

Friday Times

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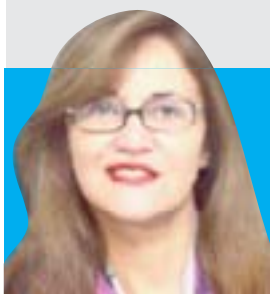
The biggest games to look out for in 2018

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Local

\$127 billion vs \$300 million!



Local Spotlight

By Badrya Darwish

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It was shocking to hear that the US may cut aid for Palestinians for disagreeing over the unilateral decision by Washington to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. It's a decision that the rest of the world pretty much opposed, and even the closest allies of the US like the UK, Germany and France criticized the move and said it would damage the peace process.

Now the US president is threatening to cut what little money his government, not himself, donates to the Palestinian refugees. The UNRWA already faces regular funding shortages and the paltry \$300 million the US gives barely helps.

But behind the scenes, there's a bigger game being played. For the last 20 years, Israel tried nonstop to convince the United Nations to close the UNRWA program. Israel wants to stop calling Palestinians refugees because it wants to legitimize its land grabs and prevent any resettlement of Palestinians back to their homeland.



Now Israel wants to delegitimize the Palestinian refugee status

Israel's strategy is to take the whole of Palestine, including the West Bank and Gaza, which was occupied in 1967 by Israel. That is why no matter what government is in power there, they still promote the settlers' initiatives. Half the West Bank now is made up of new settlements for Israelis.

Now Israel wants to delegitimize the Palestinian refugee status, and by shutting UNRWA, it will help them claim there are no Palestinian refugees left in the world.

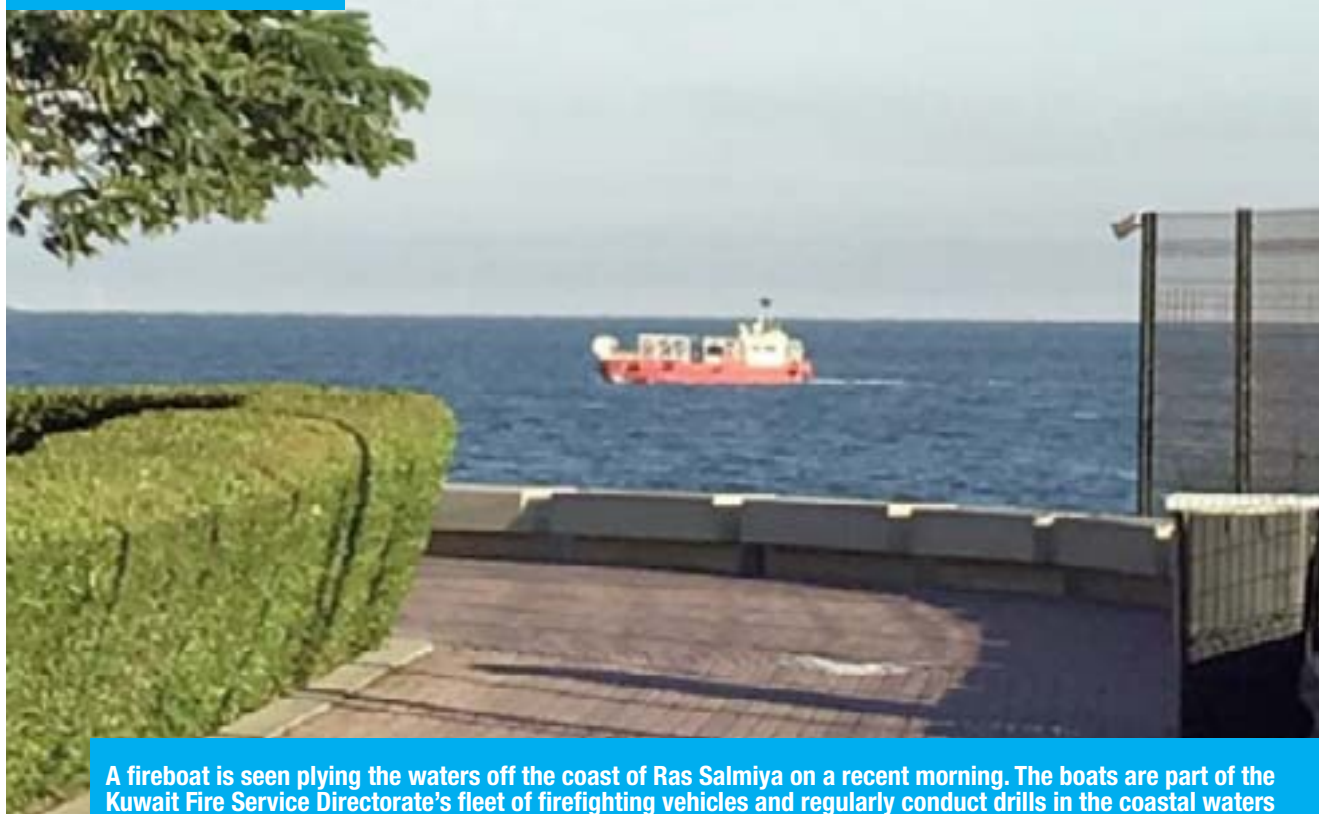
By the way, in total, the US gives around \$600 million to the Palestinians; half of which goes to UNRWA and approximately \$300 million goes to the Palestinian Authority and NGOs in Palestine.

By way of comparison, what aid does Israel receive from the US? In 2016, the US inked a deal to give Israel \$38 billion - YES BILLION - dollars in military aid over the next decade. Just imagine. In fact, from 1949 until 2015, the US has given Israel more than \$127 billion in aid, according to the Congressional Research Service.

Wow! I leave it up to you guys to contemplate on the massive difference between those two aid packages. And one goes to a military that dominates the entire region and the other to feed refugees.

So have mercy, please.

Photo of the Day



A fireboat is seen plying the waters off the coast of Ras Salmiya on a recent morning. The boats are part of the Kuwait Fire Service Directorate's fleet of firefighting vehicles and regularly conduct drills in the coastal waters of Kuwait. — Photo by Jamie Etheridge

Will 2018 be a year of change?



Local Spotlight

By Muna Al-Fuzai

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The world is still celebrating a new year after emerging from a year that was filled with dramatic and devastating changes for many countries and people. Nevertheless, we still hope for change for the best. Even our safe Gulf region is witnessing a deep-rooted crisis amongst its members that may lead to serious repercussions on the social, economic, national and political levels if not ended. Kuwait is still striving to preserve unity and solidarity among the Gulf states, but the situation is still worrying and tense. Meanwhile, the Arab world faces crises from Syria to Yemen.

Locally, there is nothing new except for a new government. Nothing significant has been achieved, whether in the field of development or corruption, or the status of women and their rights over equality with men in their demand for housing. It has become a dream. The government has repeated itself in every formation, but perhaps the most prominent event was the entry of a new member with a distinguished public status who represents new hope for Kuwaitis - Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad, the new Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister. The lifting of the suspension from Kuwaiti football and hosting the Gulf Cup sparked enthusiasm, and the spirit of unity and joy was felt all around Kuwait.

Globally, the positions of US President Donald Trump

appear to be worrisome to many around the world, and we can only point to his decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. This decision triggered an angry and dismissive reaction. I think we are at the beginning of a year that faces a lot of arduous issues. People are usually optimistic about the new year, and they see it as a new station in their lives. But some have wishes that have remained unfulfilled for many years.

Also these days, the demonstrations in Iran have been making the headlines, and many are following the developments with caution, especially as the repercussions of the situation undoubtedly affect the whole region and possibly the world's policies in dealing with Iran. However, so far the war against IS essentially seems to be over, yet the fear and threat of other terror groups exist.

Security is desired by all religions, as well as peace, security and tolerance, because people are tired of fighting, bloodshed and sectarian discrimination. There are other general wishes shared by the majority of people, such as eliminating corruption and low prices. As a Kuwaiti, I hope that the new year will eliminate corruption and witness real educational reform, most notably the amendment of the curriculum. We need a new generation that is aware of its responsibilities and role.

Will the new year bring a new breakthrough?

Kuwait  Times

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* This campaign is limited to participants in Kuwait only. Ministries and their departments, companies and NGOs cannot enter the festival.
* Kuwait Times employees, spouses and their second-degree relatives also cannot participate.

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Local



Non-native trees are planted by local authorities in the streets.

Non-native plants in the dock

By Athoob Al-Shuaibi

Sometimes you pass by a truck with a large tree on its way to an incinerator, or some decades-old trees chopped and left next to a dumpster. These are sad scenes that may make you furious, wondering what was the fault of that tree that it was dealt with in such a violent manner. Perhaps the person who planted it was not sufficiently cognizant of the



Conocarpus

problems of planting it. Those who want to green their buildings or farms often look for weather-resistant characteristics so that the trees can survive in an arid desert climate such as Kuwait and to ensure their longevity.

This is what the vendors at the Fourth Ring Road nurseries told Kuwait Times. The most common questions they get from cus-

tomers are whether the plant is suitable for external cultivation all year around, and whether it can tolerate the heat, cold and saline water. As a result, there's a huge demand for conocarpus trees, American cactus, lotus flower, Abraham's balm and oleander.

On the other hand, local authorities adopt the same approach to selecting plants that are grown in very large quantities in different parts of the country and in the desert, in order to make Kuwait greener. But we wonder whether there are studies demonstrating the long term effects of non-local plant cultivation in the ecosystem of Kuwait.

Kuwait's ecosystem and plants

In general, all plants in any desert macrocosm share the same characteristics that withstand heat and salinity. But the problem is that every plant has its natural enemy to sustain a balance



Dr. Sara Al-Ateeqi

in the environment. There is invariably a good reason why some plants and animals are not found in some geographical areas even if their climatic conditions are similar.

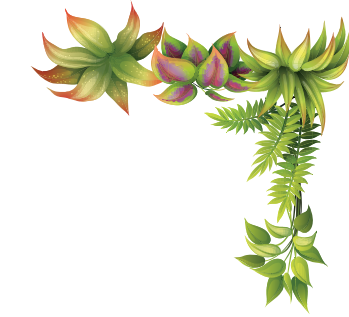
Every plant has its own soil type, bacteria and fungi. When non-native plants are cultivated in a habitat, this causes a disturbance in ecosystems, Dr Sara Al-Ateeqi, Director of Operations at Al-Shaheed Park Museums, told Kuwait Times.



Oleander



Abraham's Balm



Cactus

"As a researcher, I do not focus overly much on what happens in cities, because ecosystems are fundamentally confused - people can plant whatever they want in their homes. But the damage is done when cultivating non-native plants in the heart of the desert and in large numbers, as has happened with the conocarpus. We later discovered that its long roots damage the infrastructure and break pipes," she said.

"The real imbalance occurs when the only goal is to turn the desert into a green land without prior research. I wonder why we are ashamed of our beautiful desert nature. There is a tone of dissatisfaction with its color and shape and efforts are made to try to turn it into something else, like a jungle, despite the existence of more than 400 species of fungi plants in the desert of Kuwait," Ateeqi added.

During winter and spring, the desert blooms with all sorts of plants. Therefore, it is best to invest in local plants and scrubs such as nitraria,

matrimony vine, rhanterium and haloxyton, which are able to hold the soil, according to an academic study provided by Dr Ali Al-Dosari of the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research. The study showed that it only takes us to cultivate these small bushes to reduce the degradation of soil and dust storms.



CONDOLENCES

**Kuwait Times Editor-in-Chief,
management and staff**

convey their deepest condolences to

BAHMAN FAMILY

on the sad demise of

Abdul Hussain Bahman

Chairman and Founding Member
Bahman Group

May Allah Almighty bestow His mercy on him

Local



Saying goodbye to Bayt Lothan

Young artists in Kuwait responded to the final call from Architecture students to express their objections to the deconstruction of Bayt Lothan. This campaign was guided by the student associations at the Faculty of Architecture of Kuwait University in a stand against the ongoing demolishing process which was started last week. The legacy of Bayt Lothan goes back to

the 1930s when it was constructed by the late Sheikh Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah in Salmiya, to be transformed later into a cultural center. Photos are selected from the participating artists: Halah Al-Eissa, Rana Ajrawi, Zain Al-Farhan, Reem Al-Farhan, Kholoud Al-Asfour, Asayel Al-Saeed, Rahaf Al-Dabbous and Al-Zahra Ashkanani.



Local

How do we protect Arabic for the future?



Local Spotlight

By Jeri Al-Jeri

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Kuwait is in practice a bilingual country. Arabic is the official language but English is fast gaining as the business of language, government and society. There are both positive and negative effects to consider. English is the global language of business and commerce and if Kuwait hopes to compete on the world stage, it and its citizens must embrace English. At the same time, Arabic is a beautiful and important part of our heritage and hopefully, our future. So I want to know: "How do Kuwaitis view their Arabic language and its future?"

There are some concerns that the English language will eventually rival Arabic in the entire Arabian peninsula, and when a nation's identity is interwoven with its language, these concerns are increasingly critical to our self-image. In this article, I will strictly stress the reality of the situation of my country, Kuwait, that parallels the bulk of the GCC states.

Kuwaitis do use English in shopping malls, in school, in restaurants, and often in the comfort of their own homes when communicating with their children's nanny or their house help. In the past 20 years, it used to be that we learned English from our school's curriculum.

But now, even this task is completed by our Asian nannies whose knowledge of English is usually enough for us to communicate with them. Speaking English at home with the help, rather than struggling to teach them basic Arabic, also affords families a bit of privacy. They can language shift to Arabic whenever they want to exercise their privacy. So, when Kuwaitis account for only about a third of the population, should we be concerned about Arabic becoming irrelevant or unnecessary?

In Islam, we believe that the Holy Quran is forever divinely protected, that ensures to us that Arabic will be eternal as well. Arabic once surpassed Greek, Latin, Hebrew and Persian as the language of philosophy and science during the Dark Ages of Europe. But now, the global lingua franca is now English.

In my opinion, all we can do as people from the Arab world is to optimize the chances that Arabic will never come second to English in our countries via inserting Arabic in every technical terminology in any field and replace English with Arabic as the language of pop culture, i.e. movies and videogames and social media, to ensure that English stays as a temporary necessity for gaining momentum in our educational endeavors and business interactions. This is the most humble effort toward the security to our identity, because of the fact that nations' ideology is only "packaged" by their language, not by their countries' geography nor their racial chromosomes.



Kuwait bans poultry from Saudi Arabia over bird flu

KUWAIT: Kuwait placed a temporary ban on importing live poultry from Saudi Arabia after the appearance of a strain of bird flu there, an official announced recently. This decision came based on reports released by the World Organization for

Animal Health which indicates that the H8N8 virus was detected in Saudi Arabia, said Shakir Awadh, the official spokesman of the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources in a report published in December 25, 2017.

Harnessing the power of 'suggestion'

By Nawara Fattahova

Many people believe that their suggestions or ideas are never taken into consideration by institutions or organizations, so they don't even bother proposing them. It's true many times a customer's complaint or request may be ignored.

But persistence and the desire to create positive change can have an impact and sometimes making even the smallest suggestions can result in incredible improvements.

Take these simple examples

"Every time I came to the co-op looking for a cockroach trap, I didn't find any, so I had to buy it from other co-ops that are far from my house. When I was at the cashier the last time, I noticed the supermarket manager was present, so I went to him and asked him if they might bring this product to the store. He listened politely and agreed but honestly, I didn't believe anything would change, but imagine my surprise when I went only after three days and found the glue trap. I was impressed with the quick response," Nouf told Kuwait Times.

Aisha is a vegetarian and loves coffee with milk, but doesn't drink cow's milk. She made a suggestion, and got what she wanted. "Based on my suggestion, two different cafes added more than one plant-based milk alternative instead of regular milk, in addition to soymilk. I'm really happy that now I can drink the coffee that I like outside the house," she noted.

Even a pharmacy took suggestions into consideration. "I noticed that a pharmacy was displaying medical machines and tools in a bad way, as they were not easily seen by customers. So I suggested to the pharmacist to change the display to make them more visible to the customers when they enter the pharmacy. When I returned after a week, I saw that they had changed the display," Mohammed said.

Omar noticed that the food at a popular Lebanese restaurant was a bit salty, so he suggested reducing the quantity of salt in their dishes. "I submitted my suggestion to them, and on my next visit, when I ordered my favorite dishes, they were not as salty as they used to be. I was impressed that they responded positively to my suggestion," he said.

Suzan frequents a cafe near her house, but was annoyed by the music played there on a loop. "I filled the suggestions card with my comment, asking the management if they can change the CD that they were playing repeatedly. The manager agreed that it was boring to hear the same songs all the time. When I came back after two days, the music was different. I was pleased that they responded to my suggestion, as I wasn't sure that any-

body would read the suggestions card," she told Kuwait Times.

Violation of the labor law was behind Maha's suggestion for having an extra day off for the employees at a hotel. "We only had one day off per week, and we were working 10 hours every day. This is against the law, as we should only work for eight hours daily, unless we have two days off per week. After I submitted my suggestion to the management, they agreed to give all the staff a second day off every week," she said.

Maryam was also surprised that her suggestion at a salon elicited a quick response. "I suggested to the salon where I do my nails to have a wider selection of nail polish, especially sparkly ones, which is a trend now. When I came back the next



week, I found it available, which really impressed me," she said.

Suggestions can also help the community. One resident asked that delivery restaurants provide people ordering food with the option of 'opting' out of plastic forks and knives. This not only saves restaurants money but is good for the environment and is now being adopted by many local delivery services.

Offering ideas on how to make the world a better place can extend far beyond asking for specific products at the local market or reducing plastic waste. But it first requires that people within the community believe that their voices, and suggestions, will be heard.

Local

Sheikh Mohammad demands investigation in Interior Ministry's alleged financial violations

Move to protect police from political struggles: Lawyer

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Former defense minister Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khaled Al-Sabah lodged a petition with the Attorney General yesterday demanding an investigation in allegations mentioned in a recent State Audit Bureau report about financial violations committed at the Interior Ministry during his time as interior minister, and estimated at 'millions of dinars'. Sheikh Mohammad does not object to being sent to the ministers' court in order to "reveal the truth in front of the Kuwaiti people and protect police from political struggles," his attorney Emad Al-Saif said in a statement yesterday. Sheikh Mohammad served as defense minister from December 2016 to December 2017. He served as the interior minister for over three years from August 2013 until he was reshuffled to the defense ministry in the previous cabinet. Sheikh Mohammad was left out of the current cabinet that was formed last month, and has since been appointed as an advisor in the Amiri Diwan.

Bedoons' rights

MP Al-Humaidi Al-Subaie said the National Assembly has draft laws ready to resolve the bedoons' (stateless people) issue and will be on

the assembly's agenda. The draft laws include proposals to naturalize children of Kuwaiti women and at least 4,000 candidates a year, in addition to other laws to grant civil rights to bedoons, Subaie said, adding that the current solutions adopted by the government are temporary or partial. "We hope for a more determined approach and cooperation with the parliament to resolve this issue," he said.

Meanwhile, an informed legal source denied rumors posted recently on Twitter and suggested that the cassation court will discuss the case of storming the National Assembly. The source said there will not be a court session until after a memo is received from the prosecutor, which is yet to take place.

In the meantime, the parliament's human rights committee discuss on Sunday claims of rights violations committed inside prisons. Committee Chairman Adel Al-Demkhi said he received a letter from Committee Rapporteur Dr Waleed Al-Tabatabae, who is currently serving jail time after being convicted in the storming case, about the alleged mistreatment of a prisoner despite promises made by the Interior Ministry that no prisoners were being mistreated. MP Osama Al-Shaheen had posted on his Twitter account saying that he visited

Tabatabae and his fellow jailed MP Dr Ja-maan Al-Harbash along with other youth who were found guilty in the same case. He said all those jailed are in good shape and spirits.

Oil sector budget

The Supreme Petroleum Council plants to meet within two weeks after the cabinet officially announces its final formation, which is set to include the Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, Deputy Premier and State Minister for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh, State Minister for Economic Affairs Hind Al-Sabeeh, Central Bank Governor Dr Mohammad Al-Hashel, in addition to members from outside the government. His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah heads the council.

The oil budget for fiscal year 2018/2019 will be a top priority on the agenda of the council, according to oil sources' expectations. Speaking on



Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khaled Al-Sabah

the condition of anonymity, the sources said that the capital expenses' volume of Kuwait Petroleum Cooperation (KPC) and its subsidiaries during the fiscal year 2018/2019 reach KD 30 billion, while operating expenses are KD 17 billion.

The total number of KPC and its subsidiaries' workers will reach 21,750 according to the approved cost, which is concentrated in the increase made by the establishment of the Kuwait Integrated Petrochemical Industries Company (KIPIC), which added nearly 450 employees, not including 200 employees transferred from other KPC subsidiaries. KPC and its subsidiaries made KD 1.4 billion in net profits in the first half of fiscal year 2017/2018, with KD 5.5 billion from crude oil sales. Investment revenues increased by KD 700 million, the sources said.

Man stabs father

A citizen stabbed his father in the shoulder area in Jahra. The victim went to Naeem police station and lodged a complaint against his son as well as his former brother-in-law. The man explained that he went to hand over his two sons to his ex-wife after visitation, but a fight ensued between him and his former brother-in-law. His son, siding with his uncle, attacked him with a knife, he said.

DGCA launches new weather app

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has launched a new weather application 'KuwaitMet' competent with the latest smartphone systems, the DGCA said yesterday. The app aims to better services on weather in Kuwait, it added. The app will help people follow weather conditions nationwide, including Kuwait City, the Kuwait International Airport, Al-Wafra, Al-Abdali, Al-Salmiya, Al-Jahra, Al-Shaqeya and Al-Salmi, Deputy Director General for Air Navigation Services Affairs Khalid Mubarak Shuaibi said. He added that the app would present up-to-date data on temperature, wind speed, humidity, and sea state.

It will also provide weather warnings for four days ahead, besides satellite images and weather maps, as well as a climate archive, he noted. Shuaibi pointed out that they are working on introducing Arabic as a second language of the app. In the meantime, the DGCA's Meteorology Department has upgraded its website to keep pace with IT advances. — KUNA

Kuwait reserves higher than \$524 billion: MP Adasani

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Opposition MP Riyadh Al-Adasani said yesterday that the size of assets in Kuwait's sovereign wealth fund is much higher than the \$524 billion announced by the national assembly financial and economic affairs committee.

The lawmaker reiterated his opposition to government plans to borrow from the domestic and international markets to finance the budget deficits resulting from low oil prices.

He said that the government should instead stop squandering of public funds in many areas and also collect billions of dinars in government dues from the public and other sides.

Adasani said that the government has debt worth KD 1.3 billion, most of it held by the ministry of energy and electricity and water and the customs department.

He also said there are some KD 20 billion held by the government, half of it by

the central bank, whereas the government should have transferred these funds to the sovereign wealth fund.

He also said that based on reports, government agencies has around KD 5.8 billion in cash inventory and there is suspicion of wrongdoings by some government departments.

Adasani said he strongly rejects any plan to impose any form of taxes in the country or making citizens pay for the government failures.

He described as ridiculous a proposal by pro-government MP Ahmad Al-Fadhil to form a committee to study grillings filed by lawmakers, saying that is an intention to amend the most important tool the constitution gives to lawmakers.

Meanwhile, the minister of social affairs and labor Hind Al-Sabeeh said yesterday that she was ready for any grillings within the framework of the constitution and laws. She was responding to threats by a number of MPs to grill her.

In the meantime, opposition Islamist MP Mohammad Al-Dallal yesterday warned of clear signs that the country was headed for another wave of reform protests like the one a few years ago.

He said at one stage, some thought that the protests have gone forever but certain quarters have taken harsh measures against the reformist youths to the extent of sending them to jail, adding that this may become the launchpad for a new wave of protests.

\$36 million maintenance contract for Doha East plant signed

KUWAIT: Minister of Oil and Minister of Electricity and Water Bakheet Al-Rashidi yesterday signed a KD 12 million (\$36 million) contract for the annual maintenance of the East Doha Power Station (EDPS). The contract covers regular and thorough maintenance of the equipment and control apparatus at the EDPS to guarantee high performance and safe and stable operation of the plant's units, an official statement said. It noted that it is part of the hard efforts to improve, and secure stability of power services nationwide. Maintenance work will cover 60 months after the contract was signed.

Meanwhile, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) announced the new prices of liquid gas (Propane and Butane) for January. The corporation said that Propane gas is sold for \$590 per metric ton, while Butane gas is set at \$570 per metric ton. Propane and Butane prices are affected by the rate of crude oil, and the value of the US dollar, along with geopolitical factors and natural disasters. The two gases are used in the petrochemical industry, cooking, heating and other areas. — KUNA

Local

First batch of recruits report to duty tomorrow

Those who failed to register were transferred to investigations

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The first batch of recruits for conscription will start their training at G1, Mubarakiya Camp, and Al-Aghrar Military School tomorrow. They will serve for one year, including training during the first four months. The training phase will include military theoretical and practical training, as well as religious, security and communication lectures. The first batch consists of 140 recruits out of 6,500 on whom the conscription applies according to the law.

"The law applies on all Kuwaiti males who were born after May 10, 1999," said Major General Ibrahim Al-Amiri, Head of the Authority of National Service and Reserve during a press conference held yesterday at the Officers Club. "Of those Kuwaiti males, 2,333 have study exemption. The 140 number of recruits seems like a small number, but the number will increase when students will graduate from the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training after two years and from Kuwait University after four years. What really matters is that we do not have men who are neither studying nor recruits."

"We will now enter the registration phase. The recruits will stay for the first two weeks at a camp after which they will work from morning to afternoon at any job," he added. "The number of those who didn't register have dropped from over 1,000 to 870, and I believe there will be more registrations, as more people are now aware of the law.

Those who failed to register during the announced period were transferred to the Investigation Department, and most of them had serious reasons for being late, and we took that in consideration."

Strict sanctions

The sanctions are strict against those who failed to register. "After people start receiving warning letters, they became aware, and many registered," said retired Brigadier Falah Al-Anezi, Legal Consultant of the Authority of National Service and Reserve. "The sanctions are now applied by the Investigation Department as they didn't join the service yet. The sanctions have serious effect, one for each phase. The sanction may reach five years of imprisonment in case of disasters. Failing to register is considered a crime, and may not allow them to be employed, along with travel bans and arrest warrants. Furthermore they will be banned from voting. The punishment does not expire by time."

Women are excluded from this law. "In the new law Kuwaiti women are completely excluded from conscription. In the old law, they were not included but it was possible to issue a decree. The constitution does not forbid women from conscription, thus the present law was amended by the parliament," he further said.

Commander of the Institute of the Authority of National Service and Reserve Brigadier Saleh Al-Anezi also spoke during the press conference,



KUWAIT: (From left) Brigadier Mohammed Al-Jassar, Brigadier Saleh Al-Anezi, Major General Ibrahim Al-Amiri, and retired Brigadier Falah Al-Anezi attend a press conference held yesterday at the Officers Club. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

saying "More than 200 were sent to the Department for not registering while the rest received warning letters. There are two violations depending on the phase, so there it is a crime if one fails to register or join, and one person can be committed for both the crimes."

Some recruits may serve in different institutions. "The health condition is also considered," stated Brigadier Mohammed Al-Jassar, Director

of the Authority of National Service and Reserve. "According to medical checkup and health condition of recruits they may serve in an administrative position. Also we are cooperating with different institutions and ministries and according to their demand some of the recruits will serve in a ministry or other public institution. They will receive salary depending on their education degree with all benefits that the officers receive."

Bangladesh PM, Kuwait's Chief of Staff hold talks

KUWAIT: Promoting bilateral cooperation, military in particular, featured high on the agenda of talks held between Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the visiting Kuwaiti Army Chief of Staff Lt Gen Mohammad Khaled Al-Khuder and an accompanying delegation.

During the meeting, both reiterated willingness to consolidate ties between the two countries, the Kuwaiti Defense Ministry's Directorate of Moral Guidance and Public Relations said in a press statement.

The two sides today addressed major issues of common concern, it added. Sheikh Hasina congratulated Khuder and his delegation - who are on an official visit- on their safety after their helicopter encountered a problem while trying to land at Sylhet airport, east Bangladesh, due to heavy fog and had a friction with some trees there.

On Wednesday, Khuder expressed gratitude to the top political leaders of Kuwait for their kind phone calls with him after a helicopter accident, the Ministry of Defense said in a statement. His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-



DHAKA: Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina meets with Kuwait's Army Chief of Staff Lt Gen Mohammad Khaled Al-Khuder. — KUNA

Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah phoned Khuder earlier today to get reassured about his and his companions' health following the accident. Khuder also received similar calls from Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, as well as several ministers and MPs. — KUNA

Defense Minister to inspect Kuwaiti troops

KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah left Kuwait yesterday for Saudi Arabia to inspect the Kuwaiti troops in operation 'Restoration of Hope' in Yemen. A high-ranking delegation is accompanying Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, who was seen off by Defense Ministry Undersecretary Sheikh Ahmad Mansour Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and senior military commanders.

On Wednesday, Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad received a letter of congratulations from Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. President Bouteflika congratulated Sheikh Nasser on winning the trust

of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah - the Supreme Commander of the Kuwaiti Armed Forces.

He wished Sheikh Sabah success in his new post and voiced hope that Kuwait will see more prosperity and progress under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir, according to a statement issued by the moral guidance and public relations Department of the Kuwaiti Ministry of Defense. Sheikh Nasser sent a letter of thanks to the Algerian leader to express his best wishes for him and the sisterly Algeria.

