



NOTICE

Due to the New Year holiday today, Kuwait Times will not be published tomorrow, January 2, 2019. Our next issue will hit the newsstands on Thursday, January 3, 2019. However, readers can stay updated on breaking news and events on our digital media channels including our website www.kuwaittimes.net and on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook.



Kuwait rejects 'slanderous' charges of terror financing

Syrian Embassy denies placing Kuwaiti figures on terror list

KUWAIT: Kuwait dismisses "slanderous" accusations lodged against it over terror financing, Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah said yesterday. "I am baffled how Kuwait has been included in a list of terrorism financing countries," Jarallah told Al-Jazeera television, citing the state's hosting of a trio of donor conferences in support of Syria as counterevidence.

His remarks came as the Syrian Embassy in Kuwait categorically denied a report by Kuwaiti daily Al-Seyassah on Sunday over listing a number of Kuwaiti personalities on

the terrorism financing list. The embassy said in a statement that "it considers these allegations an attempt by some suspicious bodies which seem to be unhappy with the development of bilateral ties between the two brotherly countries".

On the status of Kuwait's embassy in Syria, Jarallah said, "operations will only resume with the Arab League's consent." He predicted a "thaw in relations" between Syria and Arab Gulf states in the coming days as more nations look to reopen their embassies in Damascus. Jarallah added the

Syrian Embassy in Kuwait has the leeway needed to look after the Syrian diaspora in the country, which number around a quarter of a million people.

Arab states, including some that once backed rebels against President Bashar Al-Assad, are seeking to reconcile with him after decisive gains by his forces in the war, aiming to expand their clout in Syria at the expense of non-Arab Turkey and Iran. The United Arab Emirates re-opened its embassy in Damascus last Thursday and Bahrain said the next day that its

embassy there and the Syrian diplomatic mission in Manama had been operating "without interruption".

Arab League's permanent representatives are due to meet in Cairo on Jan 6. US-allied Gulf Arab states were the main regional backers of armed groups opposed to Assad, providing finance or weapons or both, acting largely as part of a program of support for the armed opposition coordinated by Washington. Unlike its other neighbors, Kuwait kept Syria's embassy in Kuwait open and opposed arming the

rebels, although private donors in Kuwait sent funds to anti-Assad forces. Kuwait has led a humanitarian fundraising campaign for Syria through the United Nations.

An Arab diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Reuters last week he believed a majority of members wanted Syria to be readmitted. Syria's membership of the Arab League was suspended in 2011 in response to the government's violent crackdown on "Arab Spring" protests. For Syria to be reinstated, the Arab League must reach a consensus. — Agencies

World rings in New Year; Amir exchanges greetings

SYDNEY/KUWAIT: Australia's largest city Sydney put on its biggest-ever fireworks display in a spectacular welcome to the New Year, kicking off a wave of celebrations for billions around the world. A record amount of pyrotechnics as well as new fireworks effects and colors lit up the city's skyline for 12 minutes and dazzled the more than 1.5 million spectators who packed the harbor front and parks. The party atmosphere swept across major cities in Asia, Europe, Africa and the Americas as the clock ticked past midnight.

III the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday exchanged congratulatory cables with world leaders on the advent of the New Year. In the cables, the Amir wished the leaders evermore progress to their respective countries, as well as hoping for the prevalence of peace, security and prosperity worldwide. — Agencies



SYDNEY: New Year's Eve fireworks erupt over Sydney's iconic Harbour Bridge and Opera House early today. — AFP (See Page 18)

News in brief

TV boss fired over sex scene

TEHRAN: A regional boss of Iran's state broadcaster IRIB has been fired after inadvertently letting a Jackie Chan sex scene slip through its tight censorship rules. Viewers on Iran's Kish Island were shocked when their local TV station showed the martial arts star having sex with a prostitute in one of his films. But there were angry responses from some Iranians pointing out that no one had been fired over a fatal bus crash that killed 10 students at Tehran's Azad University last week. IRIB TV presenter Reza Rashidpoor joked on his morning talk show that the controversy could have been avoided if IRIB had included a caption saying Chan was married to the actress playing the prostitute. — AFP

Israel protests flag 'desecration'

JERUSALEM/AMMAN: Israel protested to Jordan on Sunday after the spokeswoman for the government in Amman was photographed stepping on the Israeli flag. Jumana Ghunaimat, Jordan's minister for media affairs and communications and the government spokeswoman, on Thursday walked over an Israeli flag painted on the floor of the headquarters of Jordan's professional unions in Amman. She was on her way to attend a meeting between Jordanian Prime Minister Omar Al-Razzaz and union representatives. Razzaz, however, entered the building through a rear door. — Reuters

Guard boats to get stealth tech

LONDON: Iran's Revolutionary Guards said yesterday they plan to upgrade their speedboats in the Gulf with radar-evading stealth technology and new missile launchers. "We are trying to increase the agility of the Guards' speedboats and equip them with stealth technology to facilitate their operations," said Alireza Tangsiri, the Guards' navy chief. He said the speedboats will be equipped with new missiles, and their speed will reach 80 knots per hour. The head of the Iranian armed forces warