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Lawmakers call for changes to election law, end to corruption

MP blames expats for spread of bribery • 27 MPs declare support for persecuted Muslims



By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Lawmakers yesterday debated the Amiri speech delivered on the opening day of the current term, demanding major changes and a war on corruption. MP Ali Al-Deqbasi called for changing the election law which he described as "racist" because of the major difference in the number of voters between bedouin-dominated constituencies and others.

MP Saadoun Hammad also called for changing the current electoral law and the distribution of constituencies and the voting system. A similar call was made by MP Hamdan Al-Azmi, who said that he had won his seat on the basis of the current system, but it has caused tremendous harm to the country.

MP Adel Al-Damkhi welcomed the signing of a deal with Saudi Arabia that allows the resumption of oil production from the neutral zone, although it came after Kuwait lost billions of dollars from the five-year stoppage.

MP Abdulkarim Al-Kandari, the head of the foreign relations committee, also welcomed the deal, adding that the panel will invite the foreign minister to a meeting to brief them about the details of the agreement that also modified previous border demarcation accords.

MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri lashed out at some sections of the ruling family, claiming they are the cause of most of the problems in the country. He alleged the ruling family previously had an alliance with bedouins against the rest, then with Sunnis against Shiites, and later with Shiites against Sunnis. He said now the family has changed its alliances, which is causing problems.

MP Khalil Al-Saleh blamed expatriates for some problems, saying expatriates have brought problems from their homeland with them, like bribery, although they remit some KD 5 billion annually. He said that the main problem in Kuwait remains with regards to finding jobs for citizens, as seeking jobs in the

private sector has proved a failure.

MP Al-Humaidi Al-Subaei said the country cannot march ahead and progress without resolving previous crises, calling for opening a new page by issuing a general amnesty for political opponents. He insisted that national unity will not be achieved without the pardon. The lawmaker asked how many more bedouins or stateless people should die before "we give them their basic humanitarian rights". He said bedouins do not need crocodile tears, but urgently require a solution by the National Assembly. MP Mohammad Al-Dallal said that almost every year, there is a new Cabinet in Kuwait, an indication that the country faces political instability, and this must be resolved.

MP Riyadh Al-Adasani said the value of Eurofighter warplanes is KD 2.6 billion and that of Caracal helicopters is KD 1 billion, adding these deals have some suspicions and should be sent to the public prosecution.

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Peace wishes ring in Christmas, but storm dampens joy

VATICAN CITY: Christmas was celebrated all around the world yesterday, with Pope Francis appealing for peace in many of the world's hotspots while festivities were muted for Filipinos battered by a typhoon, as well as in strike-bound France. "May Christ bring his light to the many children suffering from war and conflicts in the Middle East and in various countries of the world," Francis said in his traditional Christmas message at the Vatican, singling out the crises in Venezuela and Lebanon, as well as armed conflicts ravaging many African countries.

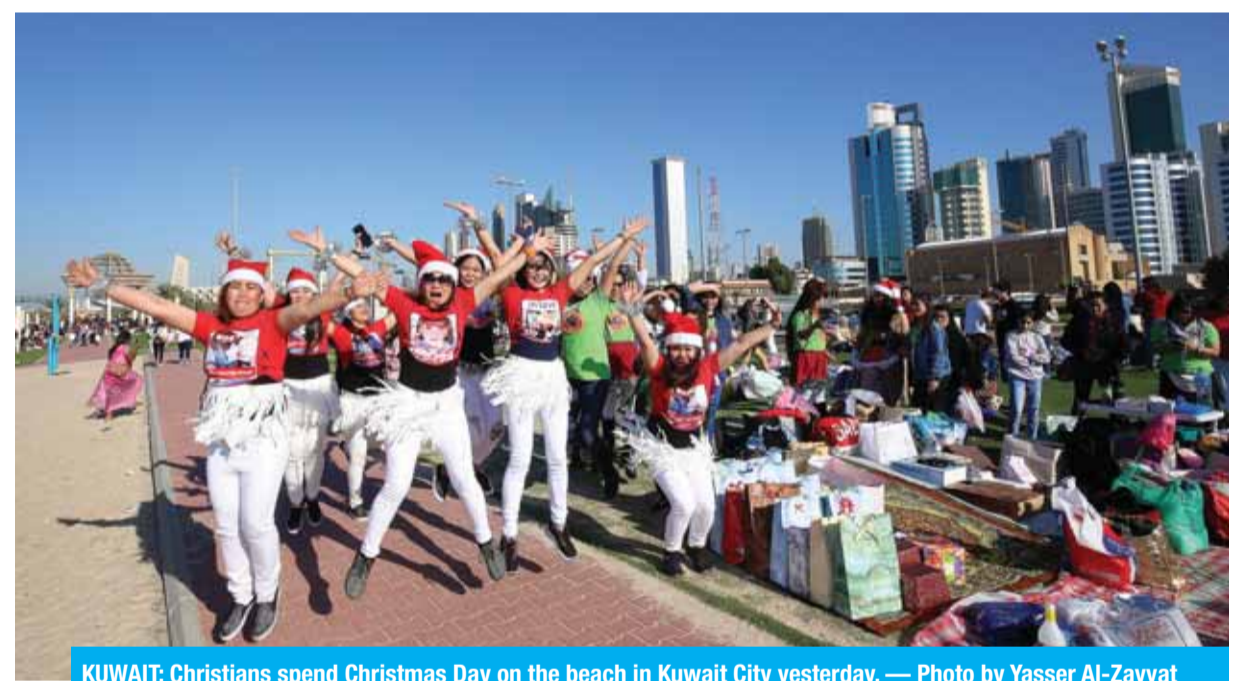
For her part, Britain's Queen Elizabeth II used her Christmas Day message to pay tribute to young environmental campaigners who were inspired to global action by Swedish teen Greta Thunberg. She also described 2019 as "quite bumpy" after a year of crises

in the royal family. The queen attended the annual Christmas Day service in Sandringham without her ailing husband Prince Philip, 98, who was released from hospital after a four-night stay for an unspecified illness. But she was accompanied by Prince Andrew, her scandal-plagued second son, whose disastrous attempts to distance himself from American convicted pedophile Jeffrey Epstein's victims have backfired. The prince gave up his public duties last month.

Earlier yesterday, Pope Francis and the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby sent wishes of "peace and prosperity" to South Sudan as negotiations faltered between the African country's government and rebels. The spiritual leaders of more than 1.3 billion Christians said they were praying "for a renewed commitment to the path of reconciliation and fraternity" in the world's newest nation.

Typhoon Phanfone meanwhile brought a wet, miserable and terrifying holiday season to the central Philippines, stranding tens of thousands of people. In France, Christmas was also a gloomy affair as a crippling transport strike against pension reform was set to enter its fourth week, ruining the plans of many to gather with family and friends.

Continued on Page 24



KUWAIT: Christians spend Christmas Day on the beach in Kuwait City yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

News in brief

Online residency renewal form

KUWAIT: In a step that paves the way to renew expats' residence permits online, the interior ministry has introduced a service through which an expat or a company representative can fill the forms for residency renewals or visit visas online. Applicants will then get a receipt with which they can go to the residency department to complete the procedures. — MoI

Saudi forces kill two 'terrorists'

DUBAI: Saudi security forces killed two "terrorists" yesterday after a shooting in a residential neighborhood in the eastern city of Dammam, state television Al-Ekhbariya reported. "Two wanted terrorists were killed after exchanging fire with security forces," Al-Ekhbariya TV said, without giving further details. Calm was restored to the residential neighborhood in Dammam after the operation, the broadcaster added. — Reuters

Iran jet crashes near volcano

TEHRAN: An Iranian military fighter jet crashed yesterday near a dormant volcano in the northwest of the country and its pilot was missing, official media reported. State news agency IRNA said the jet went down at 9:00 am (0530 GMT) near Mount Sabalan, in the Lesser Caucasus range, and was a MiG-29 on a test flight after being overhauled. Amateur video footage published on the social media accounts of various media outlets in Iran appeared to show smoke rising above snow-capped peaks. A search and rescue operation was underway for the pilot, who the army identified as Colonel Mohammadreza Rahmani, one of its most experienced fliers. — AFP

Blind spot to backlash: BJP misread mood

MUMBAI: Huge protests in India against a citizenship law seen by many as anti-Muslim have wrong-footed Prime Minister Narendra Modi and sent his Hindu nationalist party scrambling to douse the anger. In Modi's biggest challenge since taking office in 2014, hundreds of thousands have rallied against the law offering citizenship to immigrants from non-Muslim minorities who have fled Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan. At least 21 people have died in clashes with police.

Ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders were taken aback by the backlash, some party members told Reuters. Now they are reaching out for help in defusing the crisis to allies and opponents sidelined when the bill passed earlier this month, the sources said. "I really did

not see the protests coming ... not just me, other BJP lawmakers were also unable to predict this kind of anger," Sanjeev Balyan, a ruling party legislator and junior federal minister, told Reuters.

While there is no threat to his big parliamentary majority, the 69-year-old Modi's image as a master strategist with his finger on the pulse of the people has taken a hit. Publicly, his government has prioritized development, seeking to make India a \$5 trillion economy by 2025. But Modi's muscular pro-Hindu platform has also gone down well in a nation that is over 80 percent Hindu: He won back-to-back national elections with thumping majorities.

Outrage at the citizenship law has been fanned by resentment against the government for following a majoritarian agenda instead of addressing an economic slowdown and loss of jobs. Three other BJP lawmakers and two federal ministers, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told Reuters they were mobilizing party

supporters from all walks of life to start community dialogues and dispel discontent over the law.

They said they had been prepared for some anger from Muslims, but not the widespread protests that have convulsed most major cities for nearly two weeks. "I believe that the political math behind the clearance of this law was not taken into account," said one of the federal ministers, an apparent reference to lack of consultation with allies and opposition parties.

In a nation with a history of sectarian bloodshed, the minority Muslims fear the new law - and a planned register for people to prove lineage - could make them second-class citizens. Across both religious groups, students, politicians and rights activists have also taken to the streets, saying Modi is jeopardizing India's secular constitution. The government denies the citizenship register is imminent and says none of the changes will affect existing citizens.

Continued on Page 24

Erdogan visits Tunisia amid Libya tensions

ANKARA: Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan paid a surprise visit to Tunisia yesterday to discuss cooperation for a possible ceasefire in neighboring Libya, where Ankara supports the internationally recognized government. Erdogan, speaking at a joint news conference with Tunisia's President Kais Saied, also reaffirmed Ankara's willingness to send troops to Libya if it received such a request. Erdogan's visit to Tunis came a month after Turkey and Libya signed two separate accords, one on maritime boundaries in the eastern Mediterranean and another on security and military cooperation.

Turkey backs Fayez Al-Serraj's Government of National Accord (GNA), which has been fending off a months-

long offensive by Khalifa Haftar's forces in eastern Libya. Erdogan, the first head of state to visit Tunisia since Saied's landslide election win in October, said the developments in Libya were having a negative impact on neighboring states, including Tunisia. "We discussed the possible steps we can take and cooperation opportunities with the aim of establishing ceasefire in Libya as soon as possible and returning to a political process," Erdogan said.

In Tunisia's hybrid political system, the prime minister controls most policy areas, while the president is in charge of foreign affairs, defense and security. Tunisia's main foreign policy interests have traditionally been in maintaining strong ties with its two much larger neighbors Algeria and Libya.

Last week, Erdogan said Turkey would not remain silent in the face of "mercenaries" such as the Russian-backed Wagner, a group of private military contractors, supporting Haftar's forces in Libya.

Continued on Page 24



TUNIS: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (left) shakes hands with Tunisian President Kais Saied during a welcoming ceremony yesterday. — AFP

Kuwait's Christians celebrate Christmas



KUWAIT: Christians in Kuwait marked Christmas Day yesterday with a mass at churches around the country. Many families also spent their Christmas Day on the beach across the street from the Holy Family Cathedral in Kuwait City. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat and Fouad Al-Shaikh



Local

Crown Prince receives PM, Tabtabaei, Dosari families



KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with members of Al-Tabtabaei and Al-Dosari families. — KUNA photos



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday at Bayan Palace His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. His Highness also received members of Al-Tabtabaei family, including Dr Hashem Musaed Al-Tabtabaei and Dr Waleed Musaed Al-Tabtabaei, as well as several members of Al-Dosari family as they expressed deep appreciation for the Amiri pardon granted to Waleed Musaed Al-Tabtabaei and Mohammad Nayef Al-Dosari. — KUNA

Knowledge Economy Forum discusses jobs future

KUWAIT: The third iteration of the Knowledge Economy Forum, to be held in Kuwait next March, will discuss the jobs and business future from the perspective of the fourth industrial revolution. Minister of Finance and State Minister for Economic Affairs, Mariam Al-Aqeel said yesterday. In a statement, Aqeel said the forum, entitled 'Building Human Capital towards the Knowledge Economy,' would be held in cooperation with the first Human Capital

Forum and international partnership represented by international organizations and governments from different countries of the world. The forum will discuss best practices of building human capital and best educational and health programs that provide an appropriate environment for work. It will also tackle ways to strengthen the rules of the Gulf common market, she added. The Gulf common market requires a special type of qualified human capital capable of

achieving the vision of Gulf unity, she added. The knowledge economy focuses on four basic elements, human capital, institutional and participatory capital, which requires knowledge partnership in addition to focusing on the infrastructure on information and communication, she said. Aqeel stressed the importance of removing any challenges facing building this economy, which contributes to the diversification of the national economy. — KUNA



Mariam Al-Aqeel

KNG keen on building military pilots' capacity

KUWAIT: Vice President of the Kuwait National Guard (KNG) Sheikh Meshaal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah affirmed the KNG commitment to prepare a national cadre of highly trained military pilots for "comprehensive backup missions." "To do so, the KNG is introducing new capacity building courses and facilities such as the vertical take-off and landing (VTOL) division," he said in a press release after he received the first batch of KNG pilots who graduated from a training course on VTOL aircraft.

The course was recently organized by Horizon International Flight Academy in the sisterly UAE. "The comprehensive backup missions required the KNG to put its personnel and equipment on standby in an emergency to support the state bodies in evacuation, search and rescue missions," Sheikh Meshaal added. He congratulated newly trained military officers and urged them to do their utmost in gaining more technical knowledge and building the capacities of their colleagues. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Vice President of the Kuwait National Guard (KNG) Sheikh Meshaal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in a group photo with the new pilots.



Vice President of the Kuwait National Guard (KNG) Sheikh Meshaal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives the new pilots.

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Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Tern chicks heading to the beach in Kubbar Island to learn how to dive and fly in preparations for their migration. — Photo by Omar Al-Sayyed Omar (KUNA)

Burgan Bank won 'Employee Engagement, HR Professional of the Year' awards

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KUWAIT: Burgan Bank, a progressive financial powerhouse in Kuwait and the region, announced its latest recognitions earned during the Annual Brilliance Awards which took place in the prestigious Le Meridien Hotel in London. Attended by three leaders of Burgan Bank Human Resources and development team, the Bank won the prestigious awards for exemplary HR leadership in addition to delivering outstanding results under employee engagement, overall performance, effective hiring procedures and stronger employee retention.

The International awards reflect Burgan Bank's progression over the years and its investment in attracting and maintaining high caliber employees to carry the proud legacy forward. The annual HR Brilliance Awards commends Human Resource strategies that make innovative and valuable contributions to improving respective business performances. The Brilliance Awards by BOC Global Events and Training Group highlight a high standard of commitment to excellence among practitioners and consultants in a range of fields. By entering these awards, organizations make a public statement that they are willing to stand up for best practice and be judged by their peers. Consistently, simplicity emerged as a key theme and benchmarking methodology in this year's winning entries. Clear objectives and disciplined execution were the hallmark standards of the submissions that caught the judge's eyes in 2019. After implementing a scoring mechanism, BOC selected Burgan Bank as top winner in two Categories - 'Brilliance in Employee Engagement in HR' and 'HR Professional of the Year'.

The 'International Brilliance in Employee Engagement in HR' award was won based on Burgan Bank's HR team's ability to recruit a skilled workforce of national talents and adding value to the business as a whole. The dynamic Bank won the judges over after having adopted a comprehensive 360 approach, ranging from integrating brand values to running a stable system of protocols to establishing lasting corporate partnerships.

Winning the 'HR Professional of the Year' award for applying best practices and a successful strategy, Halah El-Sherbini, impressed the judges with her visionary leadership and use of modern HR digital and technological advancements in optimizing the efficiency of the staff.

Group Human Resources and Development Officer at Burgan Bank Group - Halah El-Sherbini said, "We are extremely proud of our HR Team, and this award goes to each and every one of the HR staff for their amazing efforts and contributions during 2019. This is just the start of our growth plan towards providing the best in terms of



Halah El-Sherbini receives the 'HR Professional of the Year' award.

employee experience amidst the exciting digital transformation we are undergoing currently. Through employee empowerment backed by a competitive strategy on acquiring more experienced and proficient Kuwaiti professionals, we aim to continue to be the employer of choice and a model for increased adaptability and positive work culture. Congratulations to us all!"

Burgan Bank's Senior Manager of Learning and Development, Ghada El-Kadi said: "We are proud Burganers standing out among an arena of international professionals and this could not have been possible without the visionary leadership of our Halah El Sherbini and her constant pursuit for excellence. She truly embodies our brand values and has created a safe and thriving environment based on trust, commitment, and progression. This approach is reaping results bringing us prominence on global platforms by acclaimed awarding bodies, hence, a well-deserved award as 'HR Professional of the Year'."

BOC Global Events and Training Group is a professional global event organizer and corporate training provider, dedicated to help organizations to create new market space or a "blue ocean," thereby making the competition irrelevant. Based in London, BOC has delivered its knowledge to corporations worldwide including Europe, Middle East, Africa and Asia. Whilst having a reputation for delivering the highest quality events, and with many years' experience, the company has grown with an ever changing market and built an extensive portfolio. The event incorporated an entertainment show, distribution of awards and a festive dinner that entertained more than 400 professionals from organizations from all over the globe.



Halah El-Sherbini, Nourah Buresli and Ghada El-Kadi receive the 'Brilliance in Employee Engagement in HR' award in London.

Local

Health Ministry to terminate bedoon staff without valid IDs

Court rules 'resumption' of former MP's 'marital life'

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health (MoH) has rejected renewal of employment of some bedoon (stateless) employees working for monthly payments because they failed to procure valid security IDs, said informed sources. The sources added that MoH urged its various sectors to notify those employees that they will be terminated by January unless they provide valid security IDs immediately. The sources added that the step had been taken responding to the instructions of the central apparatus for illegal residents to all government bodies to suspend all bedoon employees with IDs valid for less than six months. In addition, the sources said MoH will also terminate other non-Kuwaitis and expats to cut its expenses and implement Civil Service Commission (CSC) instructions.

In another health concern, the committee entrusted to develop the pharmacist profession, presided by MoH assistant undersecretary for food and medicine control Dr Abdullah Al-Bader has received 200 suggestions from pharmacists in three months. Bader said 45 percent of the suggestions demanded amending various related regulations and policies, 13 percent of the suggestions demanded developing pharmaceutical services and practices, 15 percent suggested more manpower training while 27 percent made other various suggestions. Bader said 48 of the

suggestions made will be adopted by the committee and turned into actual projects to be executed soon. "The portal will remain open and we await more stories about pharmacists' success in developing pharmaceutical practices," Bader concluded.



270 officers to be promoted

Tabtabaei's marital life

The court of appeal seconded former MP Waleed Al-Tabtabaei's resumption of marital life with his wife. "Thanks to Allah, the court today endorsed my return to my wife and stressed that our marital life is resumed, which puts an end to all

those who had been fishing in murky waters, making use of the first instance verdicts passed while I was in prison and during my absence abroad," Tabtabaei said.

Officers' promotion

Well-informed sources said that a list of 270 Ministry of Interior (MoI) officers, ranking colonels, brigadiers and major generals will be submitted to the interior minister by the beginning of January pending their promotion. The sources said that 240 of the officers are colonels who would be promoted to brigadiers, after their promotion was delayed by the former Cabinet's resignation. "The same applies to 30 brigadiers who have been in the same rank for eight years," the sources added, noting that once promoted, the new generals will fill vacant positions currently run by acting officials.

Legalese

Happy Holidays

By Attorney Fajer Ahmed

It is holiday season and I am so excited. So many people are celebrating different occasions and it seems like a joyful, loving time for people all around the world.

Many people in Kuwait have left their homes and their families to be here with us, working, and making Kuwait a better place: working for our companies, teaching our kids, cleaning our streets, selling us our favorite brands, making our food and so on. Let us be nice to them, let us thank them kindly. Let them feel welcomed. Let us wish them a lovely holiday celebration, whatever their holiday is.

I know how it feels to live away from your family and your home; I chose to leave to the states for months on end, for my college and closing client deals, and sometimes I missed home and my culture. So let us make sure everyone is welcome in the State of Kuwait.

Christmas holiday

Question: I understand that because we live in a Muslim country, we are entitled to days off for Muslim holidays, but I am a practicing Christian and would really enjoy to have a few days off for Christmas instead.

Fajer: By law you are entitled to the holidays mentioned in Article 68 and not for Christmas Day as follows:

- Article 68 of Kuwait labor law states: "Fully-paid official holidays are as follows:
 - a- Hegira New Year: 1 day
 - b- Isra' and Mi'raj day: 1 day
 - c- Eid Al-Fitr: 3 days
 - d- Waqfat Arafat: 1 day
 - e- Eid Al-Adha: 3 days
 - f- Prophet's Birthday (Al-Mawlid Al-Nabawi): 1 day
 - g- National Day: 1 day

You get paid overtime as well as an extra day off for working on a holiday, so I suggest you talk to your boss and/or HR department and request a day off for Christmas. Many companies are understanding about their employees' needs and do give days off for Christmas. Hopefully that works out for you.

I wish you all a festive holiday regardless of your religious beliefs. Please remember to enjoy your time and respect those around you. Stay safe and legal.

Online services helped double commercial licenses

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) announced that it issued 41,511 licenses in 2019 compared to 22,888 in 2017 and 39,638 in 2018, which

means that the number doubled in two years due to the provision of online services. MoCI added that by the beginning of 2019, it became possible to issue the new automated licenses online from anywhere without having to visit the ministry, which helped develop the local business environment and shortened the time needed to start a new business, especially for SME entrepreneurs.

MoCI said the second phase of the development was providing online license renewal and another service that helped form a real estate database in Kuwait, which is a leading experience in the Arab world that prevents intruders. In addition, MoCI said it decided to authorize only Kuwaiti licensed companies and Arab and foreign government bodies to organize local real

estate exhibitions to promote properties inside and outside Kuwait.

MoCI also organized the profession of insurance brokers and agents in 2019 with the aim of providing more job opportunities for Kuwaitis and replace non-Kuwaitis who have been dominating the sector since 1961. It also mandated all insurance companies to appoint an auditor to monitor insurance companies' commitment to fighting money laundering as per law number 106/2003, as well as issuing a special law for auditors in collaboration with the auditors' association and the parliamentary financial and economic affairs committee to ban auditors from owning shares in companies whose budgets they audit.

Six passengers arrested with drugs



By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Air customs officers continued foiling



attempts to smuggle in drugs and banned material, as inspectors at T4 and T5 terminals of Kuwait International Airport foiled six new attempts yesterday.



All six smugglers including a woman were detained. The drugs include liquid hashish in ampules, marijuana, liquor and Tramadol tablets.

Expat laborers clinic opens in Shadadiya



KUWAIT: A medical facility accepting only expatriate laborers opened in Al-Shadadiya, Kuwait yesterday, part of a new healthcare plan that includes renovations of hospitals and clinics across the country. The facility represents an effort on the Kuwaiti health ministry's part towards broad healthcare reforms, said Dr Mohammad Awaidha, the director of Al-Farwaniya

medical area. The clinic, constructed on 217 square meters area, will begin accepting only foreign residents of the central Kuwaiti district, who number 600, according to Dr Hussain Al-Mutairi, the director of primary care in the area. The facility will be open all week long from 09:00 am to 09:00 pm local time, except on official holidays, he added. — KUNA

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News in brief

Kuwait PM receives Iranian FM call

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received a phone call yesterday from Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif. Zarif congratulated His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled on assuming the post of Prime Minister. The two officials discussed ways to bolster relations and latest developments within the regional and international spheres. — KUNA

Aramco welcomes agreement

RIYADH: Saudi Aramco welcomes the new agreement signed between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the State of Kuwait regarding the Saudi-Kuwaiti Partitioned Zone, which paves the way for the resumption of oil production at two fields. Saudi Aramco President and CEO Amin Nasser commented: "Today is a remarkable day within the framework of economic and oil cooperation and integration between both the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the State of Kuwait." — KUNA



Typhoon Phanfone brings misery for Philippines on Christmas Day

Thousands of Algerians mourn army chief Salah



BAGHDAD: This picture taken yesterday shows a view of tents in a sit-in along the Tigris river near the Senak bridge erected by anti-government protesters in the capital Baghdad. —AFP

Iraqi protesters rally after arson attacks

City of Diwaniyah in turmoil after activist's death

DIWANIYAH, Iraq: Iraqi anti-government protesters again hit the streets yesterday, angered by an activist's death and an attempt on the life of a popular TV satirist. The latest rallies in Baghdad and cities including Basra and Karbala came after a night of unrest that saw protesters torch the headquarters of two pro-Iran militias in the country's south.

The demonstrators have rallied for almost three months to demand the ouster of the entire political class that has run the oil-rich yet poverty-ridden country in the aftermath of the 2003 US-led invasion which overthrew dictator Saddam Hussein. The mostly youthful activists accuse Iraq's leaders of enriching themselves, mismanaging the economy and being beholden to powerful neighbor Iran, an influential actor in Iraqi politics.

Passions were inflamed when popular TV satirist Aws Fadhil was targeted Tuesday by unknown assailants, with three bullets hitting his car. Fadhil posted footage of the bullet holes on social media and declared: "They are targeting those who support the revolution, to silence them ... But we are continu-

ing our revolution."

He added that "we have already achieved a goal", referring to a parliamentary vote Tuesday to approve an electoral reform law, in line with the demands of the protesters.

Lawmakers will from now be elected in first-past-the-post contests within electoral districts, rather than through a complex system using provincial party lists and proportional representation.

Constituencies will also be redrawn, though it was unclear how and critics feared the new boundaries could be biased toward major parties and tribal groups.

Arson Hundreds of anti-government protesters marched yesterday in southern Iraq to mourn a dead activist after a night during which the headquarters of two pro-Iran militias were set on fire, an AFP correspondent reported.

The demonstrators oppose the political class that has run the oil-rich yet poverty-hit country since a 2003 US-led invasion overthrew dictator Saddam Hussein. They accuse leaders of enriching themselves and of being beholden to neighbor Iran.

Thaer Al-Tayeb, a prominent

activist from the city of Diwaniyah, went to Baghdad's Tahrir Square, the epicentre of the unprecedented revolt shaking Iraq, when the rallies started nearly three months ago. A suspicious explosion hit Tayeb's car on December 15, badly wounding him and fellow activist Ali Al-Madani, back in Tayeb's hometown 200 kilometres (125 miles) south of Baghdad.

After Tayeb's death in hospital was announced Tuesday, crowds of demonstrators rushed to the two local headquarters of pro-Iran militias and torched them. First they set fire to the building of the powerful Badr organization, run by the parliamentary head of the pro-Iran paramilitaries, Hadi Al-Ameri.

First they set fire to the building of the powerful Badr organization, run by the parliamentary head of the pro-Iran paramilitaries, Hadi Al-Ameri. Then they burnt the headquarters of Assaib Ahl Al-Haq, a group whose head Qais Al-Khazali is subject to sanctions by the United States, accused of "kidnapping, murder and torture". Protesters also blocked roads with burning car tyres in the southern city of Basra.

Political deadlock

Around 460 people have been killed, most of them protesters, since the start of the demonstrations in early October and 25,000 have been wounded. But rallies have continue despite the campaign of intimidation, targeted killings and abductions of activists, which the United Nations blames on militias.

After dwindling in recent weeks, the protest campaign has recovered its vigor at a time when political factions are wrangling over a replacement for outgoing premier Adel Abdel Mahdi. He quit in November but still serves as caretaker. Negotiations to fill the premier's post have remained deadlocked since the latest in a series of deadlines expired at midnight on Sunday. The latest candidate seen as a frontrunner is Assaad Al-Aidani, the governor of Basra, a southern city which despite its oil wealth remains neglected in terms of infrastructure. Aidani has the support of pro-Iranian factions who had previously lobbied for the outgoing higher education minister Quossai Al-Souheil, who was however opposed by President Barham Saleh.—AFP

21 in hospital after carbon monoxide poisoning in France

LILLE: Twenty one people were hospitalized in northern France, two in a serious condition, after suffering carbon monoxide poisoning during Christmas mass, emergency services said yesterday.

Emergency personnel were sent to the church in the Oise department after several people complained of headaches during the religious ceremony on Christmas eve. The church was evacuated to a nearby community hall where 72 people were treated. Of those, 19 were brought to nearby hospitals and two, with more severe symptoms, to specialist centres where one was placed in a hyperbaric oxygen chamber.

Local emergency official Nicolas Mougin said carbon monoxide levels up to 350 parts per million (ppm) were measured inside the church. The cause of the poisoning has not been determined but investigators were looking into a gas heater. The local mayor has ordered the church closed.

Carbon monoxide (CO) is an odorless, invisible gas produced when burning fuels such as coal, wood, charcoal, oil, kerosene, propane or natural gas. The US Consumer Product Safety Commission's website states that exposure to sustained CO concentrations above 150 to 200 ppm can lead to disorientation, unconsciousness and even death.—AFP

India protests against disputed law rage on

KOLKATA: Demonstrations continued in Kolkata yesterday against a nationalist new "Citizenship Law" which grants citizenship to six religious groups from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh but excludes Muslim immigrants. The new law allows citizenship to Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh, but not Muslims under the same circumstances.

Protesters chanted anti-government slogans and carried banners with one reading: 'Presidency Against Fascism'. The controversial new legislation makes it easier for people from non-Muslim minorities in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan who settled in India before 2015 to obtain Indian citizenship.

Hundreds of students came together in Kolkata city, the capital of the Indian state of West Bengal, in protest against the controversial law.

Students marched through the streets carrying banners and chanting anti-government slogans. One banner that students were holding read: "Presidency against fascism". Another one read: "Even Voldemort was defeated by a group of students". Rallies have been held in the Indian capital New Delhi and across other cities since Dec. 9, against the act granting citizenship to Hindu,

Sikh, Jain, and Christian minorities from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, but blocks naturalization for Muslims.