Sheikh Nasser also received a letter of congratulations from Zhang Gaoli, the first vice-premier of the People's Republic of China. Zhang congratulated Sheikh Nasser on winning the trust of His Highness the Amir and wished him success in his new post. Sheikh Nasser sent a letter of thanks to the Chinese First Vice-Premier and expressed his best wishes for him and friendly China, according to a statement issued by the moral guidance and public relations department. — KUNA

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Trump slams Bannon, says ex-aide has 'lost his mind'

Pakistan shrugs off impending US aid cuts

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DAMASCUS: Syrian man walks amid destruction following bombardment a day earlier in the rebel-controlled town of Misraba, in the eastern Ghouta region on the outskirts of the capital Damascus. — AFP

Suspected Russian jets kill 30 in Syria

Civilians besieged face 'complete catastrophe'

BEIRUT: At least 30 civilians were killed early yesterday when jets dropped bombs on a residential area in a besieged rebel enclave east of Syria's capital, a war monitor said, identifying the planes as Russian. At least four bombs flattened two buildings in the Eastern Ghouta town of Misraba, in an attack that killed around 20 and wounded more than 40 people, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights and civil defense sources said.

Elsewhere in Eastern Ghouta, the last major rebel enclave near Damascus, at least ten people were killed in aerial strikes in other nearby towns, the Observatory, rescuers and residents said. The Observatory, a war monitor based in Britain, said 11 women and a child were among the dead in the strikes in Misraba, which it said were carried out by Russian planes.

Backed by Russian strikes, government forces have escalated military operations against Eastern Ghouta in recent months, seeking to tighten a siege that residents and aid workers say is a deliberate use of starvation as a weapon of war, a charge the government denies. Russia rejects Syrian opposition and rights groups' accusations that its jets have been responsible for deaths of thou-

sands of civilians since its major intervention two years ago that turned the tide in the country's nearly seven-year-old war in favor of President Bashar Al-Assad.

Moscow says it only attacks hardline Islamists. Video footage posted yesterday by activists on social media in Eastern Ghouta showed rescue workers pulling women and children from rubble. The footage could not be independently confirmed. Jets also pounded Harasta, on the western edge of the enclave, where rebels this week besieged and overran a major military base which residents say the army uses to pound residential areas.

The rebel assault aimed partly to relieve the pressure of the tightening siege. The United Nations says about 400,000 civilians besieged in the area face "complete catastrophe" because aid de-

liveries by the government are blocked and hundreds of people who need urgent medical evacuation have not been allowed outside the enclave. Scores of hospitals and civil defense centers in Ghouta and across Syria have been bombed during the conflict in what the opposition said is a "scorched earth policy" to paralyze life in rebel-held areas. Syrian state news agency SANA said on Thursday rebel shelling of the government-held capital Damascus killed one and injured 22 in the Amara district of the city.

At least ten people were killed in aerial strikes



Idlib push

Supported by Iran-backed militias and intensive Russian bombing, the Syrian army has since last month waged a new campaign to push into the heart of another rebel-held part of Syria, Idlib province in the country's northwest. Idlib is a heavily populated area where over two million

people live. Rescue workers said there had been a spike in civilian casualties there in the last twenty days from stepped-up aerial strikes on residential areas, documenting 50 dead at least in that period.

"There have been at least six major massacres perpetrated by Russia in indiscriminate bombing of cities and towns with thousands fleeing their homes in the last two weeks," said Mustafa al Haj Yousef, the head of Idlib's Civil Defence, rescuers who work in opposition-held areas. On Wednesday air strikes hit a maternity hospital in Idlib's Ma'arat Al-Nu'man city, killing five people, the Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS) charity, which supports the hospital, said.

The hospital, which SAMS said delivers around 30 babies a day, had been struck three times in four days and the last strikes temporarily put the hospital out of service. Overnight, a family of seven was buried under rubble in Tel Dukan village, rescuers said. The army has been gaining ground in Idlib and the adjoining eastern Hama countryside, with scores of villages seized from rebels mainly belonging to Tahrir al Sham, a coalition of jihadist groups with mainstream Free Syrian Army (FSA) factions also engaged in the battles. — Reuters

International

More pro-regime rallies as Iran declares 'sedition' over

No reports of fresh protests in local media

TEHRAN: Iran saw another day of large pro-regime rallies yesterday after authorities declared the end of deadly unrest and turned attention to addressing the economic concerns that fuelled protests. A week after the demonstrations broke out, there were no reports of fresh protests in local media overnight, while videos on social media suggested only limited unrest in provincial towns which could not be immediately verified.

As Washington said it may look to impose fresh sanctions on Tehran, Iranian authorities were weighing options including blocking unpopular measures in President Hassan Rouhani's recent budget. State television showed huge crowds marching in support of the government across 10 cities early yesterday, including Isfahan, Ardebil and Mashhad, where the protests first erupted last Thursday. "We are together behind the leader," chanted the crowds, in reference to supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The head of the army, General Abdolrahim Mousavin, thanked security forces for "putting out the fire of sedition".

An advisor to Khamenei said: "The revolutionary Iranian people have responded in time to the enemies and trouble-makers by coming out on the streets". "The people's main demand now is for the government and officials to deal with the economic problems," Ali Akbar Velayati told the semi-official ISNA news agency. A total of 21 people died and hundreds were arrested in five days of unrest that began on December 28 as protests against economic grievances and quickly turned against the regime as a whole, with attacks on government buildings and police stations.

Turkey furious over US sanctions-busting

ISTANBUL: Turkey reacted furiously yesterday to the fraud conviction in New York of a Turkish banker which came after an explosive trial over Iran sanctions-busting that implicated ex-ministers and even President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The conviction of Mehmet Hakan Atilla, deputy chief executive of Turkish lender Halkbank, is set to further ratchet up strains between Washington and Ankara in an increasingly trouble-plagued relationship.

"The US court... has interfered in Turkey's domestic affairs in an unprecedented way based on so-called evidence that is only fit for forgery and political abuse," the Turkish foreign ministry

'Grotesque intervention'

Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli yesterday said 42,000 people had taken part in the unrest nationwide. It was a higher figure than the 15,000 given by the head of the Revolutionary Guards a day earlier, but still far below the hundreds of thousands that took to the streets during the last major protest movement in 2009. The unrest caused international concern, with the United States in particular accusing authorities of a crackdown on dissent.

A White House official, who asked for anonymity, on Wednesday said Washington

would look for "actionable information" to try to bring fresh sanctions on those responsible. US President Donald Trump, who has repeatedly tweeted his backing for Iranian protesters, wrote: "You will see great support from the United States at the appropriate time!"

The question now is whether Trump will continue to waive nuclear-related sanctions that were suspended under the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers. Under the deal, Trump must actively lift certain sanctions every few months and the next deadline falls on January 12. Iran—which has long accused the United States and Sunni Arab rivals led by Saudi Arabia of interference in its affairs—said external "enemies" were behind recent unrest.

Its UN Ambassador Gholamali Khoshroo said the US government had "stepped up its acts of intervention in a grotesque way in Iran's internal affairs" and accused Washington of violating international law and the principles of the UN charter. Online messaging and photo sharing

said in a statement. A jury in New York found Atilla guilty on Wednesday of five counts of bank fraud and conspiracy. The federal trial hinged on the testimony of well-connected Turkish-Iranian businessman Reza Zarrab, who became a government witness after admitting his involvement in the multi-billion-dollar gold-for-oil scheme to subvert US economic sanctions against Iran.

His testimony implicated former Turkish ministers and Erdogan in the scheme, and identified 47-year-old Atilla as a key organizer. Turkey's foreign ministry branded the US ruling as "unfair and unfortunate," and "a shame of law". Erdogan's spokesman Ibrahim Kalin meanwhile described the conviction as a "scandalous decision in a scandalous case" and a "shameful scenario".

'Political plot'

Erdogan had repeatedly slammed the trial as a plot against Turkey and, according to American newspaper reports, had often raised the case in talks with US leaders. Former New York



MASHHAD: Iranian pro-government supporters hold posters of Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei during a rally in support of the regime after authorities declared the end of deadly unrest. —AFP

platforms Telegram and Instagram remained blocked on mobile phones, having been interrupted soon after protests began. Telecoms Minister Mohammad-Javad Azari Jahromi said Telegram would only be unblocked if it removed "terrorist" content.

Parliament responds

Iran's political establishment has closed ranks against the unrest, with even reformists condemning the violence. But many have also called on Rouhani to address the economic grievances that drove the initial protests. There have already been moves in parliament to block

the unpopular budget measures announced last month, which included cuts to welfare and fuel price hikes.

"As concerns petrol prices, we must absolutely take into account the situation of the people because the tensions are absolutely not in the interests of the country," parliament speaker Ali Larijani said on Wednesday. Rouhani came to power in 2013 promising to mend the economy and ease social tensions, but high living costs and unemployment have left many feeling that progress is too slow. Rural areas, hit by years of drought and underinvestment, are particularly hard-hit.—AFP

mayor Rudy Giuliani, at that point part of Zarrab's legal team, had even met Erdogan in Ankara in search of a solution to the case. Zarrab, a prominent gold trader, agreed to testify after striking a deal to plead guilty to violating US sanctions in a switch that infuriated Ankara. His assets in Turkey were later seized. Deputy Prime Minister Bekir Bozdag blasted the case as a "political plot", saying the jury's conviction "doesn't have any legal value from Turkey's point of view." "This decision is against international law," he wrote on Twitter. Ties between Turkey and the US have been strained over a number of issues including Washington's refusal so far to extradite the Muslim preacher Fethullah Gulen, who Ankara blames for orchestrating the failed 2016 coup.

Only last week, the two sides resolved a months-long crisis that resulted in the suspension of visa services for Americans in Turkey and vice versa. The foreign ministry statement said the court in the US was influenced by some Gulen group members who "made unrealistic al-

legations," with the ministry saying that "destroyed the court process's seriousness and credibility." Bozdag went even further, saying the case was "tangible proof" that the CIA and FBI were engaged in judicial cooperation with Gulen's group. Atilla is due to be sentenced on April 11. Zarrab's sentencing date has not been scheduled.

Much of the case focused on Zarrab, 34, a key figure in a 2013 Turkish corruption scandal in which he allegedly bribed four ministers to facilitate sanctions-busting trade and other deals. Those charges against Zarrab were ultimately dropped. But he was arrested in Miami in 2016 while seeking to take his family on a holiday to Florida, and eventually agreed to testify in the US case over violating Iran sanctions in a plea bargain.

In testimony in a New York court on November 30, he said he was told that Erdogan, as prime minister in 2012, and economy minister Ali Babacan had given "instructions" to two public banks to take part in the scheme.—AFP

Mass alerts as Eleanor batters Europe

4th winter storm to hit Europe since December

PARIS: The French Alps were on maximum avalanche alert yesterday as Storm Eleanor swept through Europe, killing at least four people and fanning rare winter wildfires in Corsica. With the mountains packed with skiers for the school holidays, major resort Val d'Isere closed its runs for the day because of "heavy snowfall", while Chamonix said it was shutting many of its lifts as a precautionary measure. "The objective is to keep everyone safe," said David Ponson, ski chief in the Alpine Savoie region, as many pistes were shut for a second day.

At the other extreme, nearly 400 firefighters on the French Mediterranean island of Corsica were battling two blazes fanned by Eleanor's strong gusts of wind, with three people injured in a fire overnight. Three hundred goats were killed in the blaze at Chiatra-Canale di Verde near the island's east coast and ten homes burnt-five of them completely destroyed, local authorities said. The prefecture added that the intensity of the blazes was "exceptional in the middle of winter." Two helicopters were able to help douse the flames after the winds eased up.

Eleanor, the fourth winter storm to hit Europe since December, swept into the continent on Wednesday after battering Britain and Ireland. It has left four people dead, including a 21-year-old skier hit by a falling tree in France and a couple in their 60s swept away on Spain's northern Basque coast by a huge wave. A young man had to be rescued after attempting to save them.

Yesterday, firefighters said a woman in her 90s died in Crets-en-Belledonne in the French Alps after the heavy rains caused a nearby stream to overflow its banks, sending a torrent of mud and water into her home. In France, 29 people have been injured-four of them seriously-including a woman hit by a falling block of concrete. At Lenk in central Switzerland, eight people were hurt when a violent gust of wind overturned a railway carriage.

Power cuts

The whole of Spain's northern coast remained on "orange" alert-the second highest on a four-point scale-because of the risk from strong winds and large waves. More than 40 towns in southwestern Spain have meanwhile brought forward their annual Epiphany feast parades-celebrating the coming of the three wise men with gifts for Jesus-to Thursday because of heavy rain forecast Friday. The worst of the storm appeared to have passed by Thursday, though much of eastern France was still on "orange" alert for heavy winds, floods and avalanches.

Some 29,000 French homes remained without power, a third of them in Corsica. Germany lowered its alert for violent winds Wednesday evening, but high tides were worrying several states, including in the Moselle Valley where heavy downpours have halted boat traffic. The Rhine river was set to surge to seven meters yesterday and was still rising, the Bild newspaper re-



ASNELLES: A man and children watch waves crashing against a tidal wall yesterday in Asnelles, northwestern France, after storm Eleanor swept into Europe. — AFP

ported. River traffic will be suspended if it hits 8.3 meters.

The storm had snarled air traffic on Wednesday, briefly shutting the Strasbourg and Basel-Mulhouse airports and delaying departures from Paris, Frankfurt and Amsterdam. It also played

havoc with road and rail transport, leaving branches, electrical lines and other debris strewn across tracks and highways. The Eiffel Tower was temporarily closed Wednesday, with the top deck remaining off limits most of the day due to gusts of over 80 kilometers an hour. — AFP

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International

Trump slams Bannon, says ex-aide has 'lost his mind'

Calls eldest son 'treasonous' and 'unpatriotic'

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump has unleashed a spectacular denunciation of one of his closest political allies, describing former White House chief strategist Steve Bannon as insane and irrelevant. After the release of explosive excerpts from a new book in which Bannon reportedly described Trump's eldest son's meeting with a Kremlin-connected lawyer as "treasonous" and "unpatriotic," Trump wasted no time Wednesday in firing back.

The embattled Republican president issued a response that was searing even by his combative standards. "Steve Bannon has nothing to do with me or my presidency. When he was fired, he not only lost his job, he lost his mind," Trump said in a written statement. Trump

said Bannon — who engineered the New York real estate mogul's link to the nationalist far right and helped create a pro-Trump media ecosystem—was "only in it for himself."

US media said Charles Harder, a lawyer for Trump, has sent Bannon a cease-and-desist letter accusing him of violating a non-disclosure agreement by speaking to the author of the book. Trump's fury appeared to have been provoked by the publication of startling extracts from "Fire and

Fury: Inside the Trump White House" by Michael Wolff. Passages published by The Guardian and New York magazine quoted Bannon being highly critical of Trump's son Donald Junior and daughter Ivanka.

Bannon, who left the White House in August, is also quoted as saying that the investigation by special counsel Robert Mueller into Russian interference in the 2016 election will focus on money laundering. The investigation by Mueller, a former FBI director, is looking into whether the Trump campaign colluded with Russia to help get him elected—a charge the president has repeatedly and vehemently denied.

“
Only in it
for himself

“
You should have
called the FBI”

Donald Junior took a meeting with Russian lawyer Natalia Veselnitskaya in June 2016 after an intermediary promised material that would incriminate Trump's Democratic rival Hillary Clinton. Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner and then campaign chairman Paul Manafort also attended the meeting at Trump Tower in New York.

"The three senior guys in the campaign thought it was a good idea to meet with a foreign

Hillary Clinton saw their poll numbers get better the less news coverage they got.

Given FBI investigations and assorted scandals swirling around the two deeply unpopular candidates—it stands to reason that the absence of predominantly bad news might be beneficial. Additionally, pollsters Kristen Soltis Anderson and Patrick Ruffini of Republican research firm Echelon Insights found that "in the 30 days before the election, 'Donald Trump' was Googled more in states that he lost than in those he won."

Faired well

During Trump's presidency, that apparent trend may have continued. HuffPost polling director Ariel Edwards-Levy pointed out that when a series of hurricanes hit in the United States around September—the first news cycles not totally dominated by Trump — he fared relatively well in the polls. Over Christmas he tweeted relatively little, and to an audience distracted by family meals and vacations.

Any clear link between his silence and improved political fortunes could have profound implications for the way Trump communicates. This year promises to be a difficult one for the 71-year-old, with Congressional elections and an FBI investigation looming. —AFP



WASHINGTON: This file photo taken on January 28, 2017 shows US President Donald Trump speaking on the phone with Australia's Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, alongside former Chief Strategist Steve Bannon (R) and former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn, from the Oval Office of the White House. —AFP

government inside Trump Tower in the conference room on the 25th floor—with no lawyers," Bannon was quoted as saying in the book. "They didn't have any lawyers. Even if you thought that this was not treasonous, or unpatriotic, or bad s**t, and I happen to think it's all of that, you

should have called the FBI immediately," he said.

Trump responded quickly and cuttingly to the reported comments by Bannon, a former investment banker and the executive chairman of influential ultraconservative outlet Breitbart News. —AFP

Trump receives poll boost after silence

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump enjoyed a modest bump in popularity over the Christmas break, prompting pollsters to wonder whether he's more popular when he stays out of the news. During several low-key days at his sun-kissed Florida golf course, Trump's approval ratings increased from 36 percent on the eve of his departure to 40 percent on his return, according to the latest Gallup polls. While he remains historically unpopular, his approval rating is today at a higher level than at any point since June last year—the honeymoon of his presidency.

That bump has rekindled a long-suspected theory among poll-watchers: the most attention-hungry president in modern times might actually be better off slightly out of the limelight. "It's hard thing to prove" said Kyle Kondik, of the University of Virginia, who suspects Trump "does a little bit better in approval when he's not dominating the news so much." Kondik and his colleague Geoffrey Skelley have shown that before the 2016 election, both Trump and Democrat

Blizzard pounds US Northeast

CHARLESTON: Heavy snow and high winds pounded the U.S. East Coast along a front stretching from Maine as far south as North Carolina early yesterday, knocking out power, icing over roadways and closing hundreds of schools. The storm is the product of a rapid and rare sharp drop in barometric pressure known as bombogenesis, or bomb cyclone.

On Wednesday it dumped snow on Florida's capital Tallahassee for the first time in 30 years, and was expected to last through the day. States of emergency were in effect in Florida, Georgia, North Carolina and Virginia and there were blizzard warnings from the Canadian border as far south as Virginia. Federal government offices were delaying opening for two hours on Thursday.

Much of the eastern United States is in the grip of a sustained cold spell that has frozen part of Niagara Falls, played havoc with public works and impeded firefighting in places where temperatures barely broke 20 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 6 centigrade). Areas around Boston were forecast to see about 1 foot (30 cm) of snow on Thursday, and the National Weather Service predicted a similar amount and wind gusts of up to 55 mph (90 kph) in New York City. Schools were ordered to close in both cities. "This could bring some

very dangerous conditions," New York Mayor Bill de Blasio said late on Wednesday. "Both rush hours will be affected," Boston Mayor Marty Walsh earlier told a news conference. "Be patient. With the amount of snow we're getting here, we could be plowing your street and a half hour later it could look like we haven't been there."

Southern snow

Private forecaster Accuweather said snow would fall quickly during the day, at a rate of several inches per hour, with the storm intensified by the bombogenesis effect. The phenomenon occurs when a storm's barometric pressure drops by 24 millibars in 24 hours. The rare type of storm struck the U.S. Southeast on Wednesday, also dumping snow in parts of South Carolina and eastern Georgia, said meteorologist Patrick Burke of the federal Weather Prediction Center.

More than 35,000 customers were without power in Georgia, North Carolina and Virginia early on Thursday, utilities reported online. A part of US-13 at the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel in Virginia was closed due to high winds early on Thursday while state transportation departments throughout the region reported dozens of delays due to deteriorating roads conditions. Late on Wednesday night, a baggage car and two sleeper cars on an Amtrak train traveling from Miami to New York, with 311 passengers aboard, derailed in as it was slowly backing into a station in Savannah, Georgia. No one was injured, an Amtrak spokesman said. —Reuters

50 bodies recovered from horrific bus crash in Peru

Collision on a precarious stretch known as the 'devil's curve'

LIMA: Peruvian emergency workers on Wednesday said they had recovered 50 bodies—six of them children—from a horrific bus crash over a cliff north of the capital Lima. The coach plunged around 100 meters over a seaside cliff on Tuesday after a collision with a truck on a precarious stretch known as the “devil’s curve.” It had been travelling from Huacho, 130 kilometers north of the capital, to Lima with 55 passengers registered and two crew on board. The vehicle landed upside down on rocks at the edge of the sea.

“We have finished the painful task of recovering the bodies. Fifty bodies have been recovered from the accident,” the regional head of Lima’s health service, Felic Palomo, told radio station RPP. “They have been identified by their next of kin,” he said. Efforts to get at the bodies were suspended Tuesday night because the tide had risen and reached the bus, the police said.

More than 200 workers from the police, army and navy took part in the rescue and recovery effort. A police helicopter had to winch some rescue workers to the wreck of the blue bus while others made the precarious journey down on foot with the assistance of ropes. Crews were still at the scene to ascertain whether any more bod-

ies remained in the crushed bus. There were six survivors, all injured. But most on board perished. One passenger, Maximo Jimenez, 24, saved himself by jumping through a window on the bus just as he saw it careen off the road. He suffered a broken arm and took himself to hospital in a taxi, according to doctors who treated him.

Perilous road

Dino Escudero, head of the traffic police, told reporters that a crane was being brought in to haul up the wrecked bus. Other officials said that would permit an inspection to see if anyone had

been crushed underneath. “Hopefully there will be no other bodies,” said a police commander, Victor Rucoba. President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski wrote on Twitter that “it is very painful to suffer an accident of this magnitude.” He expressed his

Vehicle landed upside down on rocks



sympathies with the relatives of those killed.

Pope Francis, who is scheduled to visit Peru later this month, sent his condolences. He asked for “eternal rest for the deceased,” said Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican secretary of state. The accident took place on a coastal highway about 45 kilometers north of Lima, said Colonel Dino Escudero, head of the police highway patrol division. The Pasamayo highway on which the

Clashes in Equatorial Guinea

MALABO: Clashes were reported in Equatorial Guinea near the border with Cameroon on Wednesday, shortly after the West African state said it had thwarted a coup against President Teodoro Obiang Nguema, Africa’s longest-serving leader. Government troops had shot dead a “mercenary” and “used gunfire to disperse them in the forests along the border”, state television TVGE said, without specifying how many “mercenaries” were involved or how long the clashes lasted.

Reports of the shooting came after Security Minister Nicolas Obama Nchama said in a statement on public radio that an attempted coup had been mounted on December 24, allegedly by foreign mercenaries recruited by political opponents. “A group of Chadian, Sudanese and Central Africans [citizens of the Central African Republic] infiltrated Kye Ossi, Ebibeyin, Mongomo, Bata and Malabo to attack the head of state, who was in the Koete Mongomo presidential palace for the year-end holiday,” he said.

The “mercenaries... were recruited by Equatorial Guinean militants from certain radical opposition parties with the support of certain powers”, the minister said. The attempted infil-

tration had been repelled thanks to an operation carried out “in collaboration with the Cameroon security services”, he said. Sources told AFP that the country’s ambassador to Chad had been arrested and was being held in a military camp. Formerly a Spanish colony, Equatorial Guinea is one of sub-Saharan’s biggest oil producers but a large proportion of its 1.2 million population lives in poverty. Obiang, in power for more than 38 years, is accused by critics of brutal repression of opponents, electoral fraud and corruption.

Ambassador arrested

Wednesday’s announcement came after Cameroon on December 27 arrested 38 heavily armed men on the border with the tiny state. Two days later, Equatorial Guinea’s ambassador to France, Miguel Oyono Ndong Mifumu, referred to the incident as an “invasion and destabilisation attempt”. The suspects, taken into custody in a bus on the border, had rocket launchers, rifles and a stockpile of ammunition, according to his office.

On Saturday, the 75-year-old Obiang said “a war” was being prepared against his regime, “because they say I have spent a lot of time in power”. The same day, the country’s ambassador to Chad, Enrique Nsue Anguesom, was arrested in the district of Ebibeyin, on Equatorial Guinea’s border with Cameroon, one of his cousins and a senior police officer told AFP on Wednesday, speaking on condition of anonymity. —AFP



Rescuers, police and firefighters work at the scene after a bus plunged the day before around 100 meters over a cliff when it collided with a truck on a coastal highway near Pasamayo, around 45 km north of Lima. —AFP

tragedy occurred is only used by trucks and buses, as cars travel a different route.

It is a dangerous sea-hugging road where fog is frequent and high humidity can make the roadway slippery. The bus driver had a lot of experience and was working with an assistant, said Luis Martinez, a representative of Transportes

San Martin de Porres, which owned the bus. Martinez could not confirm whether the driver had been killed or injured, but added that the bus underwent a mechanical check before leaving Huacho. More than 2,600 people died in traffic accidents in Peru in 2016, according to the latest available official figures. —AFP

New Jersey poised to bar drunken droning

NEW YORK: US drone sales in 2017 topped \$1 billion for the first time ever, but don’t raise a glass too quickly if you’re in New Jersey, where lawmakers are poised to outlaw drunken droning. It is one of a wave of US states moving to bring the unmanned aircrafts’ high-flying fun back to earth. New Jersey’s Assembly yesterday is slated to vote on a Senate-approved bill to ban inebriated or drugged droning, as well as outlaw flying unmanned aircraft systems over prisons and in pursuit of wildlife.

“It’s basically like flying a blender,” said John Sullivan, 41, of New York, a drone buff and aerial cinematographer. He said he opposed drunk droning but also fretted about regulatory overreach. “If I had like one drink, I’d be hesitant to even fly it.” A 2015 drone crash on the White House lawn fueled debate in the US Congress over the need for drone regulations.

It was a drunken, off-duty employee of the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency who

flew the 2-foot-by-2-foot “quadcopter” from a friend’s apartment balcony and lost control of it over the grounds surrounding the White House, the New York Times reported. New statistics set for release next week show 3.1 million drones were sold in the United States last year, up 28 percent from 2016, said Richard Kowalski, manager for Consumer Technology Association. “This was the first year that drone revenues reached \$1 billion,” Kowalski said in an email.

New Jersey is among at least 38 states considering restrictions on the devices this legislative year, including Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina, said Amanda Essex, senior policy specialist for the National Conference of State Legislatures. “Like any technology, drones have the ability to be used for good, but they also provide new opportunities for bad actors,” said Assemblywoman Annette Quijano of Elizabeth, New Jersey. She backed the bill, which would impose a punishment of up to six months prison and a \$1,000 fine for drunk droning. Already, nine states prohibit drones from operating near or over prisons, including Arizona, Louisiana, Nevada, North Carolina, Oregon, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas and Wisconsin, Essex said. —Reuters

International

Pakistan shrugs off impending US aid cuts but wary of harsher measures

Washington plans to slash 'security assistance'

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan is shrugging off proposed US aid cuts but frets that Washington could take more drastic measures to deter what it sees as the South Asian nation's support for Taliban militants causing chaos in neighboring Afghanistan. Washington plans to imminently slash "security assistance" to Pakistan, US congressional aides told Reuters on Wednesday, although the type, scale and length of the cuts was unclear. A day earlier, the White House said it would suspend about \$255 million in already delayed military assistance.

Tense ties between the uneasy allies nose-dived on Jan 1 when President Donald

Trump lashed out on Twitter against Islamabad's "lies and deceit" despite \$33 billion in aid and the White House warned of "specific actions" to pressurize Pakistan. A staunch US Cold War ally and key player in the US-backed invasion of Afghanistan after the Sept 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, Pakistan has watched warily as Washington has in recent years pivoted towards its arch-foe India.

Over the past decade, US threats to cut aid have been part and parcel of its frustrating relationship with Pakistan, a nation also seen as vital to the peace process in Afghanistan. "Aid cuts will not hurt us," Miftah Ismail, Pakistan's de facto finance minister, told Reuters. "That's not

the leverage they have, because it is something they have reduced drastically over the years." Pakistan received about \$1 billion in US assistance in 2016, down from a peak of about 3.5 billion in 2011, Pakistani and US officials say.

About \$550 million of the 2016 total came from the Coalition Support Fund (CSF), a US Defense Department program to reimburse allies for the costs of supporting counter-terrorist and counter-insurgency operations. Pakistan was the largest recipient of such funds. The remaining \$450 million was a mix of military assistance and funds for international non-government bodies (NGOs) and other development programs, Pakistan's finance ministry says.

Analysts say there are limits to how much the US can fracture relations, since Pakistan cannot be isolated or completely sidelined, because of its proximity to, and influence in, Afghanistan. "There is really no way forward for the United States in Afghanistan without Pakistan playing some kind of cooperative and collaborative role," said Huma Yusuf, a Wilson Center Global Fellow.

Part of solution

Islamabad worries that the United States, seeking to exert greater pressure on its ally, could in future train its crosshairs on Pakistan's fragile economy and impose some sort of finan-

Frustrating relationship with Pakistan



KARACHI: Activists of the Difa-e-Pakistan Council shout anti-US slogans at a protest. —AFP

cial sanctions. Pakistani officials warn economic damage would weaken the country, proving counterproductive in Washington's battle against Islamist militant groups in South Asia. "I can't imagine how the US financially or militarily hurts us and their own war effort doesn't get hurt," said Ismail, adding that it was impos-

sible to find a solution to the Afghan conflict "without Pakistan being part of it". Last year, US officials said the options being discussed to push Pakistan to change its behaviour included targeted sanctions of officials with ties to militant groups waging an insurgency in Afghanistan. —Reuters

S Korea's Park 'took money from spy agency': Reports

SEOUL: Ousted South Korean president Park Geun-Hye is to be charged with accepting millions of dollars worth of bribes from the state spy agency, news reports said yesterday. Park allegedly received between 50 and 200 million won (now \$47,000 to \$188,000) from the National Intelligence Service (NIS) every month from soon after her swearing-in in early 2013 until mid-2016, prosecutors told South Korean media.

The cash—said to total 3.8 billion won—was reportedly delivered by NIS agents to Park's aides in uncrowded parking lots or in back alleys near the presidential Blue House. The money came from the spy agency's "blind budget"—millions of dollars of special funds that can be spent without receipts for anti-espionage activities—Yonhap news agency said. It remains unclear how Park spent the funds but news reports said she used them for personal purposes or to bankroll supporter groups.

Park is already on trial on 18 charges including bribery, coercion and abuse of power for offering governmental favors to tycoons, and prosecutors will add a 19th count to the indictment regarding the payments, reports said. South Korea's first female president was impeached by parliament after months of mass protests over a sprawling graft scandal, and the constitutional court upheld the decision in March last year, dismissing her from office. She has been in custody since March 31. —AFP

Vietnam arrests fugitive tycoon

SINGAPORE/HANOI: A fugitive Vietnamese property tycoon who is accused of spilling state secrets was arrested in Hanoi yesterday after Singapore deported him, despite appeals that his life could be in danger in Vietnam. Phan Van Anh Vu, 42, told his lawyers he was also a senior officer in Vietnam's secret police and was trying to get to Germany and could have details of an operation in which a wanted Vietnamese oil executive was spirited home from Berlin last year.

Vu's case put a new international spotlight on a sweeping crackdown on corruption in the communist state, where graft has flourished alongside years of rapid economic growth that have made it a prime destination for investors. Vietnam's Ministry of Public Security said on its website that Vu was arrested in Hanoi after being deported from Singapore and that it would "investigate according to Vietnamese law".

Vu had been detained in Singapore on Dec 28 as he tried to leave for neighboring Malaysia. Singapore authorities said he

had entered the country on a passport with a false identity while carrying another Vietnamese passport with his real identity and also had a third passport in his possession. Singapore's Ministry of Home Affairs said Vu was wanted under an Interpol "Red Notice" issued by Vietnam and had been removed by the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority.

A lawyer for Vu in Singapore said he was only informed about the deportation nearly three hours after Vu had been flown out. "I am disappointed that, despite our best efforts for our client, he was deported without our knowledge or given an opportunity to contest the allegations made against him," Remy Choo told Reuters. Singapore has close diplomatic and trade ties to Vietnam and both share a concern at China's growing regional influence. This year, Singapore is also chairing the Association of Southeast Asian Nations grouping that aims to boost regional cooperation.

'Transparency and justice'

"Speed has been the enemy of both transparency and justice in this case," said Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director for New York-based Human Rights Watch. "Singapore deserves utter condemnation for forcing him back to face what will certainly be a kangaroo court trial, and quite

possibly a death sentence." Serious security offences can carry the death penalty in Vietnam although that also depends on the motivation and the degree of damage caused. Vietnamese police have not said which secrets Vu is accused of revealing.

Police published a wanted notice for Vu on Dec 21 after failing to find him at his home in the central resort city of Danang, where he had been nicknamed "Aluminum Vu" for his background making window and door frames. For years, he had been a prominent business figure in the city with public connections to authorities, among them the head of its communist party, who was fired in October for misconduct. Dozens of officials and business people have been arrested in a crackdown on corruption that gathered pace last year after changes at the top of the communist party gave greater sway to the security establishment.

The fight against corruption is broadly welcomed in Vietnam, but government critics say they believe it is also being used to undermine officials linked to the administration of former Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung. The crackdown drew global attention last summer when Germany accused Vietnam of kidnapping former oil executive Trinh Xuan Thanh from a Berlin park. —Reuters

International

India eyes ways to stop wasting \$14 billion worth of food a year

Food production is clearly not the main issue

NEW DELHI: For Bhaskar Kumar it is a struggle to name green leafy vegetables found in India for his homework as his staple diet is rice and salt with vegetables served only on festive occasions. But the eight-year-old from Pilakhana village in India's northern state of Uttar Pradesh decides not to ask his mother Shakuni Bai, aware she skipped dinner four times that week.

For Bai is among 194 million Indians going hungry daily, according to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) - despite India wasting food worth about \$14 billion a year, according to government figures. India, one of the world's largest food producers, is trying to tackle waste during production, processing, retailing and consumption by funding internal initiatives and by partnerships on best practice and technology with overseas investors.

But many of those struggling to get enough to eat are concerned that progress is too slow in India which ranked 100 among 119 countries in the 2017 Global Hunger Index, with 14.5 percent of the population undernourished. Bai said her problems getting food came when three years of inadequate rainfall were followed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "demonetization", when two of the highest denomination notes were scrapped in November 2016.

"I had my own land where I used to grow rice and wheat alternately but with three years of consecutive drought I mortgaged my land to pay the mounting debt," Bai, 42, said during an interview at her mud-and-brick hut in Pilakhana. "I decided to give myself a last chance and was planning to pay the mortgage by farming as the forecast suggested good rain in the coming months but then demonetization happened. The

little money I had saved to buy seeds became worthless," adding by the time she changed her notes the price of seed had soared. Bai now works as a daily labourer, earning 120 Indian rupees (\$1.87) a day, which is not enough to support her family of eight that includes five children.

More than enough food

The paradox of millions going hungry in India while food goes to waste is receiving increasing amounts of attention as the FAO stresses that one third of food produced globally for human consumption is wasted every year. As the World Economic Forum has highlighted, food production is clearly not the main issue as India needs 225-230 million tons of food per year to feed its population - and farm output in 2015-2016 hit more than 270 million tons.

Sharad Pawar, a former agriculture minister, once told parliament that nearly 40 percent of the value of annual production was wasted, with crops left to rot in the sun without storage or transportation, or eaten by insects and rats. This wastage has a knock-on effect on the environment as well, as the efforts made to produce this generates greenhouse gases, uses water, and can lead to deforestation. But while India's Amul, the world's largest dairy cooperative, has been widely praised for successfully processing huge amounts of milk quickly and safely for years, spurring the so-called "White Revolution" in India, authorities have struggled to stop vast amounts of grain wasting every year.

The Food Corporation of India (FCI), the nation's main grain procurement agency set up

**194 million
Indians
going
hungry daily**



JALANDHAR: This photo taken on December 30, 2017 shows an Indian woman stitching together a football as children sit nearby next to a field. — AFP

about 50 years ago, now sits on mounds of rice and wheat and has faced criticism for being too weighed down by process and bureaucracy to solve the problems. A report by the government's Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) published last year involved a detailed analysis on shortcomings of the FCI including wastage, misappropriation, and fraudulent payments. An official with the FCI, who wished to remain anonymous, said a key reason for food waste is damage caused by a lack of infrastructure which it is trying to overcome by investing in building new cold storage facilities over the next five years. But while this food is wasted, millions of

people are going hungry, with 38.4 percent of children aged under five stunted, according to the Global Hunger Index. "This reflects the chronic lack of balanced food," said Ashish Agarwal, a food rights activist with Aligarh-based non-profit group UDAAN Society that focuses on rural development. "The under-5 mortality rate is 4.8 percent in India, partially because of inadequate nutrition and unhealthy environment."

Critics are concerned that it is not enough to just focus on boosting grain storage, as 350 million of India's 1.3 billion people live in rural locations where electricity is unreliable and erratic so the use of cold storage facilities limited. —Reuters

Indian Muslims fret amid drive against immigrants

FOFONGA: Marzina Bibi, a Muslim woman living in India's northeastern state of Assam, is petrified she will be declared stateless. The 26-year-old's name was not on a preliminary list of citizens that was published at midnight on Sunday, although she holds a voter identity card and had voted in state elections in 2016. "Why are they doing this to me?" Bibi asked, sitting beside a bamboo mat she was weaving outside her mud house in Assam's Fofonga village. "They think I am a Bangladeshi. I was born here, my parents were born here, I am an Indian."

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which came to power in Assam in the April, 2016 elec-

tions, vowed during the campaign to act against illegal Muslim immigrants from neighboring Bangladesh. But rights activists say the drive is also targeting Muslims who are Indian citizens. Two national spokesmen for the BJP declined to comment. A spokesman for the Ministry of Home Affairs in New Delhi did not reply to e-mails and a telephone call seeking comment.

Citizenship and illegal migration are volatile issues in tea-growing and oil-rich Assam, home to more than 32 million people, about a third of whom are Muslims. Hundreds of people were killed in the 1980s in a violent protest by a native Assamese group against outsiders from the state taking the bulk of jobs and cornering resources, including land.

For the latest update of the National Register of Citizens (NRC), all residents of Assam had to produce documents proving that they or their families lived in the country before March 24, 1971, to be recognized as Indian citizens. According to the preliminary list of the NRC, about 19 million people in Assam have now been verified as Indian citizens. More names will be

added, and officials say the final list is likely to be published in July. Reuters spoke to nearly two dozen Muslims, including Bibi, from paddy-growing villages around Fofonga who said their names were not on the preliminary list. "I feel we are targeted because we are Muslims," said Bibi, who said she has already proved she was Indian - she was jailed for eight months on charges of being an illegal migrant from Bangladesh and was let off only after showing documents attesting to her nationality. Surrounded by her neighbors in the village, she showed her voter identity card and the court order for her release from jail.

No religious bias

The BJP has said previous governments have included many Bangladeshi immigrants on electoral rolls to buy votes. At the local NRC office in the Muslim-majority area, only around 4,500 people had made it to the preliminary list out of nearly 11,000 who had applied. The government officer in charge of the centre, Gautam Sharmah, said there was no religious bias against Muslims.

"That's impossible. We only look at documents," Sharmah said at his office, as people trickled in to look for their names on the second day of the list's publication. "The time taken in the verification process depends on what kind of documents people submit." Reuters saw a tribal Hindu man leaving the NRC office with a smile after being told that the names of all six members of his family were on the list. Soon after, two Muslim women came with their infants, and left disappointed.

Hundreds of thousands of people fled to India from Muslim-majority Bangladesh after it declared independence from Pakistan on March 26, 1971, setting off a nine-month civil war. Most of them settled in Assam and the neighboring state of West Bengal, where there are similar demands to send back illegal Muslim immigrants. The migrants include many Hindus, but the federal BJP government has said they will not be deported. Himanta Biswa Sarma, Assam's finance minister who is also in charge of the citizenship register, told Reuters that all those whose names do not figure in the final NRC list would be segregated. —Reuters

International

Games and festivities as Myanmar marks 70 years of independence

‘We need to remember this day every year’

YANGON: Children clambered up oiled banana stalks as teenagers wrestled for greasy coconuts in street fairs held around Yangon yesterday to celebrate Myanmar's 70 years of independence. The national holiday saw roads blocked off with pop music and live commentary blasting from sound systems in a cross between a street festival and a public sports day.

In Yangon's northern suburb of Insein, on-lookers cheered a young boy as he endeavored to climb up an oiled, suspended banana trunk to reach the Myanmar flag at the top—a symbol of the nation's long struggle for independence. “We need to remember this day every year. It's important for the whole country,” organizer Ye Yint, 27, told AFP, sporting a Manchester United top. “Younger generations need to remember the older generation that fought for our freedom.”

Renewed patriotic fervor

Myanmar declared independence from British colonial rule on 4 January 1948 after a long fight championed by General Aung San, the father of the country's current civilian leader, Aung San Suu Kyi.

Yet official celebrations for the 70th anniversary were kept low-key despite the renewed patriotic fervor that has gripped

Myanmar as it faces global condemnation of alleged military atrocities committed against the country's Rohingya Muslim minority.

Vice President Myint Swe was the highest-ranking official to attend a solemn ceremony that started before dawn broke in the capital Naypyidaw. But the day's meaning was not lost on ordinary people, 18-year-old Aung Thant Kyaw explained, after several bruising rounds saw him crowned champion in a wrestle for a coconut covered in grease. “Our Independence Day hero General Aung San and his comrades fought to give our country independence,” he said of a national hero who was assassinated months before Myanmar secured the independence he struggled for. “So today we play games to celebrate our freedom and to honor him.”

Other competitions included a cushion fight on a bamboo pole over a muddy pond of water, a race to snatch mouthfuls of suspended biscuits with no hands and a team competition to pass scoops of flour by hand. But the most eye-watering was an extreme version of the ‘three-legged’ race for pairs of naked young boys, running along with their penises tied together using a length of ribbon. There was jubilation for the winners but tears for the losing team who fell over halfway along the track. —AFP



YANGON: Youths play a traditional pillow fight game on a bamboo pole during festivities marking Myanmar's 70th Independence Day. —AFP

Indian pilots grounded after ‘mid-air row’

MUMBAI: An Indian airline said yesterday it had grounded two pilots over allegations they had a fight and both briefly stormed out of the cockpit during a New Year's Day flight from London to Mumbai. Jet Airways is investigating claims that a male pilot slapped his female colleague during a heated argument while the plane was in the air with 324 passengers on board. Reports in several Indian newspapers, quoting unnamed sources, said the mid-air altercation led the female pilot to leave the cockpit in tears and she had to be persuaded to go back in by cabin crew.

At one point the male pilot also left the cockpit, leaving the controls briefly unattended, the Times of India claimed. “A misunderstanding occurred between the cockpit crew... However, the same was quickly resolved amicably and the flight... continued its journey to Mumbai, landing safely,” Jet said in a statement. “The airline has reported the incident to the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) and the concerned crew have been derostered pending an internal investigation that has since been initiated,” it added. The flight departed London around 1000 GMT on Monday and arrived in India's financial capital on schedule around nine hours later at midnight local time. “At Jet Airways, safety of guests, crew and assets is of paramount importance and the airline has zero tolerance for any action of its employees that compromises safety,” the airline said in its statement. —AFP

Dozen dead in South Africa train crash

JOHANNESBURG: More than a dozen people were killed and hundreds were feared injured after a train struck a lorry, derailed and burst into flames in South Africa yesterday. Footage from television news showed fire engulfing one of the train's carriages after the accident, which occurred as it travelled between Port Elizabeth and Johannesburg.

Transport Minister Joe Maswanganyi said the train, which was carrying 700 passengers, jumped the tracks after hitting the truck, which was attempting to negotiate a level crossing. He said preliminary investigations suggested 12 people had died in the crash and 268 were in-

jured, including four critically. Emergency services said 14 people had died, and dozens were hurt, calling the minister's injury estimate premature.

“I have been briefed that the accident was the result of a truck that was driving through a level crossing... You can see for yourself the truck driver was taking chances,” Maswanganyi said on the news channel of national broadcaster SABC. He said the driver had survived and police were investigating. Emergency services and rail officials were not immediately able to confirm the circumstances of the crash.

South Africa has the continent's largest railway network, but it has been plagued by mismanagement and under-investment that has seen train use dwindle despite it being the cheapest form of public transportation. In a recent report, the government's Rail Safety Regulator (RSR) said that, in the 2016/17 financial year, 495 people lost their lives in the country's railway environment and 2,079 were injured. The death toll was up 5 percent increase from the previous year. —Reuters

Indonesia police make huge marijuana bust

JAKARTA: Indonesian authorities have seized 1.3 tons of marijuana and arrested six people in a major drug bust on New Year's Eve, police said yesterday. Authorities confiscated the drugs at a port near Lampung, on the southern tip of Sumatra Island. The bricks of tightly-wrapped cannabis—which were displayed at a press conference yesterday—were found hidden inside several vehicles waiting to cross to West Java, local media reported.

Six people were arrested in connection with the haul, but police have not provided a street value for the seized drugs. West Jakarta police Chief Idham Aziz said drug-related cases in West Java Indonesia's most populous province—were increasing. “Narcotics cases between 2015-2017 are up 11.8 percent and the victims are mostly children and teenagers,” Aziz said at a press conference. Indonesia has some of the toughest anti-drugs laws in the world, including capital punishment for traffickers. Authorities, including President Joko Widodo, have declared the world's most populous Muslim-majority country is in the grips of a “narcotics emergency”, although accurate data on drug use is notoriously difficult to find. —AFP

Lifestyle

Friday Times

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This file photo shows Australian actress Cate Blanchett posing as she arrives for the screening of the film "Sicario" at the 68th Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southeastern France. — AFP

Cate Blanchett to head Cannes festival jury

Lifestyle | Movies

CATE BLANCHETT TO HEAD CANNES FESTIVAL JURY

Cate Blanchett, the double Oscar-winning actress leading a Hollywood campaign to tackle sexual harassment in the workplace, will head the jury at this year's Cannes Film Festival, organizers said yesterday. Australian Blanchett, 48, who helped launch the "Time's Up" initiative this week following a string of sexual assault accusations against prominent men in the film industry, will become the 12th woman to lead the prestigious panel at Cannes, which kicks off on May 8.

"We're very pleased to welcome a rare and unique artist with talent and conviction," Cannes president Pierre Lescure and delegate general Thierry Fremaux said in a joint statement. "Our conversations this autumn convince us she will be a committed president, and a passionate and generous spectator." The choice of Blanchett, who was named best actress at the 2014 Academy Awards for her role in Woody Allen's "Blue Jasmine", will be seen as politically charged after a year in which the sexual harassment scandal surrounding Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein sparked a deluge of allegations against powerful men in entertainment, politics and the media.

Any male who thinks it's his prerogative to sexually intimidate or abuse women they need to be held to account

She was one of the first women to speak out against Weinstein, who faces claims of a string of sexual assaults and rapes from more than one hundred accusers. Weinstein has denied some of the accusations. "Any male who's in a position of authority or power, you know, whether he be a film producer or the president of the United States who thinks it's his prerogative to sexually intimidate or abuse women that they come into contact with, whether in the workplace or otherwise, they need to be held to account," Blanchett said during the September premier of her latest picture, "Thor: Ragnarok".

She was one of over 300 top women in Hollywood, joining the likes of Meryl Streep and Jennifer Lawrence, to unveil the "Time's Up" initiative on Monday to tackle the pervasive culture of sexual harassment at work. It urges companies, government agencies and even the US federal court system to re-examine harassment policies. Blanchett won the Oscar for best supporting actress in 2005 for her portrayal of Katherine Hepburn in Martin Scorsese's "The Aviator" and won Venice's best actress award in 2007 for her androgynous depiction of Bob Dylan in the biopic "I'm Not There". She succeeds Spanish director Pedro Almodovar as jury head at Cannes, which last year awarded its prestigious Palme d'Or for the Swedish tragicomedy "The Square".

The 10 previous heads of the prestigious panel:

- 2017:** Pedro Almodovar, Spain's most celebrated living movie director, who won Oscars for "All About My Mother" (1999) and "Talk To Her" (2002)
- 2016:** George Miller, the Australian creator of the "Mad Max" films, also known for the animated hit "Happy Feet" (2006)
- 2015:** Joel and Ethan Coen, the sibling writing/directing duo behind the quirky US cult hits "The Big Lebowski" (1998) and "Fargo" (1996), and the Oscar-winning "No Country for Old Men" (2008)
- 2014:** Jane Campion, New Zealand director of "The Piano" (1993)
- 2013:** Steven Spielberg, US director of "Raiders of the Lost Ark" (1981), "Jurassic Park" (1993) and "Schindler's List" (1993)
- 2012:** Nanni Moretti, Italian actor and director of Cannes winner "The Son's Room" (2001)



This combination of pictures created yesterday shows (from top left) US actress and president of the jury of 71th Cannes Festival Cate Blanchett on April 11, 2017, New Zealander director and president of the 67th Cannes Festival Jane Campion on May 13, 2014, French actress and president of the jury of 61th Cannes Festival Isabelle Huppert on May 13, 2009, president of the 54th Cannes Film Festival jury, Norwegian actress and director Liv Ullmann on May 9, 2001, Isabelle Adjani, French actress and president of the 50th Cannes festival 1997, on May 7, 1997, president of the 48th Festival de Cannes, Jeanne Moreau, president of jury of the 32th Cannes Festival and French writer Françoise Sagan on May 10, 1979 in Cannes, French actress and president of the jury of the 28th Cannes International Film Festival Jeanne Moreau, on May 10, 1975, Swedish actress and president of the jury of the 26th Cannes Film Festival Ingrid Bergman in 1959, actress and president of the 24th Cannes Festival Michele Morgan, in May 1971, president of the jury of the 19th Cannes Film Festival and Italian film actress Sophia Loren on November 2, 1965 at the Savoy Hotel in London, US actress and president of the jury of the 18th Cannes Film Festival Olivia de Havilland, during the Cannes Film Festival, on April 16, 1953. — AFP

- 2011:** Robert De Niro, American actor in "Raging Bull" (1980), "Casino" (1995) and "Meet the Fockers" (2004)
- 2010:** Tim Burton, American director of "Edward Scissorhands" (1990) and "Alice in Wonderland" (2010)
- 2009:** Isabelle Huppert, French actress in "The Piano Teacher" (2001) and "La Ceremonie" (1995)
- 2008:** US actor and director Sean Penn, who appeared in "Dead Man Walking" (1995), "Mystic River" (2003) and "Milk" (2008)—AFP



This file photo shows Australian actress Cate Blanchett posing during a photocall for the film "Carol" at the 68th Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southeastern France.



This file photo shows Australian actress Cate Blanchett smiling as she arrives for the screening of the film "Carol" at the 68th Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southeastern France. — AFP

Lifestyle

Golden Globes: Men in black mocked for flimsy #MeToo support

Normally ahead of the Golden Globes, the women of Hollywood would be clamoring to find the perfect headline-grabbing dress for the red carpet. Instead, many are planning to sport basic black to Sunday's gala—a sartorial protest over sexual harassment. Jessica Chastain, Meryl Streep and Emma Stone are leading the actresses taking a stand against the avalanche of misconduct allegations that have felled Harvey Weinstein and numerous other Tinseltown A-listers. But backing for the campaign by male stars including Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson—who say they, too, will turn out in black in a gesture of solidarity has raised eyebrows and prompted ridicule.

“Don’t most men who attend the Globes come cloaked in either all-black or mostly black, with a black suit and black shoes and a black tie, anyway?” asked New York-based millennial-focused news site Mic. “Haven’t men who have already stood at odds with women in Hollywood speaking out, like Matt Damon for instance, shown up to the Globes in black?” It is true that while outliers like Johnson himself, Donald Glover and Alan Cumming are sometimes partial to burgundy velvet, a glittery jacket or even a skin-tone suit, the vast majority of men turn up in reg-



The #MeToo hashtag campaign encourages women to denounce experiences of sexual abuse. — AFP

ulation tuxedos.

The stylists who say their male clients will tone it down in support of the so-called “backlash” include Ilaria Urbinati, who is dressing Johnson, along with Armie Hammer, Liev Schreiber, Tom Hiddleston and others. “Because everyone keeps asking me... Yes,

the men will be standing in solidarity with women on this wearing-all-black movement to protest against gender inequality at this year’s Golden Globes,” she posted on Instagram. “At least all my guys will be. Safe to say this may not be the right time to choose to be the odd man out here... just sayin.” — AFP

Rick Hall, unlikely producer of soul sound, dead at 85

Rick Hall, the white fiddler who became an unlikely force in soul music and made the small town of Muscle Shoals, Alabama, an international destination, has died at age 85, his family said Wednesday. Hall, who had been suffering from cancer, died Tuesday at his home near the legendary Fame Recording Studios he built in the riverside town of 14,000.

“We hope the band in Heaven is ready. If not, there’s going to be a problem,” his family said in a statement. Hall turned his studio in a go-to hub for soul music, with distinctive horns and a steady rhythm section complementing the vocal powers of visiting singers. The studio had its breakthrough when Hall licensed Percy Sledge’s “When a Man Loves a Woman,” recorded nearby, and labels soon were sending star talent to Fame to make their albums. The studio recorded Etta James, Otis Redding, Little Richard, Wilson Pickett and Aretha Franklin, who recorded her early hits “I Never Loved a Man (the Way I Love You)” and “Do Right Woman, Do Right Man” at Fame.

But the sessions with Franklin ended in disaster when Hall got into a fistfight with the diva’s then husband, Ted White, who demanded that the studio owner fire musicians for allegedly harassing his wife. Atlantic Records pulled Franklin out and she recorded her classic “Respect” in New York, although she brought in musicians from Muscle Shoals. Hall often marveled at how Muscle Shoals became internationally known. Musicians under Hall in 1969 founded the separate Muscle Shoals Sound Studio, where The Rolling Stones recorded parts of their acclaimed “Sticky Fingers” album.

Hall’s prominence in African American music was unexpected in Alabama, one of the most conservative US states whose governor George



File photo shows Rick Hall, the producer who forged the Southern soul style known as the Muscle Shoals sound. — AFP

Wallace had vowed to preserve segregation forever. “I’m one of them. I feel black,” Hall later told television host Larry King. “I can tell you that immediately when black people are around me they feel very good about me,” he said. Hall had grown up in grinding poverty, with his father working in a sawmill and his mother leaving to help run a brothel. Hall, after quitting a factory job, became a fiddler and found his passion for country music, gradually earning a living as a songwriter and taking over the local studio. He said that he found a natural connection between country and soul music, even though the genres were dominated by different races. “Both country and soul songs often dealt with growing up dirt poor, trying to make life better, hopeless love,” he told the country magazine No Depression. — AFP

Turkey fines TV channel over girls in shorts in talent show

Turkey’s broadcasting watchdog has fined a TV station nearly one million lira (\$266,000) over footage of young girls dancing in shorts in a talent competition after viewers complained of “child abuse”, a board member said yesterday. Citing moral dangers for the children, it penalised TV8 channel for footage in the “Yetenek Sizsiniz” (“You Got Talent”) programme which showed a group of girls, aged from 7 to 11, who performed in shorts and tank tops, the board member who did not want to be named told Reuters.

The move by the Turkish Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTUK) is likely to further anger government critics, who accuse President Tayyip Erdogan and his Islamist-rooted ruling AK Party of trying to roll back secularism and civil rights for minorities, gay people and women. Last year, hundreds of Turkish women marched in Istanbul to protest against violence and threats from men demanding they dress more conservatively. RTUK ruled that the footage had violated its ethical broadcast regulations and fined the channel 2 percent of its advertising revenues, amounting almost to 1 million lira. The regulations state that “programs which contain content that could harm the physical, mental and moral development of children and youth cannot be broadcast”. RTUK said in a report that it had received complaints that the channel had exploited the children in an “immoral” show. — Reuters

Paris Hilton is engaged

Paris Hilton has confirmed she is engaged to Chris Zylka. The 36-year-old heiress “immediately said yes” when her boyfriend popped the question on the ski slopes during their holiday in Aspen, Colorado, over the weekend, and couldn’t stop shaking when she put the ring on. She told PEOPLE magazine: “I am so excited to be engaged to the love of my life and my best friend. I have never felt so happy, safe and loved. He is perfect for me in every way and showed me that fairytales really do exist. I was so excited and surprised. I immediately said yes. The ring was so gorgeous and sparkling. I was shaking as I put it on. It is the most beautiful ring that I have ever seen.” The 32-year-old actor cannot wait to spend the rest of his life with the socialite, who he described as his “dream girl”. He said: “Paris is the most beautiful and incredible woman both inside and out.

“I feel like the luckiest man in the world to be marrying my dream girl. I can’t wait to spend the rest of our lives together.” Paris and ‘The Leftovers’ star first met at an Academy Awards party eight years ago but were reunited two years ago, and she confirmed their relationship on her Instagram page in February 2017. In November, the businesswoman said Chris was “everything [she’s] ever wished for” and was glad he saved her from “all these weirdos”. She said: “We are so perfect together. He’s my everything. I’m so happy and excited to have someone who is my best friend, who I trust. Everything I’ve ever wished for came true. I always thought I would end up alone just because I never thought I would fall in love and trust somebody. With him, it’s like God literally made him for me to save me from all these weirdos.” — Bang Showbiz



Paris Hilton and Chris Zylka

Lifestyle | Features



Actress Aisha Jawando performs as Cinderella in a production of the pantomime "Cinderella" at the Hackney Empire theatre in London.



In this undated handout photograph received from Hackney Empire, director and actor, Susie McKenna (center) performs with actors Kat B and Tony Whittle as the Ugly Sisters in a production of the pantomime "Cinderella" at the Hackney Empire theatre in London. — AFP photos



Actor Darren Hart performs as Buttons in a production of the pantomime 'Cinderella' at the Hackney Empire theatre in London.

British panto brings a contemporary twist to fairytales

A figure styled as Donald Trump is booed off stage by a rowdy audience enjoying the thrills of British pantomime, bringing a contemporary twist to traditional fairytales. Up and down the country over the festive season, children and adults alike flock to theatres to watch a "panto"—complete with princesses, political jibes and innuendo. Audiences attending pantomimes instinctively know when to yell out stock phrases such as "He's behind you!", while newcomers quickly learn when to join the collective hissing or cheering.

"Lots of Americans who come in are just wide-eyed and can't believe it! And by the end they've got it, they're joining in too," said Susie McKenna, director and actor who plays the Wicked Stepmother in "Cinderella" at London's Hackney Empire theatre. "It is definitely unique, it is definitely quintessentially British." Pantomime traces its origins to the 16th-century "Commedia dell'Arte", a form of Italian street theatre which travelled to Britain, according to London's Victoria and Albert Museum. It was transformed through London theatres, initially with music but no dialogue, morphing into the familiar Christmas panto during the Victorian era.

