, triggering Saturday night's killer wave. Before and after satellite images taken by Japan's space agency showed that a two square kilometer chunk of the volcanic island had collapsed into the water.

At least 430 people were killed in the disaster, with 1,495 people injured and another 159 were missing. Nearly 22,000 people have been evacuated and are living in shelters. On Wednesday evening, the disaster agency said that wind was blowing "ash and sand" from the volcano to the nearby towns of Cilegon and Serang on Java, and advised residents to wear masks and glasses if they had to venture outdoors.

Early warning system

Torrential rains have sparked flooding in some areas, hampering the relief effort and heaping more misery on the stricken region, as thousands cram emergency shelters. Medical workers have warned that clean water and medicine supplies were running low — stoking fears of a public health crisis. Indonesia, a vast Southeast Asian archipelago, 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.

ence its eight-person committee voted 5-3 to dismiss the case. "This case has no grounds that General Prawit Wongsuwan had intended...to hide the truth or had intended to hide the origins of such assets," said NACC deputy secretary-general Worawit Sukboon. The investigation found that all the watches adorning Prawit's wrists belonged to his now-deceased friend, wealthy businessman Pattawat Suksriwong. "He had also lent his luxury watches to his other friends."

Worawit added the NACC is still investigating if the general had breached the commission's rules for accepting assets worth 3,000 baht (\$92). Prawit, who is defense minister, was one of the architects of the 2014 coup toppling the government of then-premier Yingluck Shinawatra. The National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), the junta's political name, has long wielded its anti-corruption credentials while junta leader Prayut Chan-O-Cha has voiced an interest in returning to politics as the country looks toward elections slated for February 24.

Thailand's biggest party Pheu Thai — which was headed by deposed premier Yingluck and her brother Thaksin — blasted the anti-graft commission's decision. "We believe it is a double standard. The fact is that (Prawit's) actions violated laws and his reasons are groundless," said party spokeswoman Ladawan Wongsriwong. Upstart Future Forward Party called the anti-graft agency a "tool" for the NCPO. —AFP



RAJABASA: A girl washes dishes outside makeshift tents for displaced residents in Rajabasa in Lampung province. —AFP

The tsunami was Indonesia's third major natural disaster in 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. The disaster agency has said it installed new sensors to better monitor tremors at the volatile volcano. The agency initially said there was no tsunami threat at all, even as the killer wave crashed ashore.

It was later forced to issue a correction and an apology as it pointed to a lack of early warning systems for the high death toll. One of the hardest-hit areas — Tanjung Lesung — is on a list of 10 destinations that Jakarta wants to turn into another Bali, the holiday island hotspot which draws millions of tourists annually. "We need to have (tsunami) early warning systems, especially in tourist destinations," Indonesia's tourism minister Arief Yahya said yesterday. "We're going to make that happen." —AFP

Songs and toys for Indonesia's disaster-zone kids

LABUHAN: Via Sundari Octavia keeps a watchful eye on her small children as they sing and dance — part of a trauma healing program for kids displaced by Indonesia's deadly tsunami. Octavia was with dozens of parents lining the edge of a futsal pitch turned evacuation shelter in the town of Labuan yesterday, where relief workers played games with children to take their minds off the disaster.

The 30-year-old, her husband and three children — two sons aged three and five and a baby boy — survived the killer wave that killed more than 400 people and left many homeless. But they have little left beyond the clothes on their back and some meager belongings strewn on the floor. "My house was swept away by the waves," Octavia told AFP, as she sat on a tarpaulin, clothes drying on a fence behind her. "I only brought few things with me, everything else is gone."

At another relief centre in hard-hit Kalianda, volunteers handed out drawings for kids to color along with stuffed animals and other toys. But volunteers in both places were also keeping a close eye out for signs

of distress, with some youngsters eating little and struggling to sleep. "Psychologically, many children have been affected," said Dina Amanah Tayusani from children's aid group Anak Banten. "They lost their parents... Many of them lost their homes and their belongings."

An eruption of the Anak Krakatoa volcano, which sits in the middle of the Sunda Strait between Java and Sumatra islands, caused a section of the crater to collapse and slide into the ocean, triggering the killer tsunami on Saturday evening. The waves washed over popular beaches, inundating tourist hotels and beachside communities on both sides of the strait — leaving a trail of death and destruction in their wake.

Yesterday, the disaster death toll was at 430 with some 159 still missing, as authorities raised the danger alert level for the rumbling volcano amid fears of another tsunami. Medical workers have warned that clean water and medicine supplies are running low. Children are now the most vulnerable of some 22,000 people forced from their homes, said Michel Rooijackers, an advisor to Yayasan Sayangi Tunas Cilik, a Save the Children partner in Indonesia. The organization was handing out shelter and hygiene kits for about 10,000 people and setting up spaces to help distressed kids. "The situation in the temporary shelters is improving but not optimal," he said. —AFP

Thai anti-graft agency drops probe into 'Rolex General'

BANGKOK: A graft probe into the luxury watch collection of Thailand's junta number two was dropped yesterday, sparking the ire of the public and political opponents of the military. The country's anti-corruption agency cited "no grounds" for an investigation into the scandal surrounding Prawit Wongsuwan's penchant for pricey timepieces, which captivated the kingdom earlier this year and drew criticisms in a rare lightning rod of dissent as the Thai public grew weary after four years of military rule.

The 73-year-old was caught last December wearing a luxury watch in a photo, inspiring online sleuths to dig up old photos of at least 22 watches collectively worth \$1.2 million on his wrist, including 11 Rolexes, eight Patek Philipps and three Richard Milles. Questions arose over how a general on a relatively humble public servant's salary could afford items undeclared on his \$2.7 million list of assets on taking office, leading the kingdom's anti-graft agency to open a probe into his wrist bling.

The National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) announced yesterday in a press confer-

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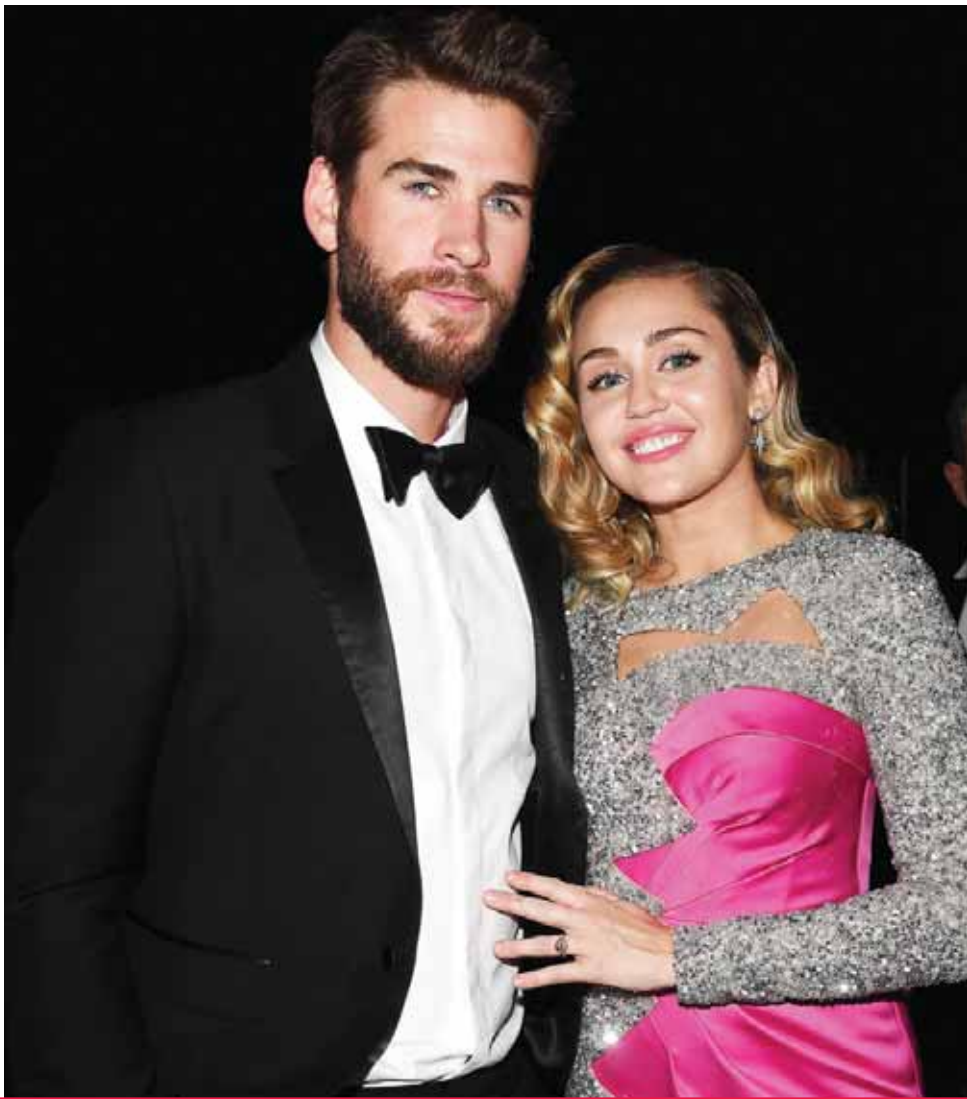
www.kuwaittimes.net

This photo shows transgender make-up artist Solongo Batsukh competing in the Miss Universe Mongolia competition in Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Mongolia. — AFP

Transmongolian: The beauty queen breaking barriers

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Lifestyle | Gossip



Miley Cyrus confirms her marriage to Liam Hemsworth

The 'Wrecking Ball' hitmaker has shared a number of black and white photos from her intimate nuptials with the 28-year-old actor on her Instagram and Twitter accounts, revealing they tied the knot on December 23, a decade after they first met while shooting 'The Last Song'. In one set of pictures of the pair embracing, Miley - who wore a floor-length white Vivienne Westwood gown - captioned the Instagram post: "12.23.18" And alongside another, she wrote: "10 years later(sic)" A third post featured the couple sharing a kiss and the 26-year-old star wrote: "This is probably our one - millionth kiss.(sic)" The 'Hunger Games' actor shared the same kissing photo, which he captioned: "My love [heart emoji]." The 'Party in the USA' hitmaker also shared a video of herself and her husband dancing to her friend and collaborator Mark Ronson's song 'Uptown Funk' on her Instagram story. Miley tagged the producer in the post, and the short clip featured Liam filming his wife in her wedding dress as she lip synched and

danced to the track, before he turned the camera and joined in." Mark also made a special video for the newlyweds, which he shared on Instagram. He captioned the clip: "Special here comes the bride cyrus/hemsworth remix for 2019. congratulations u two xo (sic)" The couple had reportedly originally planned to wed over the festive season at their Malibu home, but after it was destroyed by the California wildfires last month, they shifted their celebrations to their house in the 'Nothing Breaks Like a Heart' singer's home state of Tennessee instead and had a "perfect" day. A source told People magazine: "They always wanted a small, private celebration with family and close friends and that's what they got. Miley seems ecstatic. "She loves her Tennessee home and was very happy about having the ceremony there." Among the guests at the wedding were the couple's siblings Noah and Brandi Cyrus and Chris and Luke Hemsworth.

Anna Wintour told Vera Wang to have kids

The 69-year-old designer revealed that at the start of her career she was close with the editor, who advised her that it was time to settle down and start a family. In an interview with Vogue Australia, Vera said: "We first met when she first moved to NYC, we still argue over how old we both were, but we were young and Anna loved tennis even then. "Throughout our careers, ups and downs, we were always able to confide and encourage and support each other. "When I was still single, and Anna had just had Bee, she lectured me one evening in Paris: 'It's time for you to get married and think of starting a family', but then Ralph Lauren had actually advised me the same thing." The fashion icon went on to explain that it was her wedding that inspired her famous bridal gowns, although she never intended to be a wedding dress designer. She said: "I have always insisted that I brought freedom, I was not a bridal gown designer per se, and nothing in my resume at Vogue or Ralph Lauren would suggest that. "However, I was a fashion editor and designer who did not feel the need to conform to the standardized look of bridal gowns in the 90s. Opening the door to wedding fashion for brides of all sensibilities and styles was probably my greatest contribution."

Nicole Kidman's daughters thought her swallowing a fish in 'Aquaman' was a highlight



The 51-year-old actress may have won four Golden Globes, two Emmy Awards, a BAFTA and an Oscar, but Sunday, 10, and seven-year-old Faith - her kids with husband Keith Urban - have never been more impressed than when they visited her on the set of her latest movie 'Aquaman'. Nicole, who plays Queen Atlanna, the Queen of Atlantis, in the movie, said: "They saw me swallow a goldfish... Well, in their eyes, that is the highlight of my career. "It was a gelatin goldfish. I did not eat a real goldfish, as much as I am dedicated to my art." The actress particularly enjoyed working on the film because it was shot in her native Australia. She said: "My mom was able to come up and stay and my daughters were very happy to be there." 'Aquaman' marks the first time Nicole's daughters have been genuinely excited about her work. She said in a recent interview to promote the movie: "They're more excited about this film than they have been about anything I've done before. "They're not really interested in most of the work I do, and this is the first movie I've made that they can tell the kids at school about that they're interested in too. Particularly the boys, who are all like, 'Is your Mom really going to be in 'Aquaman'? Wow.'"



Pearl Lowe worries about looking 'muffin'



The 48-year-old fashion designer - who has daughter Daisy, 29, with Gavin Rossdale and Alfie, 22, Frankie, 19, and 12-year-old Betty with husband Danny Goffey - loves "faded glamour" and her latest collection of vintage-inspired dresses were designed with her own body shape in mind. She said: "I'm not stick thin, and I find it really difficult to find clothes, so I have to create them. "Also I don't ever want to look 'muffin' so I won't wear anything mini, sleeveless or tight anymore." And the former Powder rocker won't wear skinny jeans any more. She said in a recent interview: "I haven't worn them for 10 years. If I had a nice body I would, but since moving to the country I've put

on weight so I prefer myself in dresses - although it can get a bit cold here in Somerset in the winter." Pearl also views Daisy as a "constant source of inspiration" and also has her in mind when designing. She explained: "I call her my muse because she's a curvy girl. "So I design with her in mind because if it looks lovely on her, I can think, 'OK, that's great.' " Daisy views Pearl as a role model and credits her mother for making her the person she is now. She said: "Her creativity and enthusiasm for making women feel beautiful from the inside out has certainly nurtured me into the woman I am today."

Kris Jenner's Christmas Eve party reportedly cost \$500,000



The 63-year-old reality star staged her annual December 24 bash at the Hidden Hills home of her daughter Kim Kardashian West and son-in-law Kanye West and spared no expense in making sure the family's 200 guests had a great time - and insiders insist the celebration, which will be seen on 'Keeping Up With the Kardashians', is worth every penny. The source explained: "The party needs to be eye-popping because it sets the tone for their empire, it creates a fantasy world and makes people want to tune in so \$500,000 is nothing for them. "The grand spectacle of the party also helps sell Kylie's makeup, Kim's perfumes, and

Khloe's jeans. It's all about image." And despite the huge price tag, Kris reportedly bagged herself a bargain as party planner Mindy Weiss offered her a discount because they have worked together for so long. Mindy spent several months planning the party, which Kris requested had a Winter Wonderland theme, and Kanye - who has children North, five, Saint, three, and 11-month-old Chicago with Kim - was also heavily involved in the arrangements.



Naomi Campbell taught Adut Akech to 'stay true' to herself

The 19-year-old model considers the beauty to be a "second mum" to her now after being "inspired" by her early in her career, and says that now she's a "role model" herself, she hopes to pass on the message of self-confidence that 48-year-old Naomi taught her. In an interview with Vogue Australia, she said: "When I was growing up, the role models who inspired me in my career were Alek Wek and Naomi Campbell, who is like a second mum to me now. "I also look up to Lupita Nyong'o, and through her, I've learnt about beauty and being comfortable in your own skin and I gained the confidence of knowing my own beauty and worth. "Because of my success, I realize I've become something of a role model to young girls and I am excited about that, but I'm not going to lie, I also feel a bit of pressure, because I think people are going to expect so much of me and I don't want to do anything wrong. "If a young girl of color aspiring to be a model asks me for advice, I would say: know who you are and stay true to yourself because being in this industry it's so easy to lose yourself, which is the advice that Naomi Campbell gave me when I started." "Also, work hard, because nothing is going to come easy. You have to want it so bad and give it everything you've got."

Tristan Thompson missed Christmas Day with True

The 27-year-old sports star wasn't able to see his eight-month-old daughter open her presents as he didn't have "a lot of flexibility" to travel to Los Angeles from Cleveland, due to having a number of games around the festive season. Whilst Khloe, 34, wanted to spend the special time of year with her family, especially their famous Christmas Eve party. An insider told E! News: "Khloe wanted to be in L.A. with her family for Christmas. 'There was nothing more special than seeing True with her cousins on Christmas morning. 'There was no way she was going to miss the family Christmas Eve party and being a part of opening presents all to-

gether on Christmas morning. "She loves her family traditions and wants to continue them with True. "She was so happy to be with True and her family on Christmas. That was all she wanted." And the 'Revenge Body' star said this year was her "favorite" yet because of her little girl. She gushed alongside a picture of her wearing a matching snow outfit to the tot: "I have always looked forward to our annual Christmas Eve party but this year was hands down my favorite!! "True, you make everything so much more precious and memorable!! (sic)"



Future has become a father for the fifth time

The 35-year-old rapper and his girlfriend Joie Chavis - who already has seven-year-old daughter Shai with Bow Wow recently welcomed their first child together into the world, a son they have named Hendrix. Joie shared a photo of the tot onto her Instagram account on Christmas, which was simply captioned with his name and an eagle emoji, as well as a second picture of Hendrix being cradled by Shai, which was captioned: "Merry Christmas." Future - who already had four other children from four previous relationships, including four-year-old Future Jr. with ex-fiance Ciara - also shared the same picture of the tot alone on his Instagram Story, which he captioned with eagle and heart emojis and wrote: "Hendrix. Born King my King (sic)". The 'Mask Off' hitmaker - whose real name is Nayvadius DeMun Wilburn - used his Instagram account to also hit back at his critics. He wrote: "'Guess what you found out today? Instagram pays you zero dollars for your comments, for your negative comments...(sic)"

Drake's son gifted him a finger painting for Christmas

The 32-year-old rapper took to Instagram on Wednesday to reveal that his son Adonis - whom he welcomed in 2017 with Sophie Brussaux - had made him a painting for his Christmas present, as the 'Hold On, We're Going Home' hitmaker hinted that his tot was destined for artistic greatness. Posting a picture of the finger painting - which had been placed inside a frame - on social media, Drake wrote: "Adonis > Picasso don't @ me (sic)" The rapper accompanied the message with a blue heart emoji, and a Christmas tree emoji. Drake's adorable Christmas gift

comes after he opened up on his life as a new father on LeBron James' HBO show 'The Shop' in October, where he spoke about being "scared" to tell his mother about the situation, because he was never in a relationship with Sophie. He said: "[I was] more scared to tell my mom because my mom has had real belief and real relationships with women in my life, like, over the course of my years. I'm sure she would expect or be elated if I were to have gotten one of those women pregnant ... So it was tough for me to tell her that it's somebody that she's never met."



"I don't like to look puffy"



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

Transmongolian: The beauty queen breaking barriers

Make-up artist Solongo Batsukh braves Mongolia's below-freezing temperatures in just a skimpy black dress and light pastel pink coat—the country's trailblazing transgender beauty queen wants to look good in any weather. "I don't like to look puffy," the 25-year-old said as she drove to a beauty salon that hired her to promote its products and services via Facebook live videos. It's with this typical bluntness, confidence and attitude that taboo-breaking Batsukh strutted into the country's first ever Miss Universe Mongolia competition in October.

Though she fell short of representing her country at the Miss Universe contest in Thailand on December 17, her participation shed another light onto a group living on the edges of a deeply patriarchal country with conservative views about sexual orientation. Had she won, she would have joined Miss Spain's Angela Ponce as the first transgender contestants in Miss Universe's 66-year history.

"I wanted to inspire as many women as possible," Batsukh told AFP. "But I'm still proud that I got the chance to compete in this contest, and the 'Solongo' I created was a true winner in my heart," she said. Her participation didn't please everyone, dredging up negative reactions on social media. "The world would have a negative image of our country if a man represents us while there are thousands of beautiful and real women in our country," one person wrote on the Facebook page of Miss Universe Mongolia.

Correct misunderstandings

But Batsukh isn't deterred by such abuse. Born Bilguun Batsukh, she grew up as a boy in the semi-arid central province of Dundgovi. She couldn't pinpoint her gender identity until she learned about different gender orientations as a university student in her early 20s. It was when she started working as a program officer at Youth for Health, a non-governmental organization that provides safe-sex education for LGBT people, that she realized she was a woman born in a man's body. She started wearing wigs, putting on dresses and taking hormone therapy.

Batsukh is among the few LGBT people who have dared to come out in Mongolia, where

some 80 percent of the community remain in the closet, according to a UN survey. "It is extremely difficult for transgender people to be employed," said Baldangombo Altangerel, legal program manager at the LGBT Centre. A video of a young transgender woman who had repeatedly been beaten in the streets went viral in Mongolia last year, highlighting the prejudices LGBT people face.

Batsukh wants to dispel the image that transgender women can only be sex workers or strip-

per in Mongolia's transgender community, too, complaining that they should focus on working rather than talking about human rights.

"Instead of saying 'we're human like everyone else', we need to prove ourselves through our actions. Just show others that we're making a living like ordinary people," she said.

'Her goals inspire me'

Batsukh is seizing on the popularity of her Facebook page, which has more than 120,000



This photo shows transgender make-up artist Solongo Batsukh at a salon.

pers living on the fringes of society. She flaunts her wealth, regularly travels abroad and is a celebrity in her country of three million people. Batsukh found fame in 2014, when she represented Mongolia in Miss International Queen, finishing in the top 10 of the international transgender beauty pageant organized in Thailand. She pursued a modeling career and became a make-up artist.

"I had to reveal myself (as transgender) so I could correct the misunderstandings in society. If we keep hidden, society will keep on hating us. They don't know us," she said. Batsukh has used her public image to speak up on television and social media, fighting against perceptions that transgender people are suffering from mental illness. But she has tough words for Mon-

golia's transgender community, too, complaining that they should focus on working rather than talking about human rights. "likes", to create a reality show featuring women seeking a makeover. The beauty queen will help the women lose weight, change hairstyles and apply make-up. Sarangoo Sukhbaatar, 25, who works in a cashmere company and was among 25 women competing to be among the five participants, said she trusted in Batsukh's ability and skills to transform her looks. "Solongo truly understands what women feel," said Sukhbaatar, who started following Batsukh on social media two years ago. "Her goals and patience inspire me," she said. "If a man can be beautiful like her, women can be much more beautiful than we are today."—AFP

Sister Wendy Beckett, nun who became TV star, dies at 88

Sister Wendy Beckett, the Roman Catholic nun who left her cloistered convent life to launch a television career in later life and became an unlikely small screen star, has died aged 88. Beckett, who soared to international fame presenting a series of popular and unscripted art programs for the BBC in the 1990s, died at the Carmelite Monastery in Quidenham in Norfolk on Wednesday. "Sister Wendy had a unique presentation style, a deep knowledge of and passion for the arts," said Jonty Claypole, the BBC's director of arts.

"She was a hugely popular BBC presenter and will be fondly remembered by us all. We're thinking of her loved ones at this time." Her popular shows included "Sister Wendy's Odyssey" (1992) and "Sister Wendy's Grand Tour" (1994). Born in South Africa in 1930, Beckett was still a child when her family moved to Edinburgh, where her father studied medicine. She joined a convent at the age of 16 and was sent to Oxford University in 1950, where she was awarded a Congratulatory First Class degree in English literature, according to the BBC, before a stint teaching in South Africa.

Beckett began studying fine art in the 1980s and decided to write a book to raise money for her convent. "Contemporary Women Artists", published in 1988, was the first of many books and articles. Her solitary existence, living in a caravan in her Norfolk convent, was transformed when the BBC commissioned her to present a television documentary on the National Gallery in London in 1991.

Beckett became well-loved for her unusual presenting style, which saw her discuss featured painting in depth and without an autocue. "It is very sad news. Many people see her as a religious person and she was far more than that," said Xinran Xue, a close friend, according to Britain's Press Association newswire. "It's a huge loss for the art world. She was a brilliant art critic."—AFP



People buy lottery tickets at the Nimet Abla lottery stand in Istanbul. — AFP photos

Turkey's 'Big Sister Nimet' lottery selling hope for 90 years



Each year in the run-up to the New Year draw, thousands of people flock to the most famous lottery stand in Istanbul, drawn by the promise on display: “Nimet Abla will make you win.” For 90 years, the lottery booth has drawn large numbers of Turks, filled with hope in these troubled economic times, largely because it has convinced people that it is there that they have the best chance of winning. And so the people flock to the booth, ignoring what is a growing chorus of the pious who consider gambling a sin.

Excited customers take a selfie in front of the ticket counters in Eminonu district, close to one of the most beautiful Ottoman mosques in Istanbul, Yeni Cami. A dozen security guards form a cordon around the stall to stop queue-jumpers, redirecting them towards the end of the queue which extends for several hundreds of meters. With a waiting time of up to three or four hours at the weekend, those wishing to buy tickets have to be patient. Fortunately for Kemal, he has plenty of it.

“I’ve been trying my luck with Nimet Abla for

50 years,” the retired man says. “I have never won... for now!” Nimet Abla, which means “Big Sister Nimet” in Turkish, owes its name and fortune to founder Melek Nimet Ozden. A formidable businesswoman, she ruled over the lottery world for half a century, after selling her first ticket in 1928.

“
Nimet Abla will
make you win
”

Following her death in 1978, her nephew, who is today called Nimet Abi (“Big Brother Nimet”), took over the business, and it continues to prosper. “We sell more and more tickets each year,” Nimet Ozden, 64, tells AFP. He says they sold three million tickets last year, “a tenth of all lot-

tery tickets in Turkey”.

Carefully cultivated legend

As well as the historic booth in Eminonu, Nimet Abla has two other outlets selling tickets in Istanbul, to which customers flock from all over Turkey. This year the New Year jackpot is worth 70 million Turkish lira (around 11.5 million euros). One ticket costs 70 lira (11.5 euros), but there is also “a half-ticket” or even a “quarter of a ticket”.



In the last few days before the draw on December 31, the queues begin as early as 6:00 am and last as late as 11:00 pm.

Like seagulls swirling around a trawler returning from a day's fishing, street vendors try to snatch customers from Nimet Abla with cries of: "No time to wait! We sell the same tickets!" To stand out from the more than 15,500 authorized national lottery ticket sellers, Nimet Abla relies on its reputation as a lucky charm. It was something the founder cultivated very early on, investing heavily in advertising.

This has allowed it to stand the test of time, unlike other Turkish lottery legends. "Omer the Long", "Simon the Dwarf" and "One-armed Cemal" have all fallen by the wayside. So even if Nimet Abla has not sold the winning ticket for the end-of-year draw since 2009, its power of attraction remains intact. "I believe in the good luck of Nimet Abla," Saniye says while waiting in the queue. Similarly, Erdemir Koc, an unemployed 45-year-old, was convinced he was more likely to win there.

Ban all that

But not everyone has caught lottery fever. In this majority-Muslim country, there has been a growing expression of religious conservatism in recent

years. Last year, Turkey's Diyanet religious affairs agency issued its opinion on the lottery, saying that although it was legal, it was "haram" -illicit from an Islamic point of view, like all gambling. The founder Melek Nimet Ozden took care of her image as a pious woman, undertaking the pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia several times and building a mosque in her name. But her legacy is nevertheless now a target.

Not far from the booth, on the other side of the Yeni Cami mosque, a florist, tired of having to give directions to the stall, hung a poster in front of his shop. "Don't ask me where Nimet Abla is," it says. "Gambling is a sin." "I see the faithful who just after leaving the mosque will go queue at Nimet Abla," says the shop's owner, Kadir Sumbul, indignantly "If it were up to me, I would ban all that," he tells AFP.

But the games of chance generate a lot of revenue for the Turkish state. Last year, they brought in 1.4 billion lira (230 million euros), according to the Turkish national lottery body (MPI). Nimet Abla is aware of the criticism, even if he thinks most people don't share those views. He himself tries his luck each year in the New Year lottery, he says. But in any case, he adds, as he looks out at the line of impatient customers: "I already feel lucky enough as it is." —AFP



9 ways to explore Bosnia's Islamic heritage



The Stari Most (literally 'old bridge') is a 16th-century Ottoman bridge that spans across the river Neretva.



The 16th-century Gazi-Husrevbey Mosque was named after Bosnia's second Ottoman governor.

With more than five centuries of Ottoman history and a Muslim-majority population, modern Bosnia and Herzegovina brims with Islamic heritage. This land of Grand Viziers, magnificent imperial mosques and delicious Muslim cuisine is the perfect place to get a deeper understanding of the history and influence of Islamic culture in Europe.

Stare in awe at a 'Sinan'

There are Muslim architects and then there's Mimar Sinan. Born around 1490, Sinan became the chief architect for the Ottoman Empire. The magnificent ten-arched stone bridge over the River Drina at Viöegrad is the only confirmed 'Sinan' in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), and the master architect's fingerprints are all over this vision of symmetrical engineering. Built in 1577 and commissioned by locally born Ottoman Grand Vizier Sokollu Mehmet Pasha, the bridge has al-

ready survived five centuries and looks solid enough to easily last another five.

Lose yourself in a mystical dhikr

The Sufi lodge at Blagaj sits at the mouth of the River Buna with a huge cliff rising up behind it - a truly awe-inspiring sight. Maybe that's why the mystical Muslims chose this spot to build their tekija, or monastery, some five hundred years ago. Today, the musafirhana (guest house) and turbe (mausoleum) are part tourist site and part places of worship, with selected dhikr (remembrance) sessions even open to the public. This means anyone can respectfully take part in this unique spiritual form of Muslim worship - rhythmic chanting and movement - practised here since Islam first came to BiH.

Honour the fallen at Srebrenica

There's no getting away from it. The bullet



Sinan's beautifully proportioned Mehmet Pasa Sokolovic Bridge over the river Drina

holes still on the walls of Sarajevo buildings, the memorials scattered across the country - even the days around the festival of Bayram (Eid) are dedicated to the memory of those who lost their lives in the tragic Bosnian War between 1992 and 1995. But it's the story of the genocide at Srebrenica that induces the greatest feeling of horror. Walk through the Srebrenica Memorial Hall where thousands of Muslims sought shelter before the massacres. Then step into the serenity of the vast memorial garden, where every year headstones are added as remains from mass graves continue to be painstakingly identified - 23 years on from the killings. Stand firm as you read the names of the growing list of dead, for this too is Bosnia's Muslim heritage.

Admire Bosnia's stunning Ottoman mosques

Despite the efforts of communist rulers and, more recently, Serb and Croat militia to rid BiH of its Muslim monuments, the country remains a land of mosques. BiH is home to some of the finest Ottoman mosques outside of Turkey. Unsurprisingly, the two standout ones are in the capital founded by the Turkish empire. Sarajevo's 'oldest', the 15th century Emperor's Mosque boasts the largest single sub-dome design in the country. Meanwhile, the city's most famous and biggest, built a century later is the Gazi-Husrevbey Mosque, which some claim was overseen by architect Sinan. Both display the classical Ottoman architectural features of gravity-defying central domes and elegant pencil-thin minarets, and both are open to tourists. The latter was also at the heart of an impressive medieval social complex that boasted a library, madrasah (school), soup kitchen, and one of the world's very first public toilets.

Dine on traditional Ottoman fare

It's no coincidence that the Bosnian 'cevapi' sounds like 'kebab' - it's essentially the same word. But unlike the common 'doner' - a modern invention - the humble Bosnian cevapi of freshly baked bread stuffed with pieces of mildly spiced 'kofte' and gently fried onion, is probably closer to an authentic Ottoman kebab. Few do it better than Zeljo in Old Sarajevo, whose bustling and overwhelmingly local atmosphere at either branch will reassure any street-food connoisseur. Follow up this commoner's fare with a sweet once reserved for imperial tongues - baklava, flaky puff pastry, drowned in syrup and topped with crumbling pistachio, which began as a royal Ottoman treat but today can be grabbed on almost every street corner in BiH.

Applaud Bosnian resilience at Stari Most

So often a symbol of BiH, the perfectly arched apex of Stari Most bridge in Mostar has also become a symbol of Bosnian re-

silience. Originally commissioned by Ottoman Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, and built by a student of Sinan, Mimar Hayruddin, Stari Most is one of the few constructions able to compete with the great master's own handiwork. Sadly though, after 427 years of wowing the world, the bridge was destroyed on 9 November 1993 by Croat military forces. In 2004, it was resurrected following a masterful reconstruction using the original stonework and building techniques. As a result, the bridge now also represents the resilient, post-war Bosnian spirit, and it is best viewed from atop the medieval Ottoman minaret at nearby Koski Mehmed Pasa Mosque, which can be climbed for a small fee.

Recall Muslim Bosnia's religious tolerance

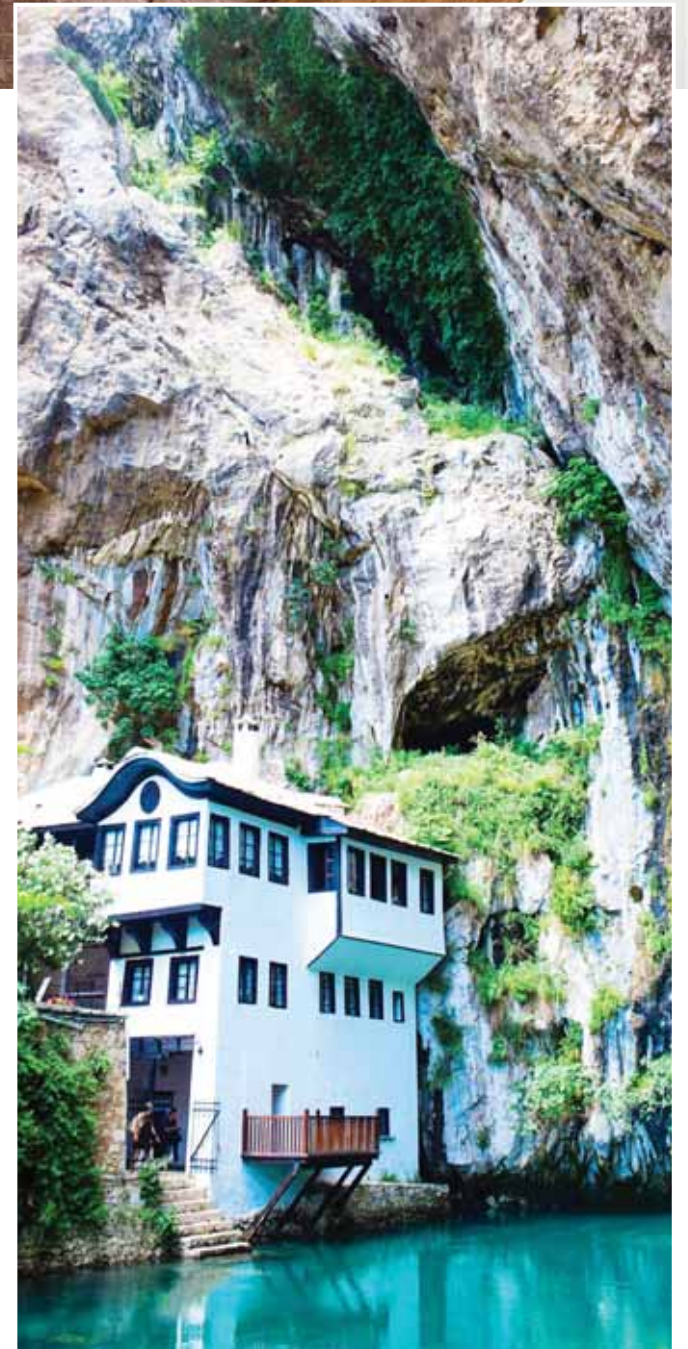
One of the oldest Haggadahs in the world, the Sarajevo Haggadah is a beautifully illustrated Jewish manuscript that details the order for the Jewish Passover Seder. It originates from Spain, was brought to Sarajevo by Sephardic Jews and is now kept in Sarajevo's National Museum. Like Sarajevo's other Jewish heritage sites, such as the old Sephardic synagogue (now the Jewish Museum), it a reminder that Ottoman Sarajevo, known as the 'Jerusalem of Europe', welcomed European Jews at a time when other countries were expelling them. In fact, Ottoman Sultan Bayezid II sent his navy out to collect the Jewish refugees from Spain and resettled them across Ottoman lands, where they mostly thrived right up until the early part of the twentieth century.

Down a cup of Bosnian coffee

Anywhere else in the world and you'd be calling it Turkish coffee, as that's who brought the popular brown bean to BiH, but nowhere else will you be expected to sip your caffeine hit through a sugar cube. The best place to practice drinking coffee Bosnian-style has to be Rahatlook in central Sarajevo; a delightfully modern cafe with outdoor seating overlooking the old Jewish quarter and enough delicious homemade cakes to while away entire afternoons.

Explore the Bosniak identity

To understand modern BiH, you have to understand what it means to be a 'Bosniak' - the term coined to describe the ethnicity of a native of BiH. The original 'Bosniak' was Adil Zulfikarpasic, a key figure during the 1990s conflict, and in his Bosniak Institute, housed in Sarajevo's 16th century hammam (public baths) building, you can truly appreciate why this was so important. Home to a library, archive centre and art gallery, the institute contains Islamic manuscripts dating back to the 14th century, as well as art by some of Bosnia's most important names. It is also the home of a documentation centre for the Bosnian War. - (www.lonelyplanet.com)



The Blagaj Tekija was built around 1520 near a spring that forms the source of the River Buna.



A trio of ways to make **white** **chicken chili pop** with flavor

White chicken chili is a fresher, lighter cousin of the thick red chili most of us know and love. Its appeal is not surprising because it is a healthier alternative and, when made well, packed with vibrant flavors and spiciness. All too often, however, this chili is lackluster. We found not one but three solutions to bland chicken chili recipes. To fix what is often a watery sauce, we pureed some of our sauteed chile-onion mixture and beans with the broth to thicken the base.

WHITE CHICKEN CHILI

Ingredients
Servings: 8

Start to finish: 1 hour

2 onions, chopped
3 Anaheim chiles, stemmed, seeded, and chopped
3 poblano chiles, stemmed, seeded, and chopped
3 jalapeno chiles, stemmed, seeded, and minced
3 pounds bone-in split chicken breasts, trimmed
2 tablespoons canola oil
6 garlic cloves, minced
1 tablespoon ground cumin
1 1/2 teaspoons ground coriander
Salt and pepper
2 (15 ounce) cans no-salt-added cannellini beans, rinsed
4 cups unsalted chicken broth
1/4 cup minced fresh cilantro

4 scallions, sliced thin
2 tablespoons lime juice, plus lime wedges for serving
1 tablespoon minced fresh oregano

Preparation

Toss onions, Anaheims, poblanos, and two-thirds of jalapenos together in bowl. Working in two batches, pulse vegetables in food processor to consistency of chunky salsa, about 12 pulses; set aside. Pat chicken dry with paper towels. Heat oil in Dutch oven over medium-high heat until just smoking. Brown chicken, 3 to 5 minutes per side; transfer to plate and discard skin. Add processed vegetable mixture, garlic, cumin, coriander, 3/4 teaspoon salt, and 1/4 teaspoon pepper to fat left in pot and cook over medium heat, stirring often, until vegetables are softened, about 10 minutes. Remove pot from heat.

Process 1 cup cooked vegetable mixture, 1 cup beans, and 1 cup broth in food processor until smooth, about 20 seconds, scraping down sides of bowl as needed. Return pureed mix-

ture to pot and stir in remaining 3 cups broth, scraping up any browned bits. Nestle chicken into pot along with any accumulated juices and bring to simmer. Reduce heat to medium-low, cover, and cook until chicken registers 160 F, 10 to 15 minutes. Stir remaining beans into chili, bring to simmer over medium heat, and cook, uncovered, until chili has thickened slightly, about 10 minutes. Off heat, stir in chicken and let sit until heated through, about 5 minutes. Stir in cilantro, scallions, lime juice, oregano, and remaining jalapeno and season with pepper to taste. Serve with lime wedges.

ture to pot and stir in remaining 3 cups broth, scraping up any browned bits. Nestle chicken into pot along with any accumulated juices and bring to simmer. Reduce heat to medium-low, cover, and cook until chicken registers 160 F, 10 to 15 minutes.

Transfer chicken to carving board, let cool slightly, then shred into bite-size pieces using 2 forks; discard bones. Stir remaining beans into chili, bring to simmer over medium heat, and cook, uncovered, until chili has thickened slightly, about 10 minutes. Off heat, stir in chicken and let sit until heated through, about 5 minutes. Stir in cilantro, scallions, lime juice, oregano, and remaining jalapeno and season with pepper to taste. Serve with lime wedges.

Nutrition information per serving: 290 calories; 67 calories from fat; 8 g fat (1 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 81 mg cholesterol; 245 mg sodium; 23 g carbohydrate; 6 g fiber; 4 g sugar; 32 g protein.

A flavorful, flourless chocolate cake without all the fuss

Incredibly rich and impossibly smooth, flourless chocolate cake is elegant, refined, and universally beloved. But recipes for this intense, deeply chocolate dessert typically require complicated techniques. Our take on this indulgent cake minimizes fuss without sacrificing flavor or texture.

We began by gently melting chocolate and butter in the microwave before incorporating the remaining ingredients. In the absence of flour, we called on eggs for structure, cornstarch for body, and water for a moist, smooth texture. Vanilla and espresso powder underscored the chocolate flavor and deepened its impact.

Ensuring a crack-free surface was as easy as straining and resting the batter before tapping out bubbles that rose to the surface. Baking the cake in a low oven produced a perfectly smooth top. This cake needs to chill for at least 6 hours, so we recommend making it the day before serving. An accurate oven thermometer is essential here. We prefer this cake made with 60 percent bittersweet chocolate; our favorite brands are Ghirardelli and Callebaut. To slice, dip a sharp knife in very hot water and wipe dry before and after each cut.

FLOURLESS CHOCOLATE CAKE

Ingredients

Servings: 10-12

Start to finish: 1 hour 45 minutes (Plus at least 6 hours to chill)

12 ounces bittersweet chocolate, broken into 1-inch pieces

16 tablespoons unsalted butter

6 large eggs

1 cup (7 ounces) sugar

1/2 cup water

1 tablespoon cornstarch

1 tablespoon vanilla extract

1 teaspoon instant espresso powder

1/2 teaspoon salt

Preparation

Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 275 F. Spray 9-inch springform pan with vegetable oil spray. Microwave chocolate and butter in bowl at 50 percent power, stirring occasionally, until melted, about 4 minutes. Let chocolate mixture cool for 5 minutes.

Whisk eggs, sugar, water, cornstarch, vanilla, espresso powder, and salt in large bowl until thoroughly combined, about 30 seconds. Whisk in chocolate mixture until smooth and slightly thickened, about 45 seconds. Strain batter through fine-mesh strainer into prepared pan, pressing against strainer with rubber spatula or back of ladle to help batter pass through. Gently tap pan on counter to release air bubbles; let sit on counter for 10 minutes to allow air bubbles to rise to top. Use tines of fork to gently pop any air bubbles that have risen to surface. Bake until edges are set and center jiggles slightly when cake is shaken gently, 45 to 50 minutes.

Let cake cool in pan on wire rack for 5 minutes; run thin knife around edge of pan to loosen cake. Let cake cool on rack until barely warm, about 30 minutes. Cover cake tightly with plastic wrap, poke small hole in top, and refrigerate until cold and firmly set, at least 6 hours or up to 2 days. Remove sides of pan and slide thin metal spatula between cake bottom and pan bottom to loosen, then slide cake onto platter. Let cake stand at room temperature for 30 minutes before serving.

Nutrition information per serving: 460 calories; 318 calories from fat; 36 g fat (21 g saturated; 1 g trans fats); 178 mg cholesterol; 158 mg sodium; 38 g carbohydrate; 4 g fiber; 30 g sugar; 7 g protein.



A classic risotto is creamy and indulgent, thanks to saffron

Risotto is a simple rice dish elevated beyond the prosaic by its voluptuously creamy texture. Of the many risotto dishes that dot northern Italy, risotto alla milanese is at once one of the simplest and most luxurious, because it's flavored with the most globally prized spice, saffron, which perfumes the dish with its floral aroma.

The dish's origin is a subject of debate: One legend claims that it was invented in the 1500s by a Milanese glassmaker who earned the nickname "Zafferano" because he used saffron often to make gold stain. When he was jokingly challenged to add it to risotto, he did! However, the recipe's first appearance in an Italian cookbook wasn't until the 1800s. Perhaps it originated from Milan's ties to Spain, or a Milanese affinity for the golden color, or possibly the idea that saffron was beneficial to health.

Risotto - Milanese or otherwise - achieves its creamy texture through constant stirring, which causes the rice to release its starch. We toasted the saffron in butter, which magnified its flavor, helped break up the threads, and distributed it throughout the rice.

This dish is traditionally prepared using Carnaroli rice, but

you can substitute Arborio rice. You may have broth left over once the rice is finished cooking; different rice products cook differently, and we prefer to err on the side of slightly too much broth rather than too little. If you do use all the broth and the rice has not finished cooking, add hot water as needed.

SAFFRON RISOTTO

Servings: 6

Start to finish: 1 hour
 3 1/2 cups chicken broth
 3 cups water
 4 tablespoons unsalted butter
 1 onion, chopped fine
 Salt and pepper
 2 cups Carnaroli rice
 1/4 teaspoon saffron threads, crumbled
 2 ounces Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, grated (1 cup)

Preparation

Bring broth and water to simmer in medium saucepan. Cover and keep warm over low heat. Melt butter in Dutch

oven over medium heat. Add onion and 1/2 teaspoon salt and cook until softened, about 5 minutes. Add rice and saffron and cook, stirring frequently, until grain edges begin to turn translucent, about 5 minutes.

Cook and stir frequently, until fully absorbed, about 2 minutes. Stir in 3 1/2 cups warm broth, bring to simmer, and cook, stirring occasionally, until almost fully absorbed, 10 to 12 minutes. Continue to cook rice, stirring frequently and adding warm broth, 1 cup at a time, every few minutes as liquid is absorbed, until rice is creamy and cooked through but still somewhat firm in center, 14 to 18 minutes. Remove pot from heat, cover, and let sit for 5 minutes. Adjust consistency with remaining warm broth as needed (you may have broth left over). Stir in Parmigiano and season with salt and pepper to taste before serving.

Nutrition information per serving: 378 calories; 94 calories from fat; 11 g fat (7 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 30 mg cholesterol; 583 mg sodium; 51 g carbohydrate; 2 g fiber; 1 g sugar; 9 g protein.



Comic

Word Search

Old West 3

Find and circle all of the words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining 46 letters spell a John Wayne quotation.

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

- | | | | |
|-------------------|--------------|------------|---------------|
| ANVIL | DEPUTY | LIVERY | SETTLERS |
| APOTHECARY | DODGE CITY | MAYOR | SILVER DOLLAR |
| BANK | FRONTIER | MERCANTILE | STABLE |
| BARBER | GERONIMO | PASTURE | STOCKADE |
| BOARDING HOUSE | GOLD RUSH | PIG FEED | TOWN |
| BOUNTY HUNTER | HAYLOFT | PLOW | TRAIL BOSS |
| BRIDLE | HOLSTER | PROSPECTOR | TRAIN STATION |
| BUFFALO BILL CODY | HORSE TROUGH | RANGE | WAGON TRAIN |
| CATTLE | HORSESHOE | RAWHIDE | WRANGLER |
| CHURCH | JAIL | SADDLEBAG | WYATT EARP |
| COAL MINE | JESSE JAMES | SAGEBRUSH | |
| DALTON GANG | KEROSENE | SASPARILLA | |

Yesterday's Solution

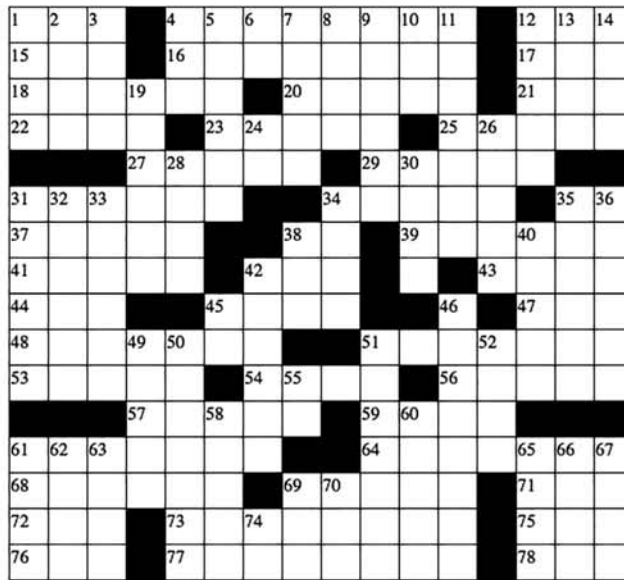
Old West 2

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

- | | | | |
|---------------|---------------|-------------|------------------|
| ASSAY OFFICE | DOCTOR | MINE SHAFT | SCOUTS |
| BANK ROBBER | DRESSMAKER | OUTLAWS | SHOOTOUT |
| BARN | FENCE | PELTS | SHOTGUN |
| BLACKSMITH | GENERAL STORE | PIGS | SPURS |
| BOOTS | GOLD NUGGET | PIONEERS | STIRRUP |
| BUCKBOARD | GUNSLINGER | POST OFFICE | TOWN HALL |
| BUNKHOUSE | HATS | RANCH HAND | TRADING POST |
| CALAMITY JANE | HIRE HAND | REVOLVER | TUMBLEWEED |
| CHAPS | HORSES | RUSTLER | WAGON |
| COAL OIL | ICE HOUSE | SADDLER | WANTED POSTER |
| COWPOKE | LIASSO | SALOON GIRL | WHISKEY |
| DAVY CROCKETT | MARSHALL | SCHOOLHOUSE | WILD BILL HICKOK |

The hidden message is: ALWAYS DRINK UPSTREAM FROM THE HERD

Crossword 2096



ACROSS

1. A widely distributed system of free and fixed macrophages derived from bone marrow.
4. A fibrous amphibole.
12. Rate of revolution of a motor.
15. Take in solid food.
16. Speak unfavorably about.
17. A flat wing-shaped process or winglike part of an organism.
18. (logic or grammar) Of or relating to scope.
20. Italian lawn bowling (played on a long narrow dirt court).
21. The Tibeto-Burman language spoken in the Dali region of Yunnan.
22. A island in the Netherlands Antilles that is the top of an extinct volcano.
23. A particular environment or walk of life.
25. An Indian side dish of yogurt and chopped cucumbers and spices.
27. An anti-inflammatory drug that does not contain steroids.
29. Given or having a specified name.
31. Expectorated matter.
37. The fur of a rabbit.
39. Reduction or lack of an immune response to a specific antigen.
41. A member of a Turkic people of Uzbekistan and neighboring areas.
43. A loose material consisting of grains of rock or coral.
44. Water frozen in the solid state.
47. A local computer network for communication between computers.
48. Used of skin roughened as a result of cold or exposure.
53. Someone who consumes food for nourishment.
54. (used of count nouns) Every one considered individually.
56. In a joyous manner.
57. Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
59. Goddess of fertility.
61. Of or pertaining to Sabah or its people.
64. Long-necked river duck of the Old and New Worlds having elongated central tail feathers.
68. A genus of Stromateidae.
71. A constellation in the southern hemisphere near Telescopium and Norma.
72. South American wood sorrel cultivated for its edible tubers.
73. A courteous manner that respects accepted social usage.
75. A Chadic language spoken in northern Nigeria.
76. A doctor's degree in theology.
77. Type genus of the family Dasyuridae.
78. Either extremity of something that has length.

DOWN

1. A state of confusion and disorderliness.
2. Large burrowing rodent of South and Central America.
3. (dialect) A short straight stick of wood.
4. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
5. A deep bow.
6. A bachelor's degree in religion.
7. To fix or set securely or deeply.
8. In the near future.
9. A large faint constellation in the southern hemisphere containing most of the Small Magellanic Cloud.
10. (of securities) Not quoted on a stock exchange.
11. United States general who was commander of all Union troops in the West.
12. Marked by excessive enthusiasm for and intense devotion to a cause or idea.
13. Make a plat of.
14. Type genus of the Majidae.
19. Short underpants for women or children (usually used in the plural).
24. A state in New England.
26. Yellow-fever mosquitos.
28. Using the voice in song.
30. (botany) Of or relating to the axil.
32. An archaic name for Easter or Passover.
33. Pleasantly (even unrealistically) optimistic.
34. An narrative telling the adventures of a hero or a family.
35. A loose narrow strip of skin near the base of a fingernail.
36. The largest Australian city located in southeastern Australia.
38. A compartment in front of a motor vehicle where driver sits.
40. A large gathering of people intended to arouse enthusiasm.
42. Of or relating to or characteristic of Hades or Tartarus.
45. A light strong brittle gray toxic bivalent metallic element.
46. A dull and listless state resulting from weariness.
49. Large dark brown North American arboreal carnivorous mammal.
50. Take hold of.
51. Someone who ships goods.
52. A kiln for drying hops.
55. The blood group whose red cells carry both the A and B antigens.
58. An oil port in southern Iraq.
60. East Indian tree whose leaves are used for fodder.
62. United States writer (born in Poland) who wrote in Yiddish (1880-1957).
63. A small ball with a hole through the middle.
65. A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
66. Extremely robust.
67. Relating to or characteristic of or occurring on land.
69. A field covered with grass or herbage and suitable for grazing by livestock.
70. (Babylonian) The sky god.
74. A soft silver-white ductile metallic element (liquid at normal temperatures).

Yesterday's Solution

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

Daily SuDoku

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

Yesterday's Solution

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

TV Listings



- 01:20 Against The Ropes
03:10 Acts Of Vengeance
04:35 The Hunt For Red October
06:50 Deepwater Horizon
08:40 The Fate Of The Furious
10:55 Resident Evil: Vendetta
12:35 Hidalgo
14:50 The Edge
16:50 Stealth
18:55 The Admiral: Roaring Currents
21:10 Flu
23:20 Thursday



- 00:50 Wolves And Warriors
01:45 North Woods Law
02:40 Alaska Monsters
03:35 Shark City
04:25 Wolves And Warriors
05:15 North Woods Law
06:02 Mutant Planet
06:49 Pit Bulls & Parolees
07:36 Dark Days In Monkey City
08:00 Dark Days In Monkey City
08:25 Man, Cheeta, Wild
09:15 Animal Cops Phoenix
10:10 Wolves And Warriors
11:05 North Woods Law
12:00 Mutant Planet
12:55 Pit Bulls & Parolees
13:50 Shark City
14:45 Groomer Has It
15:40 Big Cat Tales
16:35 Alaska Monsters
17:30 The Jeff Corwin Experience
18:25 Animal Cops Phoenix
19:20 Sharkbite Beach
20:15 Surviving Harvey: Animals After The Storm
21:10 Dr. Jeff: Rocky Mountain Vet
22:05 Wildest Arctic
23:00 Alaska Monsters
23:55 Pit Bulls & Parolees



- 00:10 Holby City
01:10 EastEnders
01:40 EastEnders
02:10 Hold The Sunset Christmas Special 2018
02:40 Mum
03:15 Holby City
04:10 Death In Paradise
05:10 Father Brown
06:00 EastEnders
06:30 EastEnders
07:00 Hold The Sunset
07:30 Call The Midwife: Christmas Special 2018
09:05 Doctor Who
10:00 Hold The Sunset
10:30 Hold The Sunset Christmas Special 2018
11:00 Casualty
11:50 Holby City
12:45 Holby City
13:40 Father Brown
14:25 Hold The Sunset
14:55 Hold The Sunset Christmas Special 2018
15:25 The Durrells
16:15 The Durrells
17:05 Doctor Who
18:00 EastEnders
18:30 Agatha Raisin
20:10 Line Of Duty
21:15 Unforgotten
22:05 Unforgotten
22:50 Father Brown
23:40 Poldark

- 05:55 Police Patrol
06:15 Crimes That Shook Britain
07:00 Evil Up Close
08:00 It Takes A Killer
08:20 Police Patrol
08:45 Police Patrol
09:05 Crimes That Shook Britain
09:50 Cold Case Files
10:35 The Eleven
11:30 Holloway: Women Behind Bars
12:25 Police Patrol
12:55 Police Patrol
13:20 Crimes That Shook Britain
14:16 Evil Up Close
15:10 It Takes A Killer
15:40 It Takes A Killer
16:05 Homicide Hunter
17:00 The Eleven
18:00 Holloway: Women Behind Bars
19:00 Waco: Madman Or Messiah
21:00 Homicide Hunter



- 00:05 Chappelle's Show
00:30 Broad City
00:55 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah
01:20 Impractical Jokers
01:45 Chappelle's Show
02:10 Inside Amy Schumer
02:35 Broad City
03:00 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah
03:25 Broad City
03:50 Broad City
04:15 Lip Sync Battle
04:40 Lip Sync Battle
05:05 Catch A Contractor
05:30 Catch A Contractor
05:55 Friendszone
06:20 Friendszone
06:50 Snack Off
07:15 Impractical Jokers: One Night Stand Up
08:30 Lip Sync Battle
08:55 Lip Sync Battle
09:20 I Used To Be Fat
10:10 Kroll Show
10:35 Kroll Show
11:00 Kroll Show
11:25 Key And Peele
13:30 Friends
20:35 Corporate
21:00 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah
21:30 Rachel Feinstein: Only Whores Wear Purple
22:25 Roast Battle UK
22:50 Tosh.0
23:15 Tosh.0
23:40 Bo Burnham: Words Words Words



- 00:30 Weather Top Tens
01:20 How It's Made
01:45 How It's Made
02:10 My Cat From Hell
03:00 Tanked
03:50 Bear Grylls: Born Survivor
04:40 Weather Gone Viral
05:30 Weather Top Tens
06:20 How It's Made
06:40 How It's Made
07:00 Destroyed In Seconds
07:25 Destroyed In Seconds
07:50 My Cat From Hell
08:40 How It's Made
09:05 How It's Made
09:30 Tanked
10:20 Bear Grylls: Born Survivor
11:10 Destroyed In Seconds
11:35 Destroyed In Seconds
12:00 Mysteries At The Museum
12:50 Weather Gone Viral
13:40 Weather Top Tens
14:30 How It's Made
14:55 How It's Made
15:20 My Cat From Hell
16:10 Xtreme Waterparks
16:35 Xtreme Waterparks
17:00 My Cat From Hell
17:50 Tanked
18:40 Destroyed In Seconds
19:05 Destroyed In Seconds
19:30 Penn & Teller Tell A Lie
20:20 The Carbonaro Effect
20:45 The Carbonaro Effect

- 21:10 How It's Made
21:35 How It's Made
22:00 Xtreme Waterparks
22:25 Xtreme Waterparks
22:50 Ultimate Survival
23:40 Penn & Teller Tell A Lie



- 00:50 What Lies Beneath
01:45 The Wonderland Murders
06:20 Village Of The Damned
07:10 I Almost Got Away With It
08:00 California Investigator
08:25 Killer Instinct With Chris Hansen
09:15 Disappeared
10:10 Suspicion
11:05 Village Of The Damned
12:00 Blood Relatives
12:55 Killer Instinct With Chris Hansen
13:50 I Almost Got Away With It
14:45 Married With Secrets
15:40 Village Of The Damned
16:35 The Perfect Murder
17:30 Killer Instinct With Chris Hansen
18:25 Disappeared
19:20 I Almost Got Away With It
20:15 Married With Secrets
21:10 Village Of The Damned
22:05 Swamp Murders
23:00 Murder By Numbers
23:55 American Monster



- 00:10 Sabrina: Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
00:35 Binny And The Ghost
01:00 Alex & Co.
01:25 Alex & Co.
01:45 Disney Mickey Mouse
01:50 Evermoor Chronicles
02:15 Sabrina: Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
02:40 Sabrina: Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
03:05 Binny And The Ghost
03:30 Binny And The Ghost
03:55 Hank Zipzer
04:15 Disney Mickey Mouse
04:20 Hank Zipzer
04:45 Alex & Co.
05:10 Alex & Co.
05:35 Sabrina: Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
06:00 Sabrina: Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
06:25 Binny And The Ghost
06:45 Disney Mickey Mouse
06:50 Rolling With The Ronks
07:00 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug And Cat Noir
07:25 Jessie
07:50 Jessie
08:15 Bunk'd
08:40 Stuck In The Middle
09:05 Raven's Home
09:30 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug And Cat Noir
09:55 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug And Cat Noir
10:20 Bunk'd
10:45 K.C. Undercover
11:10 K.C. Undercover
11:35 A.N.T. Farm
12:00 That's So Raven S1
12:25 That's So Raven S2
12:50 Freaky Friday
14:30 Stuck In The Middle
14:55 Raven's Home
15:20 Raven's Home
15:45 K.C. Undercover
16:10 K.C. Undercover
16:35 K.C. Undercover
17:00 That's So Raven S2
17:25 That's So Raven S2
17:50 Tangled: The Series
18:15 Tangled: The Series
18:40 Tangled: The Series
19:05 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug & Cat Noir
19:30 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug & Cat Noir
19:55 Hotel Transylvania: The Series
20:20 Descendants Wicked World

- 20:25 Hotel Transylvania: The Series
20:50 Liv And Maddie
21:15 Liv And Maddie
21:40 Liv And Maddie
22:05 Disney Mickey Mouse
22:10 A.N.T. Farm
22:35 A.N.T. Farm
23:00 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug And Cat Noir
23:25 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug And Cat Noir
23:50 Lolirock



- 00:15 The Lion Guard
00:45 Sofia The First
01:10 Minnie's Bow-Toons
01:15 Zou
01:30 Henry Hugglemonster
02:00 PJ Masks
02:25 PJ Masks
02:50 The Hive
03:00 Zou
03:15 Zou
03:30 Henry Hugglemonster
03:55 Henry Hugglemonster
04:20 The Hive
04:30 The Hive
04:40 Zou
05:25 The Hive
05:35 The Hive
05:45 Henry Hugglemonster
06:00 Henry Hugglemonster
06:15 Henry Hugglemonster
06:30 Minnie's Bow-Toons
06:35 The Hive
06:45 PJ Masks
08:00 Disney Muppet Babies
08:20 Puppy Dog Pals
08:35 PJ Masks
08:55 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
09:10 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
09:29 Vampirina
09:44 Vampirina
10:00 PJ Masks: Vehicle Special
11:00 Puppy Dog Pals
11:20 Puppy Dog Pals
11:40 Puppy Dog Pals
12:00 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
12:20 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
12:40 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
13:00 Vampirina
13:20 Vampirina
13:40 Vampirina
14:00 Lion Guard: Rise Of Scar
15:00 The Lion Guard
15:30 The Lion Guard
16:00 Disney Muppet Babies
16:20 Disney Muppet Babies
16:40 Disney Muppet Babies
17:00 PJ Masks: Outdoor
18:00 Elena Of Avalor
18:25 Hope Works
18:30 Puppy Dog Pals
18:45 Puppy Dog Pals
19:00 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
19:15 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
19:30 Vampirina
19:45 Vampirina
20:00 PJ Masks
20:15 PJ Masks
20:30 The Lion Guard
21:00 Sofia The First
21:25 Hope Works
21:30 Doc McStuffins
22:00 Puppy Dog Pals
22:15 Puppy Dog Pals
22:30 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
22:45 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
23:00 Vampirina
23:20 Vampirina
23:40 PJ Masks
23:55 PJ Masks



- 00:15 Street Outlaws
01:05 Expedition Unknown
01:50 Expedition Unknown

- 02:35 Master Of Arms
03:20 Street Outlaws
04:05 Alaskan Bush People
04:50 Deadliest Catch
05:35 Storage Hunters
06:00 Factory Line
06:23 Property Wars
06:45 Storage Hunters
07:10 How Do They Do It?
07:35 Alaskan Bush People
08:20 Factory Line
08:45 Property Wars
09:10 Deadliest Catch
09:55 Alaskan Bush People
10:45 Deadliest Catch
11:30 Street Outlaws
12:20 Factory Line
12:43 Property Wars
13:05 Storage Hunters
13:30 How Do They Do It?
13:55 Deadliest Catch
14:40 Street Outlaws
15:30 Expedition Unknown
16:15 Expedition Unknown
17:05 Master Of Arms
17:50 Abandoned Engineering
18:40 How Do They Do It?
19:05 How Do They Do It?
19:25 Street Outlaws
20:15 Street Outlaws
21:00 Sticker Shock
21:50 Gear Dogs
22:40 Race Night At Bowman Gray
23:30 Gold Rush



- 00:15 Randy Cunningham: 9th Grade Ninja
00:35 Boyster
01:00 Boyster
01:25 Counterfeit Cat
01:45 Counterfeit Cat
02:10 Randy Cunningham: 9th Grade Ninja
02:35 Randy Cunningham: 9th Grade Ninja
03:00 Boyster
03:20 Boyster
03:45 Dude That's My Ghost
04:10 Dude That's My Ghost
04:35 Counterfeit Cat
05:00 Guardians Of The Galaxy
05:29 Marvel's Avengers Assemble
06:00 Marvel's Spider-Man
06:29 Lab Rats
07:00 Lab Rats
07:29 Lab Rats
08:00 Phineas And Ferb
08:29 Supa Strikas
09:00 Supa Strikas
09:29 DuckTales
10:00 Milo Murphy's Law
10:29 Phineas And Ferb
11:00 Phineas And Ferb
11:29 Lab Rats
12:00 Lab Rats
12:29 Big Hero 6 The Series
13:00 Milo Murphy's Law
13:29 Phineas And Ferb
14:00 Phineas And Ferb
14:29 Space Chickens In Space
15:00 DuckTales
15:29 DuckTales
16:00 Phineas & Ferb: Summer Belongs To You
16:55 Marvel Super Heroes Black Panther: Trouble In Waka
17:00 Lab Rats: Bionic Rebellion
17:55 Marvel Super Heroes Black Panther: Trouble In Waka
18:00 Disney 11
18:29 Disney 11
19:00 Big City Greens
21:29 Star Wars Resistance
22:00 Phineas And Ferb
22:15 Milo Murphy's Law
22:30 Space Chickens In Space
22:45 Phineas And Ferb
23:00 Dude That's My Ghost
23:25 Dude That's My Ghost
23:50 Randy Cunningham: 9th Grade Ninja



- 00:50 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
01:50 E! News
02:50 Botched
03:40 Botched

- 04:35 Botched
05:30 Celebrity Style Story
06:00 Mariah's World
07:00 Mariah's World
08:00 E! News: Daily Pop
09:00 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
09:50 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
10:45 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
11:35 Celebrity Style Story
12:00 Generation Me
12:30 Generation Me
12:55 Generation Me
13:20 WAGs LA
19:00 E! News
20:00 WAGs LA
21:00 WAGs LA
22:00 Generation Me
22:30 Generation Me
23:00 Generation Me
23:25 Celebrity Style Story
23:55 Keeping Up With The Kardashians



- 00:10 Tonight At The London Palladium
01:00 Emmerdale
01:30 Coronation Street
02:00 Coronation Street
02:30 The Chase
03:25 Paul O'Grady: For The Love Of Dogs
03:55 Paul O'Grady: For The Love Of Dogs
04:20 Wedding Day Winners
05:25 Tonight At The London Palladium
06:15 Cash Trapped
07:10 The Chase
08:05 Paul O'Grady: For The Love Of Dogs
08:35 Paul O'Grady: For The Love Of Dogs
09:00 Wedding Day Winners
10:05 Tonight At The London Palladium
10:55 Cash Trapped
11:50 The Chase
12:45 Emmerdale
13:15 Emmerdale
13:45 Coronation Street
14:15 Cash Trapped
15:10 The Chase
16:00 The Royal Variety Performance 2016
18:20 Paul O'Grady: For The Love Of Dogs
18:50 Emmerdale
19:15 Emmerdale
19:45 Coronation Street
20:10 The Chase
21:00 The Royal Variety Performance 2016
23:15 Emmerdale
23:40 Coronation Street



- 00:00 Cowboys & Outlaws
01:00 Rome's Lost Legion
02:00 Cities Of The Underworld
03:00 Ancient Aliens
03:50 Ancient Aliens: The Ultimate Evidence
04:40 The Universe
05:30 Cowboys & Outlaws
06:20 Rome's Lost Legion
07:10 Ancient Aliens
08:00 Rome's Lost Legion
09:00 Cities Of The Underworld
10:00 Ancient Aliens
11:00 Ancient Aliens: The Ultimate Evidence
12:00 The Universe
13:00 Cowboys & Outlaws
14:00 Cities Of The Underworld
15:00 Ancient Aliens
16:00 Ancient Aliens: The Ultimate Evidence
17:00 The Universe
18:00 Cowboys & Outlaws
19:00 The King Who Tricked Hitler
20:00 Cities Of The Underworld
21:00 Ancient Aliens: The Ultimate Evidence
22:00 Ancient Aliens: The Ultimate Evidence
23:00 Clash Of The Gods



- 00:00 Who Killed Tupac?
01:00 Secrets Of The Morgue
01:55 Homicide: Hours To Kill
02:55 Homicide: Hours To Kill
03:50 The Eleven
04:45 Ms. Murder
05:30 Police Patrol

Stars



Aries (March 21-April 19)

This is your time for a new beginning and a fresh start. You have already started making many positive changes in your life. Make sure the new habit patterns you are starting are the best ones, as these will become habits you will keep for some time to come. Meal planning, a gym membership, and exercise in general will be come a new way of life for you. You have to work on your mental discipline and keep your level of determination strong. This is a great time to ask a friend to join you on this journey. We all need to be accountable to someone. This will be a great inspiration to you and you will be appreciated and admired for encouraging someone to be a part of your journey.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Your hard work is paying off. You will soon see the results. Try not to be too hard on others who are not as careful as you. They can be helpful. Just be sure you check their input and see that it meets your standards. Don't settle for sloppy work.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

If at first you don't succeed, you know the old saying. It is true. Nobody ever won by giving up. Visualize what you want to happen. Make a plan to as to what you need to make it happen. If things to do go as planned on your initial effort then do it again. Repetition is a good thing. You will easily learn from your mistakes. Reach for the stars.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

A bad thing can have good consequences in life. The way you handled something unpleasant has enriched your life. You have come through the fire a stronger person. You are more beautiful than before. Your life may not always be easy. You can handle whatever comes your way. Keep you chin up and your eyes focused on the prize.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

A mentor is what you may find yourself becoming to a younger person in your life. You are admired for your strength. The choices you make in your own life are obviously good ones. You have become an inspiration for many. Be thankful you are admired.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

You will experience success in the near future. It may not come in the form of money. Happiness is not measured in gold or dollars. That doesn't mean that happiness and financial success can't come in the same package. If you play your cards right, you can have both. Your world is ready for what you have to offer.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

You have set your focus on providing a strong foundation for your family life. You crave security and the one that will be by your side for a lifetime. You find yourself in a serious mood where deep conversation and planning will help to insure the stability you crave. You are serious about your future and who you want to spend it with. The seeds you plant today will develop the roots of the reward you seek. You are focused and determined to lead a healthy, happy life. You make your health a priority now, a gym membership, meal planning, or making plans to exercise as team, is where your focus is. This is great start to making your plans a reality. You know exactly what you want, and you will make it happen.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

This is your time for a new beginning and a fresh start. You have already started making many positive changes in your life. Make sure the new habit patterns you are starting are the best ones, as these will become habits you will keep for some time to come. Meal planning, a gym membership, and exercise in general will be come a new way of life for you. You have to work on your mental discipline and keep your level of determination strong. This is a great time to ask a friend to join you on this journey. We all need to be accountable to someone. This will be a great inspiration to you and you will be appreciated and admired for encouraging someone to be a part of your journey.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

This is a great day for your career wise. You may be just the one for the job that is coming available. It is an awesome day of harmony with not only your friends but with your co-workers. Your ideas and input are greatly appreciated today. Stick to your routine and stay true to yourself and you will experience a great since of admiration from others. Even though today may find you in a very impulsive mood, resist temptation and think long and hard about decisions you make today. You may be facing some life changing decisions. This is not only a great day to organize your thoughts but also work on organizing your affairs and surroundings.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Out with the old and in with the new. You are ready to develop new habit patterns and put to rest some of your old ways. New beginnings are on the horizon. This is a great time to get out and meet new people. A time of happiness and fresh starts. You only have one chance at a first date, first impression, or first kiss. Make it a good one. Today will be a day you will look back on and smile.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

You are entering a phase of emotional directness and may find yourself to be very impulsive. Not putting thought into your decisions is a great way to get yourself in trouble. You are ready for a fresh start in life. Out with the old and in with the new is your motto. All that does not bring happiness to your world will be what you easily turn your back on now. Be sure and make wise decisions as the new habits you develop will set the tone in your life for a long time to come. With determination and focus you will become very successful.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

You have always been one to say exactly what is on your mind. You may find yourself extremely outspoken and impulsive today. You may find yourself feeling very passionate today. You are ready for change. The changes you make today will have a great effect on your life for a great while so resist the urge to make impulsive decisions and put much thought into this. You may find yourself in a curious mood possibly paying close attention to and even taking part in a gossip session today. You feel not only the need to discover what drives and motivates others but are spending much of your time and focus trying to figure out the same about yourself.

Country Codes

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

CLINIC PAGE



Kuwait Times
248 33 199

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

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

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

ACADAMIC CERTIFICATES:

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

SPECIALIZED IN:

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

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DR KHALED ALMERRI
Consultant Interventional Cardiology
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Specialized in:

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

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

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

Specialized in:

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

Scope of Clinical Practice:

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

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

Academic Certificates, Trainings & Fellowships:

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

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

daralshifa
Email: aalhaddad@daralshifa.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).

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Health

Nigerian couples cautiously turn to surrogacy

LAGOS: Ada became a surrogate mother after her landlord threatened to evict her family from their apartment in Nigeria's commercial capital, Lagos, two years ago. But her husband wasn't open to the idea when she first brought it up. "He was like, 'What's that? Why on earth would you think of something like that? Please don't even go there,'" she recalled.

Ada became intrigued about surrogacy when she heard about it on a US reality television show, but thought it was only for Westerners. Then a colleague revealed that she had done it. But in a religiously conservative nation, many Christians and Muslims alike are skeptical of surrogacy—even though the practice has historic roots. Some polygamous ethnic Igbo or Yoruba clans used surrogates when a wife was unable to conceive.

In some Igbo villages, certain women could "marry" another woman. Any child born from the marriage would take the name of the "female husband" and the male

donor's identity was never divulged.

But as years pass, traditions fade. In their place, a relatively lucrative but murky and secretive system has developed. Ada, for example, was paid two million naira (more than \$5,500, nearly 5,000 euros) to be a surrogate. Key to her involvement was the surrogacy agency's provision of decent accommodation for her, her husband and their own two children while she was pregnant.

"That was what attracted me to the project," she said. "We had a pressing need to move out of our place and when I showed (my husband) the accommodation fee, he started looking at it differently, even though he was scared."

Her husband's fears were justified even if he finally relented: Nigeria is the fourth most dangerous country in the world to give birth. According to the World Bank, 814 women die for every 100,000 births—four times more than the global average and 100 times more than in the European

Union. Ada eventually gave birth to twins. So as not to arouse suspicion and to avoid the stigma attached to surrogacy, Ada told her friends she lost the babies.

The taboo surrounding surrogacy is even greater for the women who have to turn to it. Infertility is sometimes seen as divine punishment and most often the woman is blamed when couples are unable to conceive.

"When you go to church and you see couples praising God for giving them a child after 15 or 20 years, they say it's a miracle but often it's IVF (in-vitro fertilization) or surrogacy," said a surrogacy agent, who gave his name as Chike. "Most people in Nigeria can't afford the cost of IVF or a surrogate mother, so there is not an extensive market for it in Nigeria."

"There are a lot of stereotypes around surrogacy because of the 'baby factories'. People don't know the difference."

"Baby factories" are illegal maternity units

where many young women and girls give birth anonymously after getting pregnant accidentally—sometimes as a result of rape—or go there to sell the newborn. Huge social and religious pressure forces many infertile couples without means to go in desperation to these units, which are prevalent in southeast Nigeria and are often raided by police.

Toyin Lolu-Ogunmade knows the pain of not being able to have children but didn't want to use a surrogate. "I wanted to carry a baby myself," she said. "My thinking was, 'If you can't carry a pregnancy, then how are you a woman?' That is the essence of femininity and it's being taken from me." "Most people want to have children that are from their own genes, adopted children are not biologically linked to you," she explained, "with surrogacy, they are related."

Lolu-Ogunmade's 12-year struggle with infertility was due to uterine fibroids and post-surgery complications. — AFP

WELCOME

Dr Tamam Abou Ali
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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.

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Dr. Husain Alenezi

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

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	22087426	British Airways	22425635
Jet Airways	22924455	Air France	22430224

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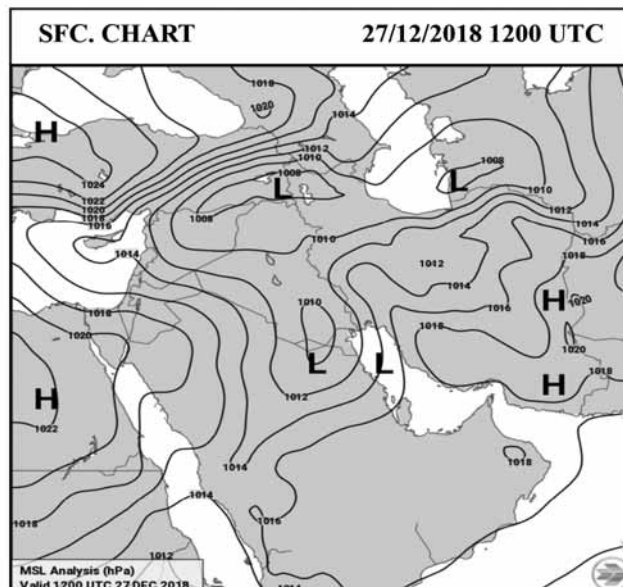
Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY NIGHT: Partly cloudy with moderate to fresh south easterly wind, with speed of 20 - 45 km/h with a chance for scattered light rain.

BY DAY: Clouds and Chance of rain will decrease gradually with moderate to fresh south easterly wind changing to north westerly wind, with speed of 20 - 50 km/h with a chance for rising dust.

WEATHER WARNING	No Current Warnings
-----------------	---------------------

STATION	MAX. REC.	MIN. EXP.
KUWAIT CITY	20 °C	13 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	22 °C	14 °C
ABDALY	22 °C	10 °C
BUBYAN	---- °C	---- °C
JAHRA	22 °C	13 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	20 °C	15 °C
SALMIYAH	19 °C	17 °C
AHMADI	19 °C	16 °C
NUWAISIB	22 °C	12 °C
WAFRA	22 °C	13 °C
SALMY	21 °C	13 °C



4 DAYS FORECAST

DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Friday	12/28	Clouds and Chance of rain will decrease gradually and Chance of rain will decrease with	21 °C	14 °C	SE-NW	20 - 50 km/h
Saturday	12/29	Sunny and decrease in temperature	18 °C	10 °C	NW-VRB	08 - 30 km/h
Sunday	12/30	Clouds will increase gradually with a chance for scattered light rain later on	17 °C	09 °C	NE-VRB	06 - 30 km/h
Monday	12/31	Clouds will decrease gradually with a chance for fog forming over some areas	19 °C	10 °C	NE-VRB	06 - 28 km/h

TOMORROW PRAYER TIMES

Fajr	05:16
Sunrise	06:41
Zuhr	11:49
Asr	14:39
Sunset	16:58
Isha	18:20

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT

MAX. Temp.	20 °C
MIN. Temp.	08 °C
MAX. RH	98 %
MIN. RH	35 %
MAX. Wind	S 18 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

FOR SALE

Toyota Camry SE model 2009, owned by doctor, leaving Kuwait, demand KD 1600. Contact 99598324. (C 5440) 25-12-2018

EMERGENCY

112

Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is

1889988

Hospitals

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

Clinics

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

Business

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 28, 2018

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BEIJING: In this file photo, Chinese and US national flags hang on a fence at an international school in Beijing, China. —AFP

China says direct trade talks with US in January

Beijing to relax cap on foreign investment in education, medical sectors

BEIJING: China and the United States have made plans for face-to-face consultations over trade in January, the Chinese commerce ministry said yesterday, as the world's two biggest economies advanced efforts to resolve a months-long trade war.

Consultations through "intensive" telephone calls will continue in the meantime, Gao Feng, spokesman at the commerce ministry, told reporters, adding that talks have been steadily moving forward despite the Christmas break in the United States. "Even as the US side is in the Christmas holiday period, China and US economic and trade teams have been in close communication, and the consultations are progressing in an orderly manner as scheduled," Gao said, when asked about progress on negotiations.

Gao did not comment directly when asked to confirm a media report on a US trade delegation visit scheduled for the week of Jan. 7. "The two sides have indeed made specific arrangements for face-to-face consultations in January in addition to continuing intensive telephone consultations,"

he said, without elaborating.

US and Chinese officials have spoken by phone in recent weeks, but a meeting next month would be the first in-person talks since US President Donald Trump met his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping, in Buenos Aires on Dec 1.

Trump and Xi agreed to stop escalating tit-for-tat tariffs that have disrupted the flow of hundreds of billions of dollars of goods between the two countries. The leaders also agreed to launch new talks while the United States delayed a planned Jan. 1 tariff increase until March.

In response, China has resumed purchases of US soybeans for the first time in six months, even though hefty tariffs on US cargoes remain in place.

Tariff suspensions

China has also said it will suspend additional tariffs on US-made vehicles and auto parts for three months starting on Jan. 1, adding that it hopes both sides can speed up negotiations to remove all additional tariffs

on each other's goods. Bloomberg, citing two people familiar with the matter, reported on Wednesday that a US trade team will travel to Beijing the week of Jan. 7 for talks. A person familiar with the matter told Reuters last week that talks were likely in early January. In yet another reconciliatory sign, China issued on Tuesday a so-called negative list that specifies industries where investors - domestic or foreign - are either restricted or prohibited.

The unified list is seen as another effort to address concern among Western investors that there is no level-playing field in China. Investment in key Chinese sectors, however, is still prohibited.

Gao said China would "comprehensively" remove all market access restrictions for foreign investors by the end of March, in areas not included in a foreign investment "negative" list published in June.

More opening and protection

China has pledged to open its vast domestic market further to foreign investors and better protect

their rights in the face of growing complaints and reduced foreign investment. The commerce ministry is working on improving market access to foreign investors in the telecommunications, education, medical and culture sectors, Gao said, when asked about areas that could see curbs eased.

In particular, the equity cap on foreign investment in the education and medical sectors, which are of "great interest to foreign investors with a large gap in domestic supply", would be relaxed, he said, without giving a timeline.

On Wednesday, China unveiled the draft of a foreign investment law containing a proposed ban on forced technology transfer and illegal government "interference" in foreign business operations, practices that have come under the spotlight during the trade war. In an apparent move to emphasize reciprocity, the draft law reserves the right to retaliate against countries that discriminate against Chinese investment with "corresponding measures". —Reuters

Business

US workers fret at making ends meet as govt shutdown persists

Trump insists on no deal until Congress funds a wall on Mexican border

WASHINGTON: According to President Donald Trump, federal workers affected by the US government shutdown support him as he insists on no deal until Congress funds a wall on the Mexican border. But rather than cheering him on, many of the 800,000 workers forced either to work without salaries or go on unpaid leave are voicing growing anxiety as they wonder how to pay approaching bills or buy holiday gifts for their children. After past shutdowns, Congress quickly ensured that federal workers were retroactively paid. But the end of the month is approaching with no headway on reopening the government. Kevin, a statistician at the Census Bureau, said he recently relocated to Washington with his wife and two-and-a-half-year-old son from North Carolina in search of the long-term stability of a government job.

But he said he used up his savings to finance the move and that his son has required early intervention services for delayed development. "Taking care for a kid with special needs is draining physically, mentally and financially," he told AFP in an email.

"Our budget is really tight and getting tighter. I no longer purchase clothes for myself and I cut my own hair." He may also have to put his rent on a credit card, added Kevin, asking that his surname be withheld because of rules against government employees speaking on politics.

Kevin's colleagues have reassured him that they have survived similar situations. The shutdown is the third this year, after two brief funding

gaps, and another stoppage in 2013 was resolved after 16 days. But Kevin is less optimistic this time, saying Trump, facing multiple crises, was acting like a "cornered animal." Asked Wednesday on a surprise trip to Iraq how long the shutdown will last, Trump replied: "Whatever it takes."

Syl, who works at the Internal Revenue Service, said she only had enough savings to pay her upcoming rent and a few other expenses after spending on travel and gifts for the holidays. While acknowledging that "I don't have it as bad as other employees" with children, she said that she resented "being used as a political pawn for the wall."

Panic as bills approach

One of the major unions of federal workers, the National Treasury Employees Union, said nearly 80 percent of members indicated in a survey they were "very concerned" about paying for housing and other living expenses. Some government employees and their families shared their predicaments online with the hashtag #ShutdownStories. @katyjb88 wrote that her husband was in the Coast Guard and that they had one child with another on the way. They live in New York where they pay more than \$2,000 a month in rent.

While active military are exempted from the shutdown, the Coast Guard is affected. Even if they are paid later, she wrote, "that won't help with bills due on the 1st."

For others, including @Ancient_Scout, consequences are even more immediate. "Broke my lease to accept new fed job for which I have to

attend 7 months of training in another state. Training canceled with shutdown." @Ancient_Scout tweeted. "Homeless. Can't afford short(?) -term housing/have to work full-time for no pay/returning Xmas presents."

@juliedotburr said that as a government contractor she will not get paid at all so long as the shutdown persists. "I am a single mom in panic mode. Picking up extra shifts at my 2nd job but it won't pay the rent!" she wrote.

Signs of solidarity are growing in Wash-

ington, where lawmakers return Thursday with no deal in sight. The Z-Burger restaurant is offering hamburgers free to federal employees, while Spanish chef Jose Andres, a longstanding critic of Trump, has invited the workers for a free sandwich in all of his Washington restaurants from 2pm to 5 pm. But there are occasional signs of support for Trump, who has made a wall and a tough line on immigration the centerpiece of his 2016 campaign and said Tuesday that federal workers "want border security." —AFP

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WASHINGTON: A sign is displayed on a government building that is closed because of a US government shutdown in Washington, DC, on December 22, 2018. The partial US government shutdown is set to stretch as the Senate adjourns with no deal to end it in sight. —AFP

European markets slide as global rally falters

LONDON: Europe's major stock markets kicked lower yesterday as investors shrugged off bumper Wall Street gains, cashed in recent profits and eyed mounting uncertainties on the horizon of the global economy. Wall Street had roared back to life on Wednesday, shaking off four straight routs following strong retail sales data and White House reassurances that Federal Reserve Chair Jay Powell won't be fired.

Asian equities mostly sparked yesterday, with Tokyo surging but Chinese stocks slid on weak data. European equities also hit a wall, slipping into negative territory in low-volume trade with many investors away for a long festive break. In late morning deals, Frankfurt stocks tanked 1.7 percent as the market opened for the first time this week—and played catch-up with Monday's heavy losses elsewhere in Europe. London sank 0.8 percent and Paris shed almost 0.1 percent compared with Monday's closing levels.

"The rally which we experienced over on Wall Street yesterday has hit the wall," ThinkMarkets analyst Naeem Aslam said. "Investors are busy profit-taking. Basically, we are struggling for the momentum to continue." New York stocks had hurtled higher in post-Christmas trade on



TOKYO: Pedestrians walk past a stock indicator board showing the share price of the Tokyo Stock Exchange (left) and the New York Dow (right) in Tokyo yesterday. —AFP

Wednesday, following strong data and White House reassurances that Powell would remain in his post. Sentiment also improved after a Bloomberg News report said a US government delegation would travel to Beijing in early January to hold trade talks, the first face-to-face discussion since US President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping agreed on a 90-day trade war truce.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average finished up nearly 1,100 points, or about five percent, at 22,878.45 points, and the broad-based S&P 500 also flew five percent higher. Investors in Europe however took the new-found optimism in their stride. Russ Mould, investment director at stockbroker AJ Bell, warned that Wednesday's "Boxing Day bonanza" could yet prove to be a "bear trap". —AFP

Russia plays down idea of forming a joint body with OPEC

MOSCOW: It is highly unlikely that OPEC and other oil producers would set up a joint structure due to the additional red tape it would create as well as the risk of US monopoly-related sanctions, Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak said yesterday. The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and other top oil producers led by Russia have since the end of 2016 made an unprecedented joint effort to curb output and support prices.

OPEC and Russia jointly produce more than 40 percent of the world's oil. Russia's energy ministry had said that Moscow and OPEC lynchpin Saudi Arabia had reached a general agreement that the OPEC+ format should be "institutional-

ized" and extended until 2019 and beyond to monitor the market and take joint action if needed.

However, Novak said such an idea has been ditched. "There is a consensus that there will be no such organization. That's because it requires additional bureaucratic brouhaha in relation to financing, cartel, with the US side," Novak told a briefing to reporters.

I think, non-OPEC (countries) will not agree as they don't want to be hit by sanctions."

Proposed US legislation known as "NOPEC" could open OPEC up to anti-trust lawsuits but has long laid dormant, with previous US presidents signalling that they would veto any move to make it law. However, US President Donald Trump has been a vocal critic of OPEC, blaming it for high oil prices and urging it to increase output.

"This won't be an organization, this is some mechanism of cooperation: to convene, to discuss, adopt some memorandums, joint resolutions," Novak said about future cooperation with OPEC. —Reuters

Business

Huawei expects 21% revenue rise despite 'unfair' treatment

Britain voices 'grave' concerns over Huawei's 5G use

BEIJING: Chinese telecoms giant Huawei expects to see a 21 percent rise in revenue for 2018, its chairman said yesterday despite a year of "unfair treatment" which saw its products banned in several countries over security concerns.

Huawei would report sales revenue of \$108.5 billion, up 21 percent year-on-year, rotating chairman Guo Ping said in a New Year message to staff. Guo also said the firm had signed 26 commercial contracts for its 5G technology despite what he described as a year of "incredibly unfair treatment".

"Huawei has never and will never present a security threat," Guo wrote in the message titled "Fire is the Test of Gold". "Setbacks will only make us more courageous, and incredibly unfair treatment will drive us to become the world's number one," he added.

The company has been under fire this year, with Washington leading efforts to blacklist Huawei internationally. A top Huawei executive was also arrested in Canada earlier this month at the request of the US, which is engaged in a bruising trade war with China.

This month, Britain's largest mobile provider BT announced it was removing Huawei equipment from its 4G cellular network after the foreign intelligence service singled out the company as a security risk.

In November, New Zealand's intelligence agency barred Huawei equipment in the rollout of the country's 5G network on the same grounds.

Australia and the United States also enacted

similar bans earlier this year, leaving Canada the only country in the "Five Eyes" intelligence network not to take steps against the Chinese firm.

Huawei founder Ren is a former People's Liberation Army engineer and there are concerns of close links with the Chinese military and government, which the firm has constantly denied.

Last week, the Chinese tech firm sought to dispel the fears around its technology by taking the unprecedented step of opening its research and development labs to media. "Banning a particular company cannot resolve cybersecurity concerns," Huawei's rotating chairman Ken Hu told reporters.

Clean record

Meanwhile, chief financial officer Meng Wanzhou, who was arrested on December 1, is fighting extradition to the US where she faces charges of violating Iranian trade-related sanctions. She has been released on bail and is now living under electronic surveillance in a luxury home in Vancouver. Following her arrest, two Canadians were detained in China on grounds of national security in what has largely been seen as retaliation for Meng's case.

Meanwhile, British Defense Secretary Gavin Williamson has warned of his "very deep concerns" about Chinese technology giant Huawei being involved in the use of 5G on Britain's mobile network, The Times reported Thursday.

"I have grave, very deep concerns about Huawei providing the 5G network in Britain. It's something we'd have to look at very

with a general statement that foreign firms' IP rights would be protected, in 2015. As trade tension flares, there has been growing caution in countries like the United States and Germany about Chinese companies - backed by the state and flush with cash - obtaining advanced foreign technology through aggressive acquisitions abroad.

In an apparent move to emphasize reciprocity, the draft law said China would reserve the right to retaliate against countries that discriminate Chinese investment with "corresponding measures".

'As soon as possible'

The draft law - the first of its kind - has been submitted to the National People's Congress Standing Committee, which began a session on Sunday, and will hold public consultations until Feb. 24. Once adopted, the law will replace three existing ones that regulate joint ventures and wholly foreign-owned enterprises, although it will likely go through several readings before being submitted for formal approval, which could take another year or more.

However, state news agency Xinhua said on Thursday that many lawmakers were calling for a prompt deliberation of the draft to put it to "a vote as soon as possible". Committee member Li Fei, however, suggested it should be put before the full session of the largely rubber-stamp assembly when it convenes its annual session in March, the news agency reported. —Reuters



HANGZHOU: Visitors look at a traffic communication system supported by Huawei 5G technology at the 2018 International Intelligent Transportation Industry Expo in Hangzhou in China's eastern Zhejiang province. —AFP

closely," Williamson was quoted as saying by the newspaper.

"We've got to look at what partners such as Australia and the US are doing in order to ensure that they have the maximum security of that 5G network," he said.

"We've got to recognize the fact, as has been recently exposed, that the Chinese state does sometimes act in a malign way," he said. Williamson's comments echo similar warnings from MI6 spy agency chief Alex Younger who

earlier this year said Britain would have to make "some decisions" about the involvement of firms such as Huawei.

Britain's government earlier this year announced the West Midlands region in central England would become the first large-scale testing area for 5G. Fifth-generation mobile networks, or 5G, will have faster transmission speeds and could enable a far wider use of self-driving vehicles and internet-powered household objects. —AFP

China's draft foreign investment law bans forced tech transfer

BEIJING/SHANGHAI: China has proposed a ban on forced technology transfer and illegal government "interference" in foreign business operations, practices that have come under the spotlight in a trade dispute with the United States. A draft foreign investment law, the full text of which was published by the top legislature on Wednesday, comes as China tries to resolve its protracted standoff with the United States, which accuses it of unfair trade practices including intellectual property (IP) theft and forced IP transfer.

While China has frequently denied such accusations, it has pledged to improve market access for foreign investors and better protect their rights in the face of growing complaints and slower foreign investment. The final draft law, with 39 articles, was far shorter than a version released in 2015, but took a notably stronger line on IP protection.

"Official authorities and their staff shall not use administrative means to force the transfer of technology," the draft says. That compares

Russia faces higher inflation, economic slowdown in 2019

MOSCOW: Russia's economy will hit some speed bumps in 2019 and inflation will rise, a Reuters monthly poll showed yesterday, due to risks of new sanctions, a weaker ruble and a planned tax increase. Russian economic growth has been below the global average in the past few years, hampered by a weak and volatile currency, a drop in oil prices, and by sanctions first imposed by the European Union and the United States in 2014 after Russia's annexation of Crimea.

Russia's seizure of three Ukrainian navy vessels in November prompted calls for more sanctions on Moscow. The EU decided against further measures but extended its existing ones targeting Russia's defence, energy and banking sectors, until mid-2019.

Several times in 2018, Washington has raised the possibility of more sanctions for what has called Moscow's "malign activities", with new penalties possibly targeting holdings of Russian state debt.

"The main risks are related to sanctions," said Oleg Kouzmin, chief economist at Renaissance Capital.

After expanding by 1.7 percent in 2018, Russia's gross domestic product is seen growing by 1.4 percent in 2019, the consensus forecast of 17 analysts and economists showed. This is below the World Bank's estimate that the global economy grew 3.1 percent in 2018. "The next year will be tough. Economic growth will slow amid an increase to the value-added tax (VAT), higher inflation and lending rates," Kouzmin said.

The planned VAT hike to 20 percent from 18 percent is expected to fuel consumer inflation, the central bank's main remit. The central bank had to raise rates twice in the second half of 2018 in a pre-emptive move to avoid a spike in inflation. But the Reuters monthly poll showed analysts expected inflation to exceed its 4 percent target and to accelerate to 5 percent by the end of 2019.

In 2019, the central bank is seen keeping the key rate unchanged at 7.75 percent but poll forecasts varied from 7.50 to 8.25 percent. "The sanctions risks together with substantially lower oil prices could anchor the ruble at low levels, which will add upside pressure on inflation," said Tatiana Evdokimova, chief economist at Nordea Bank in Moscow. —Reuters

Business

London's Gatwick airport sold to French Vinci conglomerate

Brexit proximity probably helped conglomerate close the deal

PARIS: French building conglomerate Vinci said yesterday it was adding Gatwick airport, Britain's second-busiest, to the dozens of hubs it already owns, booking a majority stake for nearly three billion pounds. The purchase of Gatwick, which is Europe's eight-biggest airport and runs the busiest single runway in the world, comes only months before Britain is to leave the European Union.

The proximity of Brexit "probably helped us close the deal", Nicolas Notebaert, Vinci Airports chief, told a telephone conference. The absence of a Brexit deal with the EU could cause major air travel problems as both sides would no longer recognize each other's aviation safety standards.

Vinci said it will own a 50.01-percent stake in Gatwick thanks to the deal worth £2.9 billion (\$3.7 billion, 3.2 billion euros) by the end of June. Gatwick made headlines last week when it closed its runway repeatedly due to reports of mystery drone sightings nearby, impacting nearly 140,000 passengers.

Best known for motorways

Vinci is best-known for being one of the world's biggest construction companies, employing close to 200,000 people across the globe, and for running motorways in France.

But the company has also been buying up

airports—most recently in Brazil, Japan and Serbia—making it "a top 5 global player in the international airport sector", according to a statement by Gatwick. One of its best-known airports is the hub of Portugal's capital Lisbon.

With the latest acquisition, Vinci Airports will control 46 airports in 12 countries with a total traffic of 228 million passengers a year. Gatwick, which in Britain is second only to Heathrow, will become the biggest airport in Vinci's portfolio, making the purchase "a major strategic move", the French company said.

"The transaction represents a rare opportunity to acquire an airport of such size and quality and fits extremely well with Vinci Concessions' long-term investment horizon," it said.

Gatwick's CEO Stewart Wingate said there would be no management or operational changes to the "immediate" running of the airport. He said the deal would mean "continuity but also further investment for passengers". Global Infrastructure Partners, the current owners of Gatwick, will hold on to 49.99 percent in the airport.

Gatwick's only runway hit a world record of 950 flights in a day in 2017, Vinci said.

"The airport constantly innovates in all areas of operations (for example passenger self-baggage drop, aircraft queuing systems, parking products) and reaches very high level of opera-



LONDON: Passengers queue with their luggage near the Departures hall in the South Terminal building at London Gatwick Airport, south of London. —AFP

tional efficiency," it said.

"The whole Vinci Airports network will benefit from Gatwick Airport's world-class management and operational excellence, which has allowed it to deliver strong and steady growth in

a very constrained environment," Notebaert said in a statement. Vinci's share price stood 0.3 percent higher at 70.70 euros in midday Paris trading, slightly outperforming the overall bourse index. —AFP

China's industrial profits suffer first drop in 3 years

BEIJING: Earnings at China's industrial firms in November dropped for the first time in nearly three years, as slackening external and domestic demand left businesses facing more strain in 2019 in a sign of rising risks to the world's second-largest economy.

The gloomy data points to a further loss of economic momentum as a trade dispute with the United States piles pressure on China's vast manufacturing sector and as firms, bracing for a tough year ahead, shelve their investment plans, executives say.

Industrial profits fell 1.8 percent in November from a year earlier to 594.8 billion yuan (\$86.33 billion), the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said on its website yesterday. It marked the first decline since December 2015. The fall in profits largely reflected slowing growth in sales and producer prices as well as rising costs, He Ping of the statistics bureau said in a statement accompanying the data.

Economists expect earnings to continue to worsen next year, weighed down by smaller gains in industrial prices due to cooling demand, with

some even warning of the risk of deflation.

"Soft economic indicators such as producer prices, industrial output and orders all point to further pressure on corporate profitability," said Nie Wen, a Shanghai-based analyst at Hwabao Trust, adding that firms' revenues have been hit by shrinking demand.

"Industrial profits next year might very well post a 5-10 percent decline on average."

In November, China's factory price growth slowed to the weakest pace in two years as domestic demand lost further momentum. "Survival is paramount for us (next year) - we will be more cautious with our investments," Jiang Ming, chairman of Henan-based Tianming Group that has businesses in healthcare, construction and finance, told Reuters. "We also need to maintain better cashflows and save our ammunition to prepare for the tight, tough and difficult days ahead." China's economy expanded at the slowest pace last quarter since the global financial crisis, hit by a years-long deleveraging campaign, cooling property market and a trade dispute with the United States, and is expected to cool further next year.

The growing pressure has prompted the government to roll out a range of measures to juice up demand. In a key annual economic conference held this month the country's top leaders said they will ratchet up support for the economy in 2019 by cutting taxes and keeping liquidity ample, while promising to push forward trade negotiations with the United States. —Reuters

US Fed chairman's job '100%' safe: Trump advisor

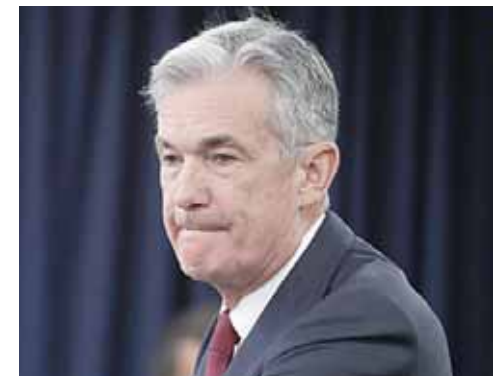
WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump has no intention of firing the chairman of the Federal Reserve, despite his barrages of criticism against the central bank, White House economic advisor Kevin Hassett said Wednesday.

"Yes, of course, 100 percent," Hassett said when asked on ABC television whether Fed boss Jerome Powell would keep his job. Hassett also downplayed jitters over the economic outlook, following plummeting stock market prices.

"All the anecdotal information we're getting is that the fundamentals remain extremely sound," Hassett said, as Wall Street bounced back from its most recent losses.

Hassett said that Christmas-period shopping had been "through the roof" and that the economy was still expanding at a good pace, with "the momentum that we saw this year... carrying over to next year." The Trump advisor likewise sought to calm nerves triggered by revelations that Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin phoned the CEOs of America's biggest banks last weekend to check that they have healthy liquidity levels.

The calls—apparently meant to demonstrate the White House's grip on the volatile situation—backfired by sparking concerns that the



Federal Reserve Board Chairman Jerome Powell

government might be worried about a run on the banks.

"Secretary Mnuchin talks to bankers all the time, practically every day and you know, the markets clearly are focused on downside risk for next year and it's important to gather information from the normal sources and from informal sources and you know," Hassett said. "We've all been doing that really quite a bit over the few weeks."

Hassett said that the ongoing budget impasse in which swaths of the federal government are going without funding, due to Congress' refusal to authorize Trump's demand for more money on a US-Mexico border barrier, would not harm the economy. "A few weeks shutdown is not going to be something that has any kind of significant effect on the outlook," he said. —AFP

Business

Amazon, Walmart face hit from new India e-commerce rules

Global giants may rethink their Indian operations

NEW DELHI: Traditional traders and local players rejoiced yesterday at new e-commerce rules imposed by the Indian government on global giants such as Amazon and Walmart which analysts said could force them to rethink their Indian operations.

Under the surprise restrictions, e-commerce companies are banned from selling products from firms in which they have a stake. They are also forbidden from entering into exclusive deals with sellers.

The rules, which come into force on February 1, will particularly hit Amazon, which has invested billions of dollars in its India operation, and Flipkart, which was taken over this year by another US giant, Walmart. The government acted in response to complaints from brick and mortar retailers that e-commerce giants were unfairly selling products at discount prices.

Indian law already prevents foreign-owned companies from selling directly on their internet sites. So the e-commerce companies have been buying in bulk and then selling the products to favored vendors. These then resell the products at discount on the e-commerce sites who legally remain intermediaries.

Amazon and Walmart, which in May bought a 77 percent stake in Indian company Flipkart for \$16 billion, will be worst hit by the new rules. Neither has made a public reaction. Snapdeal, one of India's biggest Internet

shopping sites, said the changes would enable a level playing field for all sellers.

"Marketplaces are meant for genuine, independent sellers, many of whom are MSMEs (Micro, small and medium enterprises)," Snapdeal founder Kunal Bahl said on Twitter.

The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) said the new policy would end discounting wars between e-retailers. It would also check big companies from using "the policy of exclusivity, predatory pricing and deep discounting" to their advantage, CAIT secretary Praveen Khandelwal told AFP.

The new rules will start on February 1 when the nationalist government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi announces its interim budget ahead of a general election due by May. Analysts said the rule would have a major impact on the business models built up over the last five years by the US giants as they make inroads in India's growing market.

"Amazon, Walmart and other players with their India investments will have to rethink their business strategies," Satish Meena from Forrester Research said.

"Consumers will face the brunt and prices will go up while available options will go down." The Indian government has in the past two years sought to strengthen home-grown enterprises against foreign competition. It has told credit card companies such as Visa, American Express and Mastercard that all in-

formation on Indians must be stored on India-based computers.

value me with pretty good pay," he said. "I already got a pay hike after joining the company, which motivated me to work even harder. Merit-based pay is more fitting to the times." In recent years, Mercari said, it has been hiring college students throughout the year to grab workers with needed skills. The company even offers jobs to some second-year or third-year students. Mercari also has a program called "Mergrads" to provide internships and training to improve new graduates' skills. And since April, it started offering higher pay to some job candidates with skills in information technology engineering and computer programming, said Ayano Okuda of Mercari, who is in charge of hiring new graduates. She declined to discuss the company's pay scale. "The competition is surely heating up," she said. "We judge each individual's ability and offer them attractive salaries reflecting their skills."

Mass hiring

For decades, Japan's traditional spring hirings underpinned the economy and provided a clear corporate and social ladder, grounded in - and reinforcing - the cultural emphasis on loyalty and conformity. Under Japan's often choreographed business practices, the Keidanren, the largest business lobby, had a "voluntary" timetable that many companies followed: Start recruiting new employees on March 1, begin job interviews with fourth-year students on June 1 and informally offer jobs on Oct. 1 - six months before graduation. —Reuters



NEW DELHI: In this file photo taken on May 12, 2018 Indian protesters take part in a demonstration against a deal between US retail giant Walmart and Indian online sales company Flipkart in New Delhi. —AFP

formation on Indians must be stored on India-based computers.

The government has also proposed limits on what internet giants can do with personal data.

It recently proposed that the WhatsApp messaging app break its trademark encryption which guarantees private communications between users. The Facebook-owned firm has fiercely resisted the calls. —AFP

A scramble for new workers disrupts traditional hiring in Japan

TOKYO: It's a rite of spring in Japan: Major corporations hire fresh university graduates en masse every April, starting them all at the same salary with assurances of rising pay and lifetime employment.

But lately, some companies, including Rakuten, SoftBank and Line Corp, are breaking with that tradition, signing up new employees with coveted technical skills months earlier - and paying them more than other new recruits. As competition for workers grows in Japan's shrinking labour pool, traditional seniority and group dynamics are giving ground to the more individualised, merit-based employment system found in the West. It is a welcome sign for Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's government and the central bank, which have been pushing for a more flexible labor market that would boost wages and revive consumption.

Takashi Murakami, a 23-year-old producer at Mercari, which developed a popular flea market app, says seniority-based pay and lifetime employment are relics.

"I'm grateful that the company seems to

Vietnam posts decade-high growth of 7.1% in 2018

HANOI: Vietnam's growth soared to more than 7 percent this year, its highest in a decade, helped by a surge in its manufacturing sector. The country has long been one of Asia's fastest growing economies-GDP growth topped 5 percent over the past five years-largely driven by the exports of cheap manufactured goods, from Nike shoes to H&M T-shirts, as well as tech products like Samsung phones and Intel computer processors.

But this year's growth surpassed the communist government's target of 6.7 percent, hitting 7.08 percent, according to figures released yesterday by the General Statistics Office in Hanoi.

"The processing and manufacturing sector was the bright point and the main driver for

the overall growth" with a 12.98 percent increase, said GSO head Nguyen Bich Lam.

He added the economy would remain robust next year with the expected contribution of manufacturing projects such as Vinfast, a local car assembly company owned by Vietnam's largest private conglomerate Vingroup. Run by Vietnam's richest man Pham Nhat Vuong, Vingroup also recently unveiled its first made-in-Vietnam mobile phones in an effort to gain a slice of the lucrative market.

However, the World Bank predicted a slowdown over the next two years if Vietnam does not protect itself from escalating global trade tensions. "As an open economy, Vietnam needs to maintain a responsive monetary policy, exchange rate flexibility and low fiscal deficits to enhance its resilience against potential shocks," said Sebastian Eckardt, the bank's lead economist for Vietnam.

A bruising trade war between the US and China has caused reverberations around the region, as Washington and Beijing have slapped tit-for-tat tariffs on more than \$300 billion worth of goods. But relations have eased after both sides agreed to a 90-day truce earlier this month. —AFP

Sports

Rafael Nadal confident about fitness for Australian Open

Djokovic looking to win third major in a row at Australian Open

ABU DHABI: Rafael Nadal is “confident” he will be 100 percent fit when the Australian Open starts in less than three weeks’ time despite enduring yet another tough battle with injuries over the past few months.

The Spanish world number two had to pull the plug early on his 2018 season and has not played since a knee problem forced him to retire during his US Open semi-final against Juan Martin del Potro in September.

He underwent surgery on his ankle to remove an intra-articular loose body in November and only resumed training two weeks ago. Nadal will dip his toes back into competition at the Mubadala World Tennis Championship exhibition in Abu Dhabi, where he faces either Kevin Anderson or Chung Hyeon in his opener on Friday.

“I started two weeks ago and of course doing the things step by step and I think I have time to be ready for Melbourne at my 100 percent,” Nadal told reporters in the UAE capital on Thursday.

“It’s going to be good to have some matches before but I’m confident that I’m going to arrive to Melbourne with the right situation.” The 32-year-old retired during matches at two of the four Grand Slams in 2018, but still added a record-extending 11th French Open crown to his collection.

He says he remains motivated to launch yet another comeback from injury, despite a career plagued by physical problems. “After the second part of the year, have been tough last year in terms of injuries but that happens and that’s part of my tennis

career too,” he added.

“Just try to stay calm, try to work the right way and when I’m back I know things are not easy, I know at the beginning you always have tough feelings and pains in the body that normally you don’t have.

“But I have experience in all of this and try to be ready for the everyday practices and when (I) arrive (at) the matches I don’t have to ask myself big things at the beginning, just trying to be positive with every improvement and that way normally you get the right point.”

DJOKOVIC ENJOYING TENNIS AGAIN

Joining Nadal in Abu Dhabi is the man who replaced him at the top of the rankings, Novak Djokovic. The Serb is the reigning Wimbledon and US Open champion and will be looking to win a third major in a row at the Australian Open next month.

Djokovic ended a two-year Grand Slam title drought at Wimbledon in July and has lost just three matches since. He admits that he lost his motivation during the difficult period that followed the 2016 French Open, where he completed the career Grand Slam, but has now found different ways to attain gratification from the sport.

“I feel I’m not prioritising success on the tennis court for the sake of the success only as I used to do that probably up to five years ago,” Djokovic said. “For me, tennis is more of a platform now for other things and for the values I want to share, and the messages I want to share with the young generation.



Rafael Nadal

“Ultimately a tennis court for me is a place where I get challenged in every possible way emotionally and my character is kind of on the line. I treat that as my own personal school of life. “Not many places can trigger me in a positive or negative way as a tennis court does.”

Djokovic takes on either Karen Khachanov or Dominic Thiem in Abu Dhabi today and officially kicks off his 2019 season at the Qatar Open in Doha next week. — AFP

Serena hails rule changes to protect mothers in tennis

ABU DHABI: Serena Williams has described the new changes to the ‘Special Ranking’ rule introduced by the WTA for 2019 as “great” and believes the move will encourage more players to take a break from the tour to have children then come back to resume their careers.

Under the new rules, returning mothers who have a special ranking that would earn them a seeded position can be drawn as an ‘additional seed’ at tournaments, meaning they would not be able to face a seed in the opening round of a tournament.

This change also ensures that no seed will get bumped as a result of a returning mother given a protected seeding. Williams, along with other mothers on tour like former world number one Victoria Azarenka, had been advocating for such rule changes that would ease the transition back for players following the birth of their children.

“I think it’s great,” Williams said of the new rule changes during a press conference in Abu Dhabi ahead of an exhibition match against her sister Venus yesterday. “Women that are younger can go out there and have kids and not have to worry about it and not have to wait ‘til the twilight of their years to have children and I think it’s a really great rule.”

The 37-year-old American had her daughter Alexis Olympia in September 2017 and returned to the WTA circuit last March at Indian Wells. “I think having gone through the experience myself really opened my eyes up to me and, ‘Would have I done it sooner had there been different rule changes?’ I don’t know. But now



Serena Williams

that there is an opportunity, people don’t have to ask that question anymore,” added Williams, who is currently ranked 16 in the world.

“I think it’s a great rule change. I think it is a lot. But I feel like it’s just something that’s always going to be there and be special and “m happy that they did it.” The Mubadala World Tennis Championship in Abu Dhabi will be Williams’ first on-court appearance since she lost the US Open final to Naomi Osaka in September amid a wave of controversy that resulted from her outburst at chair umpire Carlos Ramos, whom she accused of sexism.

“I’m feeling good. I’ve been training for a couple of months now and I’m getting ready for the new year,” the 23-time Grand Slam champion said in the UAE capital. — AFP

Zverev blasts fifth set tie-breaks at Australian Open

PERTH: World number four Alexander Zverev has hit out at the decision to use tie-breaks in the final sets of the Australian Open, claiming players were not consulted and it deprived the tournament of “something special”.

Organisers have decided to follow Wimbledon in abandoning advantage final sets at the opening Grand Slam of the season in Melbourne next month. In matches that reach 6-6 in the final set, the winner will now be the first to reach 10 points.

But young German star Zverev, seen as the future of tennis and who had a breakthrough 2018, said he wasn’t a fan. “We weren’t (consulted) at all. I don’t think any players were (asked), to be honest,” he said in comments in The Australian newspaper Thursday as he prepares for the Hopman Cup in Perth, where he is partnering Wimbledon champion Angelique Kerber.

“I don’t like the change too much because I think it has something special when you go 12-10 in the fifth set, or something like that. “I really enjoyed those kind of situations, really enjoy those kind of matches, even though they are physically tough. “These are the things we play for, and now, at every Grand Slam except for Roland Garros, there is a tiebreak, which I am not in favour of.” Australian Open organisers earlier this month said the decision was made “following the most extensive consultation in the tournament’s history”.

Tournament director Craig Tiley said: “We asked the players—both past and present, commentators, agents and TV analysts whether they wanted to play an advantage final set or not, and went from there.”

He added that the choice of the longer 10-point tiebreak would “ensure the fans still get a special finale to these often epic contests”. Wimbledon said in October it was introducing final-set tie-breaks, but only once the score reached 12-12. The change came after Kevin Anderson’s semi-final with John Isner this year lasted nearly three hours. Anderson eventually won the fifth set 26-24 but the exhausted South African went on to lose the final in straight sets to Novak Djokovic. Anderson led calls for the rules to be changed. The Australian Open takes place from January 14 to 27. — AFP

Tight battle 'all the way to finish line' for Sydney-Hobart glory

The four-way battle could be the closest since 1982

SYDNEY: Four supermaxis were yesterday neck-and-neck in a fierce battle to cross the finish line first in what organisers said was the closest contest in the history of the Sydney to Hobart race. Just three nautical miles were separating the mega-yachts as they raced down Australia's east coast, with defending line honours champion Comanche slightly ahead of Black Jack, Wild Oats XI and Infotrack.

The lead had been switching regularly between 100-footer Comanche and fierce rival Wild Oats XI since the fleet of yachts departed a sunny Sydney Harbour on Boxing Day Wednesday at the start of the 628-nautical mile (1,163-kilometre) endurance race. "It is by far the closest race ever," skipper Mark Richards of eight-time line honours Wild Oats XI said from the boat yesterday. His yacht was first to Hobart in 2017 but was stripped of the win after being handed a one-hour penalty over a near-collision. "I think it will go all the way to the finish line." The yachts were off the record pace of one day, nine hours, 15 minutes and 24 seconds set by Comanche last year, amid lighter winds. The breeze in the notoriously wild Bass Strait between Tasmania and the Australian mainland varied on Thursday, with the vessels supported by 15-25 knot northeasterly winds that weakened at times to six knots.

"It's not usual to have four quite different boats all in the same patch of water," said Black Jack navigator Tom Addis from his yacht. "These boats are all very different. They all have different strengths and weaknesses. This is the most inter-

esting race in the 100 footers... There's a good chance that we're all going to be together (near the finish)." The four-way battle could be the closest since 1982, when the yacht Condor beat Apollo by just seven seconds.

'CAT AND MOUSE'

Smaller boats led by Midnight Rambler were in the race for handicaps honours, which goes to the vessel that performs best according to size. TP52 Ichi Ban-last year's handicap honours winner-dropped off the lead Thursday afternoon before climbing up the ranks in the evening in pursuit of back-to-back victories.

Richards said he expected to cross the finish line in Hobart on Friday morning, but could be slowed if the breeze weakens. The commodore of organiser the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia, Paul Billingham, tipped a later arrival time of 12pm-2pm, a reflection of the uncertain conditions.

A big unknown will be the conditions on the Derwent in Hobart, a fickle river that could offer up windless holes which can halt a boat for hours. Billingham earlier told national broadcaster ABC the wind was dying amid the "cat and mouse game" between the supermaxis and the close handicap contest. "The handicap lead is changing every five minutes. There's probably 10 boats that are within an hour of each other on corrected time," he said.

The fleet in the gruelling contest is down to 81 from 85, after Hong Kong supermaxi Scallywag retired early with a broken bowsprit, followed by



SYDNEY: This handout from Rolex/Studio Borlenghi taken and released yesterday shows Infotrack yacht competing in the Sydney to Hobart yacht race near Tasmania. —AFP

Zen, Patriot and M3 Team Hungary.

The crews yesterday afternoon marked the 20th anniversary of the 1998 edition of the race,

where a fatal storm saw six sailors lose their lives, with a moment of silence and the reading out of a commemoration message. —AFP

Schumacher in F1's thoughts as stricken great turns 50

LONDON: Michael Schumacher is in Formula One's thoughts as the seven times world champion approaches his 50th birthday, five years on from the near-fatal skiing accident that has left the Ferrari great fighting brain injuries behind a wall of secrecy.

The German, still the sport's most successful driver in terms of wins (91) and titles, will reach his half century on Jan 3. Formula One's focus will be on highlighting the remarkable career and talents of a man whose fame stretched well beyond the racetrack, and who enthused a legion of fans in the 1990s and early years of this century.

The Ferrari museum in Maranello, Italy, is planning a special exhibition, opening on his birthday and lasting for a few months, "both as a celebration and a mark of gratitude to the most successful Prancing Horse driver ever."

Mercedes, the last team Schumacher

drove for in Formula One before retirement in 2012, will have some of his cars on display at their museum in Stuttgart.

Formula One management will also dedicate a week to Schumacher on its social media platforms, including exclusive interviews with many of those who were part of the German's Formula One story.

"We are going to celebrate Michael's birthday," said a spokesman.

Schumacher remains a big part of the sport's narrative, with Mercedes driver Lewis Hamilton now a five times world champion with 73 wins and getting ever closer to the German's greatest records.

Hanging over it all, however, will be a strong sense of sadness—just as every anniversary since his Dec. 29, 2013, fall while skiing off piste near Meribel in the French Alps with his family.

CONSIDERABLE CONJECTURE

Schumacher hit his head on a rock and spent months in an artificial coma after being rushed to hospital in a critical condition.

"We think a lot about him," Mercedes motorsport head Toto Wolff told Reuters. "He was an exceptional sportsman, and he's missed. "As a seven times world champion he's missed within the paddock, he's missed as a consultant to us, somebody we've been looking up to. We hope that his recovery

continues to be positive and that's the most important thing."

Just how positive, or otherwise, is a matter of considerable conjecture and one met with resolute silence from his wife Corinna, the family and those who always formed part of Schumacher's innermost circle.

They would prefer the world remembered Schumacher as the champion he was, rather than the different kind of fighter he has become. Sabine Kehm, Schumacher's trusted assistant and spokeswoman who now also manages the racing career of his son Mick, continues to guard his privacy with polite but firm determination.

"In general the media have never reported on Michael and Corinna's private life," she said in 2016. "When he was in Switzerland, for example, it was clear he was a private individual. "Once in a long discussion Michael said to me, 'You don't need to call me for the next year, I'm disappearing.' I think it was his secret dream to be able to do that some day. That's why now I still want to protect his wishes in that I don't let anything get out."

It is clear that if Schumacher were to have made a miraculous recovery, the good news would have been known quickly enough. The fact nothing has been said, in itself speaks volumes. Amid enduring media speculation, be it rumoured moves for treatment elsewhere or concerning Schumacher's general



Michael Schumacher turns 50 on January 3.

mobility, any shred of bona fide information from behind the walls of the family's lakeside Swiss mansion is news.

One such snippet was provided by Swiss archbishop Georg Ganswein, who told the mass-circulation German magazine Bunte recently about a 2016 visit to Schumacher.

"I sat opposite him, held his hands and looked at him. His face is just as we know it, the typical Michael Schumacher face. Only a bit fuller," he said. "He feels that loving people are around him and care for him and, thank God, keep the all too curious public away. A man who is sick needs discretion and understanding." —Reuters

Sports

Brilliant Boult 'in the groove' as N Zealand take full control

'It is probably one of the best swing bowling grounds in the country'

CHRISTCHURCH: Chief destroyer Trent Boult felt he was "in the groove" as his sublime six-wicket spell, backed by half-centuries from Tom Latham and Jeet Raval gave New Zealand a vice-like grip on the second Test against Sri Lanka in Christchurch yesterday.

At the close of the second day, New Zealand were 231 for two, holding a commanding 305-run lead in their second innings with eight wickets in hand. Sri Lanka's hopes of taking the series-deciding Test were severely dented in a 15-ball masterclass of swing bowling from Boult when he took six wickets for four runs to give New Zealand a 74-run first innings advantage.

"It is probably one of the best swing bowling grounds in the country. It was quite still out there and the ball was in good nick as well," Boult said. "It is nice to get the ball moving around, making the most of it. 'It's all about rhythm for me anyway. I suppose getting into a groove, a couple of wickets gives you a bit of confidence and just lets you go about your thing. Sometimes you're not really thinking about much and it's kind of happening for you.'" With the Sri Lanka innings in tatters, New Zealand took 74-run first-innings lead, which Latham and Raval extended to 195 with a century opening stand.

'WE ARE WELL BEHIND' -

Kane Williamson and Latham added a further 68 for the second wicket until Williamson played a

lazy shot to Lahiru Kumara and was caught at first slip for 48. At the close of the second day, Latham was on 74 with Ross Taylor on 25. Latham received a life on 32 when he top-edged Suranga Lakmal to fine leg where the ball slipped through the fingers of a diving Dushmantha Chameera.

Patel, who worked with Latham to produce the first wicketless session in the Test when they batted from lunch to tea, was out in the second over after the resumption for 74. Sri Lanka had resumed at 88 for four harbouring thoughts of overhauling New Zealand's first innings 178.

But nine overs and 16 runs later their last six wickets were gone, all taken by Boult, who finished with a career best six for 30. "Honestly, we are well behind in the game," Sri Lanka batting coach Thiran Samaraweera said, but adding that they remained hopeful.

"Anything can happen. The new ball is due after one over (on Friday). If we can get through a couple of wickets, keep them under 420, that's a good thing." Only Angelo Mathews was able to keep Boult out and he was unbeaten on 33 at the close of the innings. Boult triggered the collapse when he had Roshen Silva caught by Tim Southee at third slip for 21. A diving Southee produced a spectacular one-handed catch in Boult's next over to remove Niroshan Dickwella for four. Dilruwan Perera, Suranga Lakmal, Chameera and Lahiru Kumara all misread Boult and went quickly leg before wicket without scoring to end the innings. — AFP



CHRISTCHURCH: New Zealand's Trent Boult bowls during day two of the second Test cricket match between New Zealand and Sri Lanka at Hagley Park Oval in Christchurch yesterday. — AFP

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at stumps on day two of the second Test between New Zealand and Sri Lanka in Christchurch yesterday:

New Zealand first innings 178 (T. Southee 68, B. Watling 46; Lakmal 5-54)	(Mendis, 5-94 (Silva), 6-100 (Dickwella), 7-100 (Perera), 8-100 (Lakmal), 9-104 (Chameera), 10-104 (Kumara)
Sri Lanka first innings (overnight 88-4):	Bowling: Boult 15-8-30-6, Southee 15-5-35-3, de Grandhomme 6-0-19-1, Wagner 5-0-10-0.
D. Karunaratne c Williamson b Southee 7	
D. Gunathilaka c Raval b Southee 8	
D. Chandimal c Watling b Southee 6	
K. Mendis c Watling b de Grandhomme 15	
A. Mathews not out 33	
R. Silva c Southee b Boult 21	
N. Dickwella c Southee b Boult 4	
D. Perera lbw Boult 0	
S. Lakmal lbw Boult 0	
D. Chameera lbw Boult 0	
L. Kumara lbw Boult 0	
Extras: (b 5, lb 5, nb 0) 10	
Total: (all out; 41 overs) 104	
Fall of wickets: 1-10 (Karunaratne), 2-20 (Chandimal), 3-21 (Gunathilaka), 4-51	
	New Zealand second innings
	J. Raval c Mendis b Perera 74
	T. Latham not out 74
	K. Williamson c Mendis b Kumara 48
	R. Taylor not out 25
	Extras: (b 3, lb 1, wd 3, nb 3) 10
	Total: (for 2 wickets, 79 overs) 231
	Fall: 1-121 (Raval), 2-189 (Williamson)
	Bowling: Lakmal 16-5-38-0, Kumara 19-4-60-1 (1w), Chameera 15-5-53-0 (2w, 2nb), Perera 20-2-57-1 (1nb), Gunathilaka 9-2-19-0.

Bangladesh lifts Smith's Twenty20 tournament ban

DHAKA: Bangladeshi cricket officials yesterday lifted a ban on former Australian captain Steve Smith playing in the forthcoming Twenty20 Bangladesh Premier League, an official said. The ruling means Smith, currently serving a one-year ban from international cricket over a ball-tampering scandal, is free to play for Comilla Victorians in the next edition of the BPL starting on January 5.

He has signed for the side and is expected to join up with teammates in mid-January for the second phase of the BPL as a replacement for Pakistani cricketer Shoab Malik. The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) had initially blocked his participation after other franchises raised objections about Smith, who was not in the initial players' draft list for the tournament.

"We could not give him permission earlier as other franchises had protested his signing," BCB spokesman Jalal Yunus said yesterday. "Today four franchises emailed us separately saying that they have withdrawn their objections for the greater interest of the tournament," he said.

Yunus added that in return other franchises wanted at least one replacement player outside of the players' draft and the BCB had agreed to their



Steve Smith

demand. Australia's ex-vice captain David Warner will also play in the BPL—which concludes on February 8, 2019 — having signed for the Sylhet Sixers as one of their two pre-draft signings.

Smith and Warner were handed year-long international bans for their roles in a ball-tampering scandal that rocked Australian cricket in March. They were also banned from playing in Australia's domestic Sheffield Shield and Big Bash League. The BPL will be Smith's third T20 league outing—after Canada's Global T20 and the Caribbean Premier League—since the ban was imposed. He also recently signed for the Pakistan Super League, which will be played in February and March.

The BPL, which started in 2011, was hit by allegations of match-fixing in its early years. After a suspension, the tournament resumed in 2015 and has since been staged without serious controversy. — AFP

Big-hitting Guptill back in NZ colours

CHRISTCHURCH: Martin Guptill, one of only a handful of players to have scored a double century in one-day cricket, will return to the New Zealand squad for next month's one-day series against Sri Lanka.

All-rounders Doug Bracewell and Jimmy Neesham also return in the 13-man squad named

yesterday. Guptill, whose unbeaten 237 against the West Indies in the 2015 World Cup is the second highest ODI score of all time, has been sidelined by injury in recent months.

"It's great to have Martin back after injury and he'll obviously add all his class and experience to the side," selector Gavin Larsen said as New Zealand build towards next year's World Cup in England and Wales. With the selectors endeavouring to give opportunities to a wider group of players, incumbent one-day wicketkeeper Tom Latham will miss the Sri Lanka series, while Colin de Grandhomme has been rested. — AFP

Sports

Australia openers survive after Kohli, Pujara heroics post huge total

India go in search of a crucial 2-1 lead in four-Test series

MELBOURNE: A 170-run stand between century-maker Cheteshwar Pujara and captain Virat Kohli put India in a dominant position in the third Test yesterday as Australia's openers survived half a dozen nervy overs before the close.

Dogged Pujara stroked 106 and Kohli 82 before they both fell soon after lunch on what until then had been a lifeless Melbourne pitch.

Rohit Sharma was not out 63 after notching his 10th Test half-century when Kohli called a halt to the innings late in the day at 443 for seven as India go in search of a crucial 2-1 lead in the four-Test series.

That gave the tourists' attack six overs before stumps to target Australian openers Marcus Harris and Aaron Finch, who battled through to be eight without loss. "I think we have enough runs on the board. Already today you can see the pitch has started deteriorating and there's variable bounce on it. I don't think it's easy to bat on now," said Pujara.

"Our bowlers have been bowling well so I would say we have enough runs on the board."

Despite the ominous task ahead, Finch insisted Australia could still win. "It's still game on if we bat really well and then back up and bowl well and put India under a lot of pressure," he said. "I think that absolutely all three results are still on the table 100 percent-India, Australia and a draw. It's hard to say after two days with the wicket deteriorating, but we are confident we can bat really big."

STOIC PUJARA

Pujara and Kohli had continued to build their intimidating partnership after coming together when openers Hanuma Vihari and Mayank Agarwal fell on day one. They batted through to lunch with scarcely an alarming moment. But when

Kohli started to take on the short ball soon after being seen by the physio for a back complaint in the afternoon session, he was undone by pace spearhead Mitchell Starc. The Indian run-machine had hit a four and was attempting another boundary next ball when he uppercut to third man for Finch to take an easy catch.

It deprived Kohli of a 26th Test century and the chance to surpass boyhood hero Sachin Tendulkar by making a seventh hundred in Australia. They remain tied on six each. A stoic Pujara had been unflappable in his 319-ball innings until Pat Cummins sent down a rocket that stayed low, breached his defence and clattered into the stumps. Pujara, who has scored more runs and faced more balls than any other batsman in the series, added 38 to his overnight 68 in another tremendous knock by a man who has now scored 17 Test tons and two in this series.

It was an arduous day for Australia's bowlers in hot conditions with Cummins' 3-72 proving the pick. Sharma, back after missing the second Test with an injury, was in good touch, but had a massive let-off on 15 when he swept a Nathan Lyon delivery to square leg where substitute fielder Peter Siddle made a complete mess of a simple catch. Australia's leading spinner finally got a reward in his next over, trapping vice-captain Ajinkya Rahane lbw for 34 as the pitch started to show signs of variable bounce which could spell trouble for the home batsmen.

Lyon had another chance spilled when Cummins fumbled an easy catch from Rishabh Pant near the boundary. Pant finally fell for 39 and when Ravindra Jadeja went soon after, Kohli made the declaration.

The flat track in Melbourne follows much livelier pitches in Adelaide and Perth which produced results in the four-Test series which is on



MELBOURNE: India's batsman Cheteshwar Pujara (R) celebrates reaching his century (100 runs) with team's captain Virat Kohli during day two of the third cricket Test match between Australia and India in Melbourne yesterday. — AFP

a knife-edge at 1-1. Last year's Boxing Day Test saw a dull Ashes draw with England that prompted the match referee to grade the pitch "poor" and there was hope for more juice in it this time round.

Cricket Australia chief executive Kevin Roberts said the pitch would only be fully judged after the Test finishes, but conceded "a sense of urgency in the regeneration of this wicket square". — AFP

Imam takes Pakistan into lead against SA

CENTURION: Imam-ul-Haq scored a half-century as Pakistan made a good start to their second innings on the second day of the first Test against South Africa at SuperSport Park yesterday. Imam was on 57 not out as Pakistan reached 100 for one at tea, an overall lead of 58 in what has been a low-scoring Test.

Imam and opening partner Fakhar Zaman wiped out a first-innings deficit of 42, taking their side two runs into the lead before Zaman flicked a ball from first-innings destroyer Duanne Olivier to fine leg after scoring 12.

The left-handed Imam made a shaky start. He hurried to 15 off 11 balls but all three of his boundaries to that point were off the edge of his bat. He was still on 15 when he was dropped low down by Hashim Amla at first slip off Dale Steyn. But he then batted solidly in reaching fifty off 71 balls with seven fours and a hooked six off Olivier. Imam and Shan Masood (22 not out) added an unbeaten 56 for the second wicket. Earlier, Temba Bavuma and Quinton de Kock steered South Africa to a first-innings lead. Bavuma made 53 and De Kock hit 45 before South Africa were bowled out for 223.

Left-arm fast bowlers Mohammad Amir and Shaheen Shah Afridi took four for 62 and four for 64 respectively. Bavuma moved to an assured half-century off 66 balls but was then tied down by some



PRETORIA: South Africa's Wicketkeeper Quinton de Kock plays a shot during day two of the cricket test match between South Africa and Pakistan at SuperSport Park cricket stadium yesterday in Pretoria. — AFP

accurate bowling before edging Afridi to wicketkeeper and captain Sarfraz Ahmed for 53 off 87 balls with nine fours. De Kock made his runs off 53 balls with five fours before he was last man out, driving Amir to cover. — AFP

SCOREBOARD

Scorecard at stumps on day two of the third Test between Australia and India at the Melbourne Cricket Ground yesterday:

India first innings

M. Agarwal c Paine b Cummins	76
H. Vihari c Finch b Cummins	8
C. Pujara b Cummins	106
V. Kohli c Finch b Starc	82
A. Rahane lbw b Lyon	34
R. Sharma not out	63
R. Pant c Khawaja b Starc	39
R. Jadeja c Paine b Hazlewood	4
Extras (lb14, b15, nb1, w1)	31
Total (7 wickets declared, 169.4 overs)	443
Did not bat: Mohammed Shami, Ishant Sharma, Jasprit Bumrah	
Fall of wickets: 1-40 (Vihari), 2-123 (Agarwal), 3-293 (Kohli), 4-299 (Pujara), 5-361 (Rahane), 6-437 (Pant), 7-443 (Jadeja)	
Bowling: Starc 28-7-87-2, Hazlewood 31.4-10-86-1, Cummins 34-10-72-3, Lyon 48-7-110-1, Marsh 26-4-51-0, Finch 2-0-8-0	

Australia first innings

M. Harris not out	5
A. Finch not out	3
Extras	0
Total (0 wickets, six overs)	8
To bat: Usman Khawaja, Shaun Marsh, Travis Head, Mitchell Marsh, Tim Paine, Josh Hazlewood, Pat Cummins, Nathan Lyon, Mitchell Starc	
Bowling: Sharma 2-1-2-0, Bumrah 3-1-6-0, Jadeja 1-1-0-0.	

Sports

Leonard, Green help Raptors to end Miami Heat's win streak

Mavs beat struggling Pelicans to end losing streak

MIAMI: Kawhi Leonard posted a game-high 30 points and added eight rebounds as the Toronto Raptors snapped the host Miami Heat's five-game win streak with a 106-104 victory on Wednesday night. The Raptors were without point guard Kyle Lowry, who has back pain. But Toronto is 8-1 without Lowry this season. Toronto's Danny Green hit the go-ahead 3-pointer from the right corner with 23 seconds left to give the Raptors a 106-104 lead. On the following possession, a 3-point attempt by Miami's Dwyane Wade fell short. Teammate Justise Winslow grabbed the rebound and missed a 3-pointer with 2.6 seconds left, and Wade failed on a tip-in.

NETS 134, HORNETS 132 (2 OTS)

Joe Harris recorded a steal and drove in for the game-winning fast-break layup with 3.4 seconds left in double overtime as host Brooklyn finally outlasted Charlotte. The Hornets had the ball with less than two seconds' separation between the shot clock and the game clock, but Malik Monk lost the ball as he tried dribbling around Rodions Kurucs. Harris picked up the ball and scored the layup, but the shot clock never reset, so a buzzer signaling a shot clock violation went off just before Charlotte lofted a desperation shot. Officials put 1.6 seconds back on the clock and gave the Hornets the ball at half-court. Monk then missed a desperation heave from just inside half-court to end a wild affair.

SPURS 111, NUGGETS 103

DeMar DeRozan scored 30 points and LaMarcus Aldridge added 27 as San Antonio played its best basketball in the fourth quarter while defeating visiting Denver. Denver led 80-79 after two free throws by Malik Beasley with 9:44 to play before the Spurs fashioned a 15-0 run, with 3-pointers by Marco Belinelli beginning and capping the spurt, to run past the Nuggets. San Antonio ran its advantage to as many as 18 points and had more than enough to hold off a late Denver run.

MAVERICKS 122, PELICANS 119

Rookie Luka Dončić had 21 points and 10 assists as host Dallas ended a six-game losing streak and extended New Orleans' losing streak to five games. DeAndre Jordan added 20 points and 12 rebounds, J.J. Barea scored 18 points, Harrison Barnes and Devin Harris each had 16 points and Maximilian Kleber added 10 for the Mavericks, who improved to 14-3 at home. Anthony Davis had 32 points and 18 rebounds, Jrue Holiday scored 25 and Julius Randle had 23 for the Pelicans, who completed a four-game road trip by falling to 4-15 away from home.

TIMBERWOLVES 119, BULLS 94

Karl Anthony-Towns and Taj Gibson combined for all the scoring in an 8-0 burst to open the game that gave Minnesota the lead for good in its romp over host Chicago. Derrick Rose had a team-high 24 points to go with eight assists, while Towns recorded a 20-point, 20-rebound

double-double for the Timberwolves, who completed a two-game, season-series sweep of the Bulls. The 20-20 game was Towns' third of the season and eighth of his career. It was just the 21st 20-20 game of the NBA season. Only Detroit's Andre Drummond, with six, has more than Towns.

GRIZZLIES 95, CAVALIERS 87

Marc Gasol recorded 20 points, nine rebounds, six assists and four blocked shots to help Memphis post a victory over visiting Cleveland. Mike Conley registered 15 points and eight assists as the Grizzlies won their second straight game following a five-game slide. Kyle Anderson also scored 15 points, while Jaren Jackson Jr. and Garrett Temple added 11 apiece. Jordan Clarkson scored 24 points off the bench for Cleveland, which lost its fourth straight game and sixth in its last seven. Collin Sexton added 16 points and Cedi Osman scored 10 for the Cavaliers, who scored just nine first-quarter points.

PISTONS 106, WIZARDS 95

Blake Griffin scored a game-high 23 points and sparked an early second-half run that gave Detroit the lead for good in a win over visiting Washington. Detroit had lost nine of its previous 11 games, but the burst at the start of the second half gave the Pistons command. They scored 23 of the first 25 points in the third quarter and turned a one-point deficit into a 77-57 lead with 6:39 left in that period. The Pistons began the streak with back-to-back 3-pointers just nine seconds apart from Griffin and Bruce Brown. This same pair each scored five as Detroit posted the first 12 points of the half.

SUNS 122, MAGIC 120 (OT)

Devin Booker helped Phoenix end a successful road trip with an overtime win at Orlando. Booker had 35 points, eight assists and seven rebounds, and T.J. Warren added 24 points for Phoenix. Deandre Ayton was held to just eight points and 12 rebounds. The Suns' rookie center had three straight games of 20 points and 15 rebounds coming into the night. The Suns posted a winning record on a road trip of at least five games for the first time since November 2014. D.J. Augustin had a season-high 27 points, and Nikola Vučević had 22 points and 13 rebounds for the Magic, who have lost four in a row.

PACERS 129, HAWKS 121

Tyreke Evans came back from missing three games with a bruised knee to score 19 points, one of eight Indiana players in double figures in a win over host Atlanta. In 19 minutes, Evans made 7 of 9 shots from the field, including all four of his 3-point attempts, to help the Pacers win their third straight game. Indiana has won 10 of its last 12 games. Atlanta had its season-best three-game winning streak broken. The Pacers also got 21 points from Thaddeus Young, 19 points and eight rebounds from Domantas Sabonis, 16 points apiece from Victor



MIAMI: Kawhi Leonard #2 of the Toronto Raptors passes the ball against the Miami Heat on Wednesday at American Airlines Arena in Miami, Florida. — AFP

NBA results/standings

Detroit 106, Washington 95; Phoenix 122, Orlando 120 (OT); Indiana 129, Atlanta 121 Brooklyn 134, Charlotte 132 (OT); Toronto 106, Miami 104; Minnesota 119, Chicago 94; Memphis 95, Cleveland 87; Dallas 122, New Orleans 119; San Antonio 111, Denver 103; LA Clippers 127, Sacramento 118.

Eastern Conference					Western Conference				
Atlantic Division					Northwest Division				
W	L	PCT	GB						
Toronto	26	10	.722	-	Denver	21	11	.656	-
Philadelphia	22	13	.629	3.5	Oklahoma City	21	12	.636	0.5
Boston	20	13	.606	4.5	Portland	19	15	.559	3
Brooklyn	17	19	.472	9	Utah	17	18	.486	5.5
New York	9	26	.257	16.5	Minnesota	16	18	.471	6
Central Division					Pacific Division				
Milwaukee	23	10	.697	-	Golden State	23	12	.657	-
Indiana	23	12	.657	1	LA Lakers	20	14	.588	2.5
Detroit	16	16	.500	6.5	LA Clippers	20	14	.588	2.5
Chicago	9	26	.257	15	Sacramento	18	16	.529	4.5
Cleveland	8	27	.229	16	Phoenix	9	26	.257	14
Southeast Division					Southwest Division				
Charlotte	16	17	.485	-	Houston	18	15	.545	-
Miami	16	17	.485	-	San Antonio	19	16	.543	-
Orlando	14	19	.424	2	Memphis	18	16	.529	0.5
Washington	13	22	.371	4	Dallas	16	17	.485	2
Atlanta	9	24	.273	7	New Orleans	15	20	.429	4

Oladipo and Bojan Bogdanovic and 14 points from Cory Joseph.

CLIPPERS 127, KINGS 118

Lou Williams scored 24 points off the bench and Los Angeles held on for a win against visiting Sacramento. Montrezl Harrell had 22 points, nine rebounds and five blocked shots off the bench, Tobias Harris

scored 17 points and Avery Bradley added 15 points for the Clippers, who have won seven straight against the Kings. De'Aaron Fox had 19 points and nine assists, Bogdan Bogdanovic scored 13 off the bench and Iman Shumpert finished with 12 points for Sacramento, which was trying to climb four games over .500 for the first time since Nov. 25, 2014. — Reuters

Sports

How the Premier League's top six stand at the halfway stage

More history beckons for Klopp if he can win the league

LONDON: A congested festive fixture list can often prove decisive in determining the destination of the Premier League title, but an action-packed Boxing Day also marked the halfway point of the league season with Liverpool surging into a six-point lead at the top.

Tottenham, Manchester City, Chelsea and Arsenal have also shone at different stages of the season so far, while Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's appointment as caretaker manager has even offered some hope for Manchester United after the dismal final days of Jose Mourinho's reign. Here, AFP Sport looks at how the Premier League's top six have fared so far this season and what they can aspire to come May.

Liverpool (1st, 51 points)

Despite manager Jurgen Klopp's demands for Liverpool fans to remember it is still only December, the anticipation that their time has come after nearly three decades without a title is growing with every game. Still unbeaten with their only dropped points coming in creditable draws with City and away to Chelsea and Arsenal, it is an incredible defensive record—conceding just seven goals in 19 games—that has turned Klopp's side from entertainers into title contenders.

"What we wanted to do all the time (was) create a situation, a basis for the rest of the season and now the first part of the season is over," said Klopp after thrashing Newcastle 4-0 on Boxing Day. "What we said as well is that we want to create our own history. We are the first Liverpool team in the Premier League to be unbeaten in 19 matches." More history beckons for Klopp if he can be the first Liverpool manager since Kenny Dalglish in 1989-90 to win the league.

Tottenham (2nd, 45 points)

No new stadium, no new signings but so far no problem as Mauricio Pochettino's burgeoning reputation as one of the world's top coaches continues at Tottenham. The question remains

whether Spurs' squad has the stamina to keep going with the demands of four competitions in the new year. But they show no sign of slowing down having scored 11 goals in their last two games to thrash Everton and Bournemouth. "Over the last six months we haven't complained about anything," said Pochettino. "The one thing we have kept is the belief and being positive and we have created a bubble. We are in this position because we have worked a lot and the players really believe."

Manchester City (3rd, 44 points)

Until mid-December, City seemed the same side that steamrollered all before them to win the title with a record 100 points last season. But a shock run of three defeats in four games has left the champions desperately needing to beat Liverpool at home on January 3 to haul themselves back into the title race.

However, Pep Guardiola believes matching their points tally from the first half of the season will still give City a fighting chance at becoming the first team to retain the Premier League in a decade. "In a normal situation we are fighting to be champions," said Guardiola. "If we make the same number of points in the second part of the season we are fighting to win the Premier League. "But the reality is there are another two teams and they are better."

Chelsea (4th, 40 points)

Maurizio Sarri's revolution of Chelsea's style brought immediate results as the Blues kept pace with Liverpool and City in the early weeks of the season before three defeats in six games by Spurs, Wolves and Leicester.

Chelsea do remain well-placed to at least return to the Champions League next season in fourth, but with Olivier Giroud and Alvaro Morata failing to win Sarri's trust, they could do with another striker in the January window to ease the goalscoring burden on Eden Hazard.



LIVERPOOL: Liverpool's English defender Trent Alexander-Arnold (L) crosses the ball as Newcastle United's Scottish midfielder Matt Ritchie (R) attempts a block during the English Premier League football match between Liverpool and Newcastle United at Anfield in Liverpool, north west England on Wednesday. — AFP

Arsenal (5th, 38 points)

Unai Emery could not have asked for a tougher start to the task of replacing Arsene Wenger after 22 years in charge of the Gunners with defeats by City and Chelsea in his first two games in charge.

However, the Spaniard quickly won the confidence of the Arsenal fans as a 22-game unbeaten run in all competitions followed to propel them back into the fight for a top-four finish. There remain some defensive deficiencies for Emery to iron out as defeat at Southampton and a 1-1 draw at Brighton on Boxing Day illustrated, but Lucas Torreira looks like the sort of tough-tackling midfielder Arsenal have been lacking for some time and

they also boast the league's top-scorer in Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang.

Manchester United (6th, 32 points)

From the moment Mourinho started lashing out at the quality of his squad and his superiors in pre-season it seemed like he was again set to implode in his third season in charge of a big club. By the time the axe finally fell, United were already 19 points off the top and 11 behind fourth place. Solskjaer's appointment was one made with the aim of making everyone, not least their own players, remember what Manchester United once were and so far it has worked. Far tougher tests lie ahead for the Norwegian than Cardiff and Huddersfield, but there is at long last an air of optimism around Old Trafford. — AFP

Modric beats Djokovic to win Balkan athlete of year

SOFIA: Croatia captain Luka Modric was named Balkan Athlete of the Year yesterday, becoming only the second soccer player to scoop the prize after Bulgaria's former European Footballer of the Year Hristo Stoichkov in 1994.

Ballon d'Or winner Modric won the Champions League and the FIFA Club

World Cup with his Spanish club Real Madrid as well as being instrumental in helping Croatia reach the World Cup final in Russia. He was awarded the tournament's Golden Ball Award.

The 33-year-old, who received 75 points in the 46th poll, organised by Bulgarian News Agency (BTA), beat Serbia's world number one tennis player Novak Djokovic, who topped the annual poll five times in a row between 2011 and 2015.

Another tennis player, Romania's Simona Halep, who finished the year as women's world number one for the second consecutive season, came third in the poll, which is conducted by the state-run news agencies in nine Balkan countries. — Reuters

Arsenal held as Brighton make a point

BRIGHTON: Arsenal's top-four bid suffered a setback as Jurgen Locadia's equaliser gave Brighton a 1-1 draw at the Amex Stadium on Wednesday. Unai Emery's side had taken an early lead through Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang's fine first-half strike. But Locadia levelled for Brighton before half-time and the Gunners couldn't find a winner after the interval.

Arsenal have won only once in their last four games in all competitions, a frustrating sequence that started when their 22-match unbeaten run ended at Southampton on December 16. The north Londoners climb to fourth place in the Premier League, but fifth-placed Chelsea could move back above them if they

avoid defeat at Watford later on Wednesday. "I'm a little disappointed. I think the first half was key in the match. We started winning and had another two chances, but they equalised," Emery said. "In the second half we couldn't impose our game plan. We didn't make more clear chances to win the match."

Emery made a half-time change, bringing on Alex Iwobi for Mesut Ozil, increasing the feeling that the out-of-form German midfielder is on borrowed time at Arsenal, where he is the highest-paid player.

Ozil is reported to have annoyed Emery with his failure to buy into his desire for a high-tempo game-plan and has been left out on several occasions. Defending his latest snub of Ozil, Emery said: "It was tactical. It's the same every match. Sometimes I change it tactically when I need something to change."

Emery started Aubameyang and Alexandre Lacazette up front and the pair were quickly into the groove. Despite not often starting together as central strikers this term, Aubameyang and Lacazette have established a good understanding and both were denied well by goalkeeper Mat Ryan early on. — AFP

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SYDNEY: This handout from Rolex/Studio Borlenghi taken and released yesterday shows Infotrack yacht competing in the Sydney to Hobart yacht race near Tasmania. — AFP

Tight battle 'all the way to finish line' for Sydney-Hobart glory

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