The death toll since the protests began reached at least 26 on Sunday. More than 100 people have been arrested in different parts of the country in connection with the on-going violent protests.

On Monday, India's main opposition the Indian National Congress party accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of suppressing the voice of the people, referring to recent police attacks on protesters.

It is the first time since Modi came to power in India that his party has witnessed mass protests against his government. Muslim leaders believe the new law will be linked to a nationwide exercise where every citizen would be asked to prove Indian citizenship.—Reuters



NEW DELHI: Congress president Sonia Gandhi (right) and ex-party president Rahul Gandhi attend a sit-in protest for "unity" in New Delhi amid widespread protests against India's new citizenship law. —AFP

International

Most Christians in Gaza unable to visit Bethlehem for holy Christmas worship

Israeli forces demolish another Palestinian home in occupied West Bank

GAZA CITY: Members of the Palestinian Christian community on Tuesday marked Christmas Eve in the besieged Gaza Strip and like previous years most were not allowed to leave the enclave. A Christmas mass was held at the Church of the Latin Monastery in Gaza City, where Christians gathered to mark the birth of Jesus Christ.

Thousands of Christians from across the world traveled to Bethlehem, believed to be the birthplace of Jesus, to join the celebrations, but most Gazan citizens were not able to visit the city to worship. A total of 950 Gazan Christians applied to the Israeli authorities for permits earlier this month to participate in the Bethlehem ceremonies but were initially not granted access to the revered city.

Later, the Israeli authorities issued permits to 193 people to allow them to leave the enclave. On Tuesday, those selected Palestinian Christian families left the Gaza Strip, through the Beit Hanoun Erez (North) crossing, heading towards the city of Bethlehem Gabriel Romanelli, the pastor of the Latin Church said Christians of Gaza were again disappointed that most were not allowed to enter Bethlehem.

"Normally we celebrate Christmas in Bethlehem

and we celebrate Easter in Jerusalem," said Pastor Romanelli, adding that it didn't matter whether a person was Muslim, Christian or Jewish and that everyone has the right to worship in holy places. About 70 percent of Gaza Christians belong to the Greek Orthodox community, while the rest are part of the Latin Catholic community. According to Christian institutions in Gaza, the number of Christians in the Strip has decreased due to immigration, and there are now only around two thousand Christians out of two million Palestinians, living under Israel's 13-year-long blockade.

Israeli forces on Tuesday demolished the home of a Palestinian family on the occupied West Bank because they said the building did not have a proper permit. Israeli bulldozers destroyed the two-storey home of Cemal Alyan in the Iseviye neighborhood.

Residents threw stones and Molotov cocktails at the Israeli soldiers who responded by firing tear gas and stun grenades. The Israeli army uses an emergency law of a British Mandate in 1945 to demolish Palestinian homes, whose owners allegedly carried out attacks against Israelis. Israel's top court usually rejects Palestinians' appeals against the demolition orders. —Reuters



GAZA CITY: A Catholic nun of the Missionaries of Charity order holds a rosary as she attends Christmas Eve mass at the Roman Catholic Church of the Holy Family in Gaza City on Tuesday. —AFP

Thousands of Algerians mourn army chief Salah

ALGIERS: Thousands of Algerians gathered yesterday for the funeral procession of the country's powerful army chief, who fought for independence from France as a young man and this year became the country's de facto leader.

Lieutenant general Ahmed Gaed Salah died suddenly of a heart attack on Monday aged 79, having determined the secretive state's response to mass protests throughout this year calling for a wholesale change of the ruling elite. "He did the right thing when he secured the millions who marched in the past 10 months demanding change," said Abdesselam Selami, 52, a telecoms worker speaking to Reuters by phone from the capital's Palais de Peuple. "Zero killed."

As the protests reached their peak in

April, Gaed Salah called for the veteran president, his longtime ally Abdelaziz Bouteflika, to step down, prompting his resignation soon after.

Although an interim president was appointed, Gaed Salah was widely seen as holding the reins. He did not attempt to crush the peaceful protests with violence, but many demonstrators saw him as the main obstacle in their path. He pushed for an election to replace Bouteflika, a vote the protesters regarded as a charade as the real power would remain with the army.

They chanted "A civilian state, not a military state" and, as the protest wore on, demanded the resignation of Gaed Salah. After Abdelmadjid Tebboune was elected president, he brought Gaed Salah onto the stage where he was sworn in before embracing him and presenting him with an order of merit. The old general died four days later and Tebboune swiftly appointed Said Chengriha, head of the land forces and at 74 of the same generation as Gaed Salah, to replace him.

Chengriha, like Gaed Salah and most of Algeria's other rulers since independence, is a veteran of the guerrilla war



ALGIERS: A view of the funeral of Algeria's late military chief Lieutenant general Ahmed Gaed Salah in the capital Algiers. Gaed Salah was seen as Algeria's de facto strongman following the April resignation of longtime president Abdelaziz Bouteflika in the face of mass demonstrations. —AFP

against French rule. Though protesters have demanded that the old guard of rulers quit power, they have also throughout their demonstrations painted themselves as the successors to the gen-

eration which won freedom for Algeria. Gaed Salah's body will be driven through the centre of Algiers and buried in a main graveyard after Wednesday's noon prayer. —Reuters

Turkey-Libya maritime deal rattles East Mediterranean

LONDON/ANKARA/ATHENS: Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan paid a surprise visit to Tunisia yesterday to discuss cooperation for a possible ceasefire in neighboring Libya, where Ankara supports the internationally recognized government.

The visit comes after Turkey signed an accord with Libya's internationally recognized government last month that seeks to create an exclusive economic zone from Turkey's southern Mediterranean shore to Libya's northeast coast. Ankara says the deal aims to protect its rights under international law, and that it is open to signing similar deals with other states on the basis of "fair sharing" of resources.

Greece and Cyprus, which have long had maritime and territorial disputes with Turkey, say the accord is void and violates the international law of the sea.

They see it as a cynical resource-grab designed to scupper the development of East Mediterranean gas and destabilize rivals.

Greece has expelled Libya's ambassador to Athens and filed a complaint with the United Nations. Cyprus, where the northern part of the island is held by Turkey, has raised its own objections. At a Dec. 12 summit, EU leaders issued a statement "unequivocally" siding with member states Greece and Cyprus. Egypt and Israel, which have invested heavily in energy exploration in the region, are alarmed by the Turkey-Libya move, which may threaten their ability to export gas to Europe. Egypt has called it "illegal and not binding", while Israel has said it could "jeopardize peace and stability in the area".

Following are some questions and answers looking at why Turkey and Libya struck their deal, the impact it could have on the region, and the shadow it casts over East Med gas.

The motivation

Turkey has had disputes with Greece over islands in the Aegean for decades, and with the Republic of Cyprus over the island's maritime waters since 1974, when Turkish troops invaded the north after a brief Greek-Cypriot coup. In striking the deal with Libya,

analysts say Ankara has essentially put both Greece and Cyprus on immediate watch, showing it is prepared to act tough to get its way and/or force new negotiations over their long-standing disputes.

At the same time Turkey has thrown a spanner into the works of efforts by Cyprus, Greece, Israel and Egypt to develop East Mediterranean gas, putting a barrier across a proposed pipeline that would run from Israeli and Greek-Cypriot waters to the Greek island of Crete, on to the Greek mainland and into Europe's gas network via Italy. The \$7-9 billion pipeline would have to cross the planned Turkey-Libya economic zone.

Analysts say Turkey has effectively sent a message that it will not be ignored in the East Mediterranean, isn't going to let EU members access what it sees as its maritime waters, and doesn't want energy exporters like Egypt and Israel gaining leverage over Turkey, a net energy importer and transit state. For Libya, the motivation is mostly security. The accord was reached with Fayed al-Serraj, head of the Tripoli-based government, who is in conflict with a rival military force in eastern Libya under General Khalifa Haftar. Turkey has promised to step up military and other assistance to Serraj. Libya's eastern-based parliament, which is aligned with Haftar, has rejected the maritime accord. —Reuters

Lebanon banks 'trapping' state salaries: Minister

BEIRUT: Lebanon's caretaker finance minister accused the country's banks on Tuesday of "trapping" civil servants' salaries with withdrawal limits that have fuelled public anger in the crisis-stricken country. "What is happening in some Lebanese banks is unacceptable," Ali Hassan Khalil wrote on Twitter.

"They are trapping the salaries of (state) employees that are transferred by the finance ministry every month." Rocked by two months of anti-government protests and a political deadlock, Lebanon is also facing its worst economic crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war.

A liquidity crunch has pushed Lebanese banks to impose capital controls on dollar accounts, capping withdrawals at around \$1,000 a month. Some have imposed even tighter restrictions.

Some have also capped weekly with-

drawals of the Lebanese pound at one million—the equivalent of \$660 at official rates—even as the currency has plunged by nearly a third against the dollar on the black market in recent weeks. The tightening controls have prompted public uproar, with many accusing banks of robbing them of their savings.

On Tuesday, Khalil said it was a "sacred right" of civil servants to be paid in full and on time.

"It is not permissible for this right to be violated," he said, vowing legal action to ensure public servants can access their salaries in full. At banks in the northern city of Tripoli, tensions soared Tuesday as clients struggled to withdraw their salaries, said an AFP correspondent there.

A fight broke out in a branch near the city's main protest camp after the bank refused to let a customer withdraw dollars. An anti-government street movement has rocked the small Mediterranean country since October 17. Bowing to popular pressure, the government resigned two weeks into demonstrations.

Since then, a potential default on Lebanon's huge public debt has heightened the economic and political crisis. The faltering economy has pushed many



BEIRUT: A Lebanese policeman looks at graffiti drawn on the front of the Maronite Cathedral of St George in the capital Beirut's downtown district on Christmas Day yesterday. —AFP

companies into bankruptcy, while others have laid off staff and slashed salaries.

A recession of more than 0.2 percent is expected for this year, the World Bank says. In its first step towards forming an urgently-needed government, President Michel Aoun last week designated engi-

neering professor Hassan Diab as the country's next prime minister, replacing Saad Hariri who quit in late October in the face of mass protests. Diab, a self-styled technocrat, has vowed to form a cabinet of independent experts within six weeks. —AFP

Seven killed in Nigeria jihadist attack on Christmas eve

KANO: Boko Haram jihadists have killed seven people on Christmas Eve in a raid on a Christian village near the town of Chibok in northeast Nigeria's Borno state, local militia and residents told AFP yesterday.

Dozens of fighters driving trucks and motorcycles stormed into Kwarangulum late Tuesday, shooting fleeing residents and burning homes after looting food supplies. Boko Haram and its IS-affiliated Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) faction have recently stepped up attacks on military and civilian targets.

"They killed seven people and abducted a teenage girl in the attack," local vigilante David Bitrus said.

"They took away food stuff and burnt many houses before leaving," he said, adding that a church was also burnt.

The jihadists were believed to have attacked from Boko Haram's nearby Sambisa forest enclave, said Chibok community leader Ayuba Alamson who confirmed the toll. In April, Boko Haram raided Kwarangulum, 16 kilometres (10 miles) from Chibok, stealing food and burning the entire village. Residents had managed to flee before the arrival of the jihadists following tip-off from people who saw the gunmen heading toward the village.

Chibok is the scene of the mass kidnap of 276 schoolgirls in 2014 by Boko Haram which sparked global outrage and drew international attention to the group's notoriety. Fifty-seven of the girls escaped shortly after the kidnap. Another 107 have been either rescued or released after negotiations while 112 remain in captivity.

Troops have been stationed in Chibok since the kidnap but deadly Boko Haram raids continue in the area.

The decade-long conflict has killed 36,000 people and displaced around two million from their homes in the northeast, according to the United Nations. The violence has spread to nearby Niger, Chad and Cameroon, prompting a regional military coalition to fight the jihadist groups. —AFP

Egyptian publisher gets 5 years in jail over Israeli novel

CAIRO: The founder of an Egyptian publishing house was sentenced to five years in prison for distributing an Arabic version of a controversial Israeli novel, his brother said yesterday. The novel entitled "The Egyptian Spy Who Saved Israel", by Israeli writer Uri Bar-Joseph, portrays Ashraf Marwan, the son-in-law of former Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, as a spy for the Jewish state.

Khaled Lotfi has been on trial in a military court since 2018 for publishing an Arabic version of the book, two years earlier. The publisher, accused of having "divulged military secrets", was sentenced to five years in prison despite appealing against an initial ruling, his brother Mahmoud Lotfi told AFP.

"There is no other recourse but a presidential pardon," he said. Marwan, who also worked as an adviser to president Anwar Sadat after the death of Nasser in 1970, died in 2007 in London in mysterious circumstances. Egyptian authorities arranged a grand funeral and Marwan was hailed as a hero. A 2018 film based on the book, titled "The Angel", was met with outrage by Egyptian media, which slated it as a manipulation of history. —AFP

International

35 civilians, mostly women, killed in Burkina Faso jihadist attack

US considers pulling troops from West Africa

OUAGADOUGOU, Burkina Faso: Jihadists in Burkina Faso killed 35 civilians, almost all of them women, when they simultaneously attacked a town in the north and its military base in one of the deadliest assaults in nearly five years of jihadist violence in the West African country. Seven soldiers and 80 jihadists also died in the double attack Tuesday in Arbinda in Soum province which lasted "several hours" and was of a "rare intensity", the army said.

Burkina Faso, bordering Mali and Niger, has seen regular jihadist attacks which have left hundreds dead since the start of 2015 when militant violence began to spread across the Sahel region. "A large group of terrorists simultaneously attacked the military base and the civilian population in Arbinda," the army chief of staff said in a statement.

"This barbaric attack resulted in the deaths of 35 civilian victims, most of them women," President Roch Marc Christian Kabore added on Twitter, praising the "bravery and commitment" of the defense and security forces.

Communications minister and government spokesman Remis Dandjinou later said 31 of the civilian victims were women, adding around 20 soldiers and six civilians were wounded. The president has declared 48 hours of national mourning. The morning raid was carried out by dozens of jihadists on motorbikes and lasted several hours before armed forces backed by the air force drove the militants back, the army said.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, but jihadist violence in Burkina Faso has been blamed on militants linked to both Al-Qaeda and Islamic State groups.

560,000 internally displaced

Leaders of the G5 Sahel nations held summit talks in Niger earlier this month, calling for closer cooperation and international support in the battle against the Islamist threat. Militant violence has spread across the vast Sahel region, especially in Burkina Faso and Niger, having started when armed Islamists revolted in northern Mali in 2012.

The Sahel region of Africa lies to the south of the Sahara Desert and stretches across the breadth of the African continent. There are 4,500 French troops deployed in the region as well as a 13,000-strong UN peacekeeping force in Mali to fight insurgents.

The G5 group is made up of Chad, Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and Niger, whose impoverished armies have the support of French forces as well as the UN in Mali. In Burkina Faso, more than 700 people have been killed and around 560,000 internally displaced, according to the United Nations.

Attacks have targeted mostly the north and east of the country, though the capital Ouagadougou has been hit three times. Prior to Tuesday's attack, Burkina security forces said they had killed around a hundred jihadists in several operations since November.

An ambush on a convoy transporting employees of a Canadian mining company in November killed 37 people. Attacks have intensified this year as the under-equipped, poorly trained Burkina Faso army struggles to contain the Islamist militancy. The Pentagon is looking into reducing or even withdrawing US troops from West Africa, part of a worldwide redeployment of military forces, the New York Times reported Tuesday.

There are between 6,000 and 7,000 US troops in Africa, mainly in West Africa but also in places like Somalia. The US presence includes military trainers as well as a recently built \$110 million drone base in Niger, the Times said. A withdrawal would also end US support for French military efforts in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso in their war along with local troops against Al-Qaeda and Islamic State group jihadists. The Pentagon supports them by providing intelligence, logistical support and aerial refueling at an annual cost to the Pentagon of some \$45 million a year, the Times said.

France has had a major military presence in Mali since 2013, when it launched an intervention against Al-Qaeda-linked jihadists who had overrun the country's north.



THIES: In this file photo American soldiers of 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division take position near a hut during a combined training exercise with Senegalese 1st Paratrooper Battalion in Thiès. The Pentagon is looking into reducing or even withdrawing US troops from West Africa, part of a worldwide redeployment of military forces, the New York Times reported on Tuesday. — AFP

France then launched a regional counter-terrorism operation and prodded five countries—Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, Mali and Niger—to set up their own joint force. US Secretary of Defense Mark Esper is studying a global redeployment of US forces with a decreased emphasis on anti-terrorism operations and a stronger emphasis on confronting China and Russia, the newspaper said.

No decision on the matter was likely before January, it added. The Pentagon had no immediate comment when contacted by AFP. President Donald Trump has often promised to halt the US's "endless wars." He has already ordered a significant reduction of US troops deployed in Syria, and is on track to do the same in Afghanistan. Some 13,000 US troops remain in Afghanistan. — AFP

Britain's Prince Andrew skips Christmas Day walk

SANDRINGHAM, England: Britain's Prince Andrew avoided the limelight on Christmas Day by skipping the royal family's traditional mid-morning walk to church and attending an earlier service with other relatives. Andrew, Queen Elizabeth's second son, has kept a low profile since he stepped down from royal duties last month in the wake of a scandal over his friendship with convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

He was filmed walking along a path with his brother Prince Charles to St Mary Magdalene church near the Queen's estate in Sandringham, eastern England in time for a 9 a.m. service.

He did not join other members of the family walking along a road to the 11 a.m. service — one of the staples of the royal calendar. The queen attended both services, Sky News and other media outlets reported. She was not accompanied by her husband Prince Philip, 98, who was only discharged from hospital on Tuesday where he was being treated for what Buckingham Palace described as a pre-existing condition. Later in the day, palace staff say the 93-year-old queen will use her Christmas address to the nation to stress the value of harmony and reconciliation after a "bumpy" year for her own family. Over the past 12 months, her husband got a police warning for his involvement in a car crash, grandsons Princes William and Harry publicly fell out and Andrew became more entangled in the furor over his links to Epstein. Andrew has denied accusation by a woman who said she was trafficked by Epstein and forced to have sex with his friends, including the prince, when she was 17.

Epstein, who had been charged with trafficking dozens of underage girls, committed suicide in jail in August. Charles, 71, also attended the 11 a.m. service with his wife Camilla. Charles' elder son, Prince William was present with his wife Kate and two of their children — Prince George and Princess Charlotte. His younger brother Prince Harry is spending Christmas in Canada with his wife Meghan and baby Archie. — Reuters

Pope prays for peace in global flashpoints

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis appealed for peace in many of the world's hotspots, singling out the crises in the Middle East, Venezuela and Lebanon as well as armed conflicts ravaging many African countries. "May Christ bring his light to the many children suffering from war and conflicts in the Middle East and in various countries of the world," the 83-year-old pontiff said in his traditional Christmas message at the Vatican. "May he bring comfort to the beloved Syrian people who still see no end to the hostilities that have rent their country over the last decade," he said, urging the international community to find solutions to allow the peoples of that region to live together in peace and security.

He used his "Urbi et Orbi" (To the City and the World) speech to call for a resolution to the crisis in Lebanon, where he hoped for a return to "harmonious coexistence".

In the Middle East, notably Iraq and Yemen, the pope lamented that "so many people — struggling but not discouraged — still await a time of peace, security and prosperity."

The Argentinian pope, noting that in South America "a number of nations are experiencing a time of social and political upheaval," urged that "the beloved Venezuelan people... receive the aid they need." He said the continent's crises and "many forms of poverty... offend the dignity of each person." The pontiff also noted that "beloved Ukraine... yearns for concrete solutions for an enduring peace." Finally Francis denounced attacks on Christians in Africa and prayed for victims of conflict, natural disasters and disease in the world's poorest continent. The pontiff urged "comfort to those who are persecuted for their religious faith, especially missionaries and members of the faithful who have been kidnapped, and to the victims of attacks by extremist groups, particularly in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Nigeria."

'Injustice' spurs migration

The pope prayed for migrants undertaking a per-



VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis delivers a speech from the balcony of St Peter's basilica during the traditional "Urbi et Orbi" Christmas message to the city and the world, yesterday at St Peter's square in Vatican. — AFP

ious and potentially deadly sea crossing to Europe to seek a better life, saying: "It is injustice that makes them cross deserts and seas that become cemeteries." "It is injustice that forces them to ensure unspeakable forms of abuse, enslavement of every kind and torture in inhumane detention camps. It is injustice that turns them away from places where they might have hope for a dignified life, but instead

find themselves before walls of indifference." Pope Francis also focused on the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo, plagued by insecurity for a quarter of a century due to the presence of dozens of local and foreign armed groups. "May (Jesus Christ) bring peace to those living in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, torn by continuing conflicts," the pontiff said. — AFP

Trump hopes for Christmas vase, not missile test, from N Korea

PALM BEACH: US President Donald Trump on Tuesday said he hoped that North Korea would not deliver a missile test as its threatened "Christmas gift" that could reignite global tensions over its nuclear program.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has promised the unidentified "gift"—which could be a missile test—if the US does not make concessions in nuclear talks by the end of the year.

"We'll find out what the surprise is and we'll deal with it very successfully," Trump told reporters at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida. "Everybody's got surprises for me, but let's see what happens. I handle them as they come along." "Maybe it's a nice present, maybe it's a present where he sends me a beautiful vase as opposed to a missile test," the president joked. Talks on denuclearization has been largely deadlocked since a second summit between Trump and Kim in Hanoi collapsed at the start of this year. Pyongyang has issued a series of increasingly assertive comments as its time limit approaches. It has carried out a series of static



PALM BEACH: US President Donald Trump and First Lady Melania Trump attend a Christmas Eve dinner with his family at Mar-A-Lago in Palm Beach, Florida on Tuesday. — AFP

tests at its Sohae rocket facility this month, after a number of weapons launches in recent weeks.

Long before taking up residence in the White House, Donald Trump appeared in "Home Alone 2"—a turn on the big screen he described as an "honor." Trump spoke with deployed members of the military on Tuesday, and one asked him about his appearance in the Christmas film.

"I was a little bit younger, to put it mildly... It turned out to be a very big hit, obviously. It's a big Christmas hit, one of the biggest," said Trump, who had just acquired the Plaza Hotel in New York, where several scenes for the 1992 film were shot. "It's an honor to be involved in something

like that," said the president, who appeared briefly in the movie. In the film, little Kevin—played by Macaulay Culkin and again separated from his parents—struggles to find his way through the gilded hotel. He stops a man in a long black overcoat and red tie to ask him for directions to the lobby. "Down the hall and to the left," replies Trump. Actor Matt Damon claimed in a 2017 interview with The Hollywood Reporter that the businessman would allow films to be shot in his buildings as long as he received a part. Trump is thus—most of the time playing himself—in the credits of some 20 films and series, including "Zoolander" and "Sex and the City." — AFP

162 migrants rescued off Libya land in Italy: NGO

ROME: Some 162 migrants rescued off the Libyan coast have disembarked in the southern Italian port of Taranto, the NGO SOS Mediterranean said Tuesday. The migrants, including 50 minors and five pregnant women, "were rescued by the SOS Mediterranean Search and Rescue team in two critical rescues in international waters off the coast of Libya on Friday, December 20th," said the NGO, which charters the Ocean Viking rescue ship along with medical charity Doctors Without Borders.

The first operation involved a rubber dinghy that had deflated and was carrying 112 "terrified" people on board, it said. Fifty others were plucked from a wooden boat shortly before midnight the same day "in dangerous meteorological and mar-

itime conditions," the NGO added. The 50 could not be transported to Malta due to adverse weather conditions. Italian authorities then gave permission for all the rescued migrants to land in Taranto and the operation was carried out on Monday, SOS Mediterranean said. It described both rescue operations as "extremely difficult."

"As the weather was rapidly and severely deteriorating, both cases would almost certainly have resulted in tragedies if help had arrived only a little later," said Nicola Stalla, the NGO's search and rescue coordinator onboard the Ocean Viking.

Italy renewed a widely criticized 2017 agreement in October with the Libyan coastguard to block migrants trying to leave for Europe. Rights groups say Libya routinely picks up migrants in the Mediterranean and brings them back to overcrowded detention centers, where many have been victims of abuse and forced labor. Libya, wracked by conflict since the 2011 uprising against Muammar Gaddafi, has become a major transit route for migrants from sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere hoping to reach Europe. — AFP

International

Typhoon Phanfone brings misery for Philippines on Christmas Day

Thousands remain stranded at shuttered ports and evacuation centers

MANILA: Typhoon Phanfone pummeled the central Philippines on Christmas Day, bringing a wet, miserable and terrifying holiday season to millions in the mainly Catholic nation.

Tens of thousands were stranded at shuttered ports or evacuation centers at the height of the festive season yesterday, and residents covered in rain-soaked homes as Phanfone leapt from one small island to another for the second day. The typhoon crumpled houses like accordions, toppled trees and blacked out cities in the Philippines' most storm-prone region.

No deaths have been confirmed, but rescuers said they have yet to reach the more isolated areas, some in neck-deep floods. Though weaker, Phanfone was tracking a similar path as Super Typhoon Haiyan—the country's deadliest cyclone on record which left more than 7,300 people dead or missing in 2013.

More than 16,000 people spent the night in improvised shelters in schools, gyms and government buildings as the typhoon made landfall Tuesday, civil defense officials said.

"It was frightening. The glass windows shattered and we took cover by the stairs," Ailyn Metran told AFP after she and her four-year-old child spent the night at the local state weather service office where her husband worked. The typhoon ripped a metal window frame off the building and dropped it onto a car parked outside, she said.

With just two hours' sleep, the family returned to their home in Tacloban city Wednesday to find their two dogs safe, but the floor was covered in mud and a felled tree rested atop a nearby house.

The weather office said the typhoon strengthened slightly overnight Tuesday and was gusting at 195 kilometers (121 miles) an hour, which can knock down small trees and destroy flimsy houses. Survivors took to social media with pictures and videos of crushed homes, buses half-

submerged in brown-colored floods, roads strewn with tree trunks, and coconut and banana plants being shredded by ferocious winds. The typhoon hit land as millions of Filipinos trooped to once-yearly clan reunions centered on the "noche buena", a sumptuous midnight meal that is the highlight of the Catholic nation's holidays. More than 25,000 people remained stranded at ports on Christmas Day with ferry services still shut down, the coast guard said.

Scores of flights to the region also remained cancelled, though the populous capital Manila, on the northern section has so far been spared.

Phanfone ravaged the north of the island of Cebu overnight Tuesday, and residents decamped from evacuation centers only to find their homes damaged, civil defense official Allen Froilan Cabaron said.

"They were safer at the evacuation centres. At least they were able to eat the Christmas Eve meal there, even if only tinned fish and instant noodles were available," Cabaron said. "But even with food on the table, the atmosphere would have been different because they were not at home," Cabaron added. "Obviously, they were unable to celebrate Christmas properly because some spent the night at evacuation centers," rescue official Cecille Bedonia told AFP by phone from Iloilo city. At the western island resort of Coron, the beaches emptied and boat tours were suspended as Western tourists stayed in their rooms to await the typhoon onslaught later Thursday.

"Many of the tourist establishments here are closed, and some of our guests failed to arrive because their flights were cancelled," hotel receptionist Nina Edano told AFP by phone. "We're not scared, but the ambience here is generally gloomy," she added. The Philippines is the first major landmass facing the Pacific cyclone belt. As such, the archipelago gets hit by an average of 20 storms and typhoons each year, killing scores of people and wip-



MANILA: Police assist residents arriving at an evacuation centre, as typhoon Phanfone makes landfall, in Borongan, Eastern Samar province, central Philippines on Tuesday. — AFP

ing out harvests, homes and other infrastructure and keeping millions perennially poor. A July 2019 study by the Manila-based Asian Development Bank said the most

frequent storms lop one percent off the Philippine economic output, with the stronger ones cutting output by nearly three percent. — AFP

Violence flares in north Afghanistan as forces ready for deadly winter

MAZAR-I-SHARIF: At least seven Afghan soldiers were killed when the Taliban attacked their base Tuesday, the latest brazen assault in Afghanistan's north, where local and international forces are bracing for violent months ahead. Winter once marked a slowdown in the so-called "fighting season", with Taliban fighters returning to their villages because snow and ice made attacks more difficult to pull off.

But in recent years any seasonal distinction in violence has all but disappeared, with insurgents continuing to mount offensives on vulnerable bases and checkpoints year-round.

In Tuesday's incident, a joint military base in the Dawlat Abad district of Balkh province near the Uzbekistan border was attacked, the Afghan defense ministry said. The base was shared by the army and the National Directorate of Security, Afghanistan's secretive intelligence agency. Seven soldiers were killed and three more wounded, along with three NDS staff, the ministry said. According to German intelligence officials at Camp Marmal, a German-run base outside Mazar-i-sharif in Balkh near to where Tuesday's attack took place, last January saw one of the highest-ever numbers of attacks in the north. "If there is no game changer on the strategic level (this year), it will be a 'hot' winter," one official told AFP during a recent visit.

"We are talking about two dozens of security incidents average per day" across NATO's northern command this winter, he added. Unlike in the southern provinces of Kandahar and Helmand, which are largely Pashtun, the Taliban in the north are made up mainly of Uzbek and Tajik fighters.

Sometimes they join up just to get paid, and in other instances families will have one member join the Taliban while another signs up with the Afghan security forces, a German military official said. "Often families have ties to both organizations," the officer said. If you "orient yourself in more directions... you have more options."

Abe asks South Korea's Moon to act on row

CHENGDU, China/SEOUL: Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe asked South Korea's president on Tuesday to take steps to resolve a bitter dispute at their first bilateral talks in 15 months, a sign that while the mood is improving, knotty problems between the US allies remain.

Abe and South Korean President Moon Jae-in stressed, at their meeting in China, the need to improve ties after the worst period of tension between their countries in decades. Relations have been strained since South Korea's Supreme Court last year ordered Japanese firms to compensate some South Koreans forced to work for them during Japan's 1910-45 colonial rule. Japan says the issue was settled under a 1965 treaty and that the court ruling violated international law.

"South Korea should take responsibility and come up with measures to resolve the issue," Abe told a news conference. "I asked that South Korea initiate steps to restore ties between Japan and South Korea to a healthy state."

Moon and Abe met on the sidelines of a trilateral summit with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang in the Chinese city of Chengdu, with tension over

stalled denuclearization talks between North Korea and the United States the main issue. After the Korean court ruling, Japan imposed restrictions on the export to South Korea of high-tech materials used in the manufacture of chips, compounding their dispute which threatened to undermine security cooperation between them.

Abe and Moon agreed to meet more often despite differences over history and trade, Moon's spokeswoman, Ko Min-jung, told a briefing in Chengdu, adding they both wanted to resolve differences through dialogue. Abe said close security cooperation with the United States was "extremely important" in dealing with North Korea.

The two leaders had "candid" discussions recognizing the importance of dialogue, though there were still "substantive differences," said Japan's Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Naoki Okada. He said the mood was tense at times but not confrontational.

Moon expressed hopes for an early solution to their differences. "Japan and South Korea are historically and culturally the closest neighbors," Moon said. "We're not in a relationship that can set the two apart even when there's some discomfort for a while." The two shook hands and smiled slightly before their 45-minute meeting, longer than the planned 30 minutes. South Korea last month made a last-minute decision to maintain an intelligence-sharing deal with Japan that is important for trilateral security cooperation with the United States. — Reuters

Modi unveils plan to tackle water shortages in heartland states

NEW DELHI: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday launched a 60-billion-rupee (\$842 million) plan to tackle water shortages in the country's seven heartland states where agriculture is a mainstay.

India, the world's second-most populous country, faces the worst long-term water crisis in its history as demand outstrips supply, threatening farm output and overall economic growth in Asia's third-largest economy. Almost every sector of the \$2.6 trillion economy is dependent on water, especially agriculture, which sustains two-thirds of India's 1.3 billion people.

"Water shortages in the country not only affect individuals and families; the crisis also has an effect on India's development," Modi said. "We need to prepare the new India to deal with every single aspect of the crisis." The plan launched by Modi would help replenish ground water and boost overall availability in Rajasthan, Karnataka, Haryana, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat states, which produce staples such as rice, wheat, sugar and oilseeds.

India is the world's leading producer of an array of farm goods, and nearly 60 percent of the irrigation for agriculture comes from ground water, mainly through electric water pumps. Subsidized electricity gives farmers an incentive to pump out more water, a key reason behind fast-depleting water tables in the vast country.

Supplying clean drinking water to millions of poor people and reviving moribund irrigation projects were a key part of Modi's policies for India, where the monsoon accounts for nearly 70 percent of the annual rains needed to water farms and recharge aquifers and reservoirs.

Nearly half of India's farmland, without any irrigation cover, depends on annual June-September rains to grow a number of crops. Drinking water is also an issue, as about 200,000 Indians die every year due to inadequate access to safe water and 600 million face high to extreme water stress, according to the National Institute for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog, a think tank chaired by Modi.

According to UK-based charity WaterAid, about 163 million people in India - roughly 12 percent of the population - do not have access to clean water close to home. Every summer water shortages tend to be more acute in large cities such as the capital New Delhi, Chennai - a car-making center dubbed "India's Detroit", and Bengaluru, the country's software capital. Modi also exhorted farmers to increasingly adopt drip and sprinkler irrigation and use water-management techniques as well as eschewing water-guzzling crops such as rice and sugar cane. — Reuters



KABUL: An internally displaced Afghan girl stands outside a temporary home at a refugee camp in Kabul on Tuesday. — AFP

"There's less corruption than in the years before," said German Colonel Oliver Esdar, who leads the train-and-advise mission, noting that infantry forces are improving and conducting complex operations that include air support and artillery.

However, US and foreign forces have for years insisted Afghan counterparts are improving, even as the national forces cede terrain to the Taliban and Afghan soldiers continue to die in horrific numbers.

Tens of thousands of Afghan security forces have been killed since they inherited combat operations from NATO at the end of 2014 in what was widely viewed as a disaster that forced then-US president Barack Obama to halt a troop withdrawal.

US President Donald Trump is once again looking to slash the US troop presence in Afghanistan, potentially even before a deal between Washington and the Taliban is cemented. Until that is finalized, many are bracing for a tough winter ahead. — AFP

Indonesia bus crash toll rises to 28

JAKARTA: The number of people killed in a fatal bus crash in Indonesia has risen to 28 including eight children, police said yesterday as a rescue team continued to search a river.

The bus careered into a 150-metre (500-foot) ravine in South Sumatra province just before midnight (1600 GMT) on Monday and ended up in a river, according to police. Local police chief Dolly Gumara said on Wednesday another body was found late on Tuesday, adding up the death toll to 28 from earlier 27. Eight of the killed passengers were children, said Gumara.

"We have identified 27 of the killed victims and only one body is still unidentified as of today. The victim is a woman," Gumara told AFP yesterday. A local rescue team said it has evacuated at least 13 survivors and the search is still ongoing to find more bodies over fear that some might have been carried away in the river. According to a passenger manifest, the regional bus left Bengkulu province for Pagar Alam with 27 on board but some survivors told police there were around 50 people inside when the accident happened.

"There is a possibility that there will be more victims that is why we still continue the search," said yesterday local rescue team spokesman Taufan, who goes only by one name like many Indonesians. Traffic accidents are common in the Southeast Asian archipelago, where vehicles are often old and poorly maintained and road rules regularly flouted.

In September, at least 21 people died when a bus plunged into a ravine in West Java's Sukabumi region. Several months earlier, 12 people were killed and dozens more injured when a passenger tried to wrest control of a bus steering wheel following an argument with the driver on the same toll road in West Java as Thursday's accident. The bus smashed into two cars, causing a truck to roll. — AFP

Thailand charges two soldiers in killing of Muslim civilians

BANGKOK: Thailand has charged two soldiers with murder in the shooting of three Muslim men foraging on a mountain in the south, police said yesterday, a rare push for justice that one rights group called "unprecedented." The announcement comes after the military expressed regret last week over the killing of the unarmed civilians and said it was a case of mistaken identity in the insurgency-scarred region.

The Buddhist-majority state has been locked in a simmering conflict with Malay-Muslim militants in Thailand's south for 15 years with rebels fighting for more autonomy.

More than 7,000 people have been killed, most of them civilians from both faiths. Cases are rarely investigated but the police chief in the southern province of Narathiwat said two soldiers turned themselves into authorities on Monday after the shooting. They were both charged with murder but released on bail as an investigation is carried out. Major General Narin Boosaman told AFP. "We will look at both sides for information so everyone will be treated fairly," he said.

A heavy military presence blankets the southern border area, marked by lit-for-tat attacks on checkpoints by shadowy rebel groups and lethal raids in the hunt for suspects. The bodies of the three men were retrieved from mountainous terrain that is also believed to be an insurgent hideout because of its thick forest cover. A sign now warns villagers about foraging there because authorities may "misunderstand", according to Human Rights Watch.

The group said the case was unprecedented in a region rife with impunity. "Now there is a little bit of hope for justice, but it's still a long way to go," said HRW's senior Thailand researcher Sunai Phasuk. — AFP

Analysis

Kuwait Times
The First Daily in The Arabian Gulf

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Madhya Pradesh state chief minister Kamal Nath (center) holds an Indian flag as he takes part in a protest rally against India's new citizenship law in Bhopal yesterday. — AFP photos

What the smart phone has wrought

When the first Apple iPhone hit the market in 2007, not everyone was convinced it would supplant the flip-phone. When Google's Android software system arrived a year later, the Blackberry still seemed to have bright future. But with the iPhone 4 in 2010, featuring a high-resolution display, sleek design and front-facing camera, our collective fate was sealed. Here are 10 ways the smartphone has made its mark over the decade.

Access everywhere

Today some 5 billion smartphones are in use around the world, according to Canalis Research. The total number of Internet subscriptions has soared to 7.2 billion globally from 1.3 billion in 2010, the vast majority of them mobile subscriptions, International Telecommunications Union data shows. The explosion in connectivity has been especially dramatic in the developing world, where there are now more mobile connections than people.

Tech uber alles

Apple Inc. once a niche computer company, is now one of the world's most valuable companies thanks to the iPhone. The five largest Fortune 500 technology companies - Apple, Amazon, Google, Microsoft and Facebook - currently boast a market cap of \$4.7 trillion, compared with about \$800 billion for the top five in 2010. Not all of that is due to the smartphone, of course, but the mobile-related technologies and services accounted for nearly \$4 trillion in economic activity in 2018, according to trade group GSMA.

There's an app for that

Whether we're hailing a cab, ordering food, playing a game, finding a date, listening to music or shopping for just about anything, there's a good chance we'll be doing it with a smartphone app that didn't exist in 2010. Many of most popular apps are free, but consumers are still expected to spend more than \$120 billion in app stores during 2019, according to App Annie, a mobile apps analytics firm.

Feed me

The endless scroll on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and other social media apps now consumes 34 minutes of every US adult's day, according to Nielsen. Fewer people are sitting on the sofa to watch live TV at set times, and advertisers are following. Mobile ad spending surpassed TV for the first time in 2018 in terms of percentage share of the US market, according to research firm eMarketer. We can also thank the smartphone for Instagram influencers, "sextortion", and fake news.

Smile for the (smartphone) camera

Global shipments of digital cameras dropped from their 2010 peak of 121 million to just 19 million units in 2018, according to the Camera & Imaging Products Association (CIPA). Meantime the latest phones pack as many four camera lenses and cutting edge software that makes it easier than ever to get that perfect shot. The front-facing camera might be the busiest: Google reports that its Android devices take 93 million selfies every day.

Where am I?

The satellite tracking technology known as GPS, combined with information from cell towers and Wi-Fi networks, has made the smartphones incredibly powerful tracking devices. Google maps and its poorer cousins enable even the most directionally impaired find their way around unfamiliar locales with ease.

For the privacy-minded, though, it's a disaster: Phone companies and app makers routinely record the movements of subscribers and sell that data to advertisers, a \$20 billion-a-year business. The data is "anonymized," but as numerous studies and a recent New York Times investigation have revealed it is often a simple matter to identify who is behind the dot on the map. Nearly 50 percent of companies surveyed by Verizon this year used or planned to soon use smartphone management tools to track their employees.

You can look it up

The 2010 edition of the venerable Encyclopedia Britannica, all 32 volumes and 129 pounds of it, turned out to be the last. But untold barroom arguments or dining room debates can now be settled on the spot: Wikipedia is consulted more than 240 million times daily.

Distracting ourselves to death

In 2018 alone in the United States, 2,628 fatal crashes involved a distracted driver, and of those deadly crashes, about 13 percent involved mobile phone use, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). — Reuters

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Mansi



Kersi



Nandini

India's protesters: A cross-section of society

NEW DELHI: Tens of thousands of Indians have taken to the streets in recent days to voice their anger over a new citizenship law that they say discriminates against the minority Muslim community. But it is not just Muslims who are protesting - majority Hindus, low-caste Dalits and Parsis are joining in to show their solidarity and condemn the legislation across the country of 1.3 billion people.

The law allows people of six religions from Muslim-majority Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan an easier path to citizenship but not if they are Muslim. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, facing its biggest test since sweeping to power in 2014 - with at least 25 people killed in almost two weeks of protests - insists the law is not discriminatory. AFP spoke to five protesters who took part in a demonstration in New Delhi on Tuesday.

The techie

Kersi, a 32-year-old Parsi who works in the tech sector joined the march called by students from Jamia Millia Islamia University where police smashed into the campus and tear-gassed students following violent protests earlier this month. Kersi, who gave only one name, said he was worried because the country's secular foundations had been shaken like never before.

"There is a secular foundation to our constitution, there is an element of multiculturalism, pluralism, that is at the core of the country's ethos and which differentiates it from other countries," he said. "The new law threatens it more

than anything in the past. It's a step too far. It's a fundamental change they are trying to impose which I don't agree with and which we should try and prevent."

Cardboard reformer

Mansi, 29, an upper-caste Hindu settled in the US but in Delhi on holiday, was accompanied by her 64-year-old father who was carrying a cutout of Bhimrao Ambedkar, a revered social reformer and architect of India's constitution. "There have been laws in the past that have been extremely controversial but what they are trying to do now is alter the right to citizenship which sits at the foundation of democracy," she said.

"This according to me is much too far-reaching than any single law affecting any single community. You are altering the identity of the nation and by definition who gets to exercise their vote to decide the future of the country. It is the moral responsibility of the majority to stand up for the marginalized minorities."

The professor

Nandini, a professor at Delhi University who is a Hindu, said she was appalled by the alleged police brutality against students of Jamia University and wanted to show she was standing up for them. "I feel enough is enough. It is important that we are given the space to express our dissent. It doesn't mean we are anti-state. We are actually asking the state to bring in policies that are equal for all and not divisive and discriminatory," she said.

'Like Hitler'

Pranav Yadav, 20, a student from one of India's lower caste communities, lied to his parents and joined the protest march because he "could not simply sit at home and do nothing when my country is under attack from fascist forces". "It's a sort of a systematic plan to attack Muslims in India. Whenever the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is in power, they have one basic agenda of targeting Muslims. "Basically it's like one leader having a target community and getting the majority to support that idea. Like Hitler did with Jews or the way Myanmar is going to Rohingya Muslims. After the Muslims, they can target against any other community they feel like. All they need is a scapegoat and right now Muslims seem to be the perfect scapegoat."

'More important than independence'

Promila Chaturvedi, a 79-year-old upper-caste Hindu, said it was important to speak up against injustice even though she "does not have much energy now". "I want to protect my constitution. I want to show my solidarity with the Muslim community. We want to tell them 'we are with you, till the last drop of our blood'," said Chaturvedi, her feather-soft white hair tied in a bun. "This can be compared to our freedom struggle but this is more important because they (British) were outsiders but these are our own people. If they behave like this we won't tolerate." — AFP

Cost of UK royals back in spotlight after Queen's year to forget

After a torrid 2019 in which the queen's son Prince Andrew was implicated in an underage sex abuse scandal, many in Britain are again asking if the monarchy has gotten too big - and rich - for its own good. The family's year to forget may encourage Prince Charles, set to eventually take over from his mother Queen Elizabeth II, 93, in his purported belief that the centuries-old institution needs reform, according to royal experts.

"He wants to slim it down to a hard core of senior family members who work full-time," said author Penny Junor, who has written several books on the royals including "The Firm" - the nickname sometimes given to the family. "Andrew shooting himself in the foot has certainly made that an easier task," she told AFP.

The 59-year-old prince, dubbed the queen's "favorite son" by the UK press, has been dogged by allegations that he had sex with one of American convicted pedophile Jeffrey Epstein's victims. Andrew, who strenuously denies the accusations, gave a calamitous BBC interview last month in which he unsuccessfully tried to distance himself from the late US financier. The furious media backlash

saw him subsequently promise to "step back from public duties". It was a grim year as well for Prince Harry and his wife Meghan Markle, the former US actress. The celebrity couple sued several British newspapers over intrusions into their private lives, while his relationship with brother Prince William has reportedly soured - creating more tabloid gossip fodder. The family's tribulations led The Guardian to proclaim the firm had "lost its grip", with royal observers predicting change will inevitably result.

'Ministry of good feelings'

The size and cost of Britain's royal family has long been contentious, with the latest controversies renewing calls for a "rationalised structure of Windsor plc," as The Daily Telegraph wrote. "Bleated royal families are fine when you run a quarter of the world... not so good when you are in charge of a diminished, austere Britain, grappling with recession in the early 21st century," the newspaper added. Jonny Dymond, who covers the royal family for the BBC, said how much to finance the family "has been a big deal for a long time". "It's the attack point for republicans," he told AFP. Dymond noted Britain's royals have been adept at periodically reinventing the brand, acting as a kind of "ministry of good feelings" for the nation to justify its expenses. "And that's the problem with what you have at the moment, which is you're certainly not getting your money's worth," he said. "You're not getting that when you have Prince Andrew accused of what he's accused of, you're not getting that when Harry and Meghan are busy suing the newspapers."

'Cost to the taxpayer'

The queen receives an allowance - a so-called "sovereign grant" - from the government each year, which reached £82 million (\$106 million) for the financial year 2018-2019. That is intended to pay for the family members' functional roles as figureheads, as well as the salaries of employees and maintaining places like Buckingham Palace. The monarch also benefits from a "privy purse" which stems from the revenues of half a billion pounds in assets grown by the Duchy of Lancaster estate since the Middle Ages.

The portfolio of lands, properties and assets held in trust generated almost £20 million last year, which the queen partly shares across the family. Buckingham Palace does not disclose how exactly these funds are distributed to family members like Andrew. The British press reports that he has received an annual royal allowance of £250,000 which his mother would give him each year, in addition to a yearly military pension of around £25,000.

The Duke of York, known for his "jet set" lifestyle, lives free of charge, as does his ex-wife Sarah Ferguson, in a royal residence. He reportedly sold a property in Sunninghill, southwest London, which the queen had donated to him, for around £15 million in 2007, and owns a luxurious chalet in Switzerland. "One of the common complaints about the monarchy is the cost to the taxpayer," said Junor. "There is a perception that many members of the family are freeloaders who don't do much work." — AFP

Tears as politicians fail to dispel 'climate darkness'

Standing before a captive audience at this month's climate change conference in Madrid after entertaining them with a dance in her traditional Pacific island costume, 21-year-old Tabita Kaitamakin Awira Awerika's smile turned to angry tears. The student from Kiribati spoke of her anguish at the threat to her low-lying atoll nation from rising sea levels and ferocious storms - and the determination of her people not to let global warming chase them from their "beloved motherland".

"I am very sad to say that as the youth of many developed nations are enjoying their daily activities, our fellow youth in Kiribati are worrying about what the future holds for us," she told an event on the sidelines of the UN talks. "My leaders have voiced these concerns to the global community over and over but no one is listening - are we that insignificant for our cries... to fall on deaf ears?" Emotional exhortations like this are being heard more

often at the annual climate summit, especially from young people, as climate change fuels extreme weather, glaciers melt, and the world's oceans creep inexorably higher. In Madrid, veterans of the "COP" meetings - known as a place where suited officials spar over complex agreements - said they had never seen such an outpouring of grief, anxiety and sorrow.

Bill Hare, founder of climate science think-tank Climate Analytics, told US news show "Democracy Now!" he had seen more tears in Madrid than at the previous 24 summits, dubbing it "the crying COP". Representatives of small island states were "almost panicking" at the prospect of their homelands disappearing under the waves, while young people were "angry and upset" at a lack of action by politicians, he said. During two fractious weeks of talks, a handful of major polluting states resisted pressure to ramp up efforts to combat climate change, angering smaller countries and a growing protest movement that is pushing for emergency action.

'Ecological grief'

The climate change talks have experienced a "big shift" away from formality in recent years, said Ashlee Cunsolo, director of the Newfoundland-based Labrador Institute of Memorial University and an expert on "ecological grief". Tuvalu negotiator Ian Fry grabbed the world's attention at

the 2009 Copenhagen talks by saying he had woken up crying, telling delegates tearfully, "the fate of my country rests in your hands".

At the 2013 talks, Philippines negotiator Yeb Sano made headlines when he broke down speaking of the destruction wrought on his country by Typhoon Haiyan. Sano told the Thomson Reuters Foundation people were increasingly "refusing to separate science and feeling". "More and more, they are not embarrassed and not ashamed to share the emotions they are experiencing around these changes," she said.

One key driver is rising exposure to climate and weather-linked disasters, whether Australia's bushfires, flooding in the United States or Hurricane Dorian in the Bahamas, she added. And then there are communities experiencing longer-term deterioration in their native environments, including Canada's Inuit, who are struggling with losing the ice and what that means for their hunting-based lifestyle and food security.

"The lived experience that people have and are sharing publicly on social media and in media articles has so far outstripped the research that we have," said the academic who co-authored a study on the subject, published in April 2018. The paper identified "ecological grief" as "an under-developed area of inquiry" and warned it could "become more common as climate impacts worsen". — Reuters

Business

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13 Changing times put Ivory Coast's rubber industry under pressure

14 Japan ruling party lawmaker held on suspicion of casino bribery



PARIS: Paris Opera dancers perform in front of the Palais Garnier against the French government's plan to overhaul the country's retirement system, in Paris on Tuesday. —AFP

Christmas brings no respite for French travellers

Transport strikes enters fourth week ruining plans of thousands of holiday revelers

PARIS: Christmas Day brought no respite for travellers in France as a transport strike entered its fourth week, ruining the plans of thousands to share a traditional meal and quality time with loved ones. Many scrambled at the last minute to make alternative arrangements as the protest against pension reform saw thousands of trains cancelled or delayed and taxis, ride-sharing services and car rental agencies unable to make up the shortfall.

Only a fraction of high-speed and intercity trains ran on Christmas Eve, even fewer on the holiday itself. The main train stations in Paris were closed for the morning with suburban connections slashed and merely two out of 16 metro lines—the only driverless ones—providing any service.

Negotiations between the government and unions last week failed to find common ground, and strikers vowed there would be no holiday truce unless officials scrap plans to merge the current 42 pension schemes into one.

Talks are scheduled to resume on January 7. The government says the overhaul is needed to create a fairer pension system. But workers balk at the inclusion of a so-called pivot age of 64 until which people would have to work to earn a full pension—two years beyond the official retirement age.

'A moment of grace'

Others, especially railway workers, are angry at plans to do away with special

regimes that make early retirement provisions for categories of employees who work unusual hours or do physically demanding jobs. Paris Opera workers, who can retire at 42, are among those on strike.

On Tuesday, roughly 40 dancers in white tutus staged an elegant protest in Paris, performing Swan Lake to passersby on the steps outside the opera house with banners warning: "Culture in danger".

"We wanted to offer a moment of grace," said dancer Alexandre Carniato. Unions are hoping for a repeat of 1995 when the government backed down on pension reform after three weeks of metro and rail stoppages just before Christmas. But the action is taking a heavy toll on businesses, especially retailers, hotels and

restaurants, during what should be one of the busiest periods of the year.

'A turning point'

Industry associations have reported turnover declines of 30 to 60 percent from a year earlier, and the SNCF said Tuesday it had lost 400 million euros (\$442 million) in potential earnings so far. The strikers, too, are losing out, forfeiting their salary for days not worked — 21 days by yesterday. On Tuesday, the Info'Com-CGT union presented a cheque for 250,000 euros (\$277,000) to striking workers of the RATP Paris rail service, from a fund containing public contributions.

"This is a turning point," train driver Raffi Kaya told AFP at a union-organized

Christmas lunch for strikers at Paris' Gare de Lyon train station. "It is starting to hurt financially. But we have gone too far to stop now." The man leading the government's pension reform project, Laurent Pietraszewski, said Tuesday the government would be "willing to compromise" in the negotiations, set to last throughout January.

But he insisted there will be no revisiting the plan to do away with special retirement regimes. A poll by the IFOP agency published Sunday showed public backing for the action dropping by three percentage points, though 51 percent of respondents still expressed support or sympathy for the strike, which is set to also cast a pall over New Year's celebrations and the first working weeks of 2020. —AFP

Emirates' long-serving boss to hand over controls next year

DUBAI/PARIS: Tim Clark will retire as the president of Emirates Airline at the end of June 2020 after more than three decades at the state-controlled business that has helped to transform Dubai into one of the world's major travel crossroads. Emirates Chairman Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al-Maktoum said on Tuesday in an internal memo to staff, reviewed by Reuters, that Clark would stay on as an adviser to the company.

"Through wars, economic recessions, disasters natural or manmade, and various industry upheavals, Tim has ably steered and grown Emirates to its standing today as the world's largest international airline, and an eminent player in the global airline industry," Sheikh Ahmed said in the memo. An Emirates spokeswoman confirmed the retirement to Reuters.

Clark, 70, joined the airline as a founding member in 1985, having previously worked at Gulf Air and Caledonian Airways. The British national became Emirates' president in 2003. "Tim is a giant of the industry. He had the vision behind Emirates and has cultivated the airline to where it is today," said independent aviation consultant John Strickland.

Knighted in 2014 for his services to British prosperity and the aviation industry, Clark has since been referred to by many in the industry, including those at Emirates, as "Sir Tim".

Sheikh Ahmed, a member of Dubai's ruling family who has been the airline's chairman since inception, praised Clark as being central to Emirates success and Dubai's emergence as a global aviation hub.

"His achievements are too many to recount individually, but they will all be remembered," he said in the memo. Emirates, profitable for the past 31 years, has been crucial to putting Dubai on the map and its transformation into a global financial and tourism hub.

Launched in 1985 with aircraft leased from Pakistan International Airlines, Emirates today operates a fleet of 270 aircraft to 159 destinations, according to its website.

It carried close to 60 million passengers in its last financial year, and operates the single largest fleet of Airbus A380 superjumbo jets. The airline has in recent years faced a slowdown in growth.

In a separate email to staff this month, it said that from next year it would no longer offer discounted tickets to friends of employees, citing the impact those reduced fares have had on revenue.

Emirates' hub, Dubai International Airport, has been the world's busiest for international passengers since 2014 when it overtook London's Heathrow airport. Clark departs as the major airline sets upon a new growth strategy as it retires older A380 jets and starts receiving smaller Airbus A350s and Boeing 787s ordered this year.

Its move to axe 39 aircraft from its total A380 orders prompted Airbus to pull the plug on the costly plane, which airlines have struggled to fill to its capacity of 500-850 people. At the time, Emirates said it would buy smaller A330 and A350 models instead in a sale worth \$21.4 billion, but the deal struck in November fell well short of that.

Emirates is facing slowing economies in its home Gulf region and stagnant tourism numbers to its glitzy base of



DUBAI: Emirates Airlines President Tim Clark will retire at the end of June 2020 after more than three decades at the state-controlled business that has helped to transform Dubai into one of the world's major travel crossroads. —AFP

Dubai. In the last full year, its net profit dived 69 percent to just \$237 million due to high oil prices and currency fluctuations, although in November it said half-year profits nearly tripled thanks to a drop in operating costs. —Agencies

Business

Uber co-founder Travis Kalanick severs last ties with company

Kalanick to exit the board at end of 2019

NEW YORK: About a decade after co-founding Uber, Travis Kalanick on Tuesday severed his last ties with the ride-hailing giant, announcing he would exit the board of directors at the end of 2019.

Kalanick, who was pushed out as chief executive in 2017 amid revelations about the controversial business practices that accompanied the company's stunning rise, will resign from the board of directors effective December 31 "to focus on his new business and philanthropic endeavors," Uber said in a statement. "Uber has been a part of my life for the past 10 years. At the close of the decade, and with the company now public, it seems like the right moment for me to focus on my current business and philanthropic pursuits," Kalanick, 43, said in a statement released by the company.

"I'm proud of all that Uber has achieved, and I will continue to cheer for its future from the sidelines." In March 2018, Kalanick announced the creation of a new investment vehicle, 10100, that will focus on both for-profit and non-profit ventures. The key areas of focus for the fund include real estate, e-commerce and innovation in China and India.

Among his most recent ventures, Kalanick has developed the so-called "ghost kitchen" company, CloudKitchens, which will rent communal kitchens near population centers that can prepare food for delivery services. Even before Tuesday's announcement, Kalanick had taken steps to further distance himself from Uber, selling a large portion of his shares in early November.

The youthful Kalanick has been the personification of the go-go Silicon Valley disruptor associated with visionary entrepreneurship that upends traditional businesses, accompanied by unfettered growth.

Growth and growing pains

Kalanick and fellow Uber co-founder Garrett Camp



MUNICH: Travis Kalanick, co-founder of the US transportation network company Uber, speaking during the opening of the Digital Life Design (DLD) Conference in Munich. —AFP Photos

got the idea for Uber while visiting Paris in December 2008 when they were unable to find a taxi. UberCab launched in July 2010 in San Francisco. The company name was shortened in October to Uber.

The venture has grown rapidly since then, with operations in 700 cities in 65 countries at the time of its initial public offering in May. Kalanick resigned from Uber in June 2017 amid heavy pressure following a series of disturbing reports about a culturoth workplace culture, harassment, discrimination and questionable business tactics to thwart rivals.

The company appointed former Expedia chief Dara Khosrowshahi as chief executive later this year.

Khosrowshahi has taken steps to clean up the company's image, including as upgrading its rider safety programs and disclosing figures on sexual assaults. But



In this file photo, an Uber logo is seen outside the company's headquarters in San Francisco, California.

the company also still faces plenty of challenges as critics complain of excess traffic, aggressive labor practices and other ills. A regional court in Germany last week barred Uber from offering rides through car hire firms. Wall Street analysts have also questioned the company's long-term profit prospects.

Khosrowshahi said Tuesday that "very few entrepreneurs have built something as profound as Travis

Kalanick did with Uber." Board Chairperson Ron Sugar thanked Kalanick for "his unique expertise, honed over 10 years building Uber from a scrappy startup into the global public company."

Uber shares, which have fallen more than 25 percent since the company went public in May, rose on Tuesday in a holiday-shortened session. Shares gained 0.4 percent to finish at \$30.44. —AFP

China rare earth magnet exports to US slide by a fifth in Nov

BEIJING/SHANGHAI: China's exports of rare earth magnets to the United States fell 21.2 percent month-on-month, customs data showed yesterday, as improving trade relations between the two countries reduced demand for stockpiling. US-bound shipments of the magnets, which are widely used in medical devices, consumer electronics and defense, came in at 376 tons last month, according to data from the General Administration of Customs. The figure was also down 3.2 percent year-on-year.

The US military plans to stockpile rare earth magnets used in Javelin missiles and F-35 fighter jets, according to a government document seen by Reuters, although a US policy bill bans the purchase of rare earth magnets from China for military use in the 2019 fiscal year.

China, the world's top producer of rare earth magnets, raised in May the prospect of restricting the supply of rare earth products in its trade war with Washington. It has since raised annual rare earth output quotas to record highs and agreed an initial deal to end the trade row, although its overall rare earth exports in November totalled only 2,636 tons, the lowest since May 2015, customs data released on Dec. 8 showed. China's rare earth magnet exports to all countries came in at around 2,891 tons last month, down 6.5 percent from 3,091 tons in October and up 10.4 percent from November 2018.

The biggest export destination for the magnets was Germany, to which China sent 672 tonnes in November. In October, rare earth magnet exports to Germany had spiked to around 708 tonnes, the highest since at least 2016. —Reuters

Global stock markets coast through Christmas Eve

NEW YORK: Global stock markets were mostly flat in quiet Christmas Eve trading on Tuesday, running out of fizz before the festive break, although the Nasdaq hit its ninth straight record close. US investors have been in a cheery mood most of the fall as the outlook for US-China trade talks improved, reducing uncertainty, and most economic reports have been good.

In the sleepy holiday-shortened sessions, the broad S&P 500 slipped a hair, and the benchmark Dow dipped 0.1 percent, but the Nasdaq, with a 0.1 percent gain, posted another all-time high.

It was a similar picture in other major markets, as London's benchmark FTSE 100 shares index rose 0.1 percent, while the Paris CAC 40 finished flat. "In true Christmas tradition, financial markets saw low trading volumes and volatility," said CMC Markets analyst David Madden.

Frankfurt's DAX 30 had already shut for Christmas. Trading volumes are typi-

cally light at this stage with many investors away for extended Christmas and New Year holiday celebrations. But the sleepy session was punctuated by some big developments.

New Boeing revelations

Dow member Boeing fell 1.4 percent after reports the embattled company sent new documents to the congressional committee investigating its response to two deadly crashes. The documents "appear to point to a very disturbing picture" about Boeing's response to safety issues regarding the 737 MAX, an aide to the US House Transportation Committee told AFP. The company sent the documents to the committee late Monday, hours after announcing it had ousted Dennis Muilenburg as chief executive and installed Chairman David Calhoun in the post. Shares had rallied on the leadership change.

Meanwhile, Uber co-founder Travis Kalanick on Tuesday severed his last ties with the ride-hailing giant, announcing he would exit the board of directors at the end of 2019. Uber shares gained 0.4 percent.

'Santa Rally' fades

Investors were pausing for breath after a bumper run over the last two weeks or so. "Investors must feel as if they were extra good this year," said



NEW YORK: Traders work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) during the beginning of the Christmas holiday week on Tuesday. —AFP

CFRA Research Chief Investment Strategist Sam Stovall, who noted that both stocks and bonds rose solidly in 2019. Global equities have already enjoyed a "Santa Rally" as dealers welcomed news over the US-China trade war and Brexit, having been on a roller-coaster ride for the last 12 months.

Britain's pro-Brexit Prime Minister Boris Johnson won a landslide election on December 12, boosting investor senti-

ment. Last week, Johnson clinched parliamentary approval for the nation to depart from the European Union on January 31, dispelling Brexit uncertainty that had plagued markets for more than three years.

The rally gathered pace at widespread investor relief over the China-US trade pact, with the two economic superpowers set to sign off the deal early next month. —AFP

Tokyo stocks close lower in muted trading

TOKYO: Tokyo stocks closed lower yesterday in thin trade with foreign investors absent for the Christmas holidays and few fresh market-moving events. The bench-

mark Nikkei 225 index ended down 0.20 percent, or 47.71 points, at 23,782.87, while the broader Topix index slipped 0.39 percent, or 6.80 points, to 1,721.42.

"Shares moved just narrowly, which is typical of year-end trade," said Makoto Sengoku, market analyst at Tokai Tokyo Research Institute. Investors "do not need to move now in the absence of major trading pegs," he said.

Investors took to the sidelines as major markets abroad—in New York, Hong Kong,

and London, among others—were closed yesterday for the Christmas holiday, analysts also said.

In Tokyo, automakers were among losers, with Toyota slipping 0.83 percent to 7,676 yen, Honda losing 0.51 percent to 3,112 yen, and Mitsubishi Motors closing down 1.51 percent at 456.

Nissan dropped 3.13 percent to 633.1 yen after the crisis-hit automaker confirmed earlier media reports saying that its vice chief operating officer who is a

key figure in restructuring the automaker has decided to quit just weeks after taking the job. Jun Seki, 58, number three at Nissan, is expected to become president of major electric components maker Nidec, according to a source close to Nissan.

Nidec, in contrast, edged up 0.33 percent to close at 15,155 yen. Elsewhere, Panasonic edged 0.97 percent lower to close at 1,012 yen and Sharp dropped 2.26 percent to 1,640 yen. —AFP

EXCHANGE RATES

Al-Muzaini Exchange Co.	
EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES	
US Dollar Transfer	304.300
Euro	340.360
Sterling Pound	397.420
Canadian dollar	232.910
Turkish lira	52.020
Swiss Franc	313.550
US Dollar Buying	297.000
ASIAN COUNTRIES	
Japanese Yen	2.783
Indian Rupees	4.273
Pakistani Rupees	1.973
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.673
Nepali Rupees	2.665
Singapore Dollar	226.160
Hongkong Dollar	39.073
Bangladesh Taka	3.556
Philippine Peso	5.989
Thai Baht	10.122
Malaysian ringgit	77.826
GCC COUNTRIES	
Saudi Riyal	81.201
Qatari Riyal	83.633
Omani Riyal	790.903
Bahraini Dinar	808.560
UAE Dirham	82.904
ARAB COUNTRIES	
Egyptian Pound - Cash	22.350

Egyptian Pound - Transfer	18.990
Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.222
Tunisian Dinar	110.250
Jordanian Dinar	429.350
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	0.203
Syrian Lira	0.000
Morocco Dirham	32.235
Dollarco Exchange Co. Ltd	
Rate for Transfer	
US Dollar	303.940
Canadian Dollar	231.695
Sterling Pound	396.935
Euro	338.295
Swiss Franc	301.070
Bahraini Dinar	808.290
UAE Dirhams	83.155
Qatari Riyals	84.390
Saudi Riyals	81.945
Jordanian Dinar	429.975
Egyptian Pound	18.991
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.678
Indian Rupees	4.271
Pakistani Rupees	1.690
Bangladesh Taka	3.551
Philippines Peso	5.984
Cyprus pound	18.085
Japanese Yen	3.775
Syrian Pound	1.590
Nepalese Rupees	2.662
Malaysian Ringgit	74.320

Chinese Yuan Renminbi	43.805	
Thai Bhat	11.060	
Turkish Lira	51.605	
Singapore dollars	223.191	
BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL		
CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
British Pound	0.386723	0.400623
Czech Korune	0.005192	0.014492
Danish Krone	0.041048	0.046048
Euro	0.329601	0.343301
Georgian Lari	0.105858	0.105858
Hungarian 0.000924	0.001114	
Norwegian Krone	0.030037	0.035237
Romanian Leu	0.053455	0.070305
Russian ruble	0.004915	0.004915
Slovakia	0.009095	0.019095
Swedish Krona	0.028239	0.033239
Swiss Franc	0.303606	0.314606
Australasia		
Australian Dollar	0.202152	0.214152
New Zealand Dollar	0.195530	0.205030
America		
Canadian Dollar	0.225690	0.234690
US Dollars	0.300200	0.304750
US Dollars Mint	0.300700	0.304750
Asia		
Bangladesh Taka	0.002976	0.003777

Chinese Yuan	0.042121	0.045621
Hong Kong Dollar	0.036972	0.039722
Indian Rupee	0.003590	0.004362
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000017	0.000023
Japanese Yen	0.002696	0.002876
Korean Won	0.000251	0.000266
Malaysian Ringgit	0.069511	0.075511
Nepalese Rupee	0.002624	0.002964
Pakistan Rupee	0.001324	0.002094
Philippine Peso	0.005933	0.006233
Singapore Dollar	0.218084	0.229084
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001318	0.001898
Taiwan	0.009985	0.010165
Thai Baht	0.009748	0.010298
Vietnamese Dong	0.000013	0.000013
Arab		
Bahraini Dinar	0.801015	0.809065
Egyptian Pound	0.018933	0.021674
Iranian Riyal	0.000084	0.000085
Iraqi Dinar	0.000199	0.000259
Jordanian Dinar	0.423210	0.432210
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000	1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000101	0.000251
Moroccan Dirhams	0.021180	0.021180
Omani Riyal	0.785262	0.793154
Qatar Riyal	0.082928	0.083762
Saudi Riyal	0.080060	0.081360
Syrian Pound	0.001290	0.001510
Tunisian Dinar	0.103720	0.111720
Turkish Lira	0.044809	0.054654
UAE Dirhams	0.082217	0.083043
Yemeni Riyal	0.000989	0.001069

Business

Changing times put Ivory Coast's rubber industry under pressure

Planters face criticism that they are damaging environment

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast: A decade after rubber was heavily promoted as a goldmine for Ivory Coast's cocoa-dependent economy, planters are under pressure to address criticism that they are damaging the environment and weakening the country's ability to feed itself.

"Well-managed rubber production is an asset," said Eugene Kremien, the president of the Association of Professionals of Natural Rubber (APROMAC), whose detractors argue that plantations exhaust the soil and endanger food security and forests.

The association is seeking to show that the rubber industry can meet mounting demands for sustainability, both for the environment and its producers. The stakes are high in a country that produces 60 percent of Africa's rubber and holds seventh place worldwide. Annual Ivorian production is 624,000 tons and some forecasts hold that it may reach one million. Some 160,000 producers earn their living from rubber plantations and employ tens of thousands of workers who "tap" the hevea trees by cutting grooves into the bark to make the latex - natural rubber - bleed out into cups.

'Lured by quick gains'

At the end of 2010, when world rubber prices were high, conditions were ripe for a boom. The Ivorian government invested 40 million euros (\$44.3 million) to promote production, leading to the creation of 110,000 hectares (about 270,000 acres) of new plantations.

The state provided training in the different skills of the rubber business and helped open tracks in rural areas to transport produce. Since rubber trees are productive 10 months of the year, compared with one or two annual harvests for other crops, many peasant farmers turned away from their traditional cultures in a rush for "white gold".

"The planters let themselves be lured by quick gains, abandoning the growing of food crops," said Jean-Baptiste Koffi, president of the Federal Union of Ivory Coast Consumers, active since 2012.



A trainee learns how to bleed a hevea tree to harvest latex rubber. — AFP photos

"The production of bananas, cassava, yams, maize and rice, which are part of the diet of Ivorian people, has dropped in favor of speculative crops, particularly cocoa and rubber," Koffi said.

But global market prices for rubber and cocoa have slumped during the past five years. While some analysts expect cocoa prices to rise again, the forecasts for rubber are dim and discourage economic reliance on the industry.

'We are reforesting'

Numerous NGOs accuse the rubber industry of endangering food security in Ivory Coast and forcing a West African giant to import products such as rice even though it is famed for its rich soil. "The agronomic constraints of hevea cultivation (trees must be planted far apart) have led planters to marginalize food production," said Arthur Alloco of the forestry campaign group Soudele Konan Foundation.

APRAC is urging rubber planters to devote between



SIKENSI, Ivory Coast: In this photograph taken on Sept 3, 2019, trainees listen to an instructor as they learn to harvest latex rubber in a plantation some 50 km northwest of Abidjan.

five and 10 percent of their land to market garden produce and breed the likes of chickens and rabbits as a valuable source of support income. Kremien dismissed perceptions that rubber growing depletes the soil and said his industry - "unlike cocoa growing" - was not to blame for the country's deforestation. Ivory Coast has lost almost all of

its wild forests in half a century. Indeed, according to Kremien, the canopy provided by rubber trees helps to retain precious moisture from rainfall, which would otherwise evaporate in open fields. "By growing hevea we are reforesting. Where others destroy, we are rebuilding," he contended. — AFP

Morales claims US orchestrated 'coup' to tap Bolivia's lithium

Buenos Aires: Former Bolivia president Evo Morales told AFP on Tuesday that he was forced from office by a United States-backed coup d'etat aimed at gaining access to the South American country's vast lithium resources.

Demand for lithium is expected to grow globally as it is one of the key components in batteries used in high-tech equipment such as laptops and electric cars.

Morales resigned as president on November 10 after almost three weeks of protests against his controversial re-election to an unconstitutional fourth term in a poll widely denounced as rigged.

His resignation came after then-chief of the armed forces General Williams Kaliman publicly stated the former trade union leader should step down. But since then, Morales-Bolivia's first indigenous president - has claimed to have been the victim of a coup d'etat.

"It was a national and international coup d'etat," Morales told AFP in an exclusive interview in Buenos Aires, where he has been living in exile after claiming asylum. "Industrialized countries don't want competition." Morales said Washington had not "forgiven" his country for choosing to seek lithium extraction partnerships with Russia and China rather than the US.

"That's why I'm absolutely convinced it's a coup against lithium," he said. "We as a state had begun industrializing lithium... As a small country of 10 million inhabitants, we were soon going to set the price of lithium." They know we have the greatest lithium reserves in the world of 16,000 square kilometers (over 6,100 square miles).

Bolivia does have the largest confirmed lithium resources in the world, but they are widely thought to be

of poor quality, and the country lacks the infrastructure to exploit them profitably.

Coup 'prepared in advance'

As for his unconstitutional candidacy in the last election-Bolivia's presidents are limited to two successive terms but Morales was going for a fourth - the socialist leader was unapologetic.

"We won in the first round," he said, despite the audit by the Organization of American States (OAS) that found clear evidence of vote rigging. "So our participation was in no way a failure. But the coup d'etat was prepared in advance." Morales has been barred by right-wing interim President Jeanine Anez from standing in re-scheduled elections due to take place early next year, but for which no date has yet been set.

Having originally accepted asylum in Mexico when he first left Bolivia claiming his life was in danger, Morales has based himself in neighboring Argentina since December 10. His Movement for Socialism (MAS) party has even named him campaign chief for the upcoming poll.

Morales said a new MAS candidate will be picked during a party assembly on January 15, which could be held in either Bolivia or Argentina. Bolivia's government has issued an arrest warrant for Morales should he try to return to his homeland. Whoever the candidate is, Morales says he wants the next election to be monitored by foreign organizations. "There needs to be an international mission, international organizations like the Carter Center, a committee of Nobel Peace Prize winners, Pope Francis, the United Nations, or some well-known global" organization, said Morales. "Despite so much defamation and persecution and still without a candidate, we're still first in right-wing polls, which is surprising. "If MAS wins the election, the results have to be respected. We'll respect them." Morales was likely referring to a recent poll in Pagina Siete newspaper - a publication against which he ordered a criminal investigation in 2012, having accused it of being an instrument of Chile's far right.

In that poll, Andronico Rodriguez, the 30-year-old coca growers union leader widely expected to be the MAS presidential candidate, came top with 23 percent



Buenos Aires: Bolivia's ex-President Evo Morales speaks during an interview with AFP in Buenos Aires, on Tuesday. — AFP

ahead of former president Carlos Mesa at 21. Mesa was the candidate beaten into second place by Morales in October's election.

'Responsible for massacres'

One group Morales didn't include in his observation wish list was the OAS, whose general secretary Luis Almagro accused the socialist leader of being the orchestrator of a coup by standing in the last election despite being constitutionally barred from doing so. Dozens of people were killed in clashes after the OAS audit's findings were published.

"Luis Almagro deserves to be put on trial for being responsible for so many massacres and deaths in Bolivia," said Morales. Almagro has said Morales pleaded with him not to publish the audit's results as he feared it would lead to civil unrest. — AFP

Questions over Hyundai construction of Chilean bridge

SANTIAGO: Chile's finance minister has sought to downplay a row between the government and the construction and engineering arm of South Korean giant Hyundai over a \$740 million suspension bridge, saying disputes in such mega projects were "quite common."

Hyundai Engineering and Construction (HDEC) said on Monday it had suspended construction of the bridge, which will connect the Chilean island of Chiloe to the mainland. It accused the government of bad faith for seeking to increase the scope of the project without additional remuneration.

On Tuesday, however, HDEC said in a statement to Reuters that the bridge construction was still under way. Chile's minister of public works, Alfred Moreno, also said on Tuesday that there was no pause in construction of the bridge. Finance Minister Ignacio Briones said he was confident the disagreement could be ironed out in talks or in the courts.

"As far as I understand, the government has honored exactly what the contract defines, but the Korean company says the opposite has occurred. ... When there are these discrepancies... it is for the courts - if it gets to that point - to decide," he told Chilean daily El Mercurio on Tuesday.

HDEC leads the Consorcio Puente Chacao (CPC) that won the tender for the bridge's construction in December 2013. The company said on Monday that the government's Department of Public Works (MOP) and its legal advisers said at a meeting in December that it would not increase the value of the project.

"The breach of the commitments made by the MOP, the bad faith with which the conversations have been carried out, the unjust damage that results from this and the complete legal uncertainty that prevails as a consequence, has led CPC to conclude that it is impossible, in these conditions, to continue with the project," HDEC said on Monday.

It said it regretted the effect on the workers and the inhabitants of Chiloe, as well as the failure of what it called the most important connectivity project in Chilean history. The 2.5-km-long (1.5 miles) link to Chiloe, an island roughly the size of Corsica, would be Latin America's longest suspension bridge.

The bridge was first proposed in 1972, but the project has been canceled and postponed several times. The MOP said in its statement on Monday that HDEC had sought to increase the cost of the project by 50 percent, or \$300 million, a request rejected both by the current government of President Sebastian Pinera and the former government of Michelle Bachelet. Moreno, the minister of public works said Chile would not accept any delay in construction of the bridge.

"The contract included design, engineering and construction," he said in a statement to Chilean media in Santiago on Tuesday. "In other words, all the responsibility and risk lies with the contractor."

A spokesman for HDEC said, "We have been negotiating the cost of the project with our partners in Chile," a spokesman said. — Reuters

'Green' Christmas pageant provokes oil worker outrage

OTTAWA: In a Canadian oil industry town, schoolchildren singing about Santa's sleigh going electric and images of Rudolph the reindeer with a fluorescent bulb for a nose has provoked a backlash.

Parents who work in Canada's struggling oil sector in Oxbow, Saskatchewan province, called the "Santa Goes Green" concert "a kick in the groin." "It wasn't even a Christmas concert at Christmas time," said Mike Gunderman, whose daughter was in the play at the Oxbow Prairie Horizons school.

"It was blatantly just an anti-oil protest," he wrote on Facebook. One of the many people commenting on the post said "the whole system" is "brainwashing them to be little Gretas" - a reference to Swedish teen environmentalist Greta Thunberg.

Another person professed to be "appalled" by the play, noting that the oil industry donated money to enlarge the school. One song, "Turn Off the Pump," calls for using electricity or ethanol to power Santa's sleigh, saying "it's going to be a green holiday."

The Christmas musical has been performed in schools across North America. After loud complaints, school administrators apologized to Oxbow parents for denigrating a

major employer in a community dotted with tens of thousands of oil and gas wells. Canada's oil sector is the fourth largest in the world, but has struggled under low prices and a lack of pipelines to new markets.

Lynn Little, director of the local school division, apologized because "some" of the pageant content "was found to be disrespectful to some members of our school community."

Little said a statement that the Christmas pageant was not meant to be political or to promote "an anti-oil and gas industry message." Teachers selected the songs because they were "peppy" and believed that students would enjoy singing them, she said.

University of Regina professor Emily Eaton, speaking to public broadcaster CBC, said the energy industry's "enormous power and influence" was skewing Canadians' views on climate change, making it harder to get needed support for strong climate actions. She cited 2016 polling data by the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication that only found 56 percent of people in southeastern Saskatchewan, where Oxbow is located, believed the Earth was warming. That compared to 79 percent nationwide. — AFP



St Petersburg airport to host Ryanair, low-costers

MOSCOW: Low-cost airline Ryanair and other budget carriers are expected to start flying from Russia's St Petersburg airport in 2020, the Russian Transport Ministry said. The move is part of Russia's plan to boost tourist flows to St Petersburg and will mean more competition for Russian air carriers, including national flag carrier Aeroflot.

The ministry said on Tuesday that Ryanair, EasyJet, WizzAir, Volotea, Air Baltic and Fly One had expressed interest in flights from St Petersburg's Pulkovo airport, Russia's fourth largest after Moscow's three major hubs. It said the companies had applied for flights from Pulkovo, coded LED by the International Air Transport Association, to 22 countries, including Britain, Germany and France.

Russia will introduce a so-called "Open Skies" regime for the companies for five years, the ministry said, allowing airlines to fly to St Petersburg without requiring the traditional bilateral inter-governmental agreements. The move follows the introduction of a special electronic visa system for tourists visiting St Petersburg which nationals from 53 countries can take advantage of. — Reuters

Business

Japan ruling party lawmaker held on suspicion of casino bribery

Akimoto oversaw government policy on casinos

TOKYO: Japanese authorities arrested ruling party lawmaker Tsukasa Akimoto yesterday on suspicion of accepting bribes from a company interested in setting up a casino in Japan, Tokyo prosecutors said.

Hours later prosecutors searched the office of a second lawmaker from the ruling Liberal Democratic Party as part of the same investigation, Kyodo news and other Japanese media said, in what appeared to be a widening probe. The high-profile arrest of a member of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's LDP could harden public opposition to casinos, which have been consistently unpopular despite the government's push to have them running by the early 2020s.

A senior vice minister in the Cabinet Office until October last year, Akimoto oversaw government policy on casinos. He is suspected of receiving 3 million yen (\$27,500) in cash and a family holiday worth the equivalent of \$6,500 from three suspects despite knowing that their company wanted help with a casino bid, prosecutors said.

The three suspects were also arrested on suspicion of bribery, prosecutors said. No one was available for comment at Akimoto's office, which was raided by prosecutors last week. The lawmaker has repeatedly denied doing anything illegal. "I have absolutely not taken part in any wrongdoing," Akimoto wrote on his official Twitter account earlier on Wednesday, after media reported he was likely to be questioned. "I will continue to emphasize this point."

Hours later, prosecutors searched the office of lawmaker Takaki Shirasuka in Chiba, east of the capital, in connection with the probe into Akimoto, Kyodo and public broadcaster NHK said. Prosecutors did not respond to a request for com-

ment. Officials at Shirasuka's offices in Tokyo and Chiba could not immediately be reached.

Negative image

Prosecutors did not name the company whose three employees allegedly tried to influence Akimoto, but public broadcaster NHK and other local media identified it as Shenzhen, China-based 500.Com Ltd, an online sports lottery service provider. Investor relations representatives for 500.Com did not respond to two requests for comment. The phone number and email for its media relations representative listed on its website did not work. No one was immediately available for comment at the company's main number or customer service departments.

Representatives of four opposition parties said they would submit a bill to abolish Japan's casino law in the next session of parliament, public broadcaster NHK said. Lawmakers only finished legalizing casinos last year after a series of controversial bills and years of debate. The government sees casinos anchoring ambitious "integrated resorts" that include shopping outlets and hotels and are aimed at bolstering tourism, tax revenue and local economies.

Japan, which has a shrinking population and economy, is desperate to maintain growth in tourism, particularly after the Tokyo Olympics end next year.

Some analysts have said the casino market could be worth around \$20 billion a year or more, thanks to an affluent population and the proximity to Asia's wealthy gamblers. But critics have cited risks of increased gambling addiction and more organized crime. Akimoto's arrest could add to the negative images the Japanese public holds of casinos, said Hidenori Suezawa, an analyst at SMBC Nikko Securities.

"It may be a blow to some local governments' ongo-



TOKYO: Tsukasa Akimoto (right) was arrested on suspicion of accepting bribes from a company interested in setting up a casino in Japan.

ing campaign to attract casinos," he said.

Gambling has traditionally had a seedy image in Japan, with none of the glamour associated with spots like Las Vegas. "This shakes the foundation of the government's integrated-resort policy," Kazuhiro Haraguchi, parliamentary affairs chief for the opposition

Democratic Party For the People, told Kyodo.

"If a deputy minister in the Cabinet Office with authority (over the casino issue) used his position to get money, it would be outrageous." An opinion poll in October by Jiji news found 57.9 percent opposition to integrated resorts versus 26.6 percent support. —Reuters

ABK first bank in Kuwait to launch NFC technology for queuing system

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) announced that it is the first bank in Kuwait to implement NFC (Near Field Communication) technology for the queuing system.

The launch of NFC, which is the latest in a series of technology-led achievements, is in line with ABK's commitment to enhance the customer's experience through continuous investment in technology and innovation. Under its 'Simpler Banking' strategy, ABK aims to improve the customer's digital experience, offering efficiency, simplicity, and convenience. Upon entering a branch, customers will only need to scan (not insert) their CID next to a receiver which is available upon entering the branch. All customer CID information will be captured on the ABK staff's system, which allows the staff member to identify & recognize the client immediately. Furthermore, no manual entry of information would be needed, speeding the whole process up.

NFC will not only be a security benefit, but will decrease waiting times considerably. This will also allow immediate client updates, taking us to a new level of service excellence.

The NFC technology for the queuing system is currently available in ABK's Head Office branch, and will be available in all ABK branches in the very near future.

Boeing document dump shows 'disturbing' picture on 737 MAX

NEW YORK: Boeing provided a fresh batch of incriminating documents on the 737 MAX to regulators and congressional investigators, only hours after announcing a leadership shakeup, officials confirmed Tuesday. The document dump came just before Christmas, when many officials already are on holiday, and "appear to point to a very disturbing picture" about Boeing's response to safety issues regarding the 737 MAX, a congressional aide told AFP in an email Tuesday. The aide said Boeing sent the documents "late in the evening" Monday to congressional staff investigating the issues with the aircraft, which has been grounded since March following two crashes that killed 346 people. The aerospace giant has faced scrutiny over its decision to keep flying the plane after the first crash and to brush off safety concerns of some employees, and over whether it sacrificed safety in the race to develop a plane to compete with an Airbus jet.

US regulators also have been criticized for a too-cozy relationship with the company it is charged with overseeing. The Federal Aviation Administration confirmed it received what appear to be the same documents Monday afternoon, a few hours after Boeing ousted Dennis Muilenburg as chief executive amid his much-criticized handling of MAX crisis.

Boeing said it "proactively" contacted the FAA and Congress "as part of our commitment to transparency," a company spokesman said in

email. "As with prior documents referenced by the committee, the tone and content of some of these communications does not reflect the company we are and need to be."

The spokesman also highlighted changes Boeing has made "in the past nine months to enhance our safety processes, organization and culture." That references the period after the Ethiopian Airlines crash in March. The first 737 MAX crash of a Lion Air flight in Indonesia happened five months earlier.

The latest revelations make it clear that despite shaking up its leadership, Boeing will continue to face questions well into 2020 over the actions that led to the crashes as it tries to win approval to return the MAX to service and to restore its damaged reputation.

Rebuked earlier on transparency

The document dump—which surfaced on a normally tranquil Christmas Eve—came hours after Boeing announced it was replacing Muilenburg with Chairman David Calhoun, saying the company needed to "restore confidence" and "repair relationships with regulators, customers and all other stakeholders."

FAA Chief Steve Dickson ripped Boeing in October after the company only provided the agency with revealing documents months after unearthing the records. In one text message exchange that surfaced in those documents, a Boeing pilot described a problem on a simulator with a flight handling system that has been implicated in both crashes. The aide with the House Transportation Committee declined to release the latest papers on Tuesday and said committee staff were still reviewing the documents. "The records appear to point to a very disturbing picture of both concerns expressed by Boeing employees about the company's commitment to safety and efforts by some employees to ensure Boeing's production plans were not diverted by regulators or others," the aide said in an email.

5/PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE

Sometimes it's better to be passive. The punter who opted to ride the past decade's equity boom via an exchange-traded fund (ETF) tracking the S&P500 would have earned 200 percent but at a fraction of the fee a mutual fund manager would have charged. Hence spectacular ETF growth-assets have swelled to almost \$7 trillion, from below \$2 trillion in 2010, consultancy ETFIGI says. Low investment fees should help extend the boom: total ETF assets could hit \$50 trillion in 2030, BofA predicts.

6/INVESTMENT CLIMATE

With the hottest four years on record occurring in the past four years (according to the World Meteorological Organization), climate is shaping investor thinking in a way it did not a decade ago. Crop failures, floods and wildfires can all inflict portfolio losses. More funds are reducing exposure to polluting industries, embracing renewables and water conservation technologies or investing in the likes of fake-meat firm Beyond Meat, whose 2019 IPO was greeted with rapture on Wall Street. Over \$30 trillion is held in sustainable or green investments, the Global Sustainable Investment Alliance estimates, more than doubling from 2011. Green bonds debuted in 2007 to fund projects with environment benefits. This year, issuance totaled a record \$200 billion-plus.

7/SHALE OIL

Having learned to wring oil from shale with fracking, the United States has vaulted to the top of the oil producer rankings, with 12.5 million barrels per day of output, double 2010 levels. Shale oil production exceeds 9 million bpd, from below one million bpd in 2010, making the United States an oil exporter for the first time in 40 years.

The shale boom is partly why conversations around energy have switched from peak supply to peak demand. Surging output comes alongside environmental concerns, meaning an oil glut is likelier than shortages.

8/ELECTRIC DREAMS

Having relied for over a century on the internal combustion engine, the global auto industry is being upended by battery-



WASHINGTON, DC: In this file photo taken on October 30, 2019 former Boeing CEO Dennis Muilenburg makes a statement to the media before testifying at a hearing in front of a congressional lawmakers on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC.—AFP

The panel is led by Democratic Representative Peter DeFazio, who grilled Boeing executives at an October hearing at which some lawmakers called for Muilenburg to resign. DeFazio on Monday called Muilenburg's ouster "long overdue," and said the company "made a number of devastating decisions that suggest profit took priority over safety."

Mixed response on CEO

The CEO shakeup at the company drew muted response Tuesday from Wall Street analysts, a bombshell that came only days after the company took the monumental step of halting production on the 737 MAX and a day after it suffered a setback on a high-profile NASA mission. Bank of America Merrill Lynch said it had "mixed feelings" in light of Calhoun's lengthy tenure on the Boeing board. "We wonder if

appointing from within, especially an insider that has been with the company for 10 years, signals more of the same from Boeing vs an outside appointee who may have offered more of a change of pace and culture," the bank said in a commentary.

JPMorgan Chase said Muilenburg had struggled as a public voice for Boeing in response to the tragedies and in communication with regulators and customers.

"We expect David Calhoun to do better on both scores. This is something," JPMorgan said in an analysis. "But Boeing's failures on the MAX are more than poor communication so it will be important for Mr. Calhoun to show early how he intends to act differently. This is particularly important since he has been a director since 2009 and therefore part of this situation from the start, even if in an oversight role." —AFP

9/FLASH BOYS, FLASH CRASHES

Tech's transformative power has not bypassed currency trading floors. Ten years ago, dealers did the buying and selling for banks and clients. Today, electronic trading comprises 90 percent of some products, doubling in this period. Another shift is towards "algorithms"—computer programmes that follow pre-set instructions, or algorithms, to trade, often at speeds impossible for humans.

From being largely nonexistent a decade ago, algo trading now comprises a fifth of FX spot volumes on Refinitiv FXall, a platform for the buy-side. On another venue EBS, over 80 percent of the order book is algo-driven, the Bank for International Settlements estimates. One side effect is that 'flash crashes'—wild exchange rate swings—have become frequent, ostensibly due to algos that are programmed to turn off if markets become volatile. The winners? Those who can afford the most sophisticated algos. Almost half of global currency trading is now with the top five banks, with smaller institutions—and of course, traders—having to exit.

10/GOING TO POT

Marijuana took a trip this decade from street corners to stock markets. The first pure-play US "potstock"—Tilray—debuted on Nasdaq in 2018, leaping 36 percent on the first day. And 18 months since Canada legalised recreational cannabis, hundreds of potstocks are trading. Pot also spawned one of the decade's asset bubbles. Dubbed the green rush, shares in firms such as Aurora Cannabis and Canopy Growth rose several-fold before peaking in October 2018. At their high, the 10 biggest components of a pot-stock benchmark, the Alternative Harvest ETF, were worth \$50 billion. —Reuters

Disruptive decade: Ten things the teen years brought world markets

LONDON: The 21st century's teen years, bookended by a financial crisis at the start and the fintech revolution at the end, were a decade of disruption. From negative borrowing costs to bitcoin, here are ten trends that have upended traditional economic and investment models in the past decade:

1/FAANG-TASTIC FIVE

If they were a country, they would be the fifth largest in terms of economic output, outgunning Britain and snapping at Germany's heels. With a \$3.9 trillion market value (versus around \$100 billion in January 2010), tech giants Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google-owner Alphabet—collectively known as the FAANGs—are not only at the vanguard of history's longest share bullrun but have transformed how humans work, shop, consume news and relax. FAANGs comprise 7 percent of the MSCI global equity index today, up from around 1.6 percent in early 2010. The savvy investor who sank \$25,000 in Netflix in 2009 would now be sitting on \$1 million.

And in the slip stream of the five pioneers, other tech titans are rising, from China's BAT grouping of Baidu, Alibaba and Tencent to sector "disrupters" Uber, Airbnb and Deliveroo. For better or worse, the world—and markets—have changed forever.

2/PAYING TO BORROW

A defining feature of the years following the 2008-2009 meltdown was the slide of interest rates and government borrowing costs below 0 percent, possibly for the first time in history. US and German 10-year borrowing costs collapsed by 200 to 400 basis points this decade: the latter to as low as minus 0.7 percent.

Roughly \$12 trillion in debt carries negative yields, almost a quarter of all bonds outstanding. The drivers—central banks' asset buying, sub-zero interest rates, yield curve manipulation and the tech revolution's deflationary effects—were in themselves groundbreaking, at least in terms of scale. The Bank of Japan holds assets collectively worth more than Japan's economy. The European Central Bank's balance sheet is a quarter the euro zone's annual output but double decade-ago levels.

3/A CENTURY IN BONDS

With record-low rates and yield-starved investors, bonds with tenors longer than the average human lifespan have caught on. A handful of 100-year bonds were around in 2010, but Mexico's \$1 billion issue maturing 2110 started an issuance surge that saw US and British universities, Ireland, Belgium and Austria, US municipalities and corporations such as Coca Cola and Petrobras sell century bonds. Even junk-rated serial defaulter Argentina drew huge bids for its 2117-maturity bond. Just over 1,400 century bonds, worth almost \$170 billion are now outstanding, according to Refinitiv. But ... caveat emptor. Buyers of the Argentine century bond have watched it lose half its value. Austria's issue, also sold in 2017, is up more than 60 percent

4/COINING IT

In 2010, Bitcoin was an idea causing ripples in niche online forums. Ten years later, cryptocurrencies are intertwined with finance, business and politics. Crypto markets, non-existent in 2010, are now worth over \$200 billion, having hit a \$815 billion peak at the apex of the bitcoin bubble. Having changed hands for just 3 cents in its first public trade, bitcoin now trades over \$7,500. That's off its peak near \$20,000, though - a reminder of its volatility. Usage has also spread. Coin Metrics estimates that from 130 active bitcoin addresses a decade back, there are now nearly 750,000. Crypto took many guises through the 2010s, from rebel technology to a tool for criminals, speculative token to the great hope for frictionless payments. While it never really shook off doubts over security, virtual money and blockchain tech have evolved at a dizzying pace, typified recently by Facebook's push to launch its Libra token and steps by central banks to create their own digital currencies.

What's On



ACK sports teams compete in WIUC 2019

The Student Life department at the Australian College of Kuwait (ACK) accompanied 35 students from various sports teams in a trip to Pula, Croatia to compete in the 2019 World Interuniversity's Championships (WIUC).

WIUC is an annual international multi-sport tournament, this year the 5th competition was held in Croatia with over 100 universities competing from more than 25 countries. The ACK students from various majors and degrees attending the championship were members of 4 sports teams: the men's futsal club, the women's volleyball club,

and the men's and women's basketball club. During the three-day competition, ACK teams competed against teams from various countries including Italy, Slovakia, France and Spain. The ACK Futsal team qualified for the semifinals after a competitive game with a Serbian university.

Commenting on his experience, Abdullah Al Yaqout, ACK Futsal Team Captain and Business student, said "I am very proud of my team for qualifying against strong and skilled foreign universities. Being part of this journey helped build us individually and as a team."

"Besides competing, the students participating in the trip were also given the chance to explore Croatia to widen their horizons. Different activities, both within Kuwait and internationally, are important to help students learn life lessons and refine their skillsets," said Basel Dana, ACK Student Life Manager.

"Attending international sports tournaments build confident characters, leadership and teamwork skills for students. It's wonderful that our students earned this opportunity through their commitment and hard work," added Dana.

KAC honors employees



Kuwait Airways Corporation (KAC) recently organized a farewell ceremony for a number of its veteran employees and rewarded them for the efforts they had exerted in serving the company for 40 years. The outgoing employees were honored by KAC's assistant CEO for operations, captain, Abdul Halim Zaidan and the engineering department manager, Faisal Al-Azmi.

In this regard, Zaidan stressed that the gesture comes within KAC's keenness on tak-

ing care of its loyal staff members adding that all engineering department staff members gathered in the ceremony to express gratitude and appreciation to each employee of those who had contributed to building this leading carrier - KAC.

"During KAC's maiden years, non-Kuwaitis formed a majority of the staff and we, then, needed to recruit skilled staff from outside Kuwait. It is those engineers who helped train and qualify at least 90 per cent

of the current engineers", Zaidan added noting that both the board chairman and the executive management are always keen on honoring staff members who had considered KAC as their second home and worked as a team for long years.

On his part, the head of the engineers department, Faisal Al-Azmi said that it is an honor to bid four of the department's most qualified and devoted engineers.



Al-Yasra, golden sponsor in Horeca 2020

Following the success in its previous participations in Horeca exhibitions, Al-Yasra Food Co. announced its intention to participate in Horeca Kuwait 2020 exhibition, due to be organized by Leaders Group in collaboration with Hospitality Services Co. at Mishref International Fair Grounds in the period of January 20-22, 2020.

Commenting on Al-Yasra's participation, Leaders Group expressed its pride that a major and pioneer company in marketing and distributing refrigerated and frozen food stuff such as Al-Yasra would offer a golden sponsorship to Horeca's 9th exhibition; a one of its kind in terms of displaying various hospitality services and products as well as food industry, hotel and restaurants equipments by medium and large specialized companies.

On his part, Al-Yasra's items and development manager, Rami Abdul Salam said that Al-Yasra is keen on achieving constant progress for its products and services, namely in Kuwait as the third largest food and beverage market in the GCC region with the highest annual growth rate of 12 per cent in the business. He added that Al-Yasra is known as one of the largest importers for the hotels and food industry needs in Kuwait and the region and that, since its establishment thirty years earlier, it has been known for its commitment towards its clients.

Further, Abdul Salam noted that one of Horeca Kuwait's unrivalled privileges is that it annually gathers various hospitality manufacturers in Kuwait under one roof where the exhibition visitors could find food companies, hotel firms

and restaurant companies interested in the services Al-Yasra provides. "We can say that these categories care much about making this unique event successful because it plays an important role in developing the sector as a whole, helps exchange know-how, technologies and experiences as well as enhances Kuwait's reputation in business environment competitiveness, food safety, cooking arts and global tastes", he explained.

"Thanks to our accumulated experience over 30 years in the business and our vision that prioritizes customers' satisfaction, health and taste and thanks to a multi-cultural and skill staff of over 2000 employees, Al-Yasra has created its own outstanding status in the food business not only in Kuwait, but also in most regional countries and that it thus managed to win customers' trust dealing with exclusive regional and international brands and providing food solutions in the world of catering and retail markets", Abdul Salam elaborated adding that Al-Yasra owns brands such as the recently launched La Lorraine, which provides exceptional solutions for high quality baking within minutes, Hot To Home from Lamb Western company, which is the highest quality and crispest fries and DAAWAT rice.

Notably, Al-Yasra Foods Kuwait is working on developing fresh meat distribution in Kuwait through its new Kuwait factory which expected to start providing the local market with various solutions of imported and local fresh and frozen meats soon. The factory will also prepare meat cuts according to specifications required by each restaurant, hotel or catering company.



Rami Abdul Salam



Christmastide program 2019-2020 Holy Family Cathedral

December 31st 2019 Tuesday (Morning) - Normal Masses
06.30 a.m. Holy Mass in English (Cathedral)
07.00 a.m. Holy Mass in English (Cathedral)

December 31st 2019 Tuesday New Year's Eve - Masses
05.30 p.m. Malayalam (Latin) Holy Mass
06.00 p.m. French Holy Mass
06.30 p.m. Malankara Holy Mass
07.00 p.m. Tagalog Holy Mass
08.00 p.m. Korean Holy Mass
08.30 p.m. Solemn Pontifical Holy Mass
10.30 p.m. Konkani Holy Mass
10.30 p.m. New Catechumenal Holy Mass
10.30 p.m. Coptic Arabic Holy Mass
11.45 p.m. Syro-Malabar Holy Mass
10.00 p.m. Maronite Holy Mass

January 1st 2020 Wednesday New Year's Day Holy Masses
07.00 a.m. English Holy Mass
08.30 a.m. English Holy Mass
10.30 a.m. English Holy Mass
12.00 Noon Maronite Holy Mass
02.00 p.m. Tagalog Holy Mass
03.15 p.m. Konkani Holy Mass
04.00 p.m. Tamil Holy Mass
04.30 p.m. Konkani Holy Mass
04.30 p.m. Bengali Holy Mass
05.30 p.m. English Holy Mass
05.45 p.m. Sinhala Holy Mass
06.30 p.m. English Holy Mass
07.45 p.m. Malayalam (Latin) Holy Mass
06.00 p.m. Spanish Holy Mass
Salmiya Basement
08.00 p.m. Arabic Latin Holy Mass
Salmiya Basement.



Health & Science

Main reasons COP25 climate talks failed

PARIS: The climate summit in Madrid earlier this month did not collapse — but by almost any measure it certainly failed. Five years after the fragile UN process yielded the world's first universal climate treaty, COP25 was billed as a mopping-up session to finish guidelines for carbon markets, thus completing the Paris Agreement rulebook.

Governments faced with a crescendo of deadly weather, dire alarms from science and weekly strikes by millions of young people were also expected to signal an enhanced willingness to tackle the climate crisis threatening to unravel civilization as we know it.

The result? A deadlock and a dodge. The 12-day talks extended two days into overtime but still punted the carbon market conundrum to next year's COP26 in Glasgow. A non-binding pledge, meanwhile, to revisit deeply inadequate national plans for slashing greenhouse gas emissions was apparently too big an ask. The European Union was the only major emitter to step up with an ambitious mid-century target ("net zero"), and even then it was over the objection of Poland and without a crucial midway marker.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres labelled COP25 "disappointing." Others were more blunt. "The can-do spirit that birthed the Paris Agreement feels like a distant memory," said Helen Mountford of Washington-based think tank World Resources Institute (WRI). "The world is screaming out for climate action but this summit has responded with a whisper," noted Chema Vera, executive director of Oxfam International. So what went wrong?

Amateur hour

To an unsettling degree, the outcome of a UN climate summit — where 196 nations must sign off on every decision — depends on the savvy and skill of the host country, which acts as a facilitator. The stars were not aligned for the chaotic Copenhagen summit of 2009 and the Danish prime minister's less-than-deft maneuvering did not help.

By contrast, the 2015 climate treaty was in no small measure made possible by France's diplomatic tour-de-force.

This year, Chile's environment minister Carolina Schmidt wielded the hammer after the conference was moved at the last minute to Madrid due to massive protests on the streets of Santiago. From Day One, when Schmidt's mishandling of a request from the African negotiating bloc mushroomed into a diplomatic incident, veteran observers worried that she was not up to the job.

For Greenpeace International executive director Jennifer Morgan, "an irresponsibly weak Chilean leadership" enabled Brazil and Saudi Arabia to push agendas destined to derail the talks. "Chile played a bad hand poorly," noted another insider. A marginal factor, perhaps, but not a negligible one.

Fox in the henhouse

Among the nearly 30,000 diplomats, experts, activists and journalists accredited to attend the summit were hundreds of high-octane fossil fuel lobbyists. They are collectively the elephant in the room: everyone knows what causes climate change but it is considered impolitic within the UN climate bubble to point fingers. Even the Paris Agreement turns a blind eye: nowhere in its articles does one find the words oil, natural gas, coal, fossil fuels or even CO2. "We need to engage with them," UN Climate executive secretary Patricia Espinosa told AFP when asked whether it was time to exclude such lobbyists from the room. "There is no way we will achieve this transformation without the energy industry, including oil and gas."

But the incongruity of their participation in a life-and-death struggle to wean the world from their products has become harder to ignore. "Is there no space free from greenwashing," asked Mohamed Adow, director of climate think tank Power Shift Africa. "The UN climate negotiations should be the one place that is free from such fossil fuel interference."

The Trump effect

On November 4, 2020 — the day after US voters will renew Donald Trump's mandate or turn him out of office — the United States is set to formally withdraw from the Paris Agreement. It will be the second time that a Republican White House has plunged a dagger in the heart of a climate treaty nurtured by the Democratic administration that preceded it — the Kyoto Protocol was the previous one.

From the moment Trump was elected — on Day Two of COP22 in Marrakesh — advocates of climate action have played down the negative impact of the world's largest economy and second biggest carbon polluter pulling out of the Paris deal. But the corrosive "Trump effect" was palpable in Madrid, as was the anger at Washington for twisting arms even as it walked out the door.

"There are one or two parties that seem hell-bent on ensuring any calls for ambition, action and environmental integrity are rolled back," said Simon Stiell, Grenada's environment minister. Poor and small-island nations exposed to climate-addled weather — drought, heatwaves, super-storms, rising seas — were especially incensed at behind-the-scenes US efforts to block a separate stream of money for "loss and damage."

Rich nations have promised developing ones \$100 billion (90 billion euros) annually starting next year to help them adapt to future climate impacts, but there is no provision in the 1992 bedrock climate treaty for damages already incurred. No one, it seems, imagined that climate talks would drag on for 30 years. The US withdrawal has also crippled the coalition that delivered the landmark Paris treaty, said Li Shuo, a senior policy analyst for Greenpeace East Asia. "The US-China-EU climate tricycle has had a wheel pulled off by Trump," he told AFP. "Going into 2020, it is critical for the remaining two wheels to roll in sync."

China at the wheel

When it comes to climate change, Beijing holds the

fate of the planet in its hands. China accounts for 29 percent of global CO2 emissions, more than the next three countries — the US, Russia, India — combined, according to the Global Carbon Project. Its carbon footprint has tripled in 20 years from 3.2 to 10 billion tons in 2018. The core commitment of China's voluntary carbon cutting plan, annexed to the Paris treaty, is to stabilize its CO2 output by 2030.

Experts agree that China could hit that mark earlier and more countries are asking Beijing — ever so gingerly — to promise it will. Granada's minister Stiell called out half-a-dozen rich and emerging economies — including China and India — for not revising their voluntary plans in line with a world in which warming does not exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius. Failure to do so, he said, "shows a lack of ambition that also undermines ours."

"China's emissions, like the rest of the world's, need to peak imminently, and then decline rapidly," for the world to stay under 1.5C or even 2C, according to the Climate Action Tracker, a consortium that analyses climate commitments. But Beijing has been coy about its intentions. Going into Madrid, it hinted at a revised target ahead of COP26.

But during the Madrid meeting, China dug in its heels and — backed by India — invoked the principle that rich countries must take the lead in addressing climate change, calling out their failure to deliver on promises made.

"Ambition of Parties is measured first and foremost by the implementation of its commitments," said a joint statement from China, India, Brazil and South Africa. The statement said commitments made by developed countries in the pre-2020 period — especially for money and technology — must be honored. China's lack of enthusiasm is also rooted in changes on the domestic front. "When an economy slows, it is more difficult to be as single-minded about leadership on climate change," said WRI's Andrew Steer referring to China's position. — AFP

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- ◆ Member of the Canadian Society of Otolaryngology Head & Neck Surgery
- ◆ Member of the Eurpean Laryngological Society

Specialized in:

- ◆ Management of benign and malignant vocal cord lesions.
- ◆ Vocal cord augmentation.
- ◆ Treatment of spasmodic dysphonia.
- ◆ Adenotonsillectomy using latest techniques.
- ◆ Thyroid surgery.
- ◆ Surgery for the deviated nasal septum.
- ◆ Endoscopic sinus surgery.
- ◆ Treatment of allergic rhinitis.
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- ◆ Day case surgeries
- ◆ Minor surgeries (lipoma, sebaceous cyst, ingrowing nail)
- ◆ Diagnosis, treatment and follow up of all surgical emergencies
- ◆ Hemorrhoids, fistula & anal fissure surgeries
- ◆ Surgery for morbid obesity (sleeve, gastric bypass)
- ◆ Breast surgeries
- ◆ Hernia repair
- ◆ Thyroid & adrenal surgeries
- ◆ Surgery for reflux disease
- ◆ Cholecystectomy & laparoscopic appendectomy
- ◆ Liver, pancreas & bile ducts surgeries

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

Scope of Clinical Practice:

- ◆ General & Laparoscopic Surgery
- ◆ Single-Port Surgery
- ◆ Treatment of Colo-Rectal Diseases, including Colorectal Cancer
- ◆ Surgical Treatment of Inflammatory Bowel Abscess
- ◆ Treatment of Perianal Fistula & Complex Perianal Fistula (complications)
- ◆ VAAFT Procedure (Treatment of Fistula through Fistuloscope)
- ◆ Treatment of Irritable Bowel Symptoms
- ◆ Colonoscopy & Gastroscopy
- ◆ Stomach Balloon insertion & removal
- ◆ Bariatric Surgery - Lap Sleeve Gastrectomy
- ◆ Gallstones & Abdominal Hernias Surgery
- ◆ Colonic Hydrotherapy & Fecal Incontinence Treatment
- ◆ Laparoscopic mini bypass
- ◆ Transanal minimally invasive surgery

Academic Certificates, Trainings & Fellowships:

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

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

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DR. FAHAD AL-MUKHAIZEEM
Consultant Pediatrician

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

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

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

Academic Certificates - Training

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

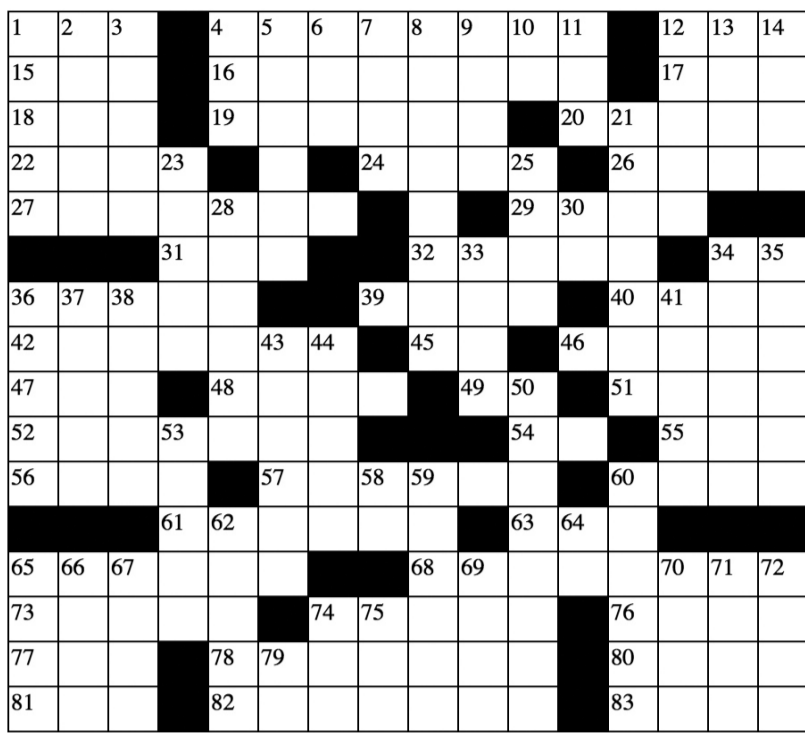
Scope of clinical Practice.

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

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

Stars

CROSSWORD 2395



ACROSS

1. A widely distributed system consisting of all the cells able to ingest bacteria or colloidal particles etc, except for certain white blood cells.
4. Herbs or shrubs or small trees.
12. Serving as an essential component.
15. A period marked by distinctive character or reckoned from a fixed point or event.
16. The state of being undressed and exposed (especially of a part of the body).
17. An extension at the end and at right angles to the main building.
18. A pass between mountain peaks.
19. (Greek mythology) One of the three Graces.
20. A telegram sent abroad.
22. (Babylonian) God of storms and wind.
24. The elapsed time it takes for a signal to travel from Earth to a spacecraft (or other body) and back to the starting point.
26. Injure or wound seriously and leave permanent disfigurement or mutilation.
27. A tricycle (usually propelled by pedalling).
29. According to the Old Testament he was a pagan king of Israel and husband of Jezebel (9th century BC).
31. A unit of absorbed ionizing radiation equal to 100 ergs per gram of irradiated material.
32. Someone whose business is advertising.
36. With rapid movements.
39. A linear unit of measurement (equal to 6 feet) for water depth.
40. A contagious skin infection caused by the itch mite.
42. Of or relating to or characteristic of Monaco or its people.
45. (Akkadian) God of wisdom.
46. A city in central New York.
47. The bureau of the Treasury Department responsible for tax collections.
48. Any of various strong liquors distilled from the fermented sap of toddy palms or from fermented molasses.
49. Unknown god.
51. A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
52. Indicating the most important performer or role.
54. A chronic inflammatory collagen disease affecting connective tissue (skin or joints).
55. A groove or furrow (especially one in soft earth caused by wheels).
56. A dress worn primarily by Hindu women.
57. A city of northern Poland near the mouth of the Vistula River on a gulf of the Baltic Sea.
61. Pick out, select, or choose from a number of alternatives.
63. A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
65. A resident of Utah.
68. Of or relating to or characteristic of Bahrain or its people or language.
73. A homeless child who has been abandoned and roams the streets.
76. A flat-bottomed volcanic crater that was formed by an explosion.
77. Of or relating to a member of the Buddhist people inhabiting the Mekong river in Laos and Thailand.
78. Coextensive with the family Oleaceae.
80. Having nine hinged bands of bony plates.
81. A kind of person.
82. A prosthesis placed permanently in tissue v 1.
83. A member of the Algonquian people living in Wisconsin the Fox River valley and the shores of Green Bay.

DOWN

1. A summary that repeats the substance of a longer discussion.
2. Become ground down or deteriorate.
3. Food mixtures either arranged on a plate or tossed and served with a moist dressing.
4. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
5. Capital and largest city of Iraq.
6. The address of a web page on the world wide web.
7. A drop of the clear salty saline solution secreted by the lacrimal glands.
8. Having been introduced to something new.
9. (archaic or Scottish) Faithful and true.
10. A mouth or mouthlike opening.
11. A committee in the executive branch of government that advises the president on foreign and military and national security.
12. Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
13. (Norse mythology) Goddess of old age who defeated Thor in a wrestling match.
14. (cosmology) The original matter that (according to the big bang theory) existed before the formation of the chemical elements.
21. Genus of widely distributed agarics that have white spores and are poisonous with few exceptions.
23. Deciduous shrub of North America.
25. Russian physicist (1895-1971).
28. Of or like a cecum.
30. (astronomy) The angular distance of a celestial point measured westward along the celestial equator from the zenith crossing.
33. East Indian tree bearing a profusion of intense vermilion velvet-textured blooms and yielding a yellow dye.
34. Grow by addition, as of capital.
35. A stiff chitinous seta or bristle especially of an annelid worm.
37. An aperture or hole opening into a bodily cavity.
38. Typical geese.
41. A crown-like jewelled headdress worn by women on formal occasions.
43. French writer who generalized surrealism to literature (1897-1982).
44. Australian clover fern.
50. Hypothetical universal solvent once sought by alchemists.
53. Chinese fruit having a thin brittle shell enclosing a sweet jellylike pulp and a single seed.
58. A very poisonous metallic element that has three allotropic forms.
59. A medicinal liquid preparation intended for use in an atomizer.
60. The father of your father or mother.
62. The capital city of Vietnam.
64. A colorless and odorless inert gas.
66. An official language of the Republic of South Africa.
67. In a murderous frenzy as if possessed by a demon.
69. A primeval personification of air and breath.
70. The United Nations agency concerned with atomic energy.
71. (Babylonian) God of wisdom and agriculture and patron of scribes and schools.
72. A republic in the Middle East in western Asia.
74. The month following August and preceding October.
75. A close friend who accompanies his buddies in their activities.
79. A unit of luminous flux equal to the amount of light given out through a solid angle of 1 steradian by a point source of 1 candela intensity radiating uniformly in all directions.

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

You'll have to demonstrate your endurance today. Much is required of you, and you have no choice but to make the contribution expected of you. There's no way around it. You're a key player in the events swirling around you. Surely you've noticed. Much as you'd like to take off for a vacation, you can't do it now.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

You may have some very good ideas relating to your professional field, but do you have complete mastery of them? If not, accept the fact that you can still learn from courses or experts in your field. It won't kill you to be guided a bit. Stop doubting or criticizing what others propose to you.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

There may be some worries nagging at you. Perhaps you have a financial concern or minor health complaint. Don't let it get you down. You have the inner resources to overcome it. Although the current state of affairs has you feeling gloomy, your optimism will return soon. Until then, put your trust in other values, such as love, friendship, and faith.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

You may feel somewhat grumpy and sluggish, like you have an energy deficit. But the oppressive mood of today will also lend objectivity and reality to any examination you make of what's happening in your life. For example, any matter that fails to elicit your enthusiasm is probably due for some changes.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

The mood is somewhat oppressive today. If you could, you'd send away anyone who tries to put obstacles in your path. Or maybe you'd prefer to go away yourself! The day ahead is good for a realistic test of the waters. How far do you think you can go with your individual potential, emotionally and professionally?



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

You've decided to blow the whistle on yourself! All of a sudden it's obvious that you're not performing as well as you should be. It's time to put your self-discipline to work. You may change your work methods, budget your money more carefully, or diversify your activities. Perhaps you'll reorganize your work team. All sorts of solutions are available to you.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Career or family? Social recognition or personal gratification? You may feel torn between two poles and spend the better part of the day searching for answers to such questions. Now you're trying to keep all the bases covered, but the weariness you feel on days like this is a hint that you need to make some wise, realistic changes for the future.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

You'll have to deal with some internal and external conflict. Often you're so happy to be lost in your dreams that you don't really focus on what's going on in the real world. But today alarm bells relating either to work or finances rudely awaken you. It's useless to panic. You've learned that running away only worsens the situation.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Your legendary impatience is playing tricks on you. You're in too much of a hurry. You may have changed things on the outside but you haven't changed who you really are. Resist the temptation to sweep everything away to start all over again. If you did, in a few months you'd just be back where you started. Think about a better approach.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

You can be a little stubborn, and it seems that you're in the process of giving a wonderful demonstration of this. You can be a little slow when you need to move, but once you get started, it's very hard to get you to stop! Still, there's nothing terribly difficult about making the necessary adjustments. You need to give yourself time.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

You may feel like you can no longer explore your inner feelings, but you must persevere. You have a tremendous capacity to bury problems deeply, and you can go through life obliviously surfing on top of them. It's true that this strategy allows you to remain in a good mood. But you may never be in such a good mood that you're profoundly happy. Wouldn't you agree?



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

You're in the process of changing directions in your professional life. This can't be done in a day. It's sometimes painful. Things will be going slowly and require you to think and confront yourself honestly. Don't run away even if you're tempted to do so. Trust that you aren't far from your goal.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Spiders 2

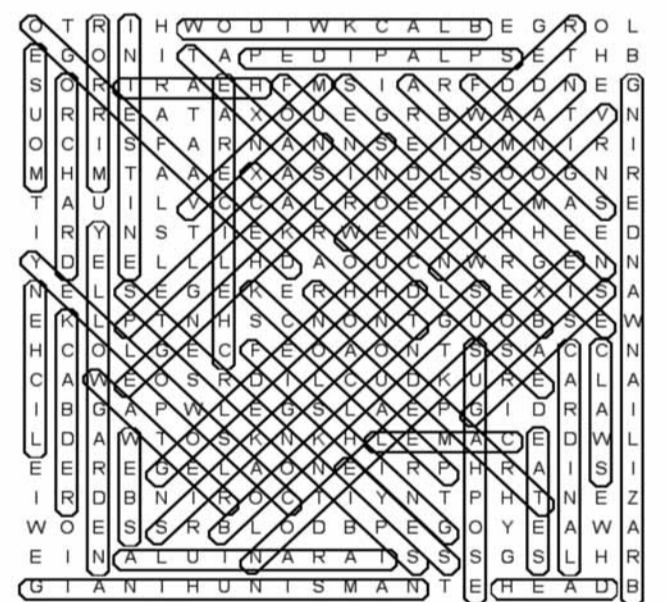
Find and circle all of the spider species that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell a secret message.



- | | | | |
|---------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| ANT MIMIC | FILMY DOME | JOHNSON JUMPER | SPITTING |
| ARROWHEAD | FLOWER | JUMPING | STEALTHY GROUND |
| BANDED GARDEN | GHOST | LADYBIRD MIMIC | STRIPED LYNX |
| BIRD DROPPING | GIANT HOUSE | NURSERY WEB | TENT WEB |
| BOLAS | GOLDENROD CRAB | ORBWEAVER | TURRET |
| BOLD JUMPER | GRAY CROSS | PARSON | TWIG |
| BROWN RECLUSE | GREEN LYNX | PIRATE | WESTERN LYNX |
| BROWN WIDOW | HAMMOCK | REDBACK | WHIP |
| BUTTON | HERCULES BABOON | RUNNING SAC | WOODLOUSE |
| CELLAR | HOBO | SAC | ZEBRA |
| ENAMEL | JEWEL | SOWBUG KILLER | |

Yesterday's Solution

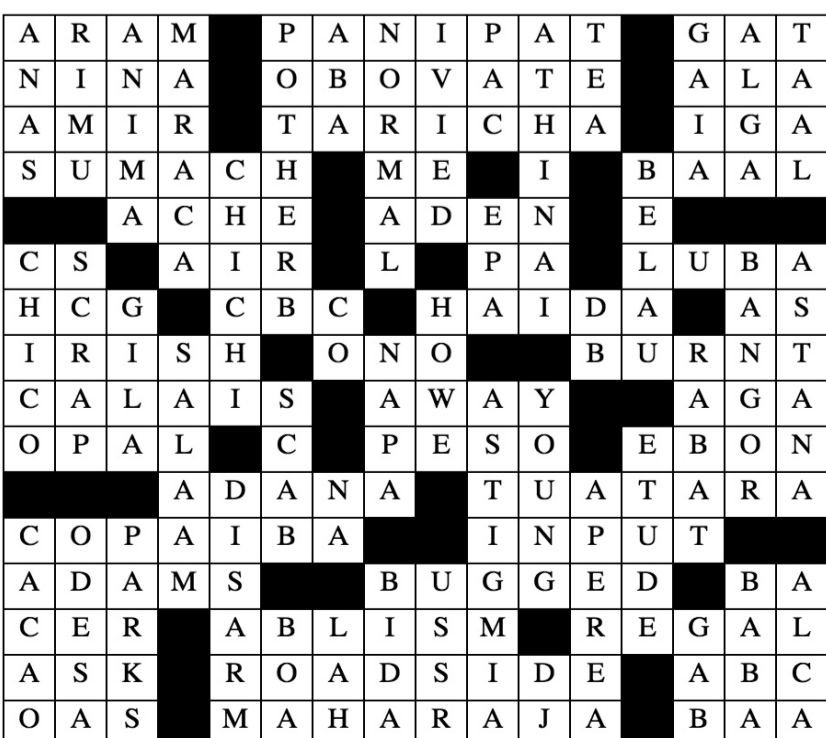
Spiders 1



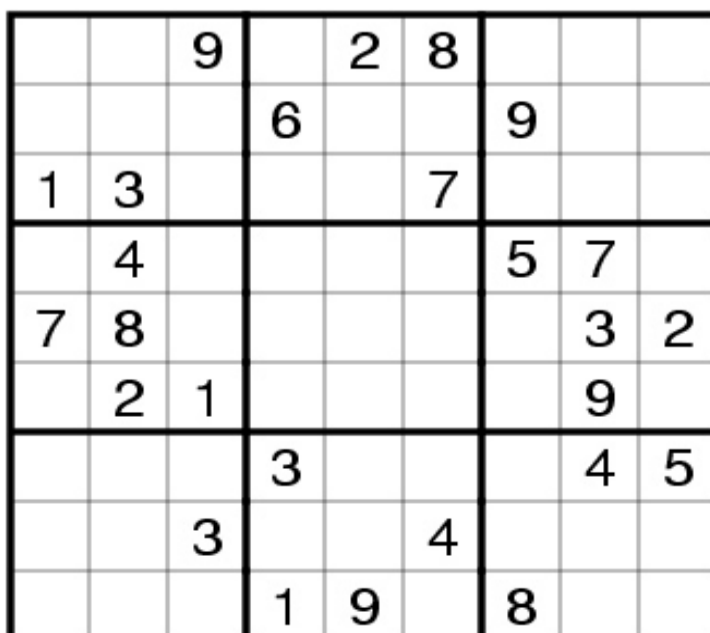
- | | | | |
|---------------------|-----------------|------------|---------------|
| ABDOMEN | FANGS | MOUSE | SPINNERETS |
| BLACK WIDOW | FISHING | OGRE FACED | TARANTULA |
| BOOK LUNGS | FUNNEL WEB | ORCHARD | TEXAS RECLUSE |
| BRAZILIAN WANDERING | GIANT HUNTSMAN | PEACOCK | THORAX |
| CAMEL | GOLDEN HUNTSMAN | PEDIPALPS | TRAPDOOR |
| CARDINAL | GRASS | PELICAN | VENOM |
| CHELICERAE | HEAD | REDBACK | VIOLIN |
| CLAWS | HEART | RED WIDOW | WATER |
| EIGHT LEGS | INTESTINE | SETAE | WEBS |
| ESOPHAGUS | LICHEN | SILK GLAND | YELLOW GARDEN |
| EXOSKELETON | MIRROR | SILKHENGE | YELLOW SAC |
| EYES | | | |

THE GOLIATH BIRDEATER TARANTULA IS THE LARGEST SPIDER IN THE WORLD BY WEIGHT

Yesterday's Solution



Daily SuDoku



medium

Yesterday's Solution



very hard

Lifestyle

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 26, 2019

Survival surfing: Indonesians riding the waves to beat tsunami trauma



This picture taken on Dec 9, 2019 shows Dery Setyawan, a survivor of the Dec 26, 2004 tsunami, carrying his surfboard after surfing on Lhoknga beach in Banda Aceh. — AFP photos



Surfboard tucked under his arm, Dery Setyawan sprints into the crashing waves. It is not just a physical challenge but an emotional one - most of his family and friends were swept to their deaths when a tsunami hit these shores 15 years ago. His hometown of Lampuuk was almost destroyed entirely, but despite his devastating loss, the father-of-two sees the water as a way to heal. "Surfing has been the best cure for my tsunami trauma. When I am on the waves, all my fears are gone and I can embrace the past and be at peace with it," he says.

On Dec 26, 2004, a monstrous 9.3 magnitude quake struck undersea off the coast of Sumatra. It sparked a tsunami nearly 100 feet (30 m) high that killed more than 220,000 across a string of Indian Ocean countries, including Thailand, Sri Lanka and India. Reaching as far as East Africa, the tsunami unleashed energy equivalent to 23,000 of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima - and is considered among the deadliest natural disasters in history.

Indonesia was hardest hit with at least 170,000 killed, though the true death toll is likely to be higher as many bodies have yet to be recovered or identified. The Indonesian city of Banda Aceh reported the highest number of casualties. Hastily dug mass graves are still being uncovered from this area with dozens of bodies pulled from the ground over the past year, including a woman whose driver's license was still in a wallet tucked into her pants pocket.

For Setyawan and others from Lampuuk, just outside of Banda Aceh, surfing has become a way to help them start again. "Water is part of our lives here. This is where we live, interact with family and others and make money for living," the 35-year-old father tells AFP as the disaster's anniversary approaches.

Mass graves

His town was almost lost as the towering waves crashed ashore, ripping palm trees from the roots and flattening buildings. Of Lampuuk's 7,000 residents - just 300 survived. Setyawan's mother, two grandmothers and infant brother were all killed, along with many of his friends. He remembers the water crashing into his home the force dragging him some 200 m till he hit some debris and clung on for his life.

In years immediately following, the surviving residents were fearful of the water. "We'd only look at the waves just to check whether the water level had gone down," Setyawan said, referring to a tell-tale sign that a tsunami may be approaching. But after the first anniversary of the disaster, Setyawan decided to face his fears. He went back into the water. "Waves from the beach are our friends, the ones that killed people during the tsunami were from the deep ocean. That was how I convinced myself before getting in for the first time," he recalls.



This picture taken on Dec 8, 2019 shows Sulaiman Muhammad Amin, a survivor of the Dec 26, 2004 tsunami, in a museum besides the Rahmatullah mosque in Lampuuk, Aceh province.

Now a professional surfer, he's competed in international and domestic competitions, and organised last month's Aceh Surfing Championships. Today, Lampuuk has been rebuilt with tsunami evacuation signs everywhere. The population has grown to 2,000 - still a far cry from its original population, but Setyawan aims to transform the shores from a place of despair to one of hope. He also formed a local surf club and set up a beachfront restaurant, and is confident of the tourism potential. "Surfing is one way of attracting people to come to this place again after the tsunami," Setyawan explains.

'Another wound'

Volcano-dotted Indonesia is one of the most disaster-hit nations in the world due to its position straddling the so-called Pacific Ring of Fire, where tectonic plates collide. In 2018, three natural disasters hit the Southeast Asian archipelago in six months. A tsunami, triggered by an earthquake, hit Palu on Sulawesi island killing 2,200 with thousands more missing and presumed dead.

Hundreds died after a series of powerful earthquakes on the island of Lombok and then in December another tsunami, this time caused by a volcanic eruption, struck the coastal regions in the strait between Java and Sumatra islands. Hundreds lost their lives, and more than 14,000



This aerial picture taken on Dec 10, 2019 shows a general view of the Baiturrahman mosque in Banda Aceh.

were reported injured.

Back in Aceh, one local government relocated hundreds of people who once lived in obliterated Kampung Baro village. But some residents opted to stay put, despite the risks. "Relocation would mean another wound for us," said tsunami survivor and fisherman Muhammad Saleh. "Moving away from the sea would be like a wound on top of a wound because our life depends on the sea."

The disaster, however, helped to heal some old wounds. Less than a year after the tsunami, Aceh's separatist rebels and the Indonesian government agreed to end almost 30 years of bloodshed in a peace deal that gave the region more autonomy. Thousands are expected to gather Thursday in Banda Aceh, which now has a dedicated tsunami memorial museum.

The day will bring back haunting memories for survivors like Abdul Hadi Firsawan, who wishes he could somehow be reunited with his mother, father and two siblings - all missing and presumed dead. "I still pray that I could see my parents again, but it's been 15 years," he said, adding: "If that's no longer a reality then I'm sure I'll meet them in heaven." — AFP



A man walks in Baiturrahman mosque.



This aerial picture taken on December 12, 2019 shows the tsunami memorial (center) in Banda Aceh.



This aerial picture taken on Dec 11, 2019 shows a general view of Lambada village, which was affected by the Dec 26, 2004 tsunami, in Aceh province.

Displaced Syrian grows mushrooms to feed family



Nasrallah and his son Saeed pick out ripe mushrooms in a dark room at a camp in a town called Haarem in the northwestern province of Idlib on Nov 29, 2019. — AFP photos



Mushrooms are pictured in a dark room.

In a camp for the displaced in northern Syria, Nasrallah scatters mushroom spores into a bag of wet hay, hoping they will sprout and feed his family. "Mushrooms have become the main alternative to meat, as it's so expensive," says the 43-year-old. After the civil war erupted in Syria eight years ago, Nasrallah started growing the fungi in his home province of Hama. "We'd eat some, give some away to friends," explains the father of three, who used to work for the local council in the town of Qalaat al-Madiq.

But earlier this year, increased regime bombardment on the Hama region forced his family to flee north towards the Turkish border. They found refuge in a camp in the town of Haarem in the northwestern province of Idlib, but jobs there are scarce. With money tight to support his wife and children, he planted some mushrooms. "We eat some and we sell a little to provide for ourselves," he says.

Before planting the fungi, Nasrallah sterilizes hay by stirring it in boiling water over a wood fire. He then layers the wet straw into a bag, sprinkling five to ten grams of mushroom spores between each coating. Sealing the bag with a tight knot, he lugs it into a dark, warm room and leaves it for around 20 days. Once the bag has turned white, he transfers it to a slightly brighter room, opens it up, and mists the top

regularly until mushrooms sprout out. "Not many people grow mushrooms, though people - especially in camps - are increasingly turning to them," he says.

'Can't afford them'

Mushrooms are commonly viewed as an alternative to meat in dishes, although they are different in nutritional value. They contain far less protein, but more minerals and vitamins. Syrians in other parts of the country have also grown them during the war, most notably in the Damascus suburb of Eastern Ghouta when it was under a five-year government siege. Around

6.5 million people in Syria are food insecure, or lack access to sufficient nutritious food. Many of them have been displaced from their homes by the conflict, the World Food Program says.

Today, Nasrallah buys a kilo of spores from Turkey for the equivalent of \$10, hoping they will generate 20 kilos of food. But he spreads out his yield, picking no more than five kilos a week. Each kilo sells for a little under the equivalent of \$3, far less than the average \$13 per kilo for meat. Inside the brighter cultivation room, his nine-year-old son, Saeed, watches as Nasrallah carves off a huge sprout of creamy oyster mushrooms from a sack.

In the street outside, 65-year-old Umm Khaled takes a quick look at the merchandise and picks it up for a few banknotes. Inside her modest mudbrick home, she chops the mushrooms up and cooks them over a camping stove with some onions and ghee. "To be honest, chicken and meat are better, but we can't afford them," says the elderly woman, who cooks for her son and grandchildren. Gathering around the dishes, she and her family rip up flat bread and dip it into the vegetables instead. — AFP



Umm Khaled cooks mushrooms in a pot.



Nasrallah sits with his son as they wait for customers to buy their mushrooms.



Umm Khaled and her family share a meal in Haarem.



Nasrallah layers wet straw into a bag.

Infamous New York island jail could have new, green life

New York City has an opportunity practically unheard of in modern times - a chance to decide what to do with an island bigger than London's Hyde Park. The city voted in October to close down its notoriously overcrowded, violent jail on Rikers Island by 2026, which has in its history held more than twice the number of prisoners it was designed for. Commanding the most public attention for the island's future is green industrial use - a renewable energy hub with possibilities of a solar farm, modernized wastewater treatment, and a plant converting organic waste into fuel.

"There's a lot of momentum for the island as a hub of green infrastructure," said Moses Gates, vice president for housing and neighborhood planning at the Regional Plan Association, a New York-based urban

research group. "It's an amazing opportunity and definitely doesn't come along every day," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Mostly landfill and situated just a few hundred feet from the city's LaGuardia Airport, Rikers Island can be reached by means of a bridge only accessible to people with jail business. The entrance to the bridge sits in an industrial section of New York's Queens borough, dominated by scrapyards, litter-strewn lots, abandoned trucking containers, bus parking lots and an 80-year-old wastewater treatment plant.

To that end, the City Council, which has a say in deciding the fate of the island, is weighing three pieces of legislation. One would shift its control to the city's Department of Environmental Protection from the Department of Correction, and the others call for studying its capacity for renewable energy and battery storage and how much wastewater it could handle from other plants.

Introducing the bills over the summer, Councilman Costa Constantinides, whose district includes Rikers Island, called it "a place of despair for many New Yorkers". "These bills are a down payment for a brighter future for this island - one that actually serves New York communities instead of tearing them apart," he said.

Bleak to green

Environmentalists note a green use of Rikers Island

would help the city meet its target of having at least 1,000 megawatts of solar capacity by 2030, which could power more than 250,000 households, according to New York City officials. New York state, meanwhile, aims to generate 70 percent of its electricity from renewable sources by 2030 and by 2040 get all of its electrical power from sources that do not emit planet-warming greenhouse gases.

"It's turning something that has been bleak, maybe gray and black, into something with a lot of potential for light and green," said Melissa Iachan, senior staff attorney at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, a civil rights organization. The proposals would transform the "literally toxic" island and help "end our addiction to fossil fuel and change the legacy of this island from one of just horror and trauma to one of possibility and clean air and sustainability," she added. And opening a wastewater treatment plant on Rikers could allow for the closure of old and out-dated plants elsewhere, said supporters of the island's green industrial use option.

Uncertain future

Putting housing on the island has been suggested but faces obstacles making it largely unfeasible, according to urban planners. The island has building height restrictions due to the flights going in and out of the airport, and its landfill is decomposing and emits methane gas, said the Council's Constantinides.

Transport is another hurdle, with the nearest subway stop well over a mile away. "Without extending some sort of mass transit to Rikers, making it a dense urban environment doesn't make much sense," said Mark Ginsberg, an architect whose firm Curtis + Ginsberg has studied possibilities for the island's future.

Other planners have proposed expanding LaGuardia to the nearby island. An additional runway could allow larger, longer-haul planes to use the airport, but the proposal has enjoyed little public support. Not to be overlooked is an acknowledgement of what the island has been since the 1930s, said Brandon Holmes, New York City campaign coordinator for Just LeadershipUSA, an organization aimed at cutting the nation's jail and prison populations.

Rikers, where most prisoners are awaiting trial or serving sentences of less than one year, was plagued by chronic violence, overcrowding and decayed facilities, said city officials as they voted to close it down. The city's \$8.7 billion plan approved in October calls for replacing Rikers with four smaller jails elsewhere. A goal for the future of Rikers Island is to remember the jail complex and "ensure that the city doesn't look at this as a blank slate," said Holmes. "What we want is to make sure the island is never used for profits over people ever again and is something that values and invests in the future of every New York." — Reuters



A man dressed as Santa Claus stands on a boat with tourists on Christmas Day at Madinat Jumeirah in Dubai yesterday. — AFP

Veiled women make Santa dolls in Gaza

The scene on Tuesday morning in the northern Gaza Strip could at first look incongruous - a group of women in black niqab veils sewing Santa Claus dolls for Christmas. They work at a small factory in the Palestinian enclave that is providing employment to women, many of whom are forbidden from leaving their village due to conservative values. Around 20 young women are employed at the factory, which is a project of the Zeina Cooperative in the village of Umm al-Nasser, close to Beit Hanoun in northern Gaza.

They have been given three years of vocational training, learning to make gifts for a series of holidays -including the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and Christmas, supervisor Asma Abu Qaida told AFP. This festive season they produced a range of goods, including Santa models and wooden Christmas trees. Seven of the women have been

taught carpentry. The gifts are wrapped and put in gift boxes marked "Merry Christmas" in Arabic and English. "We make Christmas gifts with love and precision," Abu Qaida said.

Many of the customers are foreign delegates working in international organizations in the Gaza Strip, she said. The 6,000-person village is in a conservative part of Gaza, which has been controlled by the Islamist movement Hamas since 2007 and has been under an Israeli blockade for more than a decade. Many of the women wear the niqab, a type of veil that leaves only the eyes visible. The program is an opportunity to work and leave the house, with cultural norms prohibiting them from leaving their village except in emergencies, said Hanin Rizk Al-Sammak, Zeina's executive director. "This gift-making project gives them an opportunity to showcase their abilities." — AFP



Palestinian artisans make Christmas toys at Zeina Association and Cooperative for Handicrafts in Beit Hanun in the northern Gaza Strip on Tuesday. — AFP

Merrily on high: US astronauts help track Santa delivery route



This photo released by the US air force shows NORAD Tracks Santa Operation Center at Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado on Tuesday. — AFP

For decades, the Canadian and American defense agency NORAD has provided updates on Santa Claus's international gift delivery route, but this year, for the first time, US astronauts lent a hand. "We have obtained visual confirmation that Santa is currently traveling south over India," Andrew Morgan said via a video link as he floated at zero gravity in the International Space Station (ISS).

The North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) said that the ISS was traveling at 17,000 miles (27,000 kilometers) an hour, 250 miles above Earth - providing "a great vantage point to spot Santa on his annual journey around the world". "NORAD appreciates the support of Colonel Morgan and the ISS team," it added.

The agency reported that Santa and his reindeer were near Managua, Nicaragua at 0505 GMT Wednesday and had delivered more than 5.7 billion gifts after hours of giving. They took off from the North Pole at 0930 GMT Tuesday. NORAD has been tracking Santa since 1955 when a girl

dialled a misprinted phone number from a department store advertisement in the local newspaper, believing she was calling Santa.

The number rang into the Air Defense Command Operation Center, where an officer was quick to realize the mistake and assured her he was Santa. Each year since, NORAD has reported Santa's location to millions across the globe, with noradsanta.org this year live-tracking his present-filled red sleigh pulled by nine reindeer. Today, 1,500 volunteers help the military answer calls and emails from children.

US first lady Melania Trump joined the effort, listening to several children from across the United States tick off items on their Christmas lists. She reminded them to put out milk and cookies for Santa. The US Department of Agriculture said that "Mr S. Nicholas Claus" and his reindeer had been granted a special movement permit to enter the country and were "fit for landing on rooftops". — AFP



Participants in a Santa Claus costumes jump into the water during the 110th edition of the 'Copa Nadal' (Christmas Cup) swimming competition in Barcelona's Port Vell yesterday. — AFP photos



A man dressed in a Santa Claus outfit gives out chocolate to children during a Christmas Day party in Dhaka yesterday.



A family dressed as Santa Claus drive behind the convoy of Apostolic Administrator of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem Pierbattista Pizzaballa along Israel's controversial separation barrier in the occupied West Bank town of Bethlehem on Tuesday.



Saudi fans attend the "MDL Beast Fest", an electronic music festival, held in Banban on the outskirts of the Saudi capital Riyadh on Dec 19, 2019. — AFP photos



Glittery party spotlights Saudi era of 'extreme openness'



It was billed as the Middle East's biggest party - thousands of revellers bathed in flashing laser lights danced and swayed to blasting music in the unlikely of venues: Saudi Arabia. The three-day MDL Beast last weekend was the biggest festival ever hosted by the ultraconservative Muslim kingdom - where hardliners have long branded music as sinful - as Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman pursues a taboo-busting modernization drive.

Touted by some as Saudi Arabia's Woodstock, it was not just a lineup of global DJs - from South Africa's Black Coffee, Dutch star Martin Garrix, and France's David Guetta - that tested the limits of the kingdom's cultural revolution. On the barren desert plot near Riyadh that was transformed into what seemed like an open-air nightclub, women - many unveiled and sporting glittery face paint and some even shedding their obligatory abaya robes - danced alongside men.

Also turning heads in a country notorious for gender segregation and an austere dress code was a female aerialist in a figure-hugging leotard, shimmying up a rope in a balloon-shaped cage. Suspended in mid-air over a crowd was a sloshing glass pool with four female aquatic dancers doing synchronized acts in skin-tight attire.

'Everything has changed'

Just last year, the head of General Entertainment Authority (GEA) was fired after a conservative backlash against a circus featuring women wearing similar costumes. But that seems like a distant memory. "We grew up with mutawa (religious police) warning us: 'A good man prays, does not party, does not listen to music'," Saleh Al-Najar, a 30-year-old information technology worker, said over the din of revelry. "Now everything has changed."

Promoting the extravaganza were a slew of skin-baring celebrities and Instagram "influencers", including Victoria's Secret Angel Elsa Hosk and British supermodel Jourdan Dunn. They provoked scathing online criticism, including from other top influencers, for allegedly accepting "six-figure" sums to help rehabilitate the kingdom's image amid scrutiny of its human rights record.

The over-the-top revelry is part of what observers call cultural shock therapy by Prince Mohammed, who appears bent on dragging the austere kingdom into modernity. The once unimaginable liberalization drive, pushing a new era of openness while de-emphasizing religion and promoting ultra-nationalism, has introduced glitzy concerts, magic shows and sporting extravaganzas with thumping after parties. Multiple shops and restaurants in Riyadh openly defy the once-mandatory prayer time shutdown, staying open even when the now-toothless religious police drive around exhorting people to pray.

Western officials say the government is considering allowing alcohol in some expat pockets such as Riyadh's diplomatic quarter, home to foreign embassies, in what they call a test balloon that could extend to other tourist hubs in the kingdom. Saudi authorities furiously deny the reports, but observers say the kingdom's new tourism push could falter if it does not follow in the footsteps of neighboring Dubai or Bahrain where alcohol is permitted in licensed venues. "The way to fight extremism is through extreme openness," said 30-year-old driver Murtada Al-Abawi, who endorses the cultural changes.

'Whitewash'

Not everyone is supportive, however. Last

month, a Yemeni national wounded four Spanish nationals when he went on a stabbing spree during a live theatre performance in Riyadh. Saudi state media pinned the blame on Al-Qaeda, but so far there has been no claim of responsibility from the group and observers point at burbling resentment among archconservatives in the kingdom over the multibillion-dollar entertainment push.

In a country steeped in conservatism, some Saudis have blamed a lack of rainfall in the kingdom on the "sinful" embrace of entertainment. Earlier this year, campaigners reported the arrest of religious scholar Omar Al-Muqbil after he criticized the General Entertainment Authority for "erasing Saudi society's original identity". "It's not just Islamists criticizing the entertainment push," said Quentin de Pimodan, a Saudi expert at the Institute for European and American Studies. "There appears to be a self-appointed vigilante community online keen to protect Saudi values."

GEA chief Turki Al-Sheikh courted criticism after he suggested Saudis struggling financially could take on credit card debt to fund entertainment activities. Critics say loosening social strictures is a diversionary tactic to make citizens more acquiescent and blunt public frustration over an economic downturn and an intensifying crackdown on dissent.

"Of course I want my country to open up. Of course I want art and sports to be allowed," said Lina Al-Hathloul, whose jailed sister Loujain is currently on trial along with other women activists. "But unfortunately these reforms are not institutional and are glitter to whitewash human rights violations, including my sister's unlawful detention." — AFP

Booze and football present tricky choices for Qatar

Qatar will begin sifting through fan feedback from the Club World Cup to see how it can provide supporters with a successful World Cup in 2022, but cultural differences will be a tricky challenge to surmount. The first 'trial run' for the Qatari 2022 World Cup completed at the weekend, with Liverpool defeating Brazil's Flamengo in the final. Judging from the views of fans, the feedback is likely to be a mixture of reassurance about their infrastructure but concern about the 'fun factor'.

Drinking and partying can be a tricky concept in a country with strict restrictions on alcohol consumption and low tolerance for rowdiness. "It's much more about people than bricks and mortar now," Hassan Al-Thawadi, head of Qatar's World Cup organizing committee, told Reuters in an interview. "We are looking at the fans here at this event as partners, to educate and teach

us whether our plans worked or not, what can we improve, what doesn't work and what we need to scrap all together."

The tournament attracted around 13,000 Brazilian fans as well as thousands of Liverpool supporters from around the world. Mexican, Saudi and Tunisian fans were also in attendance to support other teams in the competition. "All the facilities look top-notch. The stadiums are all state of the art, everything is state-of-the-art here," said Liverpool fan Adnan Vola, who had travelled from Britain.

Singing and chanting

But Tunisian fan Ahmed Ali, decked out in the red and yellow shirt of his team Esperance, said that the Qataris will need to shift their approach to satisfy fans from around the world who are used to gathering in large numbers to drink and sing before

matches. "I think they have to be a little bit more open. You are going to have teams coming from England, Germany, France, South America - guess what? They have to be a little bit open."

Some Flamengo fans took to wearing Arabic-style head-dress in their team's colors and staff on the new metro system appeared a little flustered by large crowds singing and chanting in the carriages. Ali said that the "openness" was needed primarily in allowing fans to enjoy their usual pre and post-match rituals which often involve drinking. In Qatar alcohol sales are limited to a handful of hotels which are allowed to operate bars but for the Club World Cup, organizers created a fan-zone, at a golf club, where supporters could buy beer at friendlier prices than in high-end accommodation. Fans were then bussed from the fan-zone to the stadium, where alcohol was not for sale. For the organizers this has the advantage of reducing the risk of alcohol fuelled incidents either in the city's public places or at the stadium.

It is expected that more fan-zones will be created for the World Cup with concerts and other entertainment put on to encourage supporters into these separated areas. But the possibility of allowing beer at the stadium itself is not completely off the agenda. "That is being discussed, keeping in mind that alcohol is not part of our culture but hospitality is," said Thawadi. "We want to ensure that everyone has a good time, we want to make sure that what we put in place, that bridges the cultural gaps and cultural differences."

"We have put something in place, I want to hear from the fans, all of them, about their experiences in Doha. About their experience of having a drink, going out to the stadium, we are here to listen and to improve," he added. Whatever the organizers settle on, Qataris are likely to be in for a culture shock when the biggest football festival in the world arrives in town. — Reuters



Flamengo supporters cheer at the traditional Soud Waqif square in the Qatari capital Doha on Dec 20, 2019 on the eve of the 2019 FIFA Club World Cup Final football match between England's Liverpool and Brazil's Flamengo. — AFP photos



People stand next to a food truck in Souq Waqif.



Children play dama, a traditional Qatari board game, in a cafe at Souq Waqif.

Classifieds

Thursday, December 26, 2019

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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Fair with light to moderate freshening at times south easterly wind, with speed of 15 - 40 km/h.

BY NIGHT: Cold with light to moderate freshening at times south easterly wind, with speed of 15 - 45 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

WEATHER WATCH			Droop in visibility	
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	SFC. CHART 25/12/2019 0000 UTC	
KUWAIT CITY	20 °C	12 °C		
KUWAIT AIRPORT	22 °C	05 °C		
ABDALY	21 °C	06 °C		
BUBYAN	17 °C	14 °C		
JAHRA	22 °C	08 °C		
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C		
SALMIYAH	19 °C	14 °C		
AHMADI	15 °C	14 °C		
NUWAISIB	22 °C	08 °C		
WAFRA	22 °C	06 °C		
SALMY	21 °C	07 °C		

4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Thursday	12/26	Fair and Partly cloudy with a chance for scattered rain	24 °C	08 °C	SE-S	15 - 40 km/h
Friday	12/27	Fair and some scattered clouds will appear	24 °C	07 °C	SE-NW	15 - 40 km/h
Saturday	12/28	Fair	22 °C	08 °C	NW	15 - 40 km/h
Sunday	12/29	Fair	21 °C	07 °C	NW	15 - 35 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	05:15
Sunrise	06:40
Zuhr	11:48
Asr	14:38
Sunset	16:56
Isha	18:19

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	22 °C
MIN. Temp.	05 °C
MAX. RH	92 %
MIN. RH	23 %
MAX. Wind	S 21 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

Hospitals

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

Clinics

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

CHANGE OF NAME
I, Shazeen Mahamad Shaif Alaji, (Indian Passport No. N1869413 issued in Kuwait) D/O Alaji Mahamad Shaif Kasam hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as, given name: Shazeen Mahamad Shaif, surname: Alji and Father's name Mahamad Shaif Kasam Alji for all purposes. (C 5698)

I, Nuwair Mahamad Shaif Alaji (Indian Passport No. T2416290 issued in Kuwait) S/O Alaji Mahamad Shaif Kasam hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as, given name: Nuwair Mahamad Shaif, surname: Alji and Father's name Mahamad Shaif Kasam Alji for all purposes. (C 5698)

I, Thodeentavida Aslam Edam, with given name as Thodeentavida and Surname as Aslam Edam, son of Moideu, holder of Indian Passport No. P0723755, issued at Kuwait on 19/07/2016, Civil ID No. 269020301865, permanent resident of AT House, Panoor P.O, Via Telichery, Dt. Kannur, Kerala, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under: Given name: Aslam, Surname: Edam Thodeentavida. (C 5482) 24-12-2019

I, Chalamala Venkata Reddy, S/O Chalamala Narasareddy (old name) D No 7/21 C3, Gangireddypalem, Rajampet town and Mandal, YSR Kadapa Dist (A.P) have changed my name as Chalamala Venkata Krishna Reddy, S/O Chalamala Narasareddy (new name). 26-12-2019

I, Fernandes Joseph Lawrence, holder of Indian Passport No J4441403, having permanent address at Janata Colony, House No. GSG 58, Worli Village, Mumbai 400-030, Maharashtra,

SHARING ACCOMMODATION

Sharing accommodation for Filipino ONLY Farwaniya block 4, near Big Jamiya, available on December 25, Contact 55571873. 24-12-2019

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For labor-related inquiries and complaints: **Call MSAL HOTLINE 128**

Directorate General of Civil Aviation Home Page (www.kuwait-airport.com.kw)

Flight Schedule

DIAL 161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

Arrival Flights on Thursday 26/12/2019				Departure Flights on Thursday 26/12/2019			
Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
IGO	1757	Kochi	00:10	KAC	781	Jeddah	13:30
AIC	989	Mumbai	00:10	JZR	123	Dubai	13:40
JZR	254	Amman	00:45	KAC	541	Cairo	13:45
THY	772	Istanbul	00:50	UAE	872	Dubai	14:15
JZR	734	Cairo	00:50	AXB	394	Kozhikode	14:15
KAC	102	London	00:55	QTR	1079	Doha	15:00
PGT	858	Istanbul	00:55	KNE	382	Taif	15:00
KAC	504	Beirut	01:05	FDB	060	Dubai	15:10
DLH	625	Dammam	01:30	GFA	222	Bahrain	15:25
RJA	642	Amman	01:40	FDB	8066	Dubai	15:40
JZR	722	Alexandria	01:55	KAC	775	Riyadh	15:45
IGO	1759	Delhi	01:55	KAC	673	Dubai	15:50
KAC	5624	Doha	02:05	SVA	501	Jeddah	16:00
UAE	853	Dubai	02:15	KNE	532	Jeddah	16:00
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:15	JZR	125	Dubai	16:00
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30	KAC	743	Dammam	16:05
KLM	446	Bahrain	02:30	ETD	304	Abu Dhabi	16:20
QTR	1086	Doha	02:40	KAC	785	Jeddah	16:30
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55	OMA	646	Muscat	16:35
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:10	ETH	128	Sharjah	16:35
MSR	612	Cairo	03:15	UAE	854	Bahrain	16:45
LMU	510	Cairo	04:00	KLM	446	Amsterdam	16:50
QTR	1076	Doha	04:00	QTR	1087	Doha	16:50
IGO	1751	Chennai	04:10	OMA	644	Muscat	16:55
KAC	418	Manila	04:25	ETD	306	Abu Dhabi	17:00
OHY	352	Istanbul	04:30	KAC	621	Doha	17:05
KAC	796	Madinah	04:40	MSR	613	Cairo	17:25
KAC	302	Mumbai	04:40	JZR	713	Sohag	17:35
JZR	406	Kochi	04:45	LMU	511	Cairo	17:35
JZR	702	Asyut	04:50	IGO	1752	Chennai	17:40
FDB	069	Dubai	05:00	QTR	1077	Doha	17:40
KAC	358	Kochi	05:10	OHY	351	Istanbul	17:45
JZR	404	Hyderabad	05:10	JZR	101	Bahrain	17:45
DHX	170	Bahrain	05:10	JZR	121	Dubai	17:45
KAC	784	Jeddah	05:20	RJA	643	Amman	18:00
KAC	382	Delhi	05:20	FDB	070	Dubai	18:00
JZR	112	Doha	05:35	GFA	212	Bahrain	18:00
JZR	216	Jeddah	05:50	KAC	413	Bangkok	18:10
KAC	284	Dhaka	05:55	KAC	167	Paris	18:10
KAC	106	London	06:00	IGO	1767	Mumbai	18:10
KAC	332	Trivandrum	06:05	KAC	173	Munich	18:20
JZR	402	Mumbai	06:05	FDB	054	Dubai	18:20
KAC	344	Chennai	06:10	JZR	001	LGW	18:20
KAC	362	Colombo	06:30	KAC	163	MXP	18:20
KAC	544	Cairo	07:00	KAC	787	Jeddah	18:35
BAW	157	London	07:05	KAC	501	Beirut	18:40
KAC	678	Dubai	07:05	BAW	156	London	18:45
KAC	206	Islamabad	07:10	JZR	731	Cairo	18:55
IGO	1766	Mumbai	07:10	QTR	1085	Doha	19:20
JZR	120	Dubai	07:35	KAC	545	Cairo	19:20
FDB	053	Dubai	07:50	KAC	157	Istanbul	19:30
QTR	1084	Doha	08:00	JZR	601	Baku	19:30
KAC	8511	Doha	08:00	KAC	671	Dubai	19:30
KAC	354	Bengaluru	08:10	KAC	561	Amman	19:35
KAC	622	Doha	08:30	ABY	126	Sharjah	19:45
UAE	855	Dubai	08:35	KAC	101	London	19:45
JZR	102	Bahrain	08:55	ETD	302	Abu Dhabi	19:55
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	08:55	JZR	151	Mashhad	19:55
IRA	667	Esfahan	09:00	KAC	117	New York	10:00
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:05	QTR	8512	Doha	10:00
KAC	384	Delhi	09:30	UAE	856	Dubai	10:00
KAC	304	Mumbai	09:30	IRA	606	Mashhad	10:00
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40	KAC	791	Madinah	10:00
IGO	1753	Ahmedabad	09:40	KAC	613	Bahrain	10:05
QTR	1070	Doha	09:45	JZR	301	Istanbul	10:05
NIA	361	Alexandria	09:50	KAC	773	Riyadh	10:15
JZR	410	Delhi	10:00	KAC	155	Istanbul	10:20
SVA	512	Riyadh	10:00	KAC	617	Doha	10:35
IAW	157A	Al Najaf	10:00	FDB	056	Dubai	10:35
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40	IGO	1754	Ahmedabad	10:40
JZR	714	Sohag	10:50	JZR	211	Jeddah	10:40
QTR	1074	Doha	11:15	NIA	462	Sohag	10:50
KAC	352	Kochi	11:35	QTR	1071	Doha	11:00
MEA	404	Beirut	11:55	IAW	158A	Al Najaf	11:00
SYR	341	Damascus	12:00	SVA	513	Riyadh	11:00
IAW	157	Al Najaf	12:00	KAC	741	Dammam	11:05
GFA	209	Bahrain	12:05	GFA	214	Bahrain	11:25
MSR	610	Cairo	12:25	JZR	221	Riyadh	12:00
SAW	701	Damascus	12:30	JZR	213	Jeddah	12:00
UAE	871	Dubai	12:50	MEA	405	Beirut	12:55
AXB	393	Kozhikode	13:15	JZR	115	Doha	13:00
QTR	1078	Doha	13:35	QTR	1075	Doha	13:00
KAC	614	Bahrain	13:50	IAW	158	Al Najaf	13:00
KNE	231	Riyadh	14:10	SYR	342	Damascus	13:00
FDB	059	Dubai	14:20	GFA	210	Bahrain	13:05
GFA	221	Bahrain	14:40	MSR	611	Cairo	13:25
				SAW	702	Damascus	13:30



A woman walks past New Year decorations in front of the Bolshoi Theatre in central Moscow yesterday. — AFP

Libya war leaves thousands homeless

TRIPOLI: Layla Mohammed barely had time to gather her children's belongings before fleeing their southern Tripoli home when shelling targeted the Libyan capital's outskirts earlier this year. For months she moved her family between apartments as soaring rents in the crowded city exhausted her savings, eventually leaving them squatting in an unfinished building alongside dozens of other families.

More than 140,000 Libyans like Mohammed have fled their homes since April, when forces loyal to eastern-based strongman Khalifa Haftar launched an assault on Tripoli, seat of the UN-recognized government. In central Tripoli, the grey skeletons of a highrise construction site - abandoned since 2008 due to a property dispute - now host more than 170 families.

For some, the high rises in Tarik Al-Sekka were "a gift from heaven", since the alternative was living in the street. But "we live like animals - without running water, electricity, or even sewerage," said Mohammed, a mother of seven. Her youngest son is sick with a chronic respiratory illness. "The dust will kill him," Mohammed despaired. "All we want is to live in dignity," she said.

Neighbor Samira crowds her four children into a single room in a nearby building, preferring the greater warmth it affords over any sense of privacy. She feels safe in the eight square metre room, which thanks to a benefactor has a door and a window. "Even if it's not ideal, at least it's free," she said. Initially, Samira was determined to stay in her southern Tripoli home, even as combat crept closer over the months. But when a rocket fell near her house the terror

became too much and she fled, she said.

The buildings sheltering Samira and Mohammed are just metres from the seat of the Government of National Accord (GNA). But authorities have done little to help. Maysoun Al-Diab is in charge of displacement issues for the GNA's crisis committee but admits "the government has offered them nothing, not even moral support". According to her, the government was unable to find shelter for all the displaced, leaving many at the mercy of avaricious lenders.

Her committee requisitioned schools, public buildings and hotels to house the displaced, but faced with an ever-growing influx as the battle dragged on, more and more families found themselves homeless. When school resumed, the situation got worse. After living for months in one Tripoli school, Khairi Al-Doukali said his family was "evicted alongside dozens of other families" to allow classes to restart. Eventually, the Doukali family also ended up on the Tarik Al-Sekka building site.

In the face of government inaction, civic-minded Tripoli residents have responded to heartfelt pleas online and stepped in to help. Every day people give food, clothing and blankets, according to Salem El-Chatti, a member of a neighborhood support group. "We try to distribute donated items in a fair manner," he said. A man named Abdel-Atti arrives to donate a mattress and blankets. "I pass by these buildings every day," he said. "It breaks my heart that my kids are fed and sleep warm inside while our brothers are experiencing this tragedy." — AFP



TRIPOLI: Displaced Libyans unload furniture, provided by aid by a Libyan man, in an unfinished building in the capital on Dec 18, 2019. — AFP

Blind spot to backlash: BJP...

Continued from Page 1

Home Minister Amit Shah, widely seen as the second most powerful man in the country, repeated in a television interview on Tuesday that Muslims had no cause for worry. "We are all in damage control mode," said the other federal minister, adding that the BJP and hardline Hindu allies have launched a campaign to explain that the law is not discriminatory.

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which is the ideological parent of the BJP, has also launched a movement across urban slums to counter opposition to the bill. "The violent protests are not because the people were not properly informed about the new law, but because they were intentionally wrongly informed by forces with vested interests," Manmohan Vaidya, a senior RSS leader, told Reuters.

Analysts say various reasons for discontent were coalescing. "It's evident that people are protesting against the law and also venting against Modi's autocratic style of leadership," said Sanjay Kumar, director of research institute the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies. "The economic crisis gives further incentive ... I don't see these protests fading very soon."

When Modi, a veteran politician and son of a tea

seller, came to power five-and-a-half years ago, he promised growth, jobs and development. But he was criticized for haphazard tax reform and shock demonetization of high value currency notes in his first term - which contributed to an economic slowdown - as well as intolerance for dissent and ignoring anti-Muslim hate crimes. Nevertheless, he was re-elected with an even stronger majority earlier this year after a strong response to a security standoff with old foe Pakistan.

In August, Modi's government withdrew semi-autonomous privileges for Jammu and Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state, and downgraded it to a federally-ruled territory. In November, the Supreme Court ruled that a Hindu temple could be built at a site where a right-wing mob tore down a 16th-century mosque in 1992, one of India's most divisive disputes. The government welcomed the decision.

Then came the citizenship law. "I feel they can't create jobs and hence they are passing such a disturbing law," said Ghanshyam Tiwari, a student protesting in the city of Lucknow last week. The protests are backed by the opposition Congress party, which has dominated Indian politics for most of the 72 years since independence but was soundly beaten in the last two national elections. It said the gloves were off between secular India and Modi's hardline Hindu agenda. "For the first time in India's history a law has been framed on the basis of religion," Prithviraj Chavan, a senior Congress leader, told Reuters. "The ruling party's strategy to make India a Hindu-first nation has backfired." — Reuters

cause through exerting diplomatic efforts and through the United Nations. The statement signed by the 27 lawmakers - and not on behalf of the National Assembly - expressed their "deep concern" on the abusive legislative and repressive security measures taken by the Indian government against Muslims who have been demonstrating after parliament passed a law deemed discriminatory against Indian Muslims.

The statement also expressed deep sorrow over the treatment of Muslims in China and called on the government to express solidarity and support for them through diplomatic channels and at the United Nations. The next Assembly session will be held on Jan 7.

Lawmakers call for changes to election...

Continued from Page 1

Meanwhile, in a statement issued on the sidelines of the Assembly session yesterday, 27 lawmakers expressed deep concern over the situation of Muslims in India and China and called on the government for backing their

Erdogan visits Tunisia amid...

Continued from Page 1

Moscow has said it is very concerned about the prospect of Turkish troops being deployed there. On Wednesday, Erdogan reiterated that Turkey would evaluate the option of deploying troops if the GNA asked for support after signing the military agreement, and added that the Wagner group had "no connections, nothing" in Libya.

"I wonder what they're doing in Libya?" Erdogan said. "If Turkey is invited (to send troops), we will accept, because at least we have an agreement" with the GNA, he added. "Until today, we have never been unwanted guests anywhere, but if a call is made then we will surely evaluate it and take steps," Erdogan said. "Serraj is the GNA's premier. We are taking steps with him. Haftar has no such title." On Tuesday Erdogan's

spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said Turkey's parliament was working on a draft bill that would allow troop deployment to Libya.

Turkey has already sent military supplies to the GNA despite a United Nations arms embargo, according to a UN report seen by Reuters last month. Haftar, meanwhile, has received support from Russia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates. Turkey and Russia have been cooperating in the search for a political solution to Syria's eight-year war, even though they back opposing sides. They also have strong ties in defense and trade.

Erdogan's visit to Tunis comes as Turkey ramps up efforts to strike deals with nations around the Mediterranean, where Ankara has been at loggerheads with Greece over resources off the coast of the divided island of Cyprus. Athens was outraged by the agreement signed by Turkey and the GNA last month mapping out maritime boundaries in the eastern Mediterranean. Greece says the deal violates international law, but Turkey says it aims to protect its rights in the region and that the accord is in full compliance with maritime laws. — Agencies

Peace wishes ring in Christmas, but...

Continued from Page 1

Things were more upbeat in Spain, where nearly 300 people, some in Santa Claus, Darth Vader or clown costumes, dived into the frigid waters of Barcelona's port for a traditional Christmas swim.

Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump and his wife Melania sent their "warmest greetings" to Christmas revellers around the world. "While the challenges that face our country are, the bonds that unite us as Americans are much stronger," the message read. "Together, we must strive to foster a culture of deeper understanding and respect."

Also in the United States, a bank robber brought some offbeat Christmas joy to stunned passers-by in Colorado, police confirmed yesterday. The white-bearded man robbed the bank in Colorado Springs on Monday, then threw the stolen cash in the air for people to grab, US media reported. "He started throwing money out of the bag and then said, 'Merry Christmas!'" witness Dion Pascale told local media. The suspect was later arrested.

In the biblical town of Bethlehem on Tuesday, a few hundred worshippers gathered in the church on the site of Jesus's birth for midnight mass, attended by Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas. This year, celebrations were bolstered by the return of a wooden relic believed to be from Jesus' manger. Sent as a gift to Pope Theodore I in 640, the piece had been in Europe for more than 1,300 years before being returned last month.

Hong Kong's Christmas celebrations were marred by sporadic clashes between police and pro-democracy activists as the city's pro-Beijing leader said the festive season was being "ruined" by demonstrators. Police used pepper spray and tear gas as activists held small flashmob protests in malls and multiple districts across the city.

Tuesday night, Paris's Notre Dame Cathedral, ravaged by fire in April, was unable to hold its traditional Christmas Eve mass for the first time in more than 200 years, with the faithful gathering at other nearby churches instead. After another midnight mass in France, 21 worshippers were hospitalized with carbon monoxide poisoning possibly caused by a faulty gas heater. Emergency personnel were sent to the church in the Oise department in the north of the country after several people complained of headaches during the service. — AFP

Sports

Sport in 2019: Ten offbeat stories



Sue Barker



Lewis Hamilton

PARIS: Matches held up by wildlife and underwear protests, chickens in danger in Croatian football and offside armpits. AFP Sport looks back at 10 of the best offbeat moments in sport in 2019:

OH DEER!

— The kick-off in a Scottish football match was delayed after a herd of wild deer left excrement all over the pitch.

“Kick off suspended due to the ref being delayed, the pitch currently waterlogged — and covered in deer faeces,” Nairn County, who play in the Highlands League, tweeted ahead of the game at Fort William.

The match in April eventually ended in a 6-2 defeat for hapless Fort William, their 29th loss in 31 games.

SUE ARE YOU?

— When Sue Barker won the Roland Garros women’s title in 1976 she became Britain’s most recent champion in Paris — or did she?

An eagle-eyed photographer spotted that Barker is listed as Australian and not British on the list of champions whose names are engraved on the Suzanne Lenglen trophy presented each June to the French Open women’s champion.

“Last time I checked, Sue Barker was British - are my eyes deceiving me?” tweeted Ella Ling who snapped a photo of the cup which has classed Barker as ‘AUST’ rather than ‘GBR’ for the last 43 years.

“I mean seriously...how has no one noticed!”

RED ALERT

— Dimitris Giannakopoulos, the owner of Greek basketball club Panathinaikos, was fined 3,000 euros

for leaving a pair of red women’s underwear on the empty bench of rivals Olympiakos before a game.

“It was an act that defamed the sport,” said the sports judge who handed down the ruling.

Giannakopoulos made the move after Olympiakos — who play in red — failed to show up for a February contest in Athens.

STANDING ROOM ONLY

— Players of Mexican football club Veracruz went on strike in the opening minutes of a league game, allowing grateful opponents Tigres to walk in two goals unchallenged.

Veracruz decided on the radical action of standing — instead of running — about the pitch to protest over unpaid wages.

As a result, Eduardo Vargas and Andre-Pierre Gignac put Tigres 2-0 ahead inside three minutes on their way to a 3-1 win.

At the end of the games, Veracruz sarcastically applauded their opponents who they claim reneged on a promise to respect their strike.

“They knew that we were going to stay still for three minutes,” said Veracruz defender Carlos Salcido.

CUT! HAMILTON TOO BUSY FOR ‘TOP GUN’

— Lewis Hamilton had to put his ambitions to be a Hollywood movie star on hold because he was too busy winning Formula One world titles.

The six-time world champion revealed he had to turn down a role in “Top Gun: Maverick” due to lack of time.

The 34-year-old’s role in the film was expected to be bigger than in his previous movie appearances in “Zoolander 2” and “Cars”.

EDDIE’S NOT HAVING A BALL

— British golfer Eddie Pepperell’s Turkish Open bid came to an abrupt and early end when he ran out of golf balls.

Pepperell put five balls into the water at the fourth hole before telling playing partners that was quitting the course.

OFFSIDE — BY AN ‘ARMPIT’

— Liverpool maintained their lead at the top of the Premier League with a last-gasp win over Aston Villa but came perilously close to being denied a result — by an offside armpit!

Jürgen Klopp’s side, who took all three points at Villa Park thanks to Sadio Mané’s 94th minute winner, were trailing to Trezeguet’s opener when Roberto Firmino thought he had tapped home the leveller seven minutes later.

However, the linesman raised his flag and a VAR check confirmed the decision to the rule the goal out, with the Premier League revealing that Firmino’s armpit “was marginally ahead of the last Villa defender”.

The decision looked like it would lead to Liverpool losing their first league match of the season, before Andy Robertson headed home an equaliser in the 87th minutes and Mané snatched the points deep in stoppage time.

“It’s not right that we laugh about it. Managers get sacked over it,” Klopp said after the game.

FOWL PLAY

— A Croatian footballer kicked a chicken to death during a soccer game.

The incident took place when a brood of chickens ran onto a pitch in the eastern part of the country.

Ivan Gazdek from the home team NK Jelengrad, ran after the birds, kicked one with his foot and then chucked it over the fence in a flurry of feathers.

“I ran towards the chickens to chase them away, swung my foot and accidentally killed one,” said Gazdek.

POPE AND GLORY

— The New Orleans Saints got a surprise shout-out from Pope Francis, with fans and at least one player taking the inadvertent tag as a good omen for the NFL team.

Francis created five new saints in October in a canonisation ceremony at the Vatican.

“Today we give thanks to the Lord for our new #Saints,” he posted on Twitter — with the combination of a hashtag and the capital letter of Saints apparently adding the New Orleans team’s fleur-de-lis logo.

Saints linebacker Alex Anzalone put a screenshot of Francis’ tweet on his own Twitter feed.

“Wow, are we blessed or what?!?!” Anzalone wrote.

BEEES STOP PLAY

— A swarm of bees sent players taking cover on the pitch during a Cricket World Cup game between South Africa and Sri Lanka in Durham.

“It’s very funny. Looks like someone’s just had a machine-gun through all the players on the field and everyone is down on the ground,” said South Africa skipper Faf du Plessis.

“You are not brave enough when there is a swarm of bees flying. I’m brave, but not that brave.” — AFP

Sport in 2019: Best quotes

RUGBY UNION

“We have so many problems in our country but a team like this, we come from different backgrounds, different races but we came together with one goal and we wanted to achieve it”

— Siya Kolisi, the Springboks’ first black Test captain. “In South Africa pressure is not having a job. Pressure is one of your close relatives being murdered.”

— Rassie Erasmus, South Africa’s World Cup winning head coach, eloquently explaining the nature of pressure in his homeland.

FOOTBALL

“I think I’m particularly, uniquely and very deeply American”

— Megan Rapinoe, USA’s World Cup winning superstar, a warrior on the pitch and off it where her unflinching advocacy for social justice brought her into conflict with US President Donald Trump.

Rapinoe “should WIN first before she TALKS! Finish the job!”

— Trump on Twitter

“This is only the start”

— Liverpool manager Jürgen Klopp after the Champions League final win over Tottenham.

“Humble”

— After the acrimony that defined his final days at Manchester United José Mourinho arrived as Tottenham’s new manager saying he had learnt from his mistakes and wanted to bring happiness to Spurs.

CYCLING

“It’s team, team, team, get up, see the doctor, have breakfast, ride the race, get a massage, physio and sleep. Then repeat”

— Egan Bernal painting a mundane picture of life as Colombia’s first Tour de France champion

ATHLETICS

“The message that no human is limited is now in everybody’s mind”

— Kenya’s Eliud Kipchoge after making history, smashing the mythical two hour barrier for the marathon on a crisp autumnal morning in Vienna

“If Karsten is Gordon Gekko then I am the IRS”

— American Rai Benjamin compares himself to the US Internal Revenue Service after Karsten Warholm expressed admiration for fictional immoral financier Gordon Gekko from the Wall Street films. Warholm beat Benjamin to 400m hurdles gold at the world championships in Doha.

HORSE RACING

“He is a once in a lifetime horse who has given us a twice in a lifetime experience.”

— Ryanair boss Michael O’Leary suc-

cinctly summing up his thoughts after his Tiger Roll put his name alongside the legendary Red Rum by winning back-to-back Grand Nationals

“He is a little like myself. He likes the good things in life — eating drinking and sleeping, though he is a little more athletic than me!”

— Tiger Roll’s trainer Gordon Elliott comparing himself to his Aintree hero.

TENNIS

“These kind of matches, you work for, you live for, they give sense and they give value to every minute you spend on the court training and working to get yourself in this position and play the match with one of your greatest rivals of all time”

— Novak Djokovic, after defeating Roger Federer for his fifth Wimbledon title in the longest final in the tournament’s history.

“I’m the loser both times, so that’s the only similarity I see.”

— Federer on what were the similarities between losing to Djokovic and to Rafael Nadal in 2008’s equally classic Wimbledon final.

“Congratulations @Bandreescu_! You’ve made history and made a whole country very proud. #SheTheNorth”

— Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau tweets his support for Bianca Andreescu who defeated Serena Williams in the US Open final to become Canada’s first Grand Slam singles champion

“INEXCUSABLE”

— Serena Williams berates herself for her performance against Andreescu

“I’m not a big fan of subways. We have also in Czech, but I never really use. There can be strange people.”

— At the US Open, Karolina Pliskova admits the New York City subway is not her preferred mode of transport.

GOLF

“It’s just another step. Things at Augusta National don’t happen very rapidly”

— Kay Cockerill, the 1986 and 1987 US Women’s Amateur champion, after history was made at the once all-male enclave with the inaugural Augusta National Women’s Amateur

“It’s overwhelming just because of what has transpired. I could barely walk. Couldn’t sleep. Couldn’t walk. Couldn’t do anything. To have the opportunity to come back, it’s one of the biggest wins I’ve ever had for sure.”

— Tiger Woods after completing an epic comeback from career-threatening injury and scandal by winning the 83rd Masters, his 15th major title to end an 11-year major drought.—AFP

Sports deaths in 2019

PARIS: From the tragic death of Argentine footballer Emiliano Sala to motor racing legend Niki Lauda and South Africa’s 1995 Rugby World Cup champion Chester Williams, AFP Sport looks at some of the notable sporting figures who passed away in 2019:

EMILIANO SALA, 28

— The Argentine footballer was killed on January 21 when the plane he was in crashed into the English Channel. He was on his way to join Cardiff after they agreed a club record 17 million-euro transfer fee with Nantes.

NIKI LAUDA, 70

— Austria’s three-time Formula One world champion died on May 20, eight months after a lung transplant. Lauda suffered severe burns on his face and hands, and inhaled toxic fumes which damaged his lungs when his vehicle burst into flames at the Nurburgring in 1976. Despite being given the last rites in hospital he made an almost miraculous recovery to race again just six weeks later still bandaged and in intense pain.

JOSE ANTONIO REYES, 35

— The former Spain international was killed in a car crash on June 1 on the main road from Sevilla to Utrera. Reyes was part of Arsenal’s unbeaten ‘Invincibles’ who won the 2003-04 Premier League title. He later had spells at Real Madrid and Atletico Madrid.

MARIEKE VERVOORT, 40

— Belgian Paralympic champion Marieke Vervoort, suffering from a degenerative muscle disease, ended her life on October 22 through euthanasia. Vervoort announced her intentions after the 2016 Rio Games after detailing her struggle with constant pain, paralysis in her legs and a condition which left her barely able to sleep.

BOB WILLIS, 70

— The former England paceman, who famously bowled his country to a dramatic Test win against Australia in 1981, died December 4. Willis played in 90 Tests, taking 325 wickets with his aggressive pace bowling and also captained England for a spell before retiring in 1984 and taking up a career in broadcasting.

CHESTER WILLIAMS, 49

— The left winger in South Africa’s side that won the 1995 Rugby World Cup died of a heart attack on September 6 after returning home from a gym session. Williams was the only black player in the triumphant 1995 side and has been credited by many with breaking barriers in a team reserved for whites for many decades.

JAMES SMALL, 50

— The former South African winger, a

member of the celebrated 1995 Rugby World Cup winning squad, died of a heart attack on July 10. Small was famed for keeping rampant Jonah Lomu at bay when the Springboks won the World Cup final in Johannesburg, a historic moment for the country just a year after the end of white-minority apartheid rule.

GORDON BANKS, 81

— England’s goalkeeper during their triumphant 1966 World Cup campaign, Banks passed away on February 12. A legendary save he made from Pele at the 1970 World Cup came to define his career. “The save was one of the best I have ever seen,” Pele recalled.

MARTIN PETERS, 76

— The forward was part of the West Ham trio of captain Bobby Moore and Geoff Hurst, who scored a hat-trick in the 4-2 victory over West Germany at Wembley, for England’s only World Cup triumph in 1966.

Hurst described Peters, who died December 21 following a long battle against Alzheimer’s disease, as “one of the all-time greats”.

TYLER SKAGGS, 27

— The Los Angeles Angels pitcher was found dead July 1 in his hotel room ahead of a game against the Texas Rangers. A toxicology report showed Skaggs had ingested a lethal mix of alcohol, fentanyl and oxycodone.

RAYMOND POULIDOR, 83

— The universally loved Poulidor died November 13 but will forever be remembered as the greatest French rider never to win the Tour de France. From 1964 to 1976 Poulidor finished second in the Tour de France on three occasions and third five times in an era dominated by Eddy Merckx.

ANTHOINE HUBERT, 22

— The French driver was killed in a horrific high-speed race just minutes into the Formula Two race at the Belgian Grand Prix on August 31. Hubert, who was considered a serious talent by Renault’s F1 set up, died following a three-car pile-up also involving Juan Manuel Correa and Giuliano Alesi.

FRANK ROBINSON, 83

— The pioneering baseball great, who was the first African-American to become a manager in the major leagues, passed away February 7 after suffering from bone cancer. The Hall of Famer won two World Series titles during a glittering career and remains the only player to win MVP awards in both the National League and American League.

MATTI NYKANEN, 55

— The Finnish ski jumping ace died suddenly on February 4. Nykanen dominated the sport in the 1980s when he won four Olympic

gold medals, six world titles and the World Cup four times. He made headlines after his sporting career as a pop singer and stripper and did repeated stunts in prison for assault.

HIDEKICHI MIYAZAKI, 108

— A Japanese centenarian who set the 100-metre sprint world record for the over-105 age category died January 23. Miyazaki, dubbed “Golden Bolt” after eight-time Olympic gold medallist Usain Bolt, clocked 42.22 seconds in his home city of Kyoto in 2015.

KELLY CATLIN, 23

— The American three-time world champion cyclist took her own life on March 7 after a battle with depression. Catlin was part of the US team pursuit squads that captured world titles in 2016, 2017 and 2018 and also won a silver medal at the 2016 Rio Olympics.

JESSI COMBS, 39

— A racing driver considered the “fastest woman on four wheels” was killed in an August 27 car accident trying to break her own record. Combs earned her “fastest woman” title in 2013 when she hit 398 miles (641 kilometres) per hour.

PERNELL WHITAKER, 55

— The former Olympic boxing gold medallist and four-weight world champion died after a traffic accident in Virginia on July 14. Whitaker was regarded as one of the most gifted fighters of his generation, a skilful technician who enjoyed a successful professional career after winning gold as a lightweight at the 1984 Olympics.

ANDRES GIMENO, 82

— The oldest male French Open champion in the Open era passed away October 9. Gimeno’s biggest achievement was winning Roland Garros aged 34 in 1972 but he also reached the Australian Open final in 1969 and the semi-finals at Wimbledon in 1970.

BILLY MCNEILL, 79

— The former Celtic captain, the skipper of the ‘Lisbon Lions’ side that became the first British team to win the European Cup in 1967, died April 22 after suffering from dementia for a number of years. His spent his entire playing career with Celtic before going on to manage the Glasgow giants.

PETER SNELL, 80

— The New Zealand running great, the most dominant middle-distance runner of his era, died December 12. Snell, who had suffered heart problems for a few years, won gold in the only three Olympic events he contested — the 800 metres at Rome in 1960 and the 800m and 1500m in Tokyo four years later. — AFP

Sports

Australia mull five specialist bowlers for Boxing Day Test

Australia head into Melbourne clash on the back of three wins at home

MELBOURNE: Australia could play five specialist bowlers against New Zealand during the second Test, captain Tim Paine said yesterday, with the decision being left until the last moment. The Melbourne Cricket Ground track has been lifeless during the past two Boxing Day Tests, making it hard to take 20 wickets, although a Sheffield Shield match there this month was abandoned due to a dangerous pitch.

With this in mind, Paine said a decision would only be made after a late inspection. But one scenario could be a five-pronged attack, in which Queensland seamer Michael Neser likely makes his debut.

"We'll find out tomorrow. The wicket is a bit unknown... but we've got a plan in place for both scenarios (with five bowlers or without)," Paine told reporters yesterday. "We've probably got two different teams (in mind), to be honest, so we'll make the final call tomorrow." Australia traditionally play only four front-line bowlers — three quicks and spinner. According to Cricket Australia, they have only fielded five once before in the past decade — at the 2013 Sydney Test against Sri Lanka.

If they go down this route today, Neser is set to line up alongside Mitchell Starc, Pat Cummins and Nathan Lyon, with James Pattinson replacing the injured Josh Hazlewood. Travis Head is expected to be the fall guy,

with wicketkeeper Paine moving up the batting order to six. "Our batting team has been scoring a lot of runs so if we were to go one more bowler, we would be comfortable they could do the job," said Paine. "The bowlers we would be bringing in can all bat so while we're taking a batter out, we're probably lengthening our line-up."

Australia head into the Melbourne clash on the back of three wins at home this summer — two against Pakistan before their 296-run thrashing of New Zealand in the first Test at Perth, a day-night affair.

Marnus Labuschagne has been their star batsman, smashing his third century in a row at Perth before a second-innings 50.

In contrast Steve Smith, their hero during the Ashes against England this year, has managed only 43 and 16 in his last two innings, out twice to short balls from Neil Wagner. It followed a quiet series against Pakistan and he is keen to pile on some runs in Melbourne.

"I've been facing a fair bit of short stuff in the nets because I'm expecting a bit (in Melbourne)," Smith said. "It's going to be completely different with the red ball as opposed to the pink ball, particularly (compared) to the second innings in Perth when it was a bit up and down with cracks and stuff. "It's going to be different, but I'm looking forward to it." — AFP



MELBOURNE: Australian captain Tim Paine bats in the nets ahead of the second cricket Test match between Australia and New Zealand in Melbourne yesterday. — AFP

N Zealand make two changes

MELBOURNE: New Zealand made two changes yesterday for the Boxing Day Test against Australia with fast bowler Trent Boult back from injury and Tom Blundell replacing Jeet Ravel at the top of the order.

The dangerous Boult missed the first Test in Perth, where his team crashed by 296 runs, with a rib injury that also kept him out of their final clash against England. But he has worked his way back to fitness, desperate to play in the Black Caps first Boxing Day Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground since 1987, with a crowd of more 75,000 expected on day one.

Williamson also confirmed Blundell, usually a middle-order batsman, would open alongside Tom Latham in place of the out-of-form Ravel. "He's a positive player and a smart cricketer so it's just trying to adapt to the conditions. It's important he goes out and plays his natural game," Williamson told reporters of Blundell.

"He's been a very good player for a long time and he's a mature head ... it's a really exciting opportunity for him." New Zealand have had 10 days to recover from their Perth day-night Test thrashing, which saw their batsmen skittled for 166 and 171.

Williamson said they had learned from their mistakes. "Perth was tough and Australia are very good and tactically sound," he said after his team were put through their paces in the nets on Christmas Day.

"It's important we learn from some bits of Perth but turn our focus to Melbourne and changing conditions and perhaps not be too reactive to that performance." Williamson was also keen to ensure his players do not get carried away with playing in front of such a big crowd during one of the most prestigious days on the



MELBOURNE: New Zealand bowler Trent Boult sends down a delivery in the nets ahead of the second cricket Test match between Australia and New Zealand in Melbourne yesterday. — AFP

cricket calendar.

"I guess there's a sense of romance about being involved in the Boxing Day Test ... at the same time it's

about removing a little bit of that and bringing the focus back to the cricket and making those improvements we need to." — AFP

Woakes the latest to fall victim to England flu bug

PRETORIA: Chris Woakes is the latest concern for England ahead of the first test against South Africa as the tourists battle with a flu bug, captain Joe Root said. Woakes missed practice on Tuesday after falling victim to the bug that has swept through the tourists' camp since they arrived in South Africa 10 days ago.

Ben Stokes' availability was also unclear after his father was taken to hospital in Johannesburg after falling ill with Stokes foregoing Tuesday's workout to be at his bedside. Ged Stokes was described as being in a "critical condition" in a statement from the England and Wales Cricket Board.

"It puts things in perspective. We're here to play good, hard cricket but it's important as a squad that we want Ben and his family to have all the support they can get," Root told reporters. "I want to stress the importance of respecting his privacy. What's most important is we support him and his family. It's crucial that comes first." Root said Jofra Archer and Stuart Broad were improving after they were laid low by flu but that they were still being monitored before a final team selection for the first test was made.

"It's been quite frustrating in many ways but we have to handle it and get on with it and make sure that the guys selected are ready to go and in a good place to hopefully win this first game," said Root. The first test begins on Boxing Day at Centurion and is followed by three more next month.

Meanwhile, James Anderson's return from injury could not be more timely for England, who are still unsure about the make-up of their bowling attack as they head into the first test against South Africa.

But while Jofra Archer and Stuart Broad are still not sure of playing in the match, which starts on Boxing Day, after being laid low with flu, Anderson will be back on the frontline for what will be his 150th Test.

England are expected to field a five-man seam attack, foregoing spin, if all their pacemen are fully fit. However, that situation may need to be reassessed based on the availability of Ben Stokes.

The all-rounder's father was admitted to hospital in Johannesburg his condition was described as being



Chris Woakes

"critical" on Tuesday in a statement from the England and Wales Cricket Board.

The 37-year-old Anderson will be the ninth cricketer to reach the 150-test milestone — joining the likes of Sachin Tendulkar, Steve Waugh and Jacques Kallis — when he makes his return to the England attack for the first time since limping off with a calf injury at the start of the Ashes in August.

"He's looking as good as I've ever seen him," said captain Joe Root. Anderson had arrived in the country ahead of the majority of the England squad to attend a fast bowlers' camp, underlining his desire to get back into the team.

"It feels like a long time since I've played a competitive game so to get some overs ... was very pleasing,"

he told reporters.

"There was a bit of rust but that's to be expected having not played for four or five months. I'm just happy to be back out there."

Anderson was only 20 when he made his debut, taking five wickets against Zimbabwe at Lord's in 2003, and last month said he wanted to continue through to the next Ashes series, which will start at the end of 2021 in Australia.

"I still want to do it, that's part of the reason I worked so hard to get back," added England's record wicket taker with 575 test scalps.

"It's something I love and I still feel I've got something to offer, so that hunger and desire to get back is still very much there." — Reuters

Bangladesh insist on neutral venue for Pakistan Tests

DHAKA: Bangladesh are ready to play Twenty20 Internationals in Pakistan next month but the test series must take place in a neutral venue, the chief executive of the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), Nizamuddin Chowdhury, said.

Test cricket returned to Pakistan after a decade with a two-test series against Sri Lanka earlier this month. Rawalpindi and Karachi hosted Pakistan's first tests on home soil since a militant attack on Sri Lanka's team bus in Lahore in 2009.

Enthusied by the smooth staging of the series, Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has announced its team would no more play their 'home' matches abroad as has been the practice with test teams shunning the country citing safety concerns.

PCB's assertion notwithstanding, Bangladesh remain wary of touring Pakistan for a lengthy period, Chowdhury told the Daily Star newspaper. "We stand firm on our ground. We only want to play T20Is in Pakistan," the BCB CEO was quoted as saying. "The stakeholders related to the series do not want us to play longer-version cricket in Pakistan," Nizamuddin said.

Bangladesh are expected to play three Twenty20 Internationals in Lahore before a two-test series against Pakistan who completed a 1-0 series victory against Sri Lanka on Monday.

"Actually, we have no other option here. We can play the T20Is but if we are to play tests then it should be in a neutral venue," Nizamuddin added. PCB chairman Ehsan Mani has hinted raising the matter with the governing International Cricket Council should Bangladesh refuse to play the tests in Pakistan.

"No one should be under any misapprehension as to where Pakistan's home Tests will take place," Mani told reporters on Monday. "All of Pakistan's matches, against Bangladesh or anyone else, will take place in Pakistan. "I still hope the BCB will reflect on the matter and accept there is no reason for them not to visit Pakistan." — Reuters

Van der Dussen to make SA test debut

PRETORIA: South Africa batsman Rassie van der Dussen will make his test debut in the first match of the series against England starting today. The 30-year-old Van der Dussen will bat at number five, captain Faf du Plessis said yesterday, in the place of Temba Bavuma who has been ruled out with a hip injury.

Van der Dussen is one of six uncapped players named in the squad chosen for the first two matches of the four-test series against England. He had played 18 one-day and nine Twenty20 internationals and was one of the few South Africans who impressed at this year's World Cup in England.

"He was a mature cricketer when he started for us in ODIs and is someone who knows his game very well," Du Plessis said of Van der Dussen. "He came into international cricket looking very comfortable and over the last season and a half has been very fruitful and scored a lot of runs in white ball cricket.

"He is calm and composed with the bat. You can just see it sometimes when someone is suited for international cricket and that's been the case with him. I think he will be very much at home."

Du Plessis said a decision on playing an extra bowler would be made on Thursday morning after assessing conditions at Centurion, Pretoria. "We have asked for good wickets for this Test series that offer both something to the bowler and batsmen," the South Africa captain added. — Reuters

Sports

CJ Anderson 'done with ball' after failed Seahawks tryout

Texans DE Watts targets return for playoffs

NEW YORK: After a tryout with the Seattle Seahawks that didn't result in him landing a contract, free agent running back C.J. Anderson tweeted that he is "done with ball." The 28-year-old appeared in two games for the Detroit Lions in September, gaining 43 yards on 16 carries, before he was released.

The Seahawks brought him in for a workout, but they instead signed two other running backs: Marshawn Lynch and Robert Turbin, neither of whom has appeared in an NFL game since October 2018.

Anderson took to Twitter later Monday to express his frustration with the business of the NFL. First, with a string of laughing emojis, he tweeted, "Man oh man this is the reason why I'm done with ball. Performance base business huh"

He then added, "Well back to the plan for 2020 and super excited about changing my community with (my foundation)." When a follower tweeted, "Total joke. All politics," Anderson replied, "You don't even know the half of it. It would be rude to all Seattle fans what they told me and my agent. Once again that's the Game not Football there is a difference my friend."

"Some of the people never have to experience the Game. I'm Happy for those people. Unfortunately I was the unlucky one who had to play the Game instead of football. All started back April 9 2017. The Football was no longer football for me. It became the Game after that." He was a member of the Denver Broncos in 2017.

Anderson began his career with the Broncos as an undrafted free agent in 2013, and he helped Denver win the Super Bowl after the 2015 season, rushing for 90 yards and a touchdown on 23 carries in the title win over the Carolina Panthers.

He spent five seasons in Denver, earning a Pro Bowl nod in 2014 and rushing for a career-high 1,007 yards in 2017. In 2018, he appeared in nine games for the Panthers and two for the Los Angeles Rams, gaining a combined 403 yards and two touchdowns on 67 carries.

Meanwhile, Houston Texans defensive end J.J. Watt returned to practice Tuesday and said he plans to rejoin the team on the field for its playoff run.

A three-time Defensive Player of the Year, Watt had surgery eight weeks ago for a torn pectoral muscle. He sustained the injury in Week 8 as he tackled Oakland Raiders running back Josh Jacobs. He is eligible to return off injured reserve for the first round of the playoffs, which will be held Jan. 4-5.

"Yes, the plan is for the first playoff game," he said at a press conference. —Los Angeles Rams cornerback Jalen Ramsey will miss the team's season finale Sunday against the Arizona Cardinals due to a knee injury. Rams coach Sean McVay confirmed that Ramsey has a Grade 2 LCL strain. Ramsey, who was named to his third straight Pro Bowl this season, finished the season with 50 tackles and five passes defended in 12 games. —The Dallas Cowboys signed linebacker Ray-Ray Armstrong and offensive lineman Wyatt Miller. The moves came after the team placed linebacker Leighton Vander Esch and guard Xavier Su'a-Filo on injured reserve. Vander Esch, the Cowboys' 2018 first-round pick, will have surgery to fix a neck injury. He finished his second season with 72 tackles in nine games.

Su'a-Filo broke a bone in his lower leg during Dallas' Sunday loss to the Philadelphia Eagles. He played in 11 games this season with four starts.

—The Philadelphia Eagles waived running back Jay Ajayi and placed cornerback Ronald Darby on injured reserve among a series of transactions.

Ajayi, 26, appeared in just three games for the Eagles this season, rushing 10 times for 30 yards. Darby, who turns 26 on Jan. 2, sustained a hip flexor strain in Sunday's win against the Dallas Cowboys. The injury doesn't not require surgery, NFL Network's Ian Rapoport reported.

Philadelphia signed tight end Richard Rodgers, pro-



SEATTLE: File photo shows wide receiver Larry Fitzgerald #11 of the Arizona Cardinals stretches out to score a touchdown as defensive lineman Quinton Jefferson #99 of the Seattle Seahawks and defensive back Bradley McDougald #30 defend during the first half of game at CenturyLink Field on December 22, 2019 in Seattle, Washington. —AFP

moted wide receiver Deontay Burnett from the practice squad to the active roster, and signed wideout River Cracraft to the practice squad.

—The Steelers placed quarterback Mason Rudolph on injured reserve, meaning Pittsburgh will rely on rookie Devlin Hodges this weekend as the team vies for the final wild-card berth in the AFC.

Hodges started Pittsburgh's game at the New York Jets last Sunday and was pulled in the second quarter

in favor of Rudolph. But when Rudolph sustained a left shoulder injury in the second half, Hodges returned.

Rudolph, a second-year QB from Oklahoma State, took over as the starter when Ben Roethlisberger went on injured reserve with an elbow injury in September. Rudolph appeared in 10 games on the year, starting eight, tallying a 5-3 record. With Rudolph out, Paxton Lynch — drafted in the first round in 2016 by the Denver Broncos — will back up Hodges. —Reuters

Kuwait wins two gold medals in fencing



By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait maintained its dominance in the Arab Fencing Championship in the open category for both genders, after winning two gold medals, while UAE also won two gold medals, during the competitions being held at Kuwait Fencing Association Hall in Daya, with the participation of 10 countries: Saudi Arabia, Iraq, UAE, Tunis, Syria, Lebanon, Qatar, Yemen, Palestine in addition to host country Kuwait.

In the men's competitions Kuwait Epee team won the teams gold, followed by Saudi Arabia in second place, while UAE and Iraq took third. Kuwait team include Abdelaziz Al-Shatti, Khalifa Al-Atiyya, Hassan Al-



Foudary and Ali Al-Fadhly.

Meanwhile, the Saber team won the gold medal, while Iraq took silver and Syria took bronze. The team is made of Yousuf and Bandar Al-Shamlan, Mohammad Al-Fadhly and Ammar Al-Ammari.

In the women's category UAE Saber team won the teams' gold beating Syria while Iraq took bronze.

UAE won the gold medal of the teams' foil, Qatar silver and Iraq bronze.

Deputy chairman of the technical committee at KFA Hassan Malallah said Kuwait players performance is satisfactory, and enabled them to win gold.

Malallah said the technical committee's policy is to build generations and follow them with the goal of

reaching world status.

He thanked KFA Chairman Abdallah Al-Waalan for supporting the technical committee and athletes and providing them with all they need.

Country	Gold	Silver	Bronze
Kuwait	6	2	2
UAE	3	4	-
Syria	1	2	-
Lebanon	-	3	-
Saudi Arabia	-	2	-
Iraq	-	1	7
Qatar	1	1	-

Chelsea want to keep Willian faith against Saints

LONDON: Willian's performance at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium last weekend highlighted just why Frank Lampard is keen to see the Brazilian's future at Chelsea resolved. While much of the focus this season has been trained on the outstanding contribution of the youngsters in Blues manager Lampard's squad, Willian's performances on the right of a front three have been consistently excellent.

The winger appeared to have lost his way in recent seasons, particularly last term when he struggled for consistency under Maurizio Sarri and appeared in danger of leaving the London club.

This campaign has been different, though, and Lampard will hope the player can inspire a return to home form when Southampton visit Stamford Bridge today following Chelsea's impressive 2-0 defeat of Jose Mourinho's Spurs.

Willian was certainly the stand-out performer in a display Lampard admitted was probably his side's best of the season after a worrying run of form that had brought four defeats in the previous five Premier League games, included home losses to Bournemouth and West Ham.

There were always going to be frustrating periods for Lampard and his players in what is a season of transition for Chelsea, who are nevertheless now fourth in the Premier League.

The task of bedding in a number of graduates from the club's academy against the backdrop of the pre-season transfer embargo has inevitably presented challenges.

Willian, though, has maintained impressively high levels, appearing rejuvenated under the club's new manager. Certainly Lampard appears to have found

the key to drawing the best out of the 31-year-old whose work on the right has contributed to striker Tammy Abraham making such a significant impact in his breakthrough season at west London club Chelsea.

Willian's work ethic had been questioned previously, with his failure to track back and support his full-back at times highlighted last season. This time around, there can be no doubt about his willingness to put in the hard yards.

And he has strengthened his hand in his contract negotiations with the club as he seeks a new deal that will keep him at Chelsea beyond the end of this season. Willian's existing deal runs out at the end of the current campaign, along with those of fellow thirty-somethings Pedro and Olivier Giroud.

With Chelsea's two-window transfer ban having been halved, leaving the club to bring in new recruits next month, Giroud is likely to leave in a bid to find the regular football he believes will boost his chances of being a member of hosts France's squad for Euro 2020.

Pedro has been reduced to a fringe player and is also expected to move on at the end of the season.

Willian, though, is a different matter and while Chelsea are notoriously reluctant to offer extended deals to players over the age of 30, the Brazilian could become an exception.

For his part, Lampard has made it clear he wants the South American to stay. And while the manager has no intention of shifting his policy of promoting young players, he knows the value of experience.

"He's a very important member of the club and of course I want it to be done but obviously both sides have to be happy for that," said Lampard when asked last month about Willian's future. Chelsea captain Cesar Azpilicueta faces a late fitness test following a hamstring problem sustained at Spurs.

Meanwhile the Saints, flirting with the relegation zone, could be without Shane Long for the whole of the busy Christmas programme because of a knee injury the striker suffered during last week's win at Aston Villa. —AFP

Vardy dilemma for Leicester as Liverpool lie in wait

LONDON: Leicester City face runaway Premier League leaders Liverpool on Boxing Day knowing their own title hopes are very much in the balance.

Thursday's match will see the second-placed Foxes, the shock 2015/16 champions, kick off 10 points adrift of Liverpool, who will arrive in the East Midlands fresh from winning a maiden Club World Cup title following a 1-0 victory over Brazilian side Flamengo in Qatar.

One of the more remarkable statistics in English football is that it is nearly 30 years since Liverpool were last crowned domestic champions in what was then the First Division.

But Premier League silverware is now in sight following a successful 2019 that has also seen Liverpool take the Champions League and UEFA Super Cup trophies back to Anfield as well as the Club World Cup.

One of the enduring peculiarities of the English game that has not changed, however, is the packed programme of matches that take place during the Christmas and New Year holiday period.

The congested schedule is again causing headaches for managers, with Foxes boss Brendan Rodgers saying the fixture list is a "nonsense".

Leicester kick off against Liverpool at 2000 GMT today before they play West Ham on Saturday. They then complete four games in 10 days with a trip to Newcastle on New Year's Day, before hosting Wigan in the FA Cup on January 4.

This presents Rodgers with a problem about how often to field Jamie Vardy, the league's leading scorer so far this season, given the striker is now aged 32. "The game is about money now. You can't say it's about the welfare of players," insisted Rodgers, himself a former Liverpool manager who added that Vardy, for all he has scored 16 goals this term, had "no chance" of being involved throughout the festive period.

This season sees the Premier League experimenting with a 'winter break' that will see all teams get a week-end off in February. But that pales into insignificance compared to the Bundesliga's long-established winter break. The German top-flight closes down for several weeks in December and January, with Rodgers saying the English break was a "let's pretend" version.

Liverpool will be without Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain after the midfielder suffered an ankle injury against Flamengo as Jurgen Klopp's side, unbeaten in the Premier League this season, bid to go 13 points clear and all but end the title-race before by the halfway stage. "If anyone wants to think things are over before they are over we cannot stop them doing that, though it is not important to us," said Liverpool manager Klopp.

"As a group we are pretty good at shutting the doors all around us to keep out the noise from outside," the German added.

Fourth-placed Chelsea, fresh from a 2-0 win away to Tottenham Hotspur marred by allegation of racist abuse, are at home to Southampton while Spurs will be without the suspended Son Heung-min for the visit of Brighton after the South Korean's red card against the Blues. Mikel Arteta's reign as Arsenal manager starts away to Bournemouth, while new Everton boss Carlo Ancelotti is in charge at home to Burnley.

Newcastle, managed by former Old Trafford favourite Steve Bruce, will look to complete a league double over Manchester United with both sides presently level on 25 points and looking to break into the top six.

Sheffield United face Watford, still bottom despite last week's win over Manchester United. —AFP

EPL table

English Premier League table ahead of Thursday's Boxing Day matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Liverpool	17	16	1	0	42	14	49
Leicester	18	12	3	3	41	14	39
Man City	18	12	2	4	50	20	38
Chelsea	18	10	2	6	33	25	32
Sheff Utd	18	7	7	4	22	16	28
Wolves	18	6	9	3	26	22	27
Tottenham	18	7	5	6	32	26	26
Man Utd	18	6	7	5	26	22	25
Newcastle	18	7	4	7	18	24	25
Burnley	18	7	3	8	23	29	24
Arsenal	18	5	8	5	24	27	23
Crystal Palace	18	6	5	7	15	20	23
Brighton	18	5	5	8	21	26	20
Bournemouth	18	5	4	9	19	25	19
Everton	18	5	4	9	20	29	19
West Ham	17	5	4	8	19	28	19
Southampton	18	5	3	10	21	37	18
Aston Villa	18	4	3	11	24	33	15
Norwich	18	3	3	12	19	37	12
Watford	18	2	6	10	11	32	12



Matches on TV (Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE	
Tottenham v Brighton & Hove Albion	15:30
beIN Sports HD 2	
Aston Villa v Norwich City	18:00
beIN Sports HD 6	
Chelsea v Southampton	18:00
beIN Sports HD 2	
Everton FC v Burnley FC	18:00
beIN Sports HD 4	
Crystal Palace v West Ham United	18:00
beIN Sports HD 5	
Bournemouth v Arsenal FC	18:00
beIN Sports HD 1	
Sheffield United v Watford	18:00
beIN Sports HD 3	
Manchester United v Newcastle United	20:30
beIN Sports HD 2	
Leicester City v Liverpool	23:00
beIN Sports HD 2	

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Australian Open prize pool jumps to \$49m

Andreescu out of season opener in Auckland with 'knee issues'



TORONTO: File photo shows Bianca Andreescu of Canada lunges for a forehand on her way to defeating Karolina Pliskova of the Czech Republic in Rogers Cup tennis tournament quarter-final action in Toronto on Friday August 9, 2019. — AFP

MELBOURNE: The prize pool for the 2020 Australian Open has been boosted by 14% to A\$71 million (\$49.1 million), organisers said on Tuesday, with the biggest gains for players exiting in the early rounds. Players losing in the first round of qualifying at the year's first Grand Slam will take home A\$20,000, up by a third from last year, while singles players who exit in the first round of the main draw will earn A\$90,000, a jump of 20%. Before the start of the 2018 Australian Open, Serb champion Novak Djokovic had to distance himself from media reports that he had pushed for a revolt over the way revenues from the four Grand Slams were distributed to help reward a larger group of players.

"We have long been committed to improving the pay and conditions for a deeper pool of international tennis players," tournament director Craig Tiley said in a statement, noting that overall prize money has more than tripled since 2007.

"This year ... we pushed to reward players competing early in the tournament in both singles and doubles." The 2020 women's and men's singles champions will receive smaller increases in prize money, with both

winners taking home A\$4.12 million, up \$20,000.

Players can usually secure a main draw appearance in the tournament, which starts on Jan. 20, by having a ranking in the top 100. Naomi Osaka of Japan is the reigning women's singles champion at the Australian Open while Djokovic claimed a record seventh title by defeating great rival Rafa Nadal in the 2019 final.

In a report published last year, an International Review Panel commissioned to address betting-related and other integrity issues said that players in the lowest tiers were susceptible to being corrupted because of the difficulty of making a living, with only 250-350 players earning enough money to break even.

The International Tennis Federation last week announced a series of measures as part of its fight against corruption in the sport's lower levels.

Meanwhile, Auckland Classic organisers suffered a major setback to their tournament lineup on Tuesday with US Open champion Bianca Andreescu withdrawing due to "knee issues". The Canadian teenager had been the top seed for the Jan. 6-12 tournament, which is a traditional warmup event for players fine tuning their

game ahead of the Australian Open.

"Organisers have been advised that Bianca Andreescu has had to withdraw from the upcoming event due to her ongoing knee issues," the tournament said in a statement on Tuesday.

"We are disappointed not to welcome Bianca back and wish her all the best for a speedy recovery." Andreescu came through qualifying in Auckland earlier this year only to lose to Germany's Julia Goerges in the final, which she used as a springboard for a sensational 2019. She won her first WTA Tour title at Indian Wells, then beat Serena Williams in the finals in Toronto and again at Flushing Meadows to clinch her first Grand Slam title. The Auckland tournament had assembled arguably its strongest ever field with Andreescu, Williams, former Australian Open champion Caroline Wozniacki and 2017 French Open winner Jelena Ostapenko all confirmed. Two-times Grand Slam winner Svetlana Kuznetsova and American teenagers Amanda Anisimova and Coco Gauff have also entered the tournament before they head to Melbourne Park for the season opening Grand Slam that runs from Jan. 20-Feb. 2. —Reuters

Nuggets' Malone signs extension

DENVER: The Denver Nuggets and head coach Michael Malone agreed to a contract extension Tuesday. Terms were not disclosed, but ESPN reported the deal extends through the 2022-23 season. The Nuggets (21-8) currently have the second-best record in the Western Conference behind the Los Angeles Lakers (24-6).

"We have been very fortunate to have Coach Malone lead our resurgence. His tireless work ethic and passion are clearly reflected in the continued improvement of our roster," president of basketball operations Tim Connelly said in a press release. "We are all extremely excited for him to continue to lead our team as we try to build a championship level organization." In his fifth season with Denver, Malone is already the fourth-winningest coach in franchise history at 194-163 (54.3 percent). —Mavericks star guard Luka Doncic is closing in on a return, which could come as soon as Dallas' Thursday home game against the San Antonio Spurs.

The 20-year-old has missed the past four games with an ankle injury but returned to practice on Tuesday. "I'm feeling good," Doncic told reporters after practice. "Just taking care of it. A lot of things that we have to do, and we're just taking care of it. We'll see how it progresses, and we'll see if I play."

—The Los Angeles Lakers should have their two stars in the lineup when they face the "visiting" Los Angeles Clippers in a marquee game. Lakers stars LeBron James and Anthony Davis are listed as questionable, but both are expected to start against the Clippers in the Christmas Day meeting. The Lakers enter with a season-high three-game losing streak.

James missed a 128-104 loss to the visiting Denver Nuggets on Sunday because of a muscle strain near his rib cage. Making matters worse, Davis slipped in the third quarter, and his right knee bent awkwardly. He left the game in discomfort, returned for a few minutes, but then departed for good as Denver's lead continued to expand.

—Philadelphia 76ers rookie guard Matisse Thybulle will miss two to four weeks due to a sprained right knee, according to multiple reports. — Reuters

Russia to compete in Tokyo under national flag

MOSCOW: The Russian Olympic Committee said Tuesday it expected that Russian athletes would take part in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics Games under the national flag despite a four-year doping ban.

"The Russian Olympic Committee is a rightful member of the Olympic movement," its president Stanislav Pozdnyakov told reporters after a meeting.

"Therefore we have every reason to believe that we will put together a team for Tokyo and do everything in our power for this team to perform under the Russian tricolour."

The World Anti-Doping Agency on December 10 banned Russia for four years from major global events, including the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, over manipulated doping data.

WADA accused Moscow of falsifying data from a doping testing laboratory that was handed over to investigators earlier this year.

Russia has said it would contest the ban, with

President Vladimir Putin slamming the sanctions as politically motivated.

Speaking on Tuesday, Pozdnyakov confirmed that the Russian Olympic Committee would support the decision of its supervisory board to defy the WADA ban.

Last week RUSADA anti-doping agency said it had "made a decision not to agree" with the four-year ban by the World Anti-Doping Agency's decision.

The decision will have to be communicated to WADA before the end of the month, triggering the appeal process in the Lausanne-based Court of Arbitration for Sport.

Under the sanctions, Russian sportsmen and women will still be allowed to compete at the Olympics next year and the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, but only as neutrals and if they can demonstrate that they were not part of what WADA believes was a state-sponsored system of doping. —AFP



MOSCOW: Russian Olympic Committee (ROC) President Stanislav Pozdnyakov holds a press conference in Moscow following meetings with the Russian anti-doping agency to discuss Russia's doping ban from major sport competitions. — AFP