Pantomimes are now staged at theatres across Britain, often starring a local celebrity and actors of all ages. In Hackney, McKenna has been writing the annual festive show for nearly 20 years and has become accustomed to another tradition—weaving in references to recent events. "This year because we were talking about the travesty that is Brexit, we have a character who's Italian who's going to be deported," she lamented, reflecting the views of the largely pro-EU neighborhood.

Tax havens and fake news also get a mention, while the brief appearance of Trump at the royal ball—which Cinderella flees at midnight—speaks to the ongoing saga of the US president's planned state visit to the UK. "So many people have said to me it was such a release, to feel that they could boo him," said McKenna, recalling audiences' delight when Trump is banished from the ball. For Darren Hart, who plays Cinderella's best friend Buttons, contemporary audiences are open to a recap of news alongside their musical theatre. "That's how fast society is now and how fast we are with our media," he said. "Referencing social culture but having our twist on it, and allowing the audience to debate it more afterwards."

Weinstein scandal

While pantomimes fill big theatres, new spaces are also tackling the genre with one London show this season being performed in a converted caravan. "Caravantomime" takes on the fairytale "Sleeping Beauty", whose star joins forces with a lost Cinderella to change both their destinies. "With a bit of sense of humor, we question what's going on in certain fairytales, and we absolutely bring in what's been happening," said Robin Steegman, creator of the 20-minute show she describes as an "anti-panto".

Steegman gives her heroines the agency they lack in their original stories, while also making direct reference to disgraced Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein—who is facing multiple accusations of sexual misconduct, which he denies. "Sexual harassment, I think, especially in this climate, it's good to bring it

to life that it happens in many situations," she said. But although Steegman has overhauled the fairytale ending, her play has kept true to panto form with its wider cultural references and men in drag.

Breaking down barriers

As well established as the pantomime horse—played by two actors inside a furry costume—the pantomime sees a male actor take on a lead female role. While men and boys have played female parts for centuries in Britain, largely due to societal restrictions placed on women, Hart believes that continuing to bend the gender norms can help children become more open-minded as they grow up. "What it allows them to do is to break down those barriers that may form later on in life and the questions they may ask. Because a lot of children don't question it," he said.

But beyond the celebrated traditions on stage, the key to a successful panto is the audience. "It's different to normal theatre, because normal theatre is like watching a TV boxset but it's live," said Aisha Jawando, who plays Cinderella at Hackney Empire. "Panto is very inclusive. We want to hear people making noise," she added. Hart agreed, rolling off a list of pantomime essentials including a good script and a great dame. "The last thing is an audience that is willing to have a good time. There's no point coming to a panto expecting to just sit there and watch it, it's a waste!"—AFP

DJs Diplo, Ronson to debut collaboration at New York festival

Diplo and Mark Ronson, two DJs who have achieved wide success as producers, will premiere a new collaboration at New York's Governors Ball music festival, promoters announced Wednesday. Unveiling the lineup for the June 1-3 festival, Governors Ball said the two would launch a new act called Silk City, the name likely an allusion to a Philadelphia club where Diplo used to play.

The artists themselves did not immediately reveal more details but Diplo, in an interview last year with GQ, said he and Ronson were working on an album together based on their shared love of disco music. Ronson, a Londoner who had his start in New York, has had a major behind-the-scenes impact on pop music as a producer for artists including Adele and Amy

Winehouse. He finally achieved stardom on his own with his infectious 2014 hit "Uptown Funk," which featured vocals by Bruno Mars.

Diplo became known for his work with hip-hop globalist M.I.A. and has since recorded with a who's who of top artists, notably freshening Justin Bieber's sound with the tropical house beats of the Canadian singer's latest album. Diplo has also become a major live attraction with his groups Major Lazer and Jack U, the latter a collaboration with another electronic producer, Skrillex. Governors Ball's key headliner will be Eminem, who is returning to live performances after releasing his long-awaited "Revival" album last month.—AFP



File photo shows DJ Diplo attending the Billboard Women In Music 2017 at the Ray Dolby Ballroom in Hollywood, California. — AFP photos



File photo shows musician Mark Ronson on the red carpet during the 2017 American Foundation for AIDS Research (amFAR) Hong Kong gala at Shaw Studios in Hong Kong.

TROPICAL ISLAND PARADISE WITH A CAUTIOUS EYE TO GROWTH

It's a nation that boasts warm azure seas and dream beaches, a landscape ranging from volcanic rocks to tropical rain-forest, and stable democratic rule—yet many people have never heard of it. Tourists to Sao Tome and Principe, a scattering of islands off the coast of western equatorial Africa that once served the slave and sugar trades of Portuguese colonial rulers, are rare. And though this paradise has been dubbed “the islands in the middle of the world”—because of their proximity to the zero point on GPS, with the prime meridian just six degrees to the west and the equator crossing one island—it rarely features on any radar for investors.

Eyes to the East

In 2002, Sao Tome's then president Fradique de Menezes announced a deal with the United States to create the deep-water port his country lacks and to build a US military base. Washington never confirmed the plan, despite stakes in the booming oil industry of the region. Today—like many other African nations—the country has turned to China to help its development, especially infrastructure. In December 2016, Sao Tome renewed diplomatic ties with Beijing to the detriment of its rival Taiwan, which had cooperated with the African archipelago since 1997. “Our country wanted to join this group of

countries that is benefiting from Chinese funding,” Finance Minister Americo De Oliveira Ramos told AFP after the pact with Beijing.

Economic sectors such as health, oil or China's primary interest here—fisheries—are earmarked for development, according to the finance minister. China is also pursuing the deepwater port proposal that went into abeyance as the Pentagon waged the Iraq War. In June, Sao Tome signed an agreement to let Chinese trawlers ply the country's waters alongside those of Japan and the European Union.

'Smart tourism'

China's arrival has raised concerns among environmentalists, particularly opposed to illegal and intensive shark fishing. But paradise is unspoiled in rural areas that are home to almost 600 recorded species of plant, not to mention those that remain undiscovered and unidentified. The government is keen to encourage tourism to provide jobs and income—two-thirds of the population live below the poverty line—but without harming the islands' natural beauty.

Renowned local chef Joao Carlos Silva—also a celebrity in Portugal—is pounding the drum for low-volume ecotourism. He uses organic produce in his kitchen, most of which he gathers

and grows in the garden of his farm. “We live in a country with an interesting biodiversity and where we can grow crops without chemicals and with traditional techniques,” Silva says, advocating “smart tourism”, a far cry from mass arrivals.

Toll of development

Among the obstacles to growth in tourism, entrepreneurs cite the sky-high cost of lending. Manuel Nazare, the owner of the Praia Inhamé hotel in Porto Alegre, told AFP in 2016: “I borrow money from the local bank at very high rates, 24 percent.” Another hindrance is the price of a trip, which makes visiting Sao Tome a luxury for Europeans though the cost of living is low. A return air fare from Lisbon costs at least 850 euros (more than \$1,000) and connecting flights are sparse, via Gabon, Ghana or Portugal.

While officials plan growth, including expansion of the international airport, the toll of development on the environment is an issue. A veteran figure in the tourism sector said he had observed a worrying degradation of the sea floor over the past two decades. “The big question is whether the public will benefit from development, and whether nature in Sao Tome will be preserved,” he said. — AFP



A handout picture released yesterday shows characters of the hit US show Game of Thrones on a new collection of stamps to be released by the Royal Mail. — AFP photos

Britain celebrates 'Game of Thrones' with new stamps

Stars of “Game of Thrones” will appear on a new collection of stamps to celebrate Britain's contribution to the fantasy series, Royal Mail announced. Ten characters are pictured in the souvenir series unveiled on Wednesday, set against dramatic scenes from the hit US show. Highlighting the prominence of British stars among the cast, the stamps feature actors Kit Harington, who plays Jon Snow, and Emilia Clarke (Daenerys Targaryen) among others.

Nikolaj Coster-Waldau, from Denmark, and American Peter Dinklage are the two actors included who hail from elsewhere. One of the stamps features an image of the series' famous Iron Throne. An additional five stamps feature non-human characters, including dragons and dire wolves, as part of the series which will be

available from January 23. Filmed largely in Northern Ireland, the fantasy epic has become a global phenomenon since its debut in 2010. The latest seventh series has also featured British pop sensation Ed Sheeran, who did not make it into the Royal Mail collection.

The television series has won 38 Emmys, more than any other fictional show in history, and one Golden Globe award. “Game of Thrones” is also a nominee for best drama series at this year's Golden Globes, competing against shows including “The Handmaid's Tale” and “The Crown”. — AFP



British actress Emilia Clarke playing Daenerys Targaryen, one of the characters of the hit US show Game of Thrones, part of a new collection of stamps released by the Royal Mail.



British actor Kit Harington who plays Jon Snow, one of the characters of the hit US show Game of Thrones, part of a new collection of stamps released by the Royal Mail.

Lifestyle | Features



Bao Shanchun watches television in his home in Laoximen, the city's oldest neighborhood, in Shanghai. — AFP photos



Zhu Laiying washes dishes inside her home in Laoximen.

Old Shanghai neighborhood shivers in winter

Amidst the skyscrapers of a modern Chinese metropolis, the city's oldest neighborhood shivers through the winter thanks to an old rule forbidding central heating. In Laoximen, not far from Shanghai's swanky riverfront Bund, locals and migrant workers bundle up in thick coats inside houses built decades ago. To save energy, the Chinese government decided in the 1950s that areas of the country south of the Qinling mountains and Huaihe river in north-central China would not have state-provided central heating.

Shanghai lies in the designated southern zone even though average temperatures in winter are around four degrees at night and 12 degrees during the day. And in the city's lower-income neighborhoods such as Laoximen, people are too poor to pay for electric heaters. Many of them own air conditioners that can

double as heating devices, but they are left largely unused in the winters because residents cannot afford the resulting electricity bills, which can top 100 yuan per month (\$15) or much more.

'We just use hot water pouch to keep our hands warm'



A woman who gave her name as Sun (right) eats dinner with her husband in their home in Laoximen.



Luo Guihua arranges food inside her home in Laoximen.



He Mincai cooks inside her home in Laoximen.



Bao Shanchun carries a blanket outside his home in Laoximen.



A woman who gave her name as Yin (right) sits with neighbors outside her home in Laoximen.



Wang Juan holds her daughter in their home in Laoximen.

The area used to be the city's cultural center. Surrounding a Confucian temple, the mostly two- and three-storey wooden buildings remain at the heart of Shanghai's commercial district even today. It is in this neighborhood that migrant workers can rent homes for just 1,000 yuan (\$150) a month. For Zhang Dongjun, a 57-year-old street sweeper, a heater was too much of a luxury to pack into his tiny single room: a bunk bed takes up most of the space. He uses an electric blanket to keep himself warm at night. A woman in her 70s who gave only her sur-

name, Yin, complained about the lack of a more affordable heating system.

The cold weather makes her legs ache, Yin said, adding she spends most of her retirement money on healthcare costs. "Heaters use electricity and we never turn them on unless we have friends or family visiting us," she said. "Most of the time, we just use a hot-water pouch to keep our hands warm." Bao Shanchun, who collects antiques from the many old houses being demolished around Shanghai, shares a heater with another man

in a space less than 10 square meters. But it is not turned on even at night. "I'm very happy here to earn one or two hundred yuan a day. To make money every day makes me happy," said Bao, who came to Shanghai 15 years ago from nearby Jiangsu province because he thought "gold is everywhere" in the city. "I will go back to my hometown when I'm 70," said Bao, now 64. "I have big houses there." — AFP

ANCIENT ANGKORIAN RETURNED FROM BRITAIN TO CAMBODIA



A statue with a set of ancient Angkor-era gold jewelry is pictured during a special exhibition at the National Museum in Phnom Penh yesterday. The piece was part of a set of ancient Angkorian gold jewelry which was returned from Britain to Cambodia last month on December 2 with an elaborate procession through the capital, decades after the precious pieces were looted from a famed jungle temple during the kingdom's civil war.



Visitors take pictures of a statue with a set of ancient Angkor-era gold jewelry during a special exhibition at the National Museum in Phnom Penh. — AFP photos



Pair carrots with the warmth of harissa for a bright dish

By Melissa D'Arabian

I first tasted harissa when I was 19, when I traveled on a lone adventure to Tunisia after spending a semester abroad in France. Browsing the open markets in Tunisia, the fragrant spice section beckoned me with its unfamiliar, dazzling aromas. I bought as many small pouches of mystery spices that my student budget could afford. My favorite was harissa, a mix of chilies and such warm spices as coriander, cumin and paprika.

Thirty years later, harissa is fairly easy to find in the United States, either in a well-stocked neighborhood supermarket or online. If you like spicy food at all, it's a worthy purchase. Harissa is available in both paste and dry powdered form, and once it's on your shelf, you'll find hun-

dreds of uses for it - mix it into hummus or yogurt for a quick dip, add a spoonful to stews to deepen the flavor, rub meat for grilling, brush it on roasted or sauteed vegetables, or even on buttered toast for a tasty garlic-bread-like indulgence. You also can add harissa to salad dressings to add an international flair.

Today's recipe for North African carrot and chickpea salad pairs lightly sweet carrots with the warmth of harissa, and the result is balanced and not overly spicy, although feel free to add more or less according to your tastes. Chickpeas add heft and protein, so you could turn this side dish into a vegetarian main dish, and herbs keep the dish bright and fresh. Buying the carrots pre-shredded is an excellent weekday timesaver. But even if you start with whole carrots, the entire dish can be thrown together in mere minutes.

North African Carrot and Chickpea Salad

Ingredients
Makes 8 servings

Salad:

3 cups shredded carrots
1 1/4 cups cooked chickpeas (garbanzo beans), rinsed and drained if canned (from about 1 15-ounce can)
1/4 cup fresh parsley leaves, chopped
1/4 cup fresh cilantro leaves, chopped
3 tablespoons chopped fresh mint
2 green onions, chopped
2 tablespoons chopped almonds

Dressing:

1 teaspoon Dijon mustard

2 tablespoons lemon juice or lime juice
1 tablespoon water
1 teaspoon lemon or lime zest
1 teaspoon powdered harissa
1/4 teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons olive oil

Preparation

Place all the salad ingredients in a salad bowl. In a small bowl, whisk together the mustard, lemon or lime juice and zest, water, harissa and salt until well-blended. Slowly whisk in the olive oil until blended. Pour the dressing over the salad and toss to coat. Serve.

Note: If you can't find harissa, substitute a mixture of smoked or sweet paprika, cayenne, cumin, coriander and granulated garlic.

ESCAROLE AND SPINACH SOUP CLEANSES THE SOUL



By Katie Workman

I have been in possession recently of a very large can of Virginia peanuts, one of my favorite things to eat on earth. It's foolish to pretend that a small handful will curb the peanut craving. But I do take out a small handful, put the lid back on, put the can away (Ha, the wishful thinking!) and crunch away. Then I take out the can again, remove another small handful, put the can away and eat those. Then I do it one more time. And maybe one more time.

All of this is to explain why I'd been craving a cleansing soup, a bracing soup, a soup that feels almost acerbic in nature. A soup that

makes me feel a bit less guilty about pulling out that peanut can yet one more time. And while this soup is all of that, it's also delicious, and doesn't feel punishing in the slightest. I think this recipe benefits from a very liberal hand with the peppermill, but that's a personal preference. To make the soup more substantial, you can add a can of rinsed and drained white beans, such as navy or cannellini. And now, maybe I'll have one more small bowl..

ESCAROLE AND SPINACH SOUP

Ingredients

Servings: 8 to 10

Start to finish: 40 minutes

2 tablespoons olive oil
1 cup chopped onion
1 large carrot, peeled and chopped
3 garlic cloves, minced
Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
4 cups roughly chopped escarole, rinsed and excess water shaken off
4 cups less-sodium chicken or vegetable broth
1 (15-ounce) cans cannellini beans, rinsed and drained (optional)
1 (15-ounce) can diced tomatoes
10 ounces baby spinach leaves, roughly chopped
Freshly grated Parmesan cheese to serve (optional)

Preparation

Heat the oil in a heavy, large pot or Dutch oven at medium-low heat. Add the onion, carrot and garlic, season with salt and pepper, and sauté until the onion is tender and golden brown, about 8 minutes. Turn the heat to medium-high, add the escarole, and cook, stirring occasionally for 4 minutes, until the escarole is wilted. Add the broth, beans (if using) and tomatoes, and bring to a simmer over high heat. Reduce the heat to medium-low. Simmer until the escarole is tender, about 20 minutes. Add the spinach and stir until the spinach is wilted, about 2 minutes. Adjust the seasonings. Ladle the soup into bowls, sprinkle with the Parmesan cheese if desired, and serve hot.

Mix Tape

The seven most anticipated games of 2018

By Aakash Bakaya

2017 was a highly memorable year for gaming but not for all the right reasons. It saw the incredibly successful launch of the Nintendo Switch along with titles that seemingly came out of nowhere like 'Playerunknown's: Battlegrounds', 'Divinity: Original Sin 2' and 'Nier: Automata'. The independent scene also continues to break new grounds with games like 'Cuphead', 'Pyre' and 'Hollow Knight', garnering universal acclaim. On the flip side, it also saw an outbreak of intrusive, near game-breaking 'micro' transactions being shoved into games simply to increase the developer's bottom line. 2018 seems like a mixed bag in comparison, so this list might appear safe for some (and it is). But if any of these titles do meet expectations, they are sure to leave an undeniable mark on the gaming world. So without further ado, here are my seven most anticipated games of 2018:



1 Monster Hunter: World

At long last, the beloved 'Monster Hunter' franchise makes its way to the current generation of consoles and will also make its debut release on PC later this year. The popular action-adventure game is also opening itself up to a much more robust online multiplayer structure which will make it a truly one-of-a-kind experience for console owners and PC gamers alike. Hunting giant monsters and dinosaurs in a massive open world along with your friends sounds like a dream and if Capcom can actually deliver on the hype, this new entry will elevate the franchise to brand new heights. New players might find the grindy-nature of 'Monster Hunter' games a bit of a slog at first but if equipping your character with weaponry and armor made from the last creature you just defeated sounds appealing to you then this is right up your alley.

2 A Way Out

I mentioned 'A Way Out' on my E3 anticipation list so I'm glad nothing has changed my mind since then. Thankfully the little bit of extra details that have come out after E3 has only grown my anticipation for it. More expansive gameplay videos and fleshed out details on the plot has really peaked interests all over the web but the best part must be the fact that the 2 player co-op campaign can be played online even if only one player has the game. The de-

velopment team 'Hazelight Studios', the studio behind 'Brothers: A Tale of Two Sons', has done more than enough to garner player trust and this latest move only cements that fact. The entirely co-op experience still hinges heavily on the story but with fun puzzle mechanics involving breaking out of a prison and fleeing from the law seems unique and challenging enough to make it immensely memorable.



3 Warhammer: Vermintide 2

I spent much of 2017 discovering the Warhammer Fantasy universe and I would credit that new found fascination to Fatshark Studio's insanely fun and atmospheric 'Vermintide'. The 'Left 4 Dead' style multiplayer might not be the first thing that comes to your mind when thinking of the fantasy tabletop games of the Warhammer universe but 'Vermintide's excellent world-building and plentiful loot system kept players returning time and

time again. 'Vermintide 2' is not only massively expanding the enemy roster but also upping the RPG elements with a new class-based progression for all the returning characters. With major improvements all across the board, Vermintide 2 is definitely a game to look out for this year.

Mix Tape

GOD OF WAR



4 God of War

One of many tent-pole releases for the PS4 this year, the new 'God of War' reboot looks like a stunning entry to both the franchise and action-adventure genre as a whole. Departing from ancient Greek myths of its beloved forebears, the reboot introduces us to a new, heavily bearded Kratos fighting the hordes of Norse mythology. Also this time

around, he's taking his son along with him. Sappy father and son bonding doesn't sound like it goes hand-in-hand with the series' famous tenacity for slaughter and bloodshed but I'm hoping for more than just a few surprises from one of Playstation's most beloved series.



6 Far Cry 5

The 'Far Cry' series has definitely had its ups and downs over the years. 'Far Cry 3' and 'Blood Dragon' were some of the greatest achievements of the first-person, open world genre while 'Far Cry 4' and 'Primal' drew dreary, tired responses from fans hoping for something new. 'Far Cry 5' is looking like it lies somewhere in between. Setting it in mid-town Montana looks both daring and beautiful while making your antagonists a deadly religious cult

trying to take over a town seems exciting regardless of execution. Ubisoft has seemingly given the developers more breathing room to experiment as well which is great for everyone involved. The 'Far Cry' open-world formula is far from the most exciting thing in modern gaming but hopefully Ubisoft can spark some new life into it once again.

5 Sea of Thieves

One of many games coming out this year involving pirates (the other major one being Ubisoft's 'Skull and Bones'), I'm choosing this one simply because it chose a more light-hearted and quirkier approach. Also its emphasis on seamless multi-player fun with players jumping in and out of games is a delightfully distinctive twist on the genre. 'Skull and Bones' might have realistic graphics and

massive naval warfare but in 'Sea of Thieves' you can shoot yourself out of canon, onto an enemy ship and fight to the death for the treasure they stole from you. As long as Microsoft keeps the game relatively customer-friendly (please no loot boxes!), 'Sea of Thieves' could be the most fun multiplayer experiences of the year.



7 Red Dead Redemption 2

Quite possibly the most anticipated gaming release of the decade, 'Red Dead Redemption 2' will either crumble Rockstar's dwindling public reputation or propel them to a legendary status that may never be touched. As they've done several times in the past, Rockstar has kept the game's features and story details close to their chest. Its predecessor is fondly remembered as the highlight of the previous console generation and the studio

knows they have the weight of the world's expectations squarely on their shoulders. I simply want to see Rockstar return to their storytelling roots and give us a Western tale to rival even the classics of the genre. How the game handles its online components will be highly debated especially with GTA V's greedy micro-transaction tactics so hopefully 'Red Dead' will be a redemption for the studio as well.



Lifestyle | Kids

ACROSS

- 2. 52 come in a deck
- 3. Sweet, chewy sticks
- 7. Hair decoration that clips
- 10. Milk or dark candy gelt
- 11. Bouncy sphere
- 12. Covers the face
- 14. Shrill noisemaker

DOWN

- 1. Wrist jewelry
- 4. Hand warmers with thumbs
- 5. Hanukkah top
- 6. Small peel-and-put pictures
- 7. Story holder
- 8. Waxy coloring sticks
- 9. Keep your feet warm
- 12. Watched with popcorn
- 13. Humming instrument



Show Amy the way to her tricycle.

Sudoku

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

Solution

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

Comic

WORD SEARCH

Fruit

Find and circle all of the fruit that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell an additional fruit.

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

- | | | |
|-------------|------------|-------------|
| APPLES | DATE | ORANGE |
| APRICOT | FIG | PAPAYA |
| AVOCADO | GRAPEFRUIT | PEACH |
| BANANA | GRAPES | PEAR |
| BLACKBERRY | KIWI/FRUIT | PERSIMMON |
| BLUEBERRY | KUMQUAT | PINEAPPLE |
| CANTALOUPE | LEMON | PLUM |
| CHERRIES | LIME | POMEGRANATE |
| CHOKICHERRY | LYCHEE | RASPBERRY |
| COCONUT | MANGO | RHUBARB |
| CRABAPPLE | MULBERRY | STRAWBERRY |
| CRANBERRY | NECTARINE | WATERMELON |

Yesterday's Solution

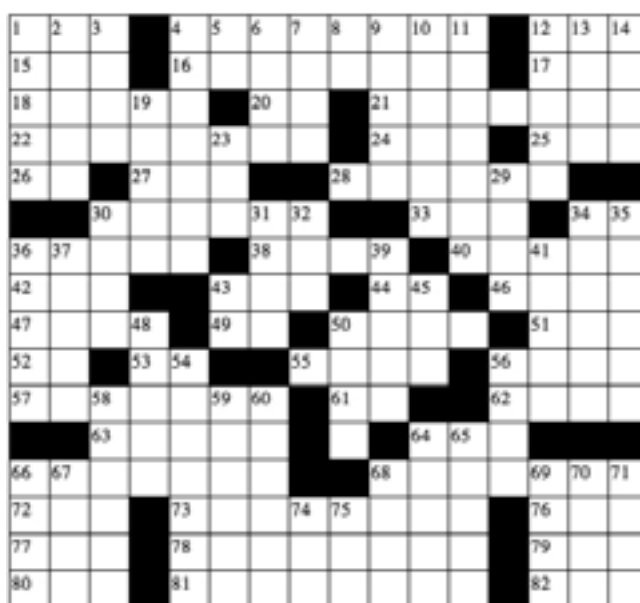
Friendship

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

- | | | |
|--------------|--------------|------------|
| ACQUAINTANCE | COMPANION | HONESTY |
| AFFECTION | COMRADE | KINSHIP |
| AFFINITY | CONFIDE | LEND |
| ALLY | EMPATHY | LOYALTY |
| AMIGO | FAVOR | PAL |
| AMITY | FONDNESS | ROOMMATE |
| BOYFRIEND | FRIENDLINESS | SHARE |
| BUDDY | FUN | SUPPORTIVE |
| CHUM | GIRL/FRIEND | SYMPATHY |
| CLOSENESS | GOOD TIMES | TRUST |

The hidden message is: CAMARADERIE

CROSSWORD 1801



ACROSS

- Experiencing or showing sorrow or unhappiness.
- Enclosed in a package or protective covering.
- Someone (especially a woman) who annoys people by constantly finding fault.
- A metal-bearing mineral valuable enough to be mined.
- Any of several plants of the genus *Achillea* native to Europe and having small white flowers in flat-topped flower heads.
- (informal) Of the highest quality.
- (Greek mythology) The brother of Jocasta and uncle of Antigone who became king of Thebes after the fall of Oedipus.
- A public promotion of some product or service.
- Having or showing profound knowledge.
- Writing board used on the lap as a table or desk.
- A container.
- Inquire about.
- A radioactive transuranic element produced by bombarding plutonium with neutrons.
- A graphical recording of the cardiac cycle produced by an electrocardiograph.
- Brought to a halt.
- An affirmative.
- A member of the Siouan people formerly living in the Missouri river valley in NE Nebraska.
- Open-heart surgery in which the rib cage is opened and a section of a blood vessel is grafted from the aorta to the coronary artery to bypass the blocked

- section of the coronary artery and improve the blood supply to the heart.
- Any of numerous low-growing cushion-forming plants of the genus *Draba* having rosette-forming leaves and terminal racemes of small flowers with scapose or leafy stems.
- Any of various long-tailed rodents similar to but larger than a mouse.
- The branch of computer science that deal with writing computer programs that can solve problems creatively.
- Relating to or characteristic of or occurring on land.
- By bad luck.
- The blood group whose red cells carry both the A and B antigens.
- A small piece of cloth.
- A New England state.
- A note appended to a letter after the signature.
- English essayist (1775-1834).
- A French variety of green bean plant bearing light-colored beans.
- (Akkadian) God of wisdom.
- A state of agitated irritation.
- Of a moderate orange-yellow color.
- Small toothless anteater with prehensile tail and four-clawed forelimbs.
- A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
- An expressway in a German-speaking country.
- An audiotape recording of sound.
- The law enforcement agency in the Justice Department.
- Any of several minute primitive wingless and eyeless insects having a cone-shaped head.
- The elementary stages of any subject (usually plural).

- A police officer who investigates crimes.
- A Spanish courtesy title for a girl or unmarried woman.
- The longer of the two telegraphic signals used in Morse code.

DOWN

- A plain plinth that supports a wall.
- A wall hanging of heavy handwoven fabric with pictorial designs.
- Relatively deep or strong.
- Fudge made with brown sugar and butter and milk and nuts.
- A radioactive element of the actinide series.
- A human female who does housework.
- Scottish sea captain who was hired to protect British shipping in the Indian Ocean and then was accused of piracy and hanged (1645-1701).
- A silvery ductile metallic element found primarily in bauxite.
- Fleshy spore-bearing inner mass of e.g. a puffball or stinkhorn.
- In an unnatural eery manner.
- Caused to show discomposure.
- Submerged aquatic plant having narrow leaves and small flowers.
- A book of the New Testament.
- A person with an unusual or odd personality.
- A religious belief of African origin involving witchcraft and sorcery.
- Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
- A British peer ranking below a Marquess and above a Viscount.
- A Chadic language spoken south of Lake Chad.
- Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
- A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
- A member of the Algonquian people of Maine and southern Quebec.
- A device that very useful for a particular job.
- A republic on the island of Malta in the Mediterranean.
- Type genus of the Gavidae.
- American professional baseball player who hit more home runs than Babe Ruth (born in 1934).
- A soft silvery metallic element of the alkali earth group.
- A plant hormone promoting elongation of stems and roots.
- The brightest star in Virgo.
- A spread made chiefly from vegetable oils and used as a substitute for butter.
- Any of various strong liquors especially a Dutch spirit distilled from potatoes.
- One thousandth of a second.
- Relating to modern Greece or its inhabitants or its language.
- Solid excretory product evacuated from the bowels.
- Someone (especially a German) who speaks a Germanic language.
- A Buddhist who has attained nirvana.
- An Italian woman of rank.
- A French abbot.
- Capital city of the Apulia region on the Adriatic coast.
- (Babylonian) God of storms and wind.
- A Chadic language spoken south of Lake Chad.
- Make an etching of.
- A member of the Siouan people inhabiting the valleys of the Platte and Missouri rivers in Nebraska.
- Seed vessel having hooks or prickles.

Yesterday's Solution

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

Daily Sudoku

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

Yesterday's Solution

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

TV Listings



01:25 Iron Man
03:40 Kingsglaive: Final Fantasy XV
05:40 Batman Unlimited: Mechs vs. Mutants
07:00 I Am Number Four
08:55 Rumble
10:35 Iron Man
12:45 Batman Unlimited: Mechs vs. Mutants
14:10 I Am Number Four
16:05 Iron Man 2
18:15 Savage Dog
19:55 War Of The Worlds
21:55 Blood Circus
23:25 REC 2



00:50 Untamed & Uncut
01:45 Treehouse Masters
02:40 Bad Dog
03:35 Swamp Brothers
04:00 Swamp Brothers
04:25 Whale Wars
05:15 Whale Wars
06:02 Wildest Indochina
06:49 Untamed & Uncut
07:36 Night
08:00 Night
08:25 Swamp Brothers
08:50 Swamp Brothers
09:15 Treehouse Masters
10:10 Bad Dog
11:05 Wildest Indochina
12:00 Swamp Brothers
12:55 Whale Wars
13:50 Whale Wars
14:45 Bad Dog
15:40 Wildest Indochina
16:35 Untamed & Uncut
17:30 Treehouse Masters
18:25 Keeping Up With The Krugers
19:20 Dr. Jeff: Mountain Vet
20:15 Bad Dog
21:10 Swamp Brothers
21:38 Swamp Brothers
22:05 Keeping Up With The Krugers
23:00 Dr. Jeff: Mountain Vet
23:55 Wildest Indochina



00:30 Benidorm
01:25 New Tricks
02:30 Holby City
03:30 Doctors
04:05 Benidorm
05:00 New Tricks
06:00 Doctors
06:30 Father Brown
07:25 Holby City
08:15 Dickensian
09:00 Dickensian
09:45 Dickensian
10:30 Doctors
11:00 Father Brown
11:55 Holby City
13:00 Eastenders
14:00 Eastenders
15:05 Father Brown
16:00 Doctors
16:30 Doctors
18:30 Bad Move
19:00 New Tricks
20:00 Father Brown
21:00 Death In Paradise
22:00 Poldark
23:00 Doctors
23:30 Bad Move



01:00 The First 48
02:00 Britain's Darkest Taboos
03:00 Kids Who Kill
05:00 The First 48
06:00 Britain's Darkest Taboos
07:00 Homicide Hunter
08:00 Crimes That Shook Britain
09:00 It Takes A Killer

09:30 It Takes A Killer
10:00 Homicide: Hours To Kill
11:00 Cold Case Files
12:00 The First 48
13:00 Crimes That Shook Britain
14:00 It Takes A Killer
14:30 It Takes A Killer
15:00 Homicide: Hours To Kill
16:00 Cold Case Files
17:00 Homicide Hunter
18:00 It Takes A Killer
18:30 It Takes A Killer
19:00 The First 48
20:00 Homicide: Hours To Kill
21:00 Crimes That Shook Britain
22:00 Cold Case Files
23:00 Killer Kids



00:30 Kids Do The Craziest Things
00:55 Kids Do The Craziest Things
01:20 NASA's Unexplained Files
02:10 Dinosaurs: Return To Life
03:00 Zoltan The Wolfman
03:50 Bear Grylls: Born Survivor
04:40 Tanked
05:30 How It's Made
05:55 How It's Made
06:20 Kids Do The Craziest Things
06:40 Kids Do The Craziest Things
07:00 Bear Grylls: Born Survivor
07:50 How It's Made
08:15 How It's Made
08:40 Kids Do The Craziest Things
09:05 Kids Do The Craziest Things
09:30 Tanked
10:20 Zoltan The Wolfman
11:10 Kids Do The Craziest Things
11:35 Kids Do The Craziest Things
12:00 The Carbonaro Effect
12:25 The Carbonaro Effect
12:50 How It's Made
13:15 How It's Made
13:40 Kids Do The Craziest Things
14:05 Kids Do The Craziest Things
14:30 Tanked
15:20 Bear Grylls: Born Survivor
16:10 Zoltan The Wolfman
17:00 Penn & Teller Tell A Lie
17:50 The Carbonaro Effect
18:15 The Carbonaro Effect
18:40 Kids Do The Craziest Things
19:05 Kids Do The Craziest Things
19:30 How It's Made
19:55 How It's Made
20:20 Tanked
21:10 Penn & Teller Tell A Lie
22:00 The Carbonaro Effect
22:25 The Carbonaro Effect
22:50 Zoltan The Wolfman
23:40 Bear Grylls: Born Survivor



00:50 Scott Peterson: Pregnant Wife Missing
01:45 Scott Peterson: Pregnant Wife Missing
02:40 Murder By Numbers
03:35 Reasonable Doubt
04:30 Scott Peterson: Pregnant Wife Missing
05:25 Scott Peterson: Pregnant Wife Missing
06:20 I Almost Got Away With It
07:10 Nightmare Next Door
08:00 California Investigator
08:25 On The Case With Paula Zahn
09:15 California Investigator
09:40 California Investigator
10:10 Nightmare Next Door
11:05 Betrayed
12:00 Evil Stepmothers
12:55 On The Case With Paula Zahn
13:50 I Almost Got Away With It
14:45 Nightmare Next Door
15:40 Betrayed
16:35 The Perfect Murder
17:30 On The Case With Paula Zahn
18:25 California Investigator
18:50 California Investigator
19:20 I Almost Got Away With It
20:15 Nightmare Next Door
21:10 Betrayed
22:05 Murder Calls

23:00 Evil Online
23:55 I Speak For The Dead



00:10 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
00:35 Binny And The Ghost
01:00 Hank Zipzer
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 & Cat Noir
07:25 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug & Cat Noir
07:50 Tsum Tsum Shorts
07:55 Elena Of Avalor
08:20 K.C. Undercover
08:45 Bunk'd
09:10 Hotel Transylvania: The Series
09:35 Tangled: The Series
10:00 Read It And Weep
11:20 Star Wars Forces Of Destiny
11:25 The Zhuzhus
11:40 Austin & Ally
12:05 That's So Raven
12:30 That's So Raven
12:55 Disney Mickey Mouse
13:00 Bunk'd
13:25 Tangled: The Series
13:50 Jessie
14:15 Hotel Transylvania: The Series
14:40 K.C. Undercover
15:05 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug & Cat Noir
15:30 Bizaardvark
15:55 Elena Of Avalor
16:20 Stuck In The Middle
16:45 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
17:00 Tangled: The Series
17:25 K.C. Undercover
17:50 K.C. Undercover
18:15 Descendants Wicked World
18:20 Bunk'd
18:45 Hotel Transylvania: The Series
19:10 Disney Mickey Mouse
19:15 Liv And Maddie
19:40 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug & Cat Noir
20:05 Descendants Wicked World
20:10 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug & Cat Noir
20:35 Disney The Lodge
21:00 Alex & Co.
21:25 Alex & Co.
21:50 Lolirock
22:15 Lolirock
22:40 Evermoor Chronicles
23:05 Rolling With The Ronks
23:20 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug & Cat Noir
23:45 Lolirock



00:15 PJ Masks
00:40 PJ Masks
01:05 PJ Masks
01:30 Art Attack
01:55 Henry Hugglemonster
02:05 Loopdidoo
02:20 Henry Hugglemonster
02:35 Calimero
02:50 Henry Hugglemonster
03:05 Art Attack
03:30 The Hive

03:40 Loopdidoo
03:55 Henry Hugglemonster
04:10 Art Attack
04:35 Loopdidoo
04:50 Calimero
05:05 Art Attack
05:30 Henry Hugglemonster
05:45 Henry Hugglemonster
06:00 Art Attack
06:30 Henry Hugglemonster
06:45 Loopdidoo
07:00 Henry Hugglemonster
07:15 Calimero
07:30 PJ Masks
08:00 P-King Duckling
08:25 Puppy Dog Pals
08:50 Doc McStuffins
09:10 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
09:35 Sofia The First
10:00 Mickey's Pirate Adventure
10:45 PJ Masks
11:00 Sheriff Callie's Wild West
11:25 Sheriff Callie's Wild West
11:50 The Lion Guard
12:15 The Lion Guard
12:45 Sofia The First
13:10 Sofia The First
13:35 PJ Masks
14:00 PJ Masks
14:30 Doc McStuffins
14:55 P-King Duckling
15:20 Vampirina
15:45 Sofia The First
16:10 Puppy Dog Pals
16:35 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
17:00 Doc McStuffins
17:30 Vampirina
18:00 PJ Masks
18:25 Puppy Dog Pals
18:50 Sofia The First
19:20 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
19:45 Doc McStuffins
20:10 The Lion Guard
20:35 P-King Duckling
21:00 Vampirina
21:30 PJ Masks
22:00 Mickey's Pirate Adventure
22:45 Minnie's Bow-Toons
22:55 P-King Duckling
23:20 Puppy Dog Pals
23:45 Mickey And The Roadster Racers



00:15 Yukon Men
01:05 Madiba
01:50 Bushcraft Build-Off
02:35 Ed Stafford: Left For Dead
03:20 Diesel Brothers
04:05 Misfit Garage
04:50 Deadliest Catch
05:35 How Do They Do It?
06:00 Extreme Collectors
06:23 Container Wars
06:45 How Do They Do It?
07:10 How Do They Do It?
07:35 Misfit Garage
08:20 Extreme Collectors
08:45 Container Wars
09:10 Deadliest Catch
09:55 Misfit Garage
10:45 Deadliest Catch
11:30 Yukon Men
12:20 Extreme Collectors
12:43 Container Wars
13:05 How Do They Do It?
13:30 How Do They Do It?
13:55 Deadliest Catch
14:40 Yukon Men
15:30 Strip The City
16:15 Bushcraft Build-Off
17:05 Ed Stafford: Left For Dead
17:50 Finding Escobar's Millions
18:40 Treasure Quest: Snake Island
19:25 Yukon Men
20:15 Diesel Brothers
21:00 Diesel Brothers
21:50 Supertruckers
22:40 Supertruckers
23:30 Gold Rush



06:00 Disney11
06:25 Supa Strikas
06:50 Marvel's Spider-Man

07:15 Right Now Kapow
07:40 Disney Mickey Mouse
07:45 Walk The Prank
08:10 Phineas And Ferb
08:35 Mech-X4
09:00 Marvel's Spider-Man
09:25 Lab Rats
09:50 Star Wars Freemaker Adventures
10:20 Gravity Falls
10:45 Kid vs Kat
11:10 Milo Murphy's Law
11:35 Right Now Kapow
12:00 Lab Rats: On The Edge
12:55 Pair Of Kings
13:20 Pair Of Kings
13:45 Phineas And Ferb
14:10 Disney Mickey Mouse
14:15 Phineas And Ferb
14:40 The Suite Life Of Zack & Cody
15:05 The Suite Life Of Zack & Cody
15:30 Gravity Falls
15:55 Gravity Falls
16:20 Two More Eggs
16:25 Lab Rats
16:50 Lab Rats
17:15 Kirby Buckets Warped
17:40 Kirby Buckets Warped
18:05 Supa Strikas
18:30 Marvel's Ant-Man
18:35 Disney11
19:00 Penn Zero: Part Time Hero
19:25 Penn Zero: Part Time Hero
19:50 Marvel's Rocket And Groot
19:55 Walk The Prank
20:20 Walk The Prank
20:45 Supa Strikas
21:10 Supa Strikas
21:35 Marvel's Rocket And Groot
21:40 Disney Mickey Mouse
21:45 Lab Rats
22:10 Lab Rats
22:35 Phineas And Ferb
23:00 Programmes Start At 6:00am



00:00 Tia Mowry At Home
00:30 Tia Mowry At Home
01:00 The Big Eat - Middle East
01:30 The Big Eat - Middle East
02:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
02:30 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
03:00 Man Fire Food
03:30 Man Fire Food
04:00 Chopped Junior
05:00 Guy's Grocery Games
06:00 Barefoot Contessa: Back To Basics
06:25 Barefoot Contessa: Back To Basics
06:50 Bake With Anna Olson
07:15 The Kitchen
08:05 The Pioneer Woman
08:30 The Pioneer Woman
08:55 Siba's Table
09:25 Siba's Table
09:55 Cooking For Real
10:25 Cooking For Real
10:55 The Kitchen
11:45 Cooking For Real
12:10 The Pioneer Woman
12:35 The Pioneer Woman
13:00 Siba's Table
13:30 Siba's Table
14:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
14:30 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
15:00 Chopped
16:00 The Kitchen
17:00 Cooking For Real
17:30 Cooking For Real
18:00 Chopped Junior
19:00 Chopped
20:00 Extreme Cake Wars
21:00 Beach Bites With Katie Lee
21:30 Beach Bites With Katie Lee
22:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
22:30 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
23:00 Chopped



00:10 Chopping Block
01:00 Emmerdale
01:30 Emmerdale
02:00 Coronation Street
02:30 Cash Trapped
03:25 Catchphrase

04:20 Tonight At The London Palladium
05:15 Big Star's Little Star
06:10 Chopping Block
07:05 Cash Trapped
08:00 Catchphrase
09:00 Tonight At The London Palladium
10:00 Surprise Surprise
10:55 Chopping Block
11:50 Cash Trapped
12:45 Emmerdale
13:45 Coronation Street
14:15 Chopping Block
15:10 Cash Trapped
16:00 Paul O'Grady: For The Love Of Dogs
16:30 Paul O'Grady: For The Love Of Dogs
17:00 5 Star Family Reunion
17:50 Big Star's Little Star
18:45 Emmerdale
19:15 Emmerdale
19:45 Coronation Street
20:10 Cash Trapped
21:00 Paul O'Grady: For The Love Of Dogs
21:30 Paul O'Grady: For The Love Of Dogs
22:00 5 Star Family Reunion
22:50 Emmerdale
23:15 Emmerdale
23:40 Coronation Street



00:00 Stan Lee's Superhumans
01:00 Ancient Impossible
02:00 Clash Of Warriors
03:00 Brad Meltzer's Decoded
03:50 Ancient Aliens
04:40 Blood And Glory: The Civil War In Color
05:30 Stan Lee's Superhumans
06:20 Ancient Impossible
07:10 The Universe
08:00 Clash Of Warriors
09:00 Brad Meltzer's Decoded
10:00 Ancient Aliens
11:00 Your Bleeped Up Brain
12:00 America's Book Of Secrets
13:00 Ancient Impossible
14:00 Clash Of Warriors
15:00 Brad Meltzer's Decoded
16:00 Ancient Aliens
17:00 Your Bleeped Up Brain
18:00 The Universe
19:00 Ancient Impossible
20:00 Clash Of Warriors
21:00 Brad Meltzer's Decoded
22:00 Ancient Aliens
23:00 Bible Secrets Revealed



00:20 Swamp People
01:10 Swamp People
02:00 Pawn Stars
02:25 Pawn Stars
02:47 The Warfighters
03:40 Billion Dollar Wreck
04:30 Swamp People
05:15 Swamp People
06:00 Swamp People
06:50 Swamp People
07:40 Swamp People
08:30 Swamp People
09:20 Swamp People
10:10 Alone: Lost And Found
11:00 Alone: Lost And Found
11:50 Alone: Lost And Found
12:40 Alone: Lost And Found
13:30 Alone: Lost And Found
14:20 Swamp People
15:10 Swamp People
16:00 Swamp People
16:50 Swamp People
17:40 Swamp People
18:30 Ultimate Wheels
19:20 Leepu And Pitbull
20:10 Fifth Gear
21:00 American Pickers Best Of's
21:50 Storage Wars
22:15 Storage Wars
22:40 Britain's Bloody Crown: War Of The Roses
23:30 Ultimate Wheels

TV Listings



00:45 Miguel's Feasts
01:10 What's For Sale?
01:40 Cesar's Recruit: Asia
02:35 Charlie Luxton's Homes By The Sea
03:30 George Clarke's Amazing Spaces
04:25 Poh & Co.
04:50 Cesar's Recruit: Asia
06:15 Chocolate Perfection With Michel Roux Jr
07:10 Cesar's Recruit: Asia
07:35 Cesar's Recruit: Asia
08:05 Charlie Luxton's Homes By The Sea
09:00 George Clarke's Amazing Spaces
09:55 Poh & Co.
10:20 Cesar's Recruit: Asia
11:45 Chocolate Perfection With Michel Roux Jr
12:40 George Clarke's Amazing Spaces
13:35 George Clarke's Amazing Spaces
14:30 Charlie Luxton's Homes By The Sea
15:25 The Food Files
15:50 The Food Files
16:20 Cruise Ship Diaries
16:45 Cruise Ship Diaries
17:15 Cradle Of Mandopop
18:10 George Clarke's Amazing Spaces
19:05 George Clarke's Amazing Spaces
20:00 Charlie Luxton's Homes By The Sea
21:00 The Food Files
21:30 The Food Files
22:00 Cruise Ship Diaries
22:25 Cruise Ship Diaries
22:55 Cradle Of Mandopop
23:50 George Clarke's Amazing Spaces



00:10 Nazi Megastructures
02:00 To Catch A Smuggler
03:00 Science Of Stupid Compilations
03:30 Science Of Stupid Compilations
04:00 Nazi Megastructures
06:00 Supercar Megabuild
07:00 X: The Generation That Changed The World
08:00 Seconds From Disaster
09:00 Crash Science
10:00 To Catch A Smuggler
11:00 China's Megatomb Revealed
13:00 100%: Planes
14:00 Seconds From Disaster
15:00 Origins: The Journey Of Humankind
16:00 Explorer XL
17:00 Original Sin
18:00 Drugs Inc
19:00 Origins: The Journey Of Humankind
20:00 Explorer XL
20:50 Original Sin
21:40 Drugs Inc
22:30 Origins: The Journey Of Humankind
23:20 Born To Ride



00:20 Boss Croc
01:10 Safari Brothers
02:00 Africa's Blood River
02:50 Animal Fight Club
03:45 World's Deadliest
04:40 Secret Life Of Predators
05:35 Africa's Blood River
06:30 Animal Fight Club
07:25 World's Deadliest
08:20 Secret Life Of Predators
09:15 Asia's Deadliest Snakes
10:10 Badlands
11:05 Little Monkey House

12:00 Shark vs Predator
12:55 Croc Invasion
13:50 Animal Fight Club
14:45 World's Deadliest
15:40 Ultimate Animal Countdown
16:35 Africa's Super Snake
17:30 Wild Scotland S2 Compilations
18:25 Last Devils
19:20 World's Deadliest
20:10 Ultimate Animal Countdown
21:00 Africa's Super Snake
21:50 Wild Scotland S2 Compilations
22:40 Last Devils
23:30 Shark vs Predator



00:12 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
00:36 Rabbids Invasion
01:24 Sanjay And Craig
02:12 Winx Club
02:36 Winx Club
03:00 Harvey Beaks
03:24 Harvey Beaks
03:48 The Loud House
04:36 Breadwinners
05:00 Breadwinners
05:24 Get Blake
05:48 SpongeBob SquarePants
06:12 SpongeBob SquarePants
06:36 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
07:24 Rabbids Invasion
07:48 Get Blake
08:12 Harvey Beaks
08:36 Sanjay And Craig
09:00 SpongeBob SquarePants
09:24 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
09:48 Henry Danger
10:12 Game Shakers
10:36 Regal Academy
11:00 Winx Club
11:24 SpongeBob SquarePants
11:48 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
12:12 The Loud House
12:36 Rabbids Invasion
13:00 Breadwinners
13:24 Harvey Beaks
13:48 Hunter Street
14:12 I Am Frankie
14:36 The Thundermans
15:00 Escape From Mr. Lemoncello's Library
16:12 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
16:36 The Loud House
17:00 Sanjay And Craig
17:24 I Am Frankie
17:48 Hunter Street
18:12 Henry Danger
18:36 Nicky, Ricky, Dicky And Dawn
19:00 School Of Rock
19:24 Game Shakers
19:48 The Thundermans
20:12 Ride
20:36 SpongeBob SquarePants
21:00 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
21:24 Sanjay And Craig
21:48 Rabbids Invasion
22:12 Breadwinners
22:36 Harvey Beaks
23:00 SpongeBob SquarePants
23:24 SpongeBob SquarePants
23:48 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles



00:15 Shimmer And Shine
00:39 Shimmer And Shine
01:01 Max & Ruby
01:25 Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom
01:36 Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom
01:47 The Day Henry Met
01:52 The Day Henry Met
01:57 Blaze And The Monster Machines
02:19 Blaze And The Monster Machines
02:41 Zack & Quack
02:52 Kid-E-Cats
02:58 Kid-E-Cats
03:04 Shimmer And Shine

03:26 Nella The Princess Knight
03:38 Paw Patrol
04:01 Little Charmers
04:13 Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom
04:24 Dora The Explorer
04:46 Max & Ruby
05:06 The Day Henry Met
05:11 Nella The Princess Knight
05:35 Shimmer And Shine
05:59 Wallykazam!
06:21 Zack & Quack
06:32 The Day Henry Met
06:38 Blaze And The Monster Machines
07:00 Rusty Rivets
07:13 Paw Patrol
07:37 Dora The Explorer
08:00 Nella The Princess Knight
08:10 Kid-E-Cats
08:15 Kid-E-Cats
08:21 Bubble Guppies
08:44 Blaze And The Monster Machines
09:07 Paw Patrol
09:30 Shimmer And Shine
09:53 Nella The Princess Knight
10:15 The Day Henry Met
10:22 Paw Patrol
10:45 Rusty Rivets
10:56 Rusty Rivets
11:05 Wallykazam!
11:28 Bubble Guppies
11:52 Team Umizoomi
12:15 Shimmer And Shine
12:39 Shimmer And Shine
13:01 Max & Ruby
13:25 Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom
13:47 The Day Henry Met
13:57 Blaze And The Monster Machines
14:41 Zack & Quack
14:52 Kid-E-Cats
15:04 Shimmer And Shine
15:26 Nella The Princess Knight
15:38 Paw Patrol
16:01 Little Charmers
16:13 Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom
16:24 Dora The Explorer
16:46 Max & Ruby
17:06 The Day Henry Met
17:11 Nella The Princess Knight
17:35 Shimmer And Shine
17:59 Wallykazam!
18:21 Zack & Quack
18:32 The Day Henry Met
18:38 Blaze And The Monster Machines
19:00 Rusty Rivets
19:13 Paw Patrol
19:37 Dora The Explorer
20:00 Nella The Princess Knight
20:10 Kid-E-Cats
20:21 Bubble Guppies
20:44 Blaze And The Monster Machines
21:07 Paw Patrol
21:30 Shimmer And Shine
21:53 Nella The Princess Knight
22:15 The Day Henry Met
22:22 Paw Patrol
22:45 Rusty Rivets
22:56 Rusty Rivets
23:05 Wallykazam!
23:28 Bubble Guppies
23:52 Team Umizoomi



01:20 The Kids From 62-F
03:15 The Secret Life Of Pets
04:45 Christmas Trade
06:30 The Great Gilly Hopkins
08:10 The Kids From 62-F
10:05 A Tiger's Tail
11:30 The Secret Life Of Pets
13:00 The Tale Of Despereaux
14:35 Minions
16:10 The Sound Of Music Live!
18:30 Because Of Winn Dixie
20:20 Coat Of Many Colors
21:50 The Tale Of Despereaux
23:25 Minions



00:10 Puerto Ricans In Paris
01:40 Growing Up And Other Lies
03:20 Elizabethtown

05:30 Holiday Joy
07:00 Are We Done Yet?
08:40 Welcome Home Roscoe Jenkins
10:40 The Tiger Hunter
12:20 Men At Work
14:05 Are We Done Yet?
15:45 Tyler Perry's Boo: A Madea Halloween
17:35 A Date With Miss Fortune
19:20 SuperBob
20:50 They Came Together
22:20 How To Make Love Like An Englishman



00:40 Crisscross
02:30 The Salesman
04:45 The Challenger
06:35 A Country Called Home
08:15 The Salesman
10:30 The Challenger
12:20 A Country Called Home
14:00 Forsaken
15:40 An Inconvenient Truth
17:30 Rushmore
19:15 The Man Who Knew Infinity
21:15 The Kite Runner
23:25 Wild At Heart



00:00 Back To The Sea
01:40 Freddy Frogface
03:10 Moomin And Midsummer Madness
04:35 Simba The King Lion
06:45 Hocus Pocus Alfie Atkins
08:10 The Secret Of Kells
09:40 Phantom Boy
11:15 Dinofroz - An Island In The Sky
12:40 Pacific Pirates
14:10 Moomin And Midsummer Madness
15:35 Simba The King Lion
17:45 Monkey King: The Hero
19:20 Dinofroz - An Island In The Sky
20:45 Ivan The Incredible
22:15 Azur & Asmar: The Prince's Quest
23:55 Monkey King: The Hero



01:00 Black Snake Moan
03:00 Oleanna
04:35 Baby's Day Out
06:15 Nacho Libre
07:50 The Count Of Monte Cristo
10:05 Oleanna
11:40 Nacho Libre
13:15 Steve Jobs
15:20 Leatherheads
17:15 Hot Pursuit
18:45 Zoolander 2
20:30 London Has Fallen
22:10 The Revenant



00:40 Mythbusters
01:30 How Do They Do It?
01:55 Food Factory USA
02:20 Mysteries Of The Missing
03:10 Strangest Weather On Earth
04:00 The Future Of...
04:48 Mythbusters
05:36 How Do They Do It?
06:00 Food Factory USA
06:24 Mysteries Of The Missing
07:12 Strangest Weather On Earth
08:00 How Do They Do It?
08:26 The Future Of...
09:14 Mythbusters
10:02 Strangest Weather On Earth
10:50 How Do They Do It?
11:14 Food Factory USA
11:38 How Things Work
12:26 The Future Of...
13:14 Mythbusters
14:02 How Do They Do It?
14:26 Food Factory USA
14:50 Strangest Weather On Earth

15:38 The Future Of...
16:26 How Things Work
17:14 Mythbusters
18:02 Strangest Weather On Earth
18:50 The Future Of...
19:40 Mythbusters
20:30 Gamechangers: Inventing The World
21:20 How Do They Do It?
21:45 Food Factory USA
22:10 Strangest Weather On Earth
23:00 You Have Been Warned
23:50 The Future Of...



01:45 Man To Man
03:45 The Assignment
05:30 Night Moves
07:30 The Maiden Heist
09:00 Noel
10:35 Hurricane Season
12:15 Hostage
14:15 Man To Man
16:15 Nothing But The Truth
18:00 Crash
20:00 The Legend Of Bagger Vance
22:15 Henry's Crime



00:00 Married At First Sight
01:00 Married At First Sight
02:00 Mom vs. Matchmaker
02:30 Mom vs. Matchmaker
03:00 Fashion Star
04:00 Project Runway All Stars
05:00 Project Runway
06:00 Married At First Sight
07:00 Married At First Sight
08:00 Mom vs. Matchmaker
08:30 Mom vs. Matchmaker
09:00 Fashion Star
10:00 Project Runway All Stars
11:00 Project Runway
12:00 Married At First Sight
13:00 Married At First Sight
14:00 Mom vs. Matchmaker
14:30 Mom vs. Matchmaker
15:00 Fashion Star
16:00 Project Runway All Stars
17:00 Mistresses
18:00 Devious Maids
19:00 Devious Maids
20:00 Married At First Sight
21:00 Grey's Anatomy
22:00 Grey's Anatomy
23:00 Grey's Anatomy



00:20 Say Yes To The Dress UK
00:42 Say Yes To The Dress UK
01:05 90 Day Fianc?: Happily Ever After?
01:50 The Spouse House
02:35 Oprah: Where Are They Now?
03:20 Kate Plus 8
04:05 Toddlers & Tiaras
04:50 Randy To The Rescue
05:35 Say Yes To The Dress
06:00 Little People, Big World
06:45 Little People, Big World
07:30 Kate Plus 8
08:15 Outdaughtered: Busby
09:00 Say Yes To The Dress UK
09:25 Obsessive Compulsive Cleaners
10:10 Extreme Cheapskates
10:55 Love At First Swipe
13:10 Oprah: Where Are They Now?
13:55 Oprah: Where Are They Now?
14:40 Cake Boss
17:00 Baby Bodybuilders
17:50 Meet The Putmans
18:50 Outdaughtered: Busby
19:20 Quints
19:40 Cake Boss
20:10 Say Yes To The Dress UK
20:35 Say Yes To The Dress
21:00 Outdaughtered: Busby
21:00 Quints

21:50 Finding My Twin Stranger
22:40 The Undateables
23:30 Return To Amish



00:00 When Ghosts Attack
01:00 Ghost Hunters International
02:00 Mysteries At The Museum
03:00 Top Secret Beaches
04:00 Top Secret Swimming Holes
05:00 When Ghosts Attack
06:00 Bizarre Foods With Andrew Zimmern
07:00 Mysteries At The Museum
08:00 House Hunters International
08:30 House Hunters International
09:00 House Hunters International
09:30 House Hunters International
10:00 Salvage Dawgs
10:30 Salvage Dawgs
11:00 Hotel Impossible
12:00 Mysteries At The Museum
13:00 Mysteries At The Museum
14:00 House Hunters International
14:30 House Hunters International
15:00 House Hunters International
15:30 House Hunters International
16:00 Hotel Impossible
17:00 Salvage Dawgs
17:30 Salvage Dawgs
18:00 Bizarre Foods: Delicious Destinations
18:30 Bizarre Foods: Delicious Destinations
19:00 Bizarre Foods With Andrew Zimmern
20:00 House Hunters International
20:30 House Hunters International
21:00 House Hunters International
21:30 House Hunters International
22:00 Off The Grid Living
22:30 Off The Grid Living
23:00 Building Off The Grid: Mud Men



00:05 Broad City
00:30 Idiotsitter
00:55 Tosh.0
01:15 Tosh.0
01:45 Tosh.0
02:10 The Opposition With Jordan Klepper
02:35 Real Husbands Of Hollywood
03:00 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah
03:25 Tosh.0
03:50 The Opposition With Jordan Klepper
04:15 Lip Sync Battle UK
04:40 Workaholics
05:05 Workaholics
05:30 Workaholics
05:55 Workaholics
06:20 Workaholics
06:50 Brotherhood
08:30 The Jim Gaffigan Show
08:55 Punk'd (Bet)
09:20 Punk'd (Bet)
09:45 Important Things With Demetri Martin
11:00 Kroll Show
11:25 Kroll Show
11:50 Kroll Show
12:15 Kroll Show
12:40 Kroll Show
13:05 Disaster Date
13:30 Disaster Date
13:55 The Dude Perfect Show
14:20 The Dude Perfect Show
14:45 Ridiculousness Arabia
15:10 Ridiculousness Arabia
15:35 Ridiculousness Arabia
16:00 Important Things With Demetri Martin
16:30 Important Things With Demetri Martin
16:55 Lip Sync Battle UK
17:20 Lip Sync Battle UK
17:45 Friends
18:10 Friends
18:35 Friends
18:58 Friends
19:20 Friends
19:45 Idiotsitter
20:07 Workaholics
20:30 Graves
21:00 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah

Stars

**Aries (March 21-April 19)**

Aries, a restless quest to learn spurs you on; you won't stop until you find one particular thing. You have entered a cycle that causes change; you desire new paths and methods just now. Everything seems to get on your last nerve as a result of careless decisions made in the recent past. You could exhibit volatile behavior that causes tongues to wag. This is a perfect time to redirect your thoughts and activities to the more positive possibilities, not a good time to gamble now. You could become indecisive and unsure of what you really want, sometimes being at a standstill can be a good thing. Make an effort to keep your emotional and mental energies high as you end the day with someone you love, aries.

**Taurus (April 20-May 20)**

Taurus, you could grow to cherish something you take for granted. You are entering a cycle of abundance in the areas of real estate and finances. You look to the future and imagine what you would like to see in it; this could involve a sweetheart, child or self-change. Daydreaming and thinking of things less realistic seem to be your path today; this could cause friction today or possibly this evening. There will be important projects come up that will demand your best efforts. Someone listens to your side of the story and agrees with you. You will get praise for your ability to make things happen. You might wrestle with what your heart wants and what you head knows; you will get help from someone who cares for you, taurus.

**Gemini (May 21-June 20)**

Gemini, you will cross over the line of mundane with your thoughts reaching for the stars. New concepts will be inspired as you look at the infinity of the universe and spirit. When asked, your views can help bring a new perspective to difficult situations. You will feel love and encouragement from those around you; confidence and peace of mind are prominent now. You will discover the cause of a problem and eliminate it. You will feel strong energy urging you to work out, dance, walk or any other means of moving your body. You will feel refined and quite handsome or beautiful. Your thoughts are on the cosmic levels of understanding. Others will express much interest and curiosity in your opinions of complicated, mystic issues, gemini.

**Cancer (June 21-July 22)**

Cancer, others admire you for your excellent leadership abilities regarding groups. If you are in advertising, public relations or broadcasting you will have very good insight into what consumers and audiences are looking for just now. Definitive choices concerning others could prove very positive. It seems you will have to make things happen today; others will eagerly strive to do what you say needs to happen. Events will determine which direction an important meeting should be taken; go with the flow and be assured all will be well. Even if your idea never catches on, you got the attention that it takes to be included on the next decision-making team and you created some good energy around an idea. Relax and enjoy a few moments to yourself, cancer.

**Leo (July 23-August 22)**

Leo, you will feel a strong urge to understand the mysteries of life and they might apply to you. The vibrations of compassion and assisting will be strong according to the stars. You could feel that you are watching some things from far away, but you're actually right there. Open your physical mind to absorb spiritual truths and to see that we are all connected in a divine way. This new cycle will highlight your ability to organize and put things in motion. You could want to ignore duties today and instead just have fun, unfortunately your role is far too important today for you to be absent. You will reign yourself in and complete whatever needs to be finished; friends may scoff because they wanted you with them, dependable leo.

**Virgo (August 23-September 22)**

Virgo, you will feel a need to be recognized and thanked for your contributions. You enjoy giving as much as you do receiving and you want those who receive your gifts to pay it forward. Through your example, you teach others to come from the truth and not their anger. If you feel excluded consider that you may have set yourself up for this by being overcritical or too conservative; there is a thing called give and take and you are good at it when you want to be. You could have a tough time regarding work or home just now; delay making your mind up about any important issues you may have at this time. Let your mind go to the accomplishments you have made. Put your feet up and enjoy dinner in front of the television tonight, virgo.

**Libra (September 23-October 22)**

Libra, your senses are acutely in tune with your surroundings, as though you can almost feel what people are thinking. This would be perfect timing for finding big ticket items like furniture, vehicles, jewelry and such. There is a vibration of high drama if you choose to engage; you are not connected to your innermost sensitivities at this time, only to the feelings of others. Relax and don't dwell on bothersome issues just now; breathe and meditate as you wait for better times. You could be assigned to an unusual task using teamwork. An irritating problem concerning someone close could crop up and eventually you will need to make some decisions regarding this matter. Tonight will be a relaxing time at home away from tensions and demands, libra.

**Scorpio (October 23-November 21)**

Scorpio, you could find yourself looking back at burned bridges; when we learn our lessons we don't have to learn them again. Perhaps this year you can conduct yourself differently when faced with situations resembling the past! With so many things on your mind, it may be hard to concentrate on routine matters. But the mundane is where you have succeeded and prospered. Be grateful for what you have instead of wanting things you think you can't have. Later today someone may be rude and interrupt at an inopportune time. You could feel the right place for you today is home. Poetry and art may soothe your jangled nerves this evening. Choose something fun or relaxing later and do it with someone you know you will enjoy, passionate scorpio.

**Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)**

Sagittarius, turmoil in your personal life is indicated if you choose not to avoid it. Your opinions and wants do not sync with what is going on with others and you could feel downhearted regarding this. Keep your innermost thoughts and feelings to yourself just now and wait for better days. Someone important, a boss or customer more than likely, will hold you up for praise. A new assignment will herald a welcome new beginning. Tonight you may be surprised at the progress you make on a task you were dreading. You could be tempted to attend a gathering perhaps you should not; consider this before you act. You have a way with words and people this evening when you try to help some feuding neighbors, sagittarius.

**Capricorn (December 22-January 19)**

Capricorn, try to stay in the present today as the past repeats over and over in your mind. You will notice others around you more clearly and look inward for understanding. Treat yourself to some fun, plan an escape with someone you love. This day is destined to give you moments of joy. Eat well, enjoy the outdoors, let your reflections on the past teach you. You have an eager mind and a willing spirit that love to learn embrace these blessings now just as you have in the past. Your general goodwill toward people will shine through today and someone will appreciate your energy. This evening, put your feet up, let your mind and body relax. Keep melancholy away by remembering that you are respected and needed by many, capricorn.

**Aquarius (January 20-February 18)**

Aquarius, job opportunities don't feel right to you, they actually go against your grain. The activities and efforts associated with this position goes against your moral compass; remember that money isn't everything even at a time like this. Your plans and the direction you desired in your life resemble a runaway rollercoaster. It's almost as though even your family life is unacceptable in the workplace. Someone will cross you today and possibly create a scene. Shopping for items to feather your nest is not a good idea just now; your tastes aren't appreciated. Special attention is given to your ancestral history; you may become involved with a group. Your investments will include land and property and the time is perfect for it, aquarius!

**Pisces (February 19-March 20)**

Pisces, are you going through a separation of some kind perhaps you have or will be graduating from one school to another, or maybe one job to another whatever the case you will finally be free of a situation you won't miss; not that it was negative, but the time has come to move toward the future. Smile as you join the world of independence and responsibility; remember you should call each obstacle teacher and friend! Deep, reflective moments could occur throughout this month. A new start with an old flame or it could be a job could materialize. Let your renewed energy flow into your newest efforts at work and home. You could fall into the trap of after holiday sales; avoid these unless you truly need an item and it just happens to be on sale, pisces.

COUNTRY CODES

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

Cosmic dust, not 'alien mega structure,' veils mysterious star

MIAMI: It's been called the "most mysterious star in the universe," bigger than the sun and yet brightening and dimming in an odd way that suggested to some an alien mega structure might be circling it. But a study out Wednesday, compiled by more than 100 scientists who have been observing the star, named KIC 8462852, puts the alien rumors to rest.

"Dust is most likely the reason why the star's light appears to dim and brighten," said

lead author Tabettha Boyajian, assistant professor of physics and astronomy at Louisiana State University, for whom "Tabby's Star" is nicknamed. "The new data shows that different colors of light are being blocked at different intensities. Therefore, whatever is passing between us and the star is not opaque, as would be expected from a planet or alien mega structure."

The initial discovery of the star was made

with the help of NASA's planet-hunting space telescope, known as Kepler. Kepler detects planets by tracking moments when a star's light dims as an object passes in front of it. The unusual dips in brightness in Tabby's Star—more than 1,000 lightyears away, about 50 percent bigger and 1,000 degrees hotter than the sun—aroused global interest.

More than 1,700 people donated some \$100,000 through a Kickstarter campaign to

study it further. Astronomers at the California-based Las Cumbres Observatory watched it closely from March 2016 to December 2017. "We were hoping that once we finally caught a dip happening in real time, we could see if the dips were the same depth at all wavelengths," said co-author Jason Wright, assistant professor at Pennsylvania State's department of astronomy and astrophysics. —AFP

CLINIC PAGE



Kuwait Times
THE LEADING INDEPENDENT DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF

Dr. Fahad Al-Mukhaizeem **فهد علي المخيزيم**
Consultant Pediatrician استشاري أطفال
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Friday, January 5, 2018

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EMERGENCY



112

Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Fair and with light variable wind, with speed of 08 - 22 km/h .

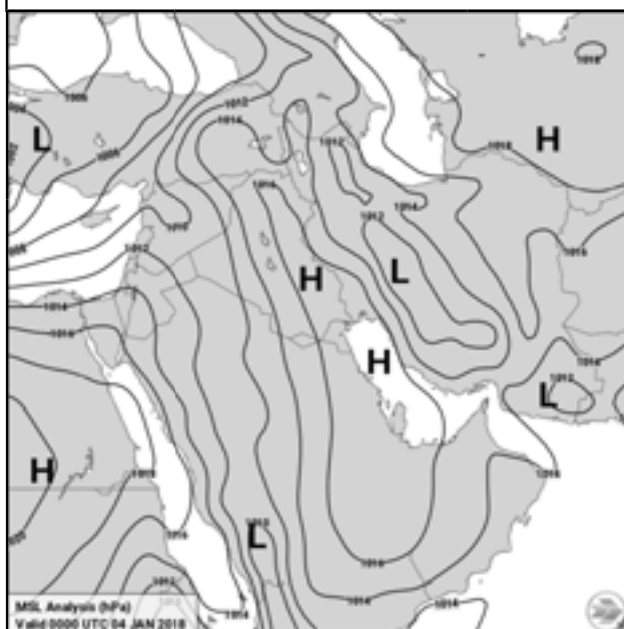
BY NIGHT: Cold and Humid specially over coastal areas with light variable wind changing to wind, with speed of 08 - 35 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

WEATHER WARNING

No Current Warnings

STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.
KUWAIT CITY	23 °C	14 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	23 °C	06 °C
ABDALY	24 °C	07 °C
BUBYAN	24 °C	08 °C
JAHRA	23 °C	09 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	22 °C	10 °C
SALMIYAH	20 °C	14 °C
AHMADI	21 °C	13 °C
NUWAISIB	24 °C	10 °C
WAFRA	22 °C	08 °C
SALMY	20 °C	07 °C

SFC. CHART 04/01/2018 0000 UTC



4 DAYS FORECAST

DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Friday	01/05	Fair and some high clouds will appear	23 °C	08 °C	SE	08 - 32 km/h
Saturday	01/06	Fair and some scattered clouds will appear with a chance for scattered rain	24 °C	06 °C	VRB-NW	08 - 30 km/h
Sunday	01/07	Partly cloudy with a chance for scattered rain	23 °C	09 °C	NW	15 - 42 km/h
Monday	01/08	Fair	24 °C	07 °C	NW	15 - 40 km/h

PRAYER TIMES

Fajr	05:19
Sunrise	06:43
Zuhr	11:53
Asr	14:44
Sunset	17:03
Isha	18:25

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT

MAX. Temp.	22 °C
MIN. Temp.	05 °C
MAX. RH	72 %
MIN. RH	30 %
MAX. Wind	NW 32 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

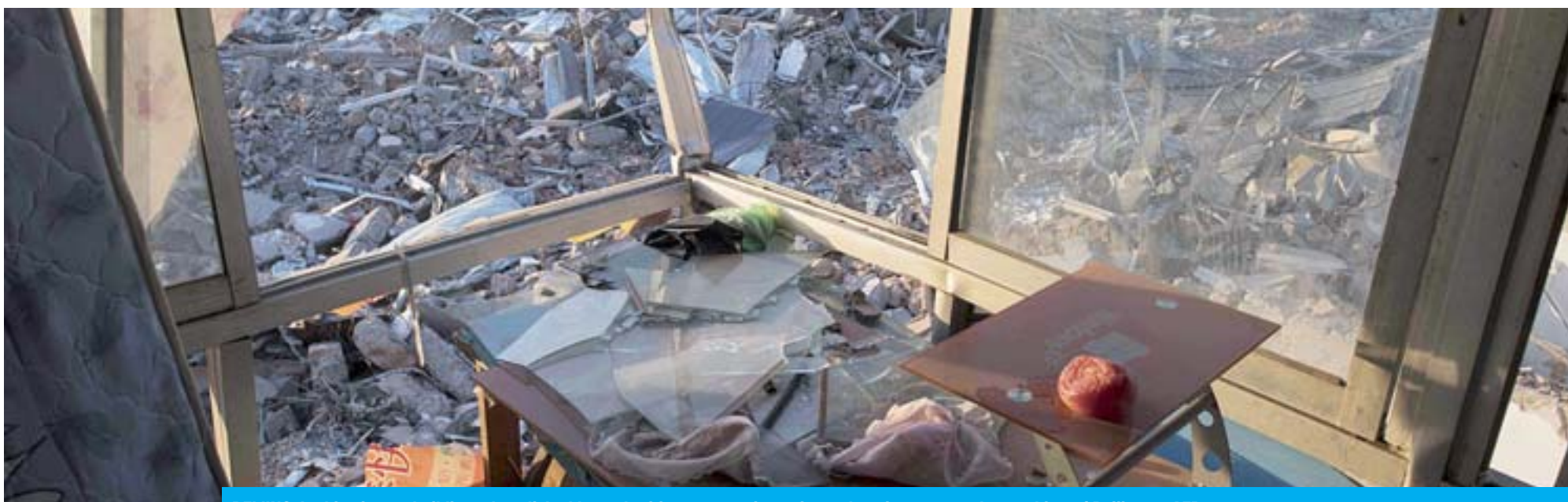
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AIRLINES

American Airlines	22087425
Kuwait Airways	22087426
Jazeera Airways	171
Jet Airways	177
FlyDubai	22924455
Qatar Airways	22414400
KLM	22423888
Royal Jordanian	22425747
British Airways	22418064/5/6
Air France	22425635
Emirates	22430224
Air India	22921555
Sri Lanka Airlines	22438184
Egypt Air	22424444
Swiss Air	22421578
Saudia	22421516
Middle East Airlines	22426306
Lufthansa	22423073
PIA	22422493
Bangladesh Airlines	22421044
Indian Airlines	22452977/8
Oman Air	22456700
Turkish Airlines	22958787
Aeroflot	22453820/1
	22404838/9

Business

FRIDAY, JANUARY 5, 2018

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BEIJING: In this picture, buildings demolished by authorities are seen in a migrant housing area on the outskirts of Beijing. —AFP

Migrant worker evictions tear at Beijing's backbone

City plans on demolishing 'illegal' structures

BEIJING: They fuelled their nation's dramatic economic rise, toiling in jobs far from home, but China's migrant workers are now finding themselves increasingly unwelcome as authorities try to cap the population explosions in key cities. Lin Huiqing moved to Beijing to look for work when his children were still in diapers. For the last eighteen years, he has seen his family just once a year, the rest spent doing the hard labor most Beijingers would prefer to avoid.

The 50-year-old is one of hundreds of millions of migrants who moved from the countryside to the cities, a colossal demographic shift that made China's ascent possible. But last month Lin was evicted from the village where he lived on the capital's outskirts, another victim of a city-wide demolition plan to limit Beijing's population to 23 million by 2020 — a target that could come at the cost of its economy. "If I go home, I have no way to support my wife and kids," Lin lamented.

According to the Communist Party mouthpiece People's Daily, the city plans to demolish 40 million square meters of "illegal" structures. Many are the homes and shops of low-income migrants like Lin. When he first arrived in Beijing, Lin and his friends pooled their money and took out loans to purchase delivery trucks. He made a living hauling the wares of small-scale shopkeepers and traders, but the

moving business has taken a hit as the city condemns buildings en masse, evicting tens of thousands into the winter cold. "Our customers are commoners like us," he said. "With their small businesses shut down, there's no stock for us to move. We're basically unemployed now."

'Can't make it here anymore'

Authorities say the campaign, which kicked into high gear after a fire in an illegal structure killed 19 in November, is needed to clean the city up once and for all. But it is also removing vibrant chunks of Beijing's economy, such as retail and small scale manufacturing, and throwing into chaos other sectors like delivery, the bedrock of the booming e-commerce trade. Relegated to the periphery, migrants have kept China's economy humming, handling the difficult, dirty and sometimes dangerous work that the city's permanent residents won't do.

Urban industries like construction, domestic work and sanitation are almost completely staffed by migrants. Eli Friedman, associate professor of in-

ternational and comparative labor at Cornell University, said China's biggest cities "simply cannot function without migrant workers". "If every non-local were to actually be removed from cities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, these economic engines for the whole country would completely collapse," he said. But that is exactly what is happening, said Li Ning, one of the 60,000 delivery drivers who criss-cross Beijing's streets.

Li was recently evicted from a village on the city's outskirts, forcing him into an apartment where the rent quadrupled. Then authorities came for his delivery company's warehouse, forcing staff to sort packages on the sidewalk and sending his income plummeting. "In Beijing all the migrants are leaving. We can't make it here anymore," he said, adding he plans to leave for good during the upcoming spring festival.

Another delivery franchise owner surnamed Wang said she will "give up" if authorities knock down her current warehouse, which they marked in black paint with the character "chai" — (demolish) — in mid-December. She had just moved in De-

ember 1, after she had to close two other delivery hubs this year, forcing her to cut her work force from 240 couriers to 60. "There's no stability. I don't know what I'll be facing tomorrow," she said, tears welling in her eyes.

'Now we have to start over'

The demolitions have also hit Beijing's retail sector, decimating once affordable mom and pop shops and pushing consumers online or into high-end malls. Two years ago, Ge Guoxiang moved with his wife from their home province of Jiangsu to take over his brother's textiles stall. It had thrived for over 20 years in Beijing's Tuanjieshu Tianyu market. But three months ago, they received notice that authorities will shutter the market.

Dozens of small-scale community markets have been forced to shut down this year—including the iconic Beijing Zoo market, where hundreds of merchants organized rare street protests against the evictions. Officials said they have designated certain areas in the neighboring Hebei province where merchants can move their businesses to. But Ge is unconvinced. "It takes years for businesses like ours to build up clientele. Now we have to start over," he said. "Our clients are mostly older people who don't know how to shop online. Where will they go?"—AFP

Where will they go?

Business

Stocks records tumble, oil at highest since 2015

World stocks hit record on upbeat growth data

LONDON: Market bulls resumed their charge yesterday as strong data from the world's biggest economies sent stock index records tumbling and oil prices to their highest since mid-2015. In an apparent acceleration of last year's global equity boom, MSCI's world stocks index and London's FTSE both set records as Europe opened.

Tokyo's Nikkei - Asia's biggest market - earlier shot to its highest since 1991 with a 3.3 percent surge. Asia-Pacific excluding Japan also scaled a decade-high peak as a fifth day of gains in China helped emerging market stocks to a 6-1/2 year high as well. "It is a continuation of the goldilocks story," said State Street Global Markets' head of macro strategy Michael Metcalfe. "The main theme last year was strong growth and accommodative (monetary) policy and the data we have had so far suggest that the growth is expected to accelerate, and without inflation." The data published yesterday reinforced expectations that solid world growth will boost demand for goods, including oil, and lift corporate earnings.

China's services sector activity hit its highest level in more than three years, manufacturing data from Japan came in strong and euro zone surveys showed the bloc enjoying its strongest run in nearly seven years. IHS Markit's Final Composite Purchasing Managers' Index - seen as a good overall growth indicator for the 19-country region - rose to 58.1 in December from 57.5 in November and up slightly from a flash estimate of 58.0.

"A stellar end to 2017 for the euro zone rounded

off the best year for over a decade, continuing to confound widely held fears that rising political uncertainty would curb economic growth," Chris Williamson, chief business economist at IHS Markit, said. Another factor behind the upbeat mood was that minutes of the Federal Reserve's mid-December meeting released on Wednesday did little to change that view that it will stick to measured increases in US interest rates.

They showed policymakers expect US President Donald Trump's tax cut plans to boost consumer spending but are still uncertain about the impact the stimulus would have on inflation. Fed funds rate futures moved to price a 75 percent chance of a rate hike by March, compared with around 60 percent at the end of last year. But markets are still not fully pricing in the three rate increases many Fed officials expect this year. The dollar climbed off a three-month low after the minutes but was backsliding again in Europe on Thursday as the euro zone and Asia data handed the initiative back to the euro and yen. It left the greenback flat at 112.61 yen and the euro up 0.15 percent at \$1.2033. If the single currency gets above September's peak of \$1.2092 it would return to ground last trod in early 2015. "We see some very positive euro sentiment in the market right now," said Commerzbank currency strategist Esther Reichelt in Frankfurt.

Oil on the boil

Euro zone bond yields were also creeping higher,



TOKYO: Women wearing traditional kimono outfits pose after the opening of the stock market for the year at the Tokyo Stock Exchange.—AFP

buoyed by the data, as investors readied for new debt sales from France and Spain in what is traditionally one of the busiest issuance months of the year. Yields on French and Spanish 10-year bonds were around 1 basis point higher. In Germany, the bloc's benchmark

bond issuer, 10-year bond yields were up 1.5 bps at 0.46 percent and holding within reach of recent two-month highs. The bigger focus though was on the ongoing rise in commodity prices, which often have a big influence on global inflation.—Reuters

Big oil powers UK's FTSE 100 to record high; Debenhams drops

LONDON: A rally in oil majors pushed the UK's top share index to an all-time high yesterday, though elsewhere retailers were under pressure after a profit warning from Debenhams. Britain's FTSE 100 index was up 0.2 percent at 7,686.95 points by 0948 GMT, while mid caps rose 0.1 percent.

"Just because we're trading on ground that's never been traded on before doesn't really mean that we're due a pullback - we do expect (the FTSE 100) to push higher," John Moore, trader at Berkeley Capital, said. "We've also seen that the historic correlation between the pound and the FTSE is somewhat not as strong as before," Moore added, saying bigger factors, such as the oil price, were driving the index.

A rally in cyclical sectors such as financials and energy added around 20 points to the index, with BP and Shell rising 1 percent and 0.8 percent respectively. The UK's oil and gas index was up 0.8 percent at its highest level since May 2008. The British oil majors aped a move higher in oil prices, which were spurred to their highest level since mid-2015 on the back of tensions in producer Iran.

A supportive research note from Barclays also helped the energy sector, in which analysts said they expected European integrated oil and refining companies to be cash flow positive after dividends in the fourth quarter, thanks to a higher oil price. Likewise positive metals prices also drove shares in British miners.—Reuters

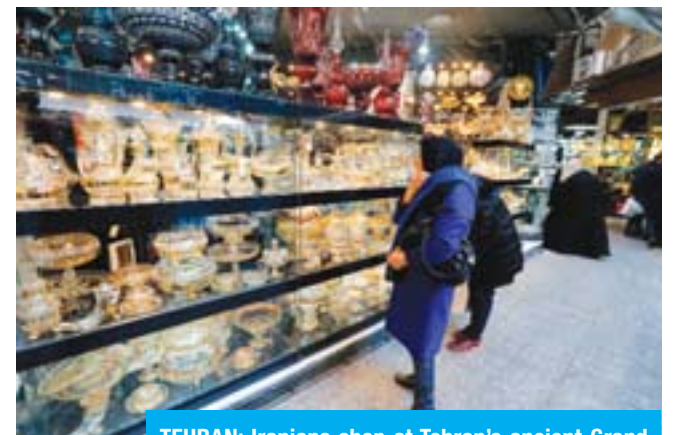
Solid US, China data lifts emerging stocks

LONDON: Fresh evidence that the world's top two economies were on a solid growth track pushed emerging stocks to fresh 6-1/2 year highs yesterday, while higher oil prices underpinned crude exporters. Global equities hit a new high following record closes on Wall Street on Wednesday, helped by robust growth numbers and a rally in energy stocks. Tensions in key oil producer Iran and ongoing OPEC-led output cuts have pushed oil prices to their highest in over 2-1/2 years.

US factory activity increased by more than expected in December, boosted by a surge in new orders growth, while China's services sector activity expanded at the fastest pace in more than three years. MSCI's benchmark emerging equities index rose 0.4 percent, with Chinese mainland shares up 0.5 percent to over one-month highs, Warsaw up 1.7 percent to a six-week high, Prague up 1 percent to a 6-1/2 year high and Russian shares up 0.7 percent. Strong economic data out of Germany and the broader euro zone added to the benign backdrop for Eastern Europe. "Everything seems to point to a positive start, the risk appetite is good, you have FX rallying, you have equity markets rallying - it is a typical start to the new year with people taking up risk again," said Paul Fage, a strategist at TD Securities.

In Turkey, Halkbank shares surged as much as 4.7 percent before giving up most of these gains, after a US jury found a Halkbank executive guilty of helping Iran evade US sanctions. Halkbank said the banker had the right to appeal against the verdict. Halkbank dollar-denominated bonds were little changed. The almost four-week trial has strained relations between the US and Turkey, which said the decision was "unjust and unfortunate".

The Turkish bank sector index and the broader market were both up around 0.5 percent, while the lira firmed 0.4 percent



TEHRAN: Iranians shop at Tehran's ancient Grand Bazaar.—AFP

against the dollar. "The market has taken pretty much no notice of it," Fage said. "The whole thing is really about what the consequences will be for the relationship between Turkey and the US, and it is hard to know at this precise moment in time." He was skeptical it would really have a substantial long-term negative market impact.

The South African rand firmed 0.8 percent against the dollar, shrugging off data showing South Africa's private sector economic activity contracted for a fifth consecutive month in December, hitting a 20-month low. Meanwhile Angola's central bank said it would abandon its currency peg against the U.S. dollar from this month, setting the stage for the kwanza to fall sharply to match its value on the streets.

NKC African Economics said the change may not address domestic product shortages in the short-term. "Hence, the net impact will be inflationary given that a certain proportion of imports are no longer subsidised at a stronger exchange rate," analyst Cobus de Hart said in a note.—Reuters

Qatar allows full ownership for foreign investors

Qatar tries to secure new revenues

DOHA: Qatar has approved legislation allowing 100-percent ownership for foreign investors in most sectors of the economy in a bid to boost non-energy revenues, the government said yesterday. The move comes at a time of political crisis in the Gulf, with Qatar under an economic and diplomatic boycott by neighboring countries for the past seven months. It is also an attempt by Qatar, the third largest economy in the Gulf, to secure new revenues to finance a budget deficit due to the slump in oil prices since mid-2014.



Overseas investors will be able to fully own businesses in almost all economic sectors but they are not allowed to purchase real estate or own franchises, according to the ministry of economy and trade. To invest in the banking and insurance sectors, foreigners need to secure a special permit from the government, the law states. Currently, foreign investors can own up to 49 percent of companies listed on Qatar's stock exchange in accordance with a law

passed in 2014.

The new law was approved at the cabinet's weekly meeting on Wednesday. "The draft law aims to increase tax revenues, protect foreign and local investors and boost Qatar's status in global economic indicators," according to a statement by the ministry. It is not yet clear when the draft law will come into force. The move is the latest attempt by Qatar, the world's largest exporter of liquefied natural gas, to secure new revenues since the Gulf crisis took hold.

100-percent ownership

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt severed ties with Qatar in June, accusing it of links to extremist groups and being too close to Shiite Iran, Riyadh's regional arch-rival. Doha has denied the charges. Qatar has increased business with existing trade partners outside the region, announced plans to produce more gas and sought new markets, most recently in West Africa.—AFP



DOHA: In this file photo, a Qatari woman walks in front of the city skyline in Doha, Qatar. —AP

London house prices in first annual fall since 2009

LONDON: The average price of a home in London dropped in 2017 for the first time in eight years on fallout from Brexit, data showed yesterday. While prices were up nationwide, they were down in London for the first time since 2009, mortgage lender Nationwide calculated. UK house prices rose by 2.6 percent overall last year—slower than the 4.5 percent seen the previous year—said Nationwide, whose monthly survey is closely watched by markets.

However, "London saw a particularly marked slowdown, with prices falling in annual terms for the first time in eight years, albeit by a modest 0.5 percent" during the fourth quarter, said Nationwide chief economist Robert Gardner. In addition, London was the UK's worst-performing region for the first time since 2004. "How the housing market performs in 2018 will be determined in large part by developments in the wider economy," noted Gardner.

"Brexit developments will remain important, though these remain hard to foresee," he added. Since Britain voted to leave the European Union in June 2016, a drop in sterling-making imported goods more expensive—has pushed inflation up to more than 3.0 percent. In 2017, "low mortgage rates and healthy employment growth continued to support demand" for housing, according to Gardner.—AFP



LONDON: Passenger trains pass through Battersea Park rail station as construction work continues on the Battersea Power Station residential and retail development complex in south-west London. —AFP

More Zurich tax cheats come clean as data sharing looms

ZURICH: Switzerland's largest and wealthiest canton saw a three-fold rise in the number of tax cheats turning themselves in during 2017, Zurich officials said yesterday, as an international accord to share information on offshore wealth takes effect. The finance department said 6,150 Zurich taxpayers came clean on previously undisclosed assets in 2017,

tripling the previous record set in 2016 and helping to disclose 1.3 billion Swiss francs in hidden wealth so far.

The authorities have been able to handle only about half the cases so far, however, so they expect the sum to rise. Under the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's new Automatic Exchange of Information program, more than 100 countries are beginning to exchange financial information amid a global clamp-down on tax evasion. The agreement aims to ensure offshore accounts are known to authorities in the country where the account holder owes tax.—Reuters

Labor's economic plan, a high-risk gamble

LONDON: The opposition Labor Party's proposal for a sharp increase in state-funded investment is a high-risk economic strategy, Labor's education policy chief said in an interview published yesterday. The socialist leadership of Britain's second largest party has promised a range of sweeping economic reforms if it wrestles power from Prime Minister Theresa May's Conservatives, including a debt-funded 250 billion pound 10-year investment plan.

"We are in different times, radical times where we need to have a real investment in Britain's future. Genuinely, I don't mean that as a slogan, I mean it as an economic strategy," Angela Rayner, Labor's would-be education minister told the Spectator magazine. "It's a high-risk strategy. But all of Britain's great advancements in the past have been because we've had the gumption to take a risk." Labor performed much better than expected in a June national election, depriving May of an outright majority in parliament.

That has pushed investors to seriously consider the prospect of Labor taking power sooner than the next scheduled election in 2022. Morgan Stanley cautioned investors on Nov. 26 that political uncertainty in Britain was a bigger threat than Brexit given the risk of Corbyn winning power and then dismantling what was once seen as one of the world's most stable free-market economies. Labor leader Jeremy Corbyn later hit back at the bank, saying: "They're right: We're a threat to a damaging and failed system that is rigged for the few."—Reuters

Business

US Fed members divided over rate hikes in 2018

Companies to use windfall for mergers, share buybacks

WASHINGTON: US central bankers are divided over how fast they will need to raise interest rates next year, given differences over the causes behind the low inflation and wage gains seen to date, according to a report released Wednesday. The minutes of the December 12-13 policy meeting, when the Federal Reserve raised the benchmark lending rate for the third time last year, also showed officials believe the likely benefits of the recently adopted tax cut are highly uncertain. While the tax cuts could boost spending, there are indications companies are likely to use the windfall for mergers and share buybacks, the minutes said. That is contrary to the arguments its supporters used to back the massive tax package. The Fed's policy-setting Federal Open Market Committee last month increased the key lending rate to 1.25-1.5 percent, an increase of a quarter-point on the rate that affects all types of credit from mortgages to car loans.

The Fed's quarterly economic projections also released last month indicated the central bank is likely to raise the federal funds rate three times in 2018 and once in 2019. However, that is a median forecast and the minutes show there are conflicting views among the policymakers about the number of rate hikes that will be needed. The disagreement centers on whether inflation has remained stubbornly below the Fed's two percent target due to temporary or more enduring factors.

Return of inflation to 2%

How many rate hikes?

A few FOMC members said three rate increases, while still a gradual upward path, would be too fast and "might prove inconsistent with a sustained return of inflation to two percent." However, a few others found the pace of rate hikes should be "somewhat faster" than the three signaled in the forecast. They worried that "continued low interest rates risked financial instability in the future, or that the labor market was increasingly tight."

With steady job creation in the past two years pushing the unemployment down to a 17-year low of 4.1 percent, Fed officials have been perplexed about why inflation has remained very low and wage gains have been sluggish so far, but largely attributed it to transitory factors. The Fed's preferred inflation measure, the Personal Consumption

Expenditures price index, remains well below two percent and shows few signs it will rise soon. The 12-month core PCE, which excludes volatile food and energy prices, has risen just 1.4 percent.

The central bank forecasts indicate the unemployment rate is expected to continue to drop to 3.9 percent next year, although some economists see it falling even further. Two voting members of the FOMC, Charles Evans of Chicago and Neel Kashkari of Minneapolis, dissented from the decision to raise rates last month saying the central

bank should wait to see actual wage and inflation increases before raising rates. Analysts at Barclays said the actual pace of rate increases will depend on inflation this year, but if it does not rise by March "or if the unemployment rate decline stalls out, then the case for a pause in the rate hike cycle strengthens."

Uncertain tax cut impact

Last month's policy meeting took place just before the US Congress approved the massive \$1.4

trillion tax package, and many Fed officials noted the potential for the tax cuts to provide some boost to consumer and business spending. However, they highlighted the uncertainty about the magnitude of the impact.

On the business side especially, reports from firms and surveys indicate that "the increase in cash flow that would result from corporate tax cuts was more likely to be used for mergers and acquisitions or for debt reduction and stock buybacks." —AFP

Malaysia unlikely to meet 2020 balanced budget goal

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia is unlikely to meet earlier targets it set for a balanced budget by 2020 and will need another two to three years to reach the goal, the country's second finance minister said yesterday. The shift in the budget target follows comments by ratings agencies late last year that the Southeast Asian economy might struggle to meet its objectives in the stated timeframe due to a run up in spending.

"I don't think by 2020 (the government) can achieve a balanced budget because if you do that, basically you will squeeze economic development," second finance minister Johari Abdul Ghani said at a conference, adding the government will have to spend in order to stimulate the economy. "We will try to extend it to 2022-23," he said. Johari reiterated projections stated previously that the fiscal deficit will be reduced to 2.8 percent of gross domestic product this year from 3 percent in 2017.

Prime Minister Najib Razak has been able to lower Malaysia's fiscal deficit every year since taking power in 2009 and that has been signifi-

cant for maintaining Malaysia's investment-grade sovereign credit ratings. However, some analysts are concerned the increase in government spending will hinder the pace of deficit reduction going forward. Najib, under pressure to shore up his government's popularity, in October unveiled a budget aimed at winning votes in a national election that must be held by August. He announced a spending increase of 7.5 percent for 2018 from last year, and said the government plans to cut personal income tax for lower-income citizens, pay more to pensioners and spend billions on schools, hospitals and rural infrastructure.

Post the 2018 budget announcement, ratings agency Moody's said it does not expect Malaysia to achieve the balanced budget target by 2020. Rising spending in the run up to the elections and lack of revenue reforms slowed the pace of deficit reduction, it said. Fitch, however, said in October Malaysia's 2020 target would "require a step-up in consolidation efforts in 2019 and 2020, but is not unattainable." Najib faces his toughest election yet as he looks to counter bad publicity from a corruption scandal involving state-owned fund 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) and a growing challenge from Mahathir Mohamad, his former mentor turned rival. Malaysia's economy expanded at its fastest pace in more than three years in the third quarter of 2017, a turnaround from 2016 when low oil prices hurt. —Reuters



WASHINGTON: A man walks past the Federal Reserve Bank in Washington, DC. —Reuters

Tortilla, gasoline prices unnerve Mexicans as election year begins

MEXICO CITY: Mexico's government on Wednesday denounced forecast price hikes by fuel retailers and tortilla makers, saying increases were unjustified as it sought to allay public concern about high inflation at the start of a presidential election year. Prices for corn tortillas, the Mexican staple, are forecast to rise in the coming days by between nearly 11 and 21 percent, according to figures from the National Union of Industrial Mills and Tortillas.

Meanwhile, gasoline and diesel prices are seen by one retail association rising an average of about 7 percent this year due to tax changes, volatility of the peso currency and higher crude prices. "That they say they are now going to hike prices is unjustified. We don't see the market conditions for this to happen," said Jose Rogelio Garza, a deputy economy minister. The forecast from the Mexican Association of Gasoline Businesses (AMEGAS) was quickly dismissed as false in a statement by state-run oil company Pemex, but that did not stop complaints.

"My suppliers bring me the dough by car and if gasoline prices go up then obviously they are

going to have to adjust their prices," said Jorge Garcia, the owner of a Mexico City bakery. The price of liquefied natural gas, used for cooking, rose by an average of 25 percent in 2017, while electricity rates have also inched up, according to government data. "With increasing gas prices we're going to have to make adjustments... I can't work without gas," said Garcia.

As inflation hovers near a 16-year high at just below 7 percent, officials insisted the forecast price spikes, which have triggered social media outrage and threats of protests, are not warranted. "In 2018, variations in international fuel prices will continue to be cushioned," the finance ministry said in a statement on Tuesday, emphasizing a scheme that allows it to reduce a key excise tax applied to fuel sales.

With presidential elections looming in July, the government is especially sensitive to the possibility that protests could further erode its support among voters. But beyond rhetoric, the government is mostly powerless to force the hands of gas station owners as its ability to set prices ended in late November after it finalized a gradual, nationwide fuel liberalization. The move to market prices, part of sweeping 2013-2014 energy reform, ending a transitional period during which it still set maximum gasoline and diesel prices. The fuel regulator, or CRE, said in a statement that prices in central Mexico for Pemex's Magma gasoline, which makes up more than 80 percent of total sales, have only risen 1.3 percent compared to average prices at the end of November, an increase it described as stable. —Reuters

Business

Computer chip 'flaw' sparks security debate

Systems updated to protect against new attack

WASHINGTON: A newly discovered vulnerability in computer chips raised concerns Wednesday that hackers could access sensitive data on most modern systems, as technology firms sought to play down the security risks. Chip giant Intel issued a statement responding to a flurry of warnings surfacing after researchers discovered the security hole which could allow privately stored data in computers and networks to be leaked.

Intel labeled as incorrect reports describing a "bug" or "flaw" unique to its products. Intel chief executive Brian Krzanich told CNBC that "basically all modern processors across all applications" use this process known as "access memory," which was discovered by researchers at Google and kept confidential as companies work on remedies. Google, meanwhile, released findings from its security researchers who sparked the concerns, saying it made the results public days ahead of schedule because much of the information had been in the media.

The security team found "serious security flaws" in devices powered by Intel, AMD and ARM chips and the operating systems running them and noted that, if exploited, "an unauthorized party may read sensitive information in the system's memory such as passwords, encryption keys, or sensitive information open in applications." "As soon as we learned of this new class of attack, our security and product development teams mobilized to defend Google's systems and our users' data," Google said in a security blog.

"We have updated our systems and af-

ected products to protect against this new type of attack. We also collaborated with hardware and software manufacturers across the industry to help protect their users and the broader web."

Specter and Meltdown

The Google team said the vulnerabilities, labeled "Specter" and "Meltdown," affected a number of chips from Intel as well as some from AMD and ARM, which specializes in processors for mobile devices. Intel said it was working with AMD and ARM Holdings and with the makers of computer operating software "to develop an industry-wide approach to resolve this issue promptly and constructively."

Jack Gold, an independent technology analyst, said he was briefed in a conference call with Intel, AMD and ARM on the issue and that

the three companies suggested concerns were overblown. "All the chips are designed that way," Gold said. The companies were working on remedies after "some researchers found a way to use existing architecture and get into protected

areas of computer memory and read some of the data," he added. Microsoft said in a statement it had no information suggesting any compromised data but was "releasing security updates today to protect Windows customers against vulnerabilities." But an AMD spokesman said that because of the differences in AMD processor architecture, "we believe there is near zero risk to AMD products at this time." ARM meanwhile said it was "working



together with Intel and AMD" to address potential issues "in certain high-end processors, including some of our Cortex-A processors." "We have informed our silicon partners and are encouraging them to implement the software mitigations developed if their chips are impacted," the SoftBank-owned firm said.

Slowdown?

Earlier this week, some researchers said any fix—which would need to be handled by software—could slow down computer systems, possibly by 30 percent or more. Intel's statement said these concerns, too, were exaggerated. "Contrary to some reports, any performance impacts are workload-dependent, and, for the average computer user, should not

be significant and will be mitigated over time," the company statement said. Tatu Ylonen, security researcher at SSH Communications Security, said the patches "will be effective" but it will be critical to get all networks and cloud services upgraded, Ylonen said. British security researcher Graham Cluley also expressed concern "that attackers could exploit the flaw on vulnerable systems to gain access to parts of the computer's memory which may be storing sensitive information. Think passwords, private keys, credit card data." But he said in a blog post that it was "good news" that the problem had been kept under wraps to allow operating systems such as those from Microsoft and Apple to make security updates before the flaw is maliciously exploited.—AFP

US auto sales fall for the first time since 2009

NEW YORK: Automakers on Wednesday reported the first annual decline in US sales since the end of the financial crisis, a dip offset by continued strength in sales of trucks and other large vehicles. The three leaders in the US market—General Motors, Ford and Toyota—all reported modest declines in 2017 compared with the sales records set in 2016. The results put an end to US auto industry's eight-year streak of increases, as the national total slipped 1.5 percent to 17.23 million, according to Autodata.

The winning streak "was the result of pent-up demand after the recession that's finally just running out," said Tim Fleming, an analyst at Kelley Blue Book. Automakers had been bracing for the sales gains to come to an end for the last couple of years, but that was averted in 2016 in part by heavy incentives implemented late in the year to unload excess inventory. Despite the decline, analysts note that sales above 17 million is still very strong.

And the US auto industry continues to enjoy strong demand for

larger vehicles, including SUVs, pickup trucks and "crossover" models. Larger vehicles are grabbing even more market share from sedans, which Kelley estimated made up just 36 percent of the US market last year, down from 50 percent in 2012. GM's annual sales fell 1.3 percent to three million vehicles last year, but the biggest US automaker said continued strength in larger crossover vehicles and trucks had helped lift the average retail price for all vehicles to a record \$35,400 in the final month of the year.

Ford's sales fell 1.1 percent to 2.6 million compared to 2016, but it reported a surprise increase in December, fueled in part by the continued success of the F-Series pickups and other large vehicles. The average price of best-selling F-Series came in at \$47,800, a new record, marking an "unbelievable year" for the model, Ford Vice President Mark LaNeve said. Toyota, saw US sales drop 0.6 percent to 2.4 million, but the company highlighted strength in its popular Camry sedan, the RAV4 crossover and SUVs.

Fiat Chrysler did not release year-end figures, but its December sales fell 11 percent to 171,946, a bit below the level projected by Edmunds, but above the forecast by Kelley Blue Book. Sales were hit by lower sales to car rental companies. Honda's US sales rose 0.2 percent for the year to 1.6 million. Nissan's 2017 sales also came in at 1.6 million, a 1.9 percent increase from the prior year.

Bullish on 2018?

Some in the auto world remain bullish about 2018, pointing to



CALIFORNIA: This file photo shows the Ford logo on a truck in Manhattan Beach, California.—AFP

the benefits from the US tax cut that President Donald Trump signed into law last month. "In 2017, we had solid GDP growth and good news on employment, wages and consumer sentiment, which helped deliver very strong retail sales for the auto industry," GM chief economist Mustafa Mohatarem said. "This year, many consumers will see their take-home pay rise because of tax reform. That will keep the broad economy growing, and help keep sales at very healthy levels even as the Fed increases interest rates." —AFP

Sports

World champion Fernandez carries Spanish hopes

Fernandez has played a key role in developing the sport in Spain

MOSCOW: When two-time world champion Javier Fernandez competes at the Pyeongchang Games next month, he will be hoping to end a 26-year Winter Olympic medal drought for Spain. Fernandez trains in Canada but his success has reverberated to his native land, where figure skating has struggled to find a similar level of popularity enjoyed by soccer, tennis and basketball. The Pyeongchang Olympics will be Fernandez's third and final Games and the 26-year-old, a five-time European champion, is keen to improve on his heart-breaking fourth-place finish at the 2014 Sochi Games.

"I wanted to get onto the podium but it didn't happen," Fernandez said of Sochi in an interview with the International Skating Union (ISU) website. "I didn't have a bad competition but it was not good enough."

Fernandez was in third after the short programme but a mistake in his free skate saw Kazakhstan's Denis Ten dislodge him and take the bronze. After narrowly missing the podium, Fernandez returned to the rink with "so much energy to give in practice".

"So I think it was actually positive for me to not even achieve the medal in Sochi," the ISU quoted him as saying. Fernandez's consistency has been astonishing since then. He won back-to-back world titles, three consecutive European titles and

two Grand Prix Final silver medals.

He did not qualify for December's Grand Prix Final but won the Grand Prix event in France in November with a season-best performance in the short programme. He was more than 10 points ahead of second-place finisher Shoma Uno of Japan, even though he fell on his quad Salchow and triple Axel in the free skate. "Javier is a fighter, a person whose ideas are clear and who follows his goals to the end," Spanish Ice Sports Federation (FEDH) general secretary Xavier Cherta told Reuters. "Only good things can be said about Javier."

“ Fernandez’s consistency has been astonishing ”

“MAN OF LA MANCHA”

In Pyeongchang, Fernandez will be skating his free programme to "Man of La Mancha", a musical based on the 17th-century

classic Spanish novel "Don Quixote" by Miguel de Cervantes. Fernandez said that his choice of music was a wink to his compatriots, a gesture he hoped would be appreciated back home.

Although his fan base in Spain is not as large as those of tennis star Rafael Nadal and NBA veteran Pau Gasol, Fernandez has played a key role in developing the sport. Cherta has seen Fernandez's success spark growing public interest in figure skating.

"When we have a high-level athlete, he has to



Javier Fernandez

leave Spain to train because we cannot give him the facilities for his calibre," Cherta said. "But Javier's appearance has allowed us to work toward building a high-performance centre and we have the support of public institutions."

In its history Spain has won only two medals at the Winter Olympics—a gold in the men's slalom in 1972 and a bronze in the women's slalom in 1992 won by siblings Francisco and Blanca Fernandez Ochoa.

German-born cross-country skier Johann

Muehlepp won three gold medals for Spain in the 2002 Salt Lake City Games only to be disqualified for doping. Fernandez, who left Spain at 17 to pursue his figure skating career, also recognises his role in transforming the landscape of Spanish sport.

"We got more support, more sponsors, more everything," Fernandez told the ISU. "Now people know about figure skating a little bit more. They know that we have a team that is competing." — Reuters

Quad king Chen pushes for artistry ahead of Pyeongchang

MOSCOW: Nathan Chen became the first figure skater to land five quadruple jumps in a single programme last year, but the 18-year-old American insists he has much more to offer. In his second season on the senior circuit, the 2017 US national champion is hoping to prove at the Pyeongchang Olympics that he's not all about the quad.

Chen has packed his programmes with quadruple jumps, four-revolution jumps that have become key elements in world-class men's programmes. But Chen has made special efforts to improve his presentation, turning to Canadian choreographers Shae-Lynn Bourne and Lori Nichol to develop his artistry-footwork, expression and other elements essential to a high score.

Chen says he is trying to "imagine the programme as a whole picture," and not un-

necessarily waste energy on its individual components. "That's definitely what I'm trying to prove this season," Chen told reporters a day after winning his first senior grand prix event in Moscow in October.

"Obviously there is still work to be done. But definitely I'm in the right direction." Chen opened the season by beating defending Olympic and world champion Yuzuru Hanyu of Japan in Moscow, landing four quadruple jumps in his short programme including a breathtaking combination of the quad lutz and triple toe loop.

In November he won the Skate America grand prix event despite one of the worst free skates of his senior career. He had planned five quadruple jumps but only attempted four and put his hand on the ice on his quad flip before falling on his quad toe loop. Chen redeemed himself at the Grand Prix Final in December, overcoming an error-filled free skate to win the title.

The youngest of five children, Chen was born in Salt Lake City to Chinese immigrant parents. He was not quite three years old when his hometown hosted the 2002 Winter Olympics. Chen is skating his free programme to music from the movie "Mao's Last Dancer", based on an autobiography of former Chinese ballet dancer Li Cunxin. —Reuters

Tennell leads US champs after short program

SAN JOSE: Bradie Tennell performed a brilliant routine to take a narrow short program lead over sentimental favourite Mirai Nagasu in the ladies competition at the US figure skating championships on Wednesday.

Under the microscope of the Olympic selectors in the last event before the team for Pyeongchang is picked, in-form teenager Tennell executed flawlessly in San Jose, California. Tennell arrived at the championships as one to watch after finishing third at Skate America last month and she did not disappoint, notching the highest ever US championships short program score of 73.79 points, ahead of Nagasu's 73.09.

"I didn't even know that," the 19-year-old said in a post-routine interview. "My expectations were just to skate a clean program. I just ignored the whole Olympics aspect of it and skated how I know how."

Nagasu, meanwhile, failed to stick her signature jump in a nervous start to what she hopes will be Olympic redemption but still recovered to challenge Tennell. The 24-year-old wept openly after being overlooked for the 2014 American team for Sochi, despite finishing third at the US championships that year.

Four years after that crushing disappointment, Nagasu entered this year's championships with the distinction of being only the second American after Tonya Harding to land a triple Axel in international competition.

After a nervous warm-up, Nagasu started her routine with the triple Axel but stumbled upon landing, although she stayed on her feet. She regrouped, however, and was rewarded with the highest technical score of the night.

"I think I did a great job. To go down in history is all I've ever wanted," said Nagasu, who makes no secret of her desire to atone for 2014. "I wish I had the mental ability of (multiple gold medal-winning swimmer) Michael Phelps but I think my journey has been about getting up... I'm so proud to still be here today."

Tennell and Nagasu are well clear of third-placed Karen Wang on 69.48, with triple national champion Ashley Wagner languishing down in fifth place on 65.94. "I've had a really mental season, I'm not going to lie about that," said Wagner, referring to her recent mediocre form.

"This was solid. You can lose an event in the short program and my main focus was to get through this, not get too far behind and get myself a close enough distance to make a real killing in the long."

The ladies' event concludes on Friday with the long program. The first three finishers are not guaranteed of selection, as Nagasu discovered in 2014, but know a strong finish will be hard to ignore. —Reuters

Warriors survive frantic Mavericks rally for victory

Celtics rout Cavs, Thomas gets ovation in Boston return

DALLAS: Stephen Curry buried a tie-breaking 3-pointer with three seconds remaining Wednesday, allowing the visiting Golden State Warriors to survive a frantic Dallas Mavericks rally for a 125-122 victory. Curry (32), Kevin Durant (25) and Klay Thompson (25) all topped 20 points as the Warriors beat the Mavericks for the ninth straight time while winning their eighth in a row on the road, matching the second-longest road streak in the NBA this season. After trailing 120-110 with 2:46 to play, the Mavericks rallied into a tie by scoring 10 straight, including 3-pointers by Yogi Ferrell and Wesley Matthews. Harrison Barnes' 15-footer with 39 seconds remaining forged a 120-all deadlock. Matthews had 22 points and Dwight Powell 21 for the Mavericks, whose four-game winning streak ended.

ROCKETS 116, MAGIC 98

Playing without James Harden for the first time since the star guard injured his hamstring, visiting Houston trounced Orlando. Harden was injured Sunday in Houston's double-overtime victory over the Los Angeles Lakers. He could be out of the lineup for anywhere from two to six weeks. Playing in only his fourth game of the season, veteran Gerald Green helped pick up the slack. He produced a season-high 27 points and six rebounds and made 7 of 10 3-point tries for the Rockets. Clint Capela finished with 21 points and eight rebounds for Houston. Aaron Gordon led the Magic with 16 points.

CELTICS 102, CAVALIERS 88

Former Celtics star Isaiah Thomas rested on the second night of a back-to-back after making his season and Cavaliers debut Tuesday, so Cleveland had to fend without him and came up short in a loss at Boston. Thomas exchanged hugs and smiles with his former teammates before and after the game and when he was shown on the scoreboard videoscreen, Boston fans responded with a standing ovation. Ex-Celtics forward Jae Crowder received one as well. Terry Rozier paced the Celtics with 20 points off the bench. Jayson Tatum and Marcus Smart each scored 15 and Jaylen Brown 14 as Boston won its fourth straight. Kyrie Irving finished with 11 points, nine rebounds and six assists. LeBron James finished with 19 points, seven rebounds and six assists for Cleveland. Kyle Korver hit five 3-pointers for 15 points, and former Celtic Jeff Green scored 13 for the Cavaliers, who fell for the fourth time in five games.

THUNDER 133, LAKERS 96

Paul George put on a show in his home state to help visiting Oklahoma City rout Los Angeles. George, a native of nearby Palmdale, Calif., who is rumored to be interested in signing with the Lakers as a free agent next offseason, tied for the team high with 24 points. Terrance Ferguson poured in 24 points with six 3-pointers in his first career NBA start in place of Andre Roberson (knee). Russell Westbrook, who played in college at UCLA, had 20 points, 12 assists and six rebounds. Carmelo Anthony added 21 for the Thunder, all in the first half. Kyle Kuzma scored 18 points to pace the Lakers. Kentavious Caldwell-Pope had 12 as the Lakers lost their eighth straight.

76ERS 112, SPURS 106

Ben Simmons scored 26 points, Joel Embiid added 21 points and 11 rebounds, and JJ Redick had 20 points as Philadelphia defeated San Antonio. Dario Saric contributed 15 points for the Sixers, who won for the third straight game and snapped a 12-game

losing streak to the Spurs that dated to 2011. The Sixers also broke a five-game home losing skid. The short-handed Spurs played without a number of key players including Rudy Gay (right heel bursitis), Manu Ginobili (rest), Danny Green (left groin), Kawhi Leonard (quadriceps) and Tony Parker (injury management). Patty Mills led the Spurs with 26 points off the bench while LaMarcus Aldridge added 24 points and 14 rebounds.

WIZARDS 121, KNICKS 103

John Wall and Bradley Beal spearheaded a defensive surge with steals that they turned into dunks during a third-quarter burst, helping Washington turn back New York. The Wizards completed a 3-0 home stand by limiting the Knicks to seven points in the first 10 1/2 minutes of the third quarter while turning a one-point halftime advantage into an 87-70 lead. Beal finished with game-high 27 points, Wall 25 and Marcin Gortat 21 for the Wizards, who shot 59.3 percent from the field. Michael Beasley had 20 points off the bench for the Knicks.

HEAT 111, PISTONS 104

Miami had three 20-point scorers in a game for the second time this season and held off visiting Detroit on Wednesday night to go three games over the .500 mark for the first time since April 2016. Kelly Olynyk scored a game-high 25 points, Goran Dragic added 24 and Josh Richardson posted the 10th 20-point game of his career and seventh of this season with 22 for the Heat. Tobias Harris led the Pistons with 19 points, and Reggie Bullock hit a season-best 5 of 8 3-pointers on his way to 17 points. Boban Marjanovic scored a surprising 15 points in getting his first start in nearly two years, replacing Andre Drummond, out due to a rib injury.

NETS 98, TIMBERWOLVES 97

Spencer Dinwiddie capped off a strong performance by scoring the decisive basket with 10.1 seconds remaining as Brooklyn registered a victory over Minnesota. Dinwiddie's fadeaway jumper finished off a showing in which he had 26 points and nine assists. Joe Harris added 17 points on 6-of-7 shooting for the Nets, who were 14 of 30 from 3-point range while winning for the third time in their past four games. Jimmy Butler scored 30 points but was off the mark with a jumper with 1.5 seconds left for the Timberwolves. Andrew Wiggins scored 17 points and Karl-Anthony Towns contributed 16 points and 10 rebounds, but Minnesota was 1 of 11 from 3-point range and lost for just the second time in the past nine games.

RAPTORS 124, BULLS 115

DeMar DeRozan scored 26 of 35 points after halftime as Toronto overcame an early deficit to blow past Chicago. The victory was the third straight and 15th in 18 contests for the Raptors. Justin Holiday finished with 26 points for Chicago, which lost its third in a row. The Bulls lost for the fifth time in eight games. Serge Ibaka and Kyle Lowry scored 16 points each for the Raptors. Nikola Mirotic had 20 points for the Bulls.

BUCKS 122, PACERS 101

Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 31 points, Khris Middleton added 27 and Milwaukee extended Indiana's losing streak to five games. Antetokounmpo and Middleton combined to hit 21 of 32 shots, with Middleton knocking down 3 of 4 from beyond the arc. Overall, the Bucks shot 58.7 percent from the field and



DALLAS: Kevin Durant #35 of the Golden State Warriors dribbles the ball against Maximilian Kleber #42 and Harrison Barnes #40 of the Dallas Mavericks at American Airlines Center in Dallas, Texas. —AFP

NBA results/standings

Philadelphia 112, San Antonio 106; Washington 121, New York 103; Houston 116, Orlando 98; Miami 111, Detroit 104; Brooklyn 98, Minnesota 97; Boston 102, Cleveland 88; Toronto 124, Chicago 115; Milwaukee 122, Indiana 101; Golden State 125, Dallas 122; Denver 134, Phoenix 111; New Orleans 108, Utah 98; Oklahoma City 133, Los Angeles Lakers 96.

Eastern Conference				Western Conference					
	W	L	PCT	GB					
Boston	31	10	75.6	-	Golden State	30	8	78.9	-
Toronto	26	10	72.2	2.5	Houston	27	9	75.0	2
Cleveland	25	13	65.8	4.5	San Antonio	26	13	66.7	4.5
Washington	22	16	57.9	7.5	Minnesota	24	15	61.5	6.5
Detroit	20	16	55.6	8.5	Oklahoma City	21	17	55.3	9
Milwaukee	20	16	55.6	8.5	Denver	20	17	54.1	9.5
Miami	20	17	54.1	9	Portland	19	18	51.4	10.5
Indiana	19	19	50.0	10.5	New Orleans	19	18	51.4	10.5
Philadelphia	18	19	48.6	11	LA Clippers	17	19	47.2	12
New York	18	20	47.4	11.5	Utah	16	22	42.1	14
Brooklyn	15	23	39.5	14.5	Phoenix	15	25	37.5	16
Charlotte	14	23	37.8	15	Dallas	13	26	33.3	17.5
Chicago	13	25	34.2	16.5	Sacramento	12	25	32.4	17.5
Orlando	12	27	30.8	18	Memphis	12	26	31.6	18
Atlanta	10	27	27.0	19	LA Lakers	11	26	29.7	18.5

were 9 of 17 from long distance. Indiana fell to 0-6 on the season without leading scorer Victor Oladipo, who missed a fourth straight game because of soreness in his left knee. Domantas Sabonis made 10 of 13 shots and led the Pacers with 24 points.

NUGGETS 134, SUNS 111

Gary Harris tied his career with 36 points, and Wilson Chandler scored 17 points for hot-shooting Denver in a victory over Phoenix. Reserve Trey Lyles had 16 points, and Nikola Jokic had 14 points, nine rebounds and eight assists for the Nuggets. Denver shot 62.2 percent from the field, including 12 of 27 (44.4 percent) on 3-point attempts. Devin Booker had 17 points and Marquese Chriss and Greg Monroe had 16 points apiece for the Suns, whose flight did not land in Denver until

about 2 p.m. Wednesday because of mechanical issues and regulations regarding pilot flying time.

PELICANS 108, JAZZ 98

Anthony Davis scored 29 points and collected 15 rebounds, and Jrue Holiday added 24 points to lead New Orleans past Utah in Salt Lake City. DeMarcus Cousins added 19 points and 11 rebounds, and Rajon Rando chipped in 12 points for the Pelicans. New Orleans snapped a two-game losing streak and also ended a five-game skid to the Jazz. Donovan Mitchell scored 24 points and Joe Johnson added a season-high 20 points to lead Utah. The Jazz forced 20 turnovers but could not overcome poor perimeter shooting. Utah made just 7 of 32 (21.9 percent) from 3-point range while losing for the fourth time in five games. —Reuters

Sports

Murray, Nishikori pull out of Australian Open

Stan Wawrinka, Milos Raonic to play in Melbourne

MELBOURNE: Former world number one Andy Murray and Japan's Kei Nishikori pulled out of the Australian Open yesterday as a host of top names battle to be fit for the year's first Grand Slam. Murray, 30, had failed to recover from a hip injury sustained last year and has not played since losing in the Wimbledon quarter-finals last July, while Nishikori has been on the sidelines since August due to a torn tendon in his right wrist.

"Sadly I won't be playing in Melbourne this year, as I am not yet ready to compete," the three-time Grand Slam champion Murray said in a statement.

"I'll be flying home shortly to assess all the options but I appreciate all the messages of support and I hope to be back playing soon." Murray, who earlier withdrew from the Brisbane International, did fly from Queensland to Melbourne, but only to catch a connecting flight back to Europe, the national broadcaster ABC reported.



Top names battle to be fit for the first Grand Slam

time Australian Open champion Novak Djokovic remain huge doubts having yet to play a competitive match this year.

Nadal, the reigning French Open and US Open champion, pulled out of Brisbane at the weekend with a knee injury but said he still intends to play at Melbourne Park. Former world number one Novak Djokovic has not played since a right elbow issue forced him to quit Wimbledon in the quarter-finals.

He cancelled scheduled appearances in Abu Dhabi and Doha but intends to test the injury next week at two warm-up events in Melbourne before

deciding whether to embark on a tilt at a record seventh Aussie title.

"Novak is travelling to Australia where he will take part in two exhibition tournaments," said a statement on 12-time Grand Slam winner's website early Thursday. "After the two events, the decision will be made about his participation."

'GAME BECOMING MORE PHYSICAL'

World number eight Jack Sock joined the growing injury list when he injured his hip at the Hopman Cup in Perth on Tuesday. Former champion Stan Wawrinka and Canada's Milos Raonic are also returning from injuries but intend to play in Melbourne. On the women's side of the draw there are question marks over the fitness of defending champion Serena



Kei Nishikori

Williams, who has not played competitively since giving birth four months ago. And British number one Johanna Konta, a semi-finalist in Melbourne two years ago, retired from her Brisbane quarter-final yesterday with a right hip injury and was not sure if she would defend her Sydney International title next week.

"Hips take a massive beating," Konta said. "Obviously, our game is becoming more and more physical and the demands of the tour as well, week-in and week-out, is becoming more demanding." Earlier in the week Wimbledon champion and world number

two Garbine Muguruza was forced to retire at Brisbane with severe leg cramps, though the Spaniard two-time Grand Slam winner yesterday accepted a wildcard to play in Sydney.

US Open champion Sloane Stephens pulled out of Brisbane before the tournament to rest a troublesome knee but is entered for Sydney. And upcoming French star Caroline Garcia, who enjoyed a breakthrough season in 2017 rising to eight in the world, retired in tears with back pain from the same event on Sunday. —AFP

Sharapova, Halep in Shenzhen semi-finals

SHENZHEN: Former world number one Maria Sharapova cruised past Kazakhstan's Zarina Diyas and into the semi-finals of the Shenzhen Open in China yesterday. Sharapova, who won 6-3 6-3, struck 24 winners and five aces to stay on course for a title clash with top-ranked Simona Halep after the Romanian dismissed Aryna Sabalenka 6-2 6-2. "I'm glad that I ended up being the winner of the match," Sharapova said in a courtside interview. "I didn't play my best tennis and there's certainly a lot of things to improve on in the next. The great thing is that I'm through and have another chance to play tomorrow." The five-times grand slam champion committed 22 unforced errors in the match but stepped up her game at decisive moments of the contest to get past her spirited rival.

Sharapova's only title in 2017 came at the Tianjin Open, after she came back from a 15-month doping ban, and the world number 59 is aiming for a title-winning start to the year in her first visit to Shenzhen. "I feel like I'm having a nice little tour of China. It's my fourth Chinese city in a few months," Sharapova added. "It's obviously been a great welcome here. It took many years for me to play this event but I'm really glad that I did." Sharapova plays Katerina Siniakova next after the defending champion beat fellow Czech Kristyna Pliskova 6-2 6-2. Earlier, fourth seed Irina-Camelia Begu had to work hard to overcome Timea Babos 7-5 7-5 to set up a semi-final meeting with her compatriot Halep. —Reuters

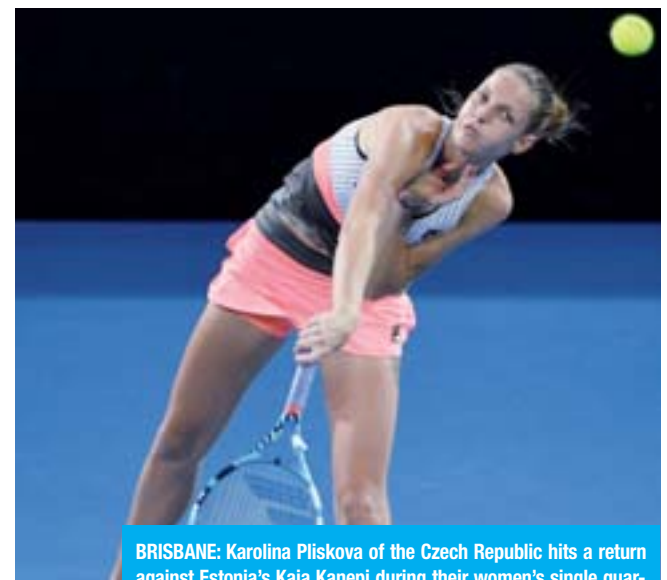
Pliskova survives Kanepi scare at Brisbane

BRISBANE: Defending champion Karolina Pliskova survived a massive scare from Estonia's Kaia Kanepi to move into the semi-finals of the Brisbane International yesterday. Second seed Pliskova lost the first set to an inspired Kanepi and was down 3-1 in the second before launching an epic comeback, winning 3-6, 7-5, 6-2 in two hours and 11 minutes. Pliskova was in imperious form in her demolition of American Catherine Bellis in the last round, but the powerful Kanepi proved a far tougher challenge. The 32-year-old Estonian won in Brisbane in 2012 but 12 months away from the game with injury in 2016-17 saw her ranking plummet and she had to qualify to make the main draw this year.

Kanepi looked like joining fellow qualifier Aliaksandra Sasnovich in the semi-finals as she outplayed Pliskova at her own power game. But she faltered when serving to go to 4-1 in the second set, allowing Pliskova to break back and swing the momentum towards the Czech world number four. "I was a little bit surprised the first set and a half how she played," Pliskova said. "And for the big risks that she was taking, she had almost zero mistakes," she added. "The only thing that I could do is just wait for my chance, and I got it, because, obviously, nobody can play like this for two sets or three."

Pliskova will now play third seed Elena Svitolina for a place in the final after the Ukrainian won an eventful match against British number one Johanna Konta. Svitolina reached the final four when Konta was forced to retire with an injury at 2-3 in the third set.

Konta had raced through the first set before Svitolina recovered to take the second in a tiebreak. But Konta felt a problem with her



BRISBANE: Karolina Pliskova of the Czech Republic hits a return against Estonia's Kaia Kanepi during their women's single quarter-final match in Brisbane. —AFP

right hip in her first service game of the third set and opted to withdraw, with Svitolina winning 1-6, 7-6 (8/6), 3-2.

Svitolina, tipped as a possible winner of the Australian Open, was pleased at her recovery after a sluggish start. "Playing against a top 10 player early in the year... it can be challenging, but it's good," the Ukrainian said.

"After losing the first set, I was trying to stay calm and to realise what I was doing wrong, and I actually came back in the second set. The second semi-final will be between Sasnovich and seventh seed Anastasija Sevastova of Latvia. —AFP

Sports

Australia hit back with late wickets in Sydney

Root makes 83 before late exit

SYDNEY: Australia stunned England with two late wickets, including that of Joe Root for 83, to leave the tourists wobbling on 233 for five at the end of the rain-disrupted opening day of the fifth and final Ashes Test yesterday.

A day that started with rain washing out the first session had looked like ending with a packed Sydney Cricket Ground bathed in summer sunshine and England's Barmy Army of fans in full triumphant voice. Root and Dawid Malan had combined for a 133-run partnership to help steer the tourists to 228 for three when Australia took the second new ball with two or three overs of play remaining.

First, Mitchell Starc, back after missing the fourth test with a bruised heel, induced Root into a half volley to square leg where Mitchell Marsh took a superb catch. Then Jonny Bairstow, who had eschewed a nightwatchman, was removed caught behind by Josh Hazlewood with what turned out to be the last ball of the day.

"It was great to get the late reward as a bowling group for our hard toil," said Marsh. "Two three-hour sessions really took it out of us, certainly in that last hour, it felt pretty long. So to get those two wickets was great for our confidence and we've got a two-over new ball tomorrow, so hopefully we can

get stuck into them."

Despite the Ashes already having been relinquished after the loss of the first three Tests in the series, the tourists had been determined to build on their performance in the drawn fourth test and secure a consolation win.

Malan, who survived a few scares to notch up his fifth test half century and reached stumps unbeaten on 55, said England were obviously disappointed. "It sort of sums up where we've been in on this tour,

we've been on top for so long in games and then make a couple of mistakes and let the Aussies back in," he said.

"I thought Rooty played fantastically well to get to that position, obviously he was disappointed to get out and to be five down after the hard work we put in today is obviously not ideal." Mark Stoneman, James Vince and Alastair Cook de-

Cook falls short of 12,000 runs



parted relatively cheaply before tea but Australia's bowlers were unable to drive home their advantage until the dramatic climax.

Both Root and Malan scored slowly - the captain had six boundaries in his half century and his partner five - and there were chances to dismiss the latter in particular. Root had just reached the 50 mark when he called for a single off Nathan Lyon only for Malan, who was on 28, to stand his ground and then set off very late.

Marsh fielded the ball but fired it to the striker's

end and Tim Paine's throw to Lyon caused the spinner to spill the ball, allowing Malan to make his ground. Malan had eked his tally to 34 when he got an edge off to a Lyon delivery that eluded both wicketkeeper Paine and captain Steve Smith at first slip.

They were chances that Australia would have rued had the day not ended as well for them as it had started. Stoneman and Vince

had got starts under brightening skies but departed for 24 and 25 respectively, both caught behind off Pat Cummins.

Cook made 244 not out in Melbourne last week and looked to be creeping assiduously towards another big tally when Hazlewood intervened to remove him lbw for 39, a review leaving the former England captain five runs short of 12,000 Test runs. — Reuters



SCOREBOARD

SYDNEY: Scoreboard at the close on day one in the fifth Ashes Test between Australia and England in Sydney yesterday:

England first innings:		Total (5 wickets; 81.4 overs)	233
A. Cook lbw b Hazlewood	39	Fall of wickets: 1-28 (Stoneman), 2-88 (Vince),	
M. Stoneman c Paine b Cummins	24	3-95 (Cook), 4-228 (Root), 5-233 (Bairstow)	
J. Vince c Paine b Cummins	25	To bat: M. Ali, T. Curran, S. Broad, M. Crane, J.	
J. Root c M. Marsh b Starc	83	Anderson.	
D. Malan not out	55	Bowling: Starc 16-4-63-1, Hazlewood 17.4-2-	
J. Bairstow c Paine b Hazlewood 5		47-2, Cummins 17-4-44-2 (lw), Lyon 26-4-61-	
Extras (lb1, w1)	2	0, M. Marsh 5-0-17-0.	

It's the pitch we wanted, says Du Plessis

CAPE TOWN: South African captain Faf du Plessis said yesterday that the pitch for the first Test against India, starting at Newlands on Friday, looked ideal for his team. "The groundsman has done a fantastic job," said Du Plessis. "It's been very, very hot but it looks like it's going to be a good cricket wicket, nothing too extreme but it looks like it's going to be exactly what we wanted."

After several days of hot weather the match pitch had a mottled appearance. It looked less green than it was when the South Africans assembled on Tuesday but there was still a good covering of grass. The ideal pitch, according to Du Plessis, is one that offers pace, bounce and some seam movement.

"You don't want excessive movement that brings both bowling attacks into the game. We feel that our seam resources on a wicket that offers a bit of pace and bounce can exploit some areas in their batting line-up," he said.

For the first time in more than a year, South

Africa have all their key bowlers fit, while the returning AB de Villiers needs to be slotted into what has been a settled batting middle order. "There are so many combinations," said Du Plessis. "It is the hardest team selection I've been involved in. We have so many different options, we can almost pick different teams for different venues."

Although coach Ottis Gibson indicated earlier in the week that it was unlikely Dale Steyn would be part of the fast bowling line-up after a long injury break, Du Plessis said the former world number one bowler had lost none of his skill.

"Dale for me is the best bowler in the world," said Du Plessis. "He hasn't played for a while. He hasn't got the overs under his legs that he would have wanted but facing Dale in the nets it feels like he's got the same pace, the same swing."

Du Plessis admitted that South Africa had produced some disappointing results in the past two years, notably away to India and at home to England in 2015/16 and in England in 2017, but said conditions, particularly in India, and injuries has been a factor.

He said he looked forward to his team challenging for the number one Test ranking, currently held by India. "The next two or three years are going to be very exciting for South African cricket. We can push very hard to not only get to number one but to stay there for quite a bit." — AFP



SYDNEY: England batsman Joe Root drives a ball from Australia's attack on the first day of the fifth Ashes cricket Test match. — AFP

Sports

Inter play catchup on Napoli, Juventus before winter break

Napoli lead the way with 48 points from 19 games

MILAN: Inter Milan travel to Fiorentina today looking to close the gap on leaders Napoli and Juventus to rekindle their Serie A campaign before the winter break. Inter Milan and Roma lost ground on the leading duo last weekend after both were held and need three points to ensure the leading duo are within sight before a two-week break in the championship.

Napoli lead the way with 48 points from 19 games, one point ahead of six-time champions Juventus, with Inter now seven points adrift of top spot in third. Roma—a further two points behind in fourth—host midtable Atalanta tomorrow.

Luciano Spalletti's side face a tricky task at Fiorentina, seventh after being held 1-1 by AC Milan last weekend. Spalletti, who arrived from Roma last season, wants more despite just two losses in the campaign.

"I am not happy with my work," said Spalletti. "I think we've done quite well, but are capable of something more. We've got to get a move-on in the second half of the season." Spalletti is counting on leading Serie A scorer Mauro Icardi to lift his side, which suffered back-to-back league defeats followed by an Italian Cup exit to AC Milan.

"We have Mauro Icardi, the goal psychologist. He will speak to the team before (Thursday's) training session and he will help find the

solution to more team goals," added Spalletti.

NAPOLI REFOCUS AFTER CUP EXIT

Napoli turn their focus back to their Serie A campaign against second-from-bottom Verona days after their shock 2-1 Italian Cup exit to Atalanta. Maurizio Sarri was at a loss to explain his side's flagging performance in the 2-1 home defeat by the side from Bergamo.

"I don't understand why we can't perform at the same level as in the league," said Sarri whose side have lost just once this season to Juventus. "I guess it's subconscious or perhaps we see some games as less important than others. Either way, it's a mistake on our part."

"If we play the same way we did in the second half when we go to Bergamo, we'll struggle again."

"We'll need to be fierce and aggressive." Juventus host lowly Cagliari boosted by their Italian Cup derby win over Torino. "I said we expected key matches before the break, now we do not throw anything tomorrow," said coach Massimiliano Allegri.

Torino—whose coach Sinisa Mihajlovic has been sacked after the club's Italian Cup defeat—host European rivals Bologna. AC Milan begin their first match of 2018 against Crotone, occupant of the first relegation spot, looking to climb



VERONA: File photo shows Juventus' players celebrate their victory at the end of the Italian Serie A football match Verona vs Juventus in Verona. —AFP

back into the top of the table and their push for European football next season.

Sampdoria, in sixth and also targeting the Eu-

ropean berths, travel to tailenders Benevento who are looking to build on their first win of the season last weekend. —AFP

Costa back with a bang as Atletico thrash Lleida in King's Cup

BARCELONA: Diego Costa enjoyed a typically eventful return to action for Atletico Madrid on Wednesday, scoring within six minutes of coming off the bench in his side's 4-0 King's Cup win at Lleida Esportiu but appearing to injure his knee in the process.

Costa turned Juanfran's low cross into the net in the 69th minute for Atletico's third goal in the first leg of the last 16 tie against third division Lleida but immediately limped to the sidelines. He did return to the pitch, however, and completed the game despite bleeding from his knee.

Diego Godin had headed Atletico in front in the 33rd minute following a free kick and Fernando Torres slid in to double the lead, completing a sweeping counter-attack although he was fortunate not to be ruled offside.

Antoine Griezmann completed the rout with a goal from a free kick in stoppage time, moments after the home side had defender Marc Trilles sent off for a second yellow card. The win put Atletico on the verge of the quarter-finals, with the second leg at their Wanda Metropolitano stadium on Jan. 9.

Elsewhere, Sevilla beat second division Cadiz 2-0 away in former AC Milan coach Vincenzo Montella's first game in charge. Early goals from Nolito and Jesus Navas put the 2016 finalists in charge although the home side missed a late penalty.

Spain international Rodrigo Moreno struck late to salvage a 1-1 draw for Valencia at Las Palmas and last year's runners-up Deportivo Alaves eased to a 3-1 win at tiny island side SD Formentera.

EXTRA EDGE

Costa completed a 57 million-pound (\$77 million) move back to Atletico from Chelsea in September, having left the club in 2014 after firing them to the La Liga title. The move was delayed by the club's ban on registering new players which expired on Jan. 1.

Costa immediately gave his side an extra edge, charging into challenges and provoking opponents as well as starting and finishing the move for the third goal, his first strike for Atletico since scoring against Chelsea in April 2014.

"In those first five minutes he showed what he is all about and I hope he can keep it up," Atletico coach Diego Simeone told reporters. "But we have to take it easy, it's bad to get carried away. He is quick, determined and strong, but (Kevin) Gameiro and Torres played well too, the team played well as a collective."

Spain international Vitolo, a 40 million-euro signing from Sevilla who spent the first half of the season on loan at Las Palmas, also made his debut for Atletico by coming on in the second half.

"The arrival of these players will help us grow," Simeone added. "I hope they improve us and give us more power and drive. They are top level players and they bring us extra competition." — Reuters

Torino sack coach

MILAN: Torino sacked coach Sinisa Mihajlovic yesterday, one day after he was sent off for dissent in a 2-0 Coppa Italia defeat against neighbours Juventus. The Serbian-born coach, who as a player was regarded as one of the game's best-ever free kick specialists, had been in charge at the club for 18 months.

Torino, who have drawn 10 of their 19 league games this season, are 10th in Serie A and did not give any reasons for the unexpected decision.

"Torino announce the release of Sinisa Mihajlovic from his post of first-team coach," said a brief statement. "We thank Sinisa and his staff for the effort and passion he has shown in these 18 months." There was no immediate comment from Mihajlovic himself. Italian media said that the 48-year-old had been told of the decision in the early hours of the morning and that a group of players had visited him to tell him that they stood behind him.

Local media also reported that former Napoli, Inter Milan and Watford coach Walter Mazzarri was expected to be named as his replacement. Torino was the sixth Serie A club of Mihajlovic's coaching career after Bologna, Catania, Fiorentina, Sampdoria and AC Milan, where he lasted less than one full season. He has also coached the Serbian national team. Mihajlovic was sent off midway through the second half of Wednesday's game after protesting angrily at the referee's decision to award Juventus' second goal, a decision that the official stood by after studying the video replay system (VAR).

Torino claimed that midfielder Afriyie Acquah was fouled in the buildup to the goal. Mihajlovic has mellowed in the last few years although still shows flashes of the fiery temper for which he used to be known. —Reuters



Sinisa Mihajlovic

Wenger rages at 'farcical' penalty, vows to fight charge

Bellerin strikes late to rescue Arsenal in Chelsea thriller

LONDON: Arsene Wenger slammed the "farcical" penalty decision that cost Arsenal in their thrilling 2-2 draw against Chelsea and vowed to fight a Football Association charge in his latest furious attack on the authorities.

Wenger was seething after referee Anthony Taylor awarded a penalty for Hector Bellerin's challenge on Eden Hazard in the second half of Wednesday's heated London derby at the Emirates Stadium. The Arsenal manager felt there wasn't enough evidence of a foul to justify Taylor's decision and Hazard rubbed salt into the wound by converting the spot-kick to cancel out Jack Wilshere's opener.

After Marcos Alonso put Chelsea in front with six minutes left, Bellerin enjoyed a sweet moment of redemption as he blasted Arsenal's 90th-minute equaliser. But Wenger's anger wasn't soothed by that dramatic intervention and, recalling the controversial penalty awarded for a handball by Arsenal's Calum Chambers in Sunday's draw at West Brom, he launched another broadside at the officials.

"We got again a farcical decision on the penalty, but we knew that (could happen) before the game," Wenger said. "You could give 10 penalties like that a game. Since the start of the season it is what we have to take."

"I'm fed up with that. At the moment we have to face surprising decisions. "Nothing will change and we have to deal with that." Wenger was hit with an FA charge for his

conduct towards referee Mike Dean after the Chambers penalty incident. But although he risked further censure with his latest outburst, the Frenchman, who could be given a touchline ban, insisted he has every intention of stating his case in front of the governing body.

"(I will contest the charge) 100 percent. You can listen to every interview and I stick to everything I said without any problem," he said. "I am 35 years in football and I know what I said. "What I find terrible is we just saw a great game and we talk only about this and for me it would be nice if we think about football for a change."

'SHOW RESPECT'

Once he had calmed down, Wenger reserved praise for Arsenal midfielder Wilshere, who scored his first league goal for the club since May 2015. Wilshere appeared to have no future with the Gunners when he was sent on loan to Bournemouth last season, but now Wenger says he deserves an England recall.

"He is where not many people expected him to be. Since Euro 2016 he hasn't played for England. I would say that means everyone had given up on him," he said. "Now no one would be surprised if he was selected again. He deserves great credit for that."

Chelsea manager Antonio Conte said Wenger should show more respect for the officials as he responded to his rival's complaints. "For sure there is a lot of frustration



LONDON: Arsenal's Chilean striker Alexis Sanchez (2R) has a shot on goal by Chelsea's Italian defender Davide Zappacosta during the English Premier League football match between Arsenal and Chelsea at the Emirates Stadium in London. — AFP

from the coach after the game. Sometimes we don't agree with them, but we must have great respect for the decision of the referee," he said.

Conte also defended Alvaro Morata after the Chelsea striker missed a host of chances to continue his erratic first season in England following his move from Real Madrid. "For a striker it is very important to score, it is a pity, he had many chances to score, but I'm very happy with his commitment and effort,"

Conte said. "This is the first season he is playing with regularity, because he didn't play with Real Madrid and also Juventus. He has to stay calm and continue to play this way, the goals are coming." With Chelsea 16 points behind runaway leaders Manchester City, Conte conceded the champions wouldn't be able to retain the title. "We must be realistic. It is very difficult to catch them. We fight for a place in the Champions League," he said. — AFP

Klopp juggles Coutinho, Salah, Van Dijk for Everton tie

LIVERPOOL: Mohamed Salah's fitness, Philippe Coutinho's future and Virgil van Dijk's arrival are the three key issues facing Liverpool as they prepare to host neighbours Everton in the FA Cup's outstanding third-round tie today.

Salah, Liverpool's 23-goal top scorer, missed Monday's 2-1 Premier League victory at Burnley because of a groin injury, and manager Jurgen Klopp has indicated that he remains a doubt. Despite that, Klopp was happy for Egypt international Salah and Senegal forward Sadio Mane were both allowed to fly to Ghana for an awards ceremony taking place on Thursday.

Both men are on the shortlist for the Confederation of African Football's player of the year award, and Klopp says it is important that they are at the ceremony, even though it is so close to the Everton match.

"If it had been a match day, they wouldn't have asked," Klopp said. "For our side, it is just a sign of respect. We sleep in a hotel, they sleep in a plane. That is all the difference. If Mo is not fit, it will not be because of that."

Salah, Mane, Coutinho and Roberto Firmino are widely considered to be Liverpool's four key forwards, though the

Senegal international was the only one who started at Burnley, as Dominic Solanke was given a rare start.

Firmino was used only as a substitute, undoubtedly to keep him fresh for the Everton match, while Coutinho was omitted from the squad altogether with a thigh problem, amid reports that Barcelona were preparing a new attempt to sign him.

"He is a doubt, at least a doubt, for Everton," Klopp said. Defender Van Dijk, meanwhile, is eligible to make his debut, having officially completed his £75 million move from Southampton on Monday. If he is selected, it will mean Klopp fielding a fourth different central defensive partnership in four games, with Joel Matip playing alongside Ragnar Klavan against Swansea and Dejan Lovren against Leicester, before dropping out as the latter two faced Burnley. "There is no rush," Klopp said on Van Dijk. "We need time. A pre-season is for that usually but we don't have a pre-season. After the Everton game, we have a little bit more time, that will help, but it's a long-term project."

"So it's not important when he makes his first game, it's important how many good games he will play for Liverpool." While Liverpool are unbeaten in all competitions since October 22, Everton have gone four games without victory, losing their last two, at Bournemouth last Saturday and at home to Manchester United on Monday.

New manager Sam Allardyce guided them to a 1-1 draw against Liverpool at Anfield in the Premier League on December 10, although the visitors were outplayed for a significant chunk of the game, needing a late Wayne Rooney penalty to secure a point. — AFP



Matches on TV (Local Timings)

ARABIAN GULF CUP 2017

Oman v United Arab Emirates 20:00
Saudi Sports HD1
MBC Pro Sports 1 HD
OMAN SPORTS HD
KTV Sport HD
Dubai Sports 1 HD

ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE

Chievo Verona v Udinese Calcio 20:00
beIN SPORTS HD 4
Fiorentina v Internazionale Milano 22:45
beIN SPORTS HD 4



SHENZHEN: Maria Sharapova of Russia hits a return against Zarina Diyas of Kazakhstan during their women's singles quarter-final match at the WTA Shenzhen Open tennis tournament in Shenzhen yesterday. — AFP

Sharapova, Halep in Shenzhen semi-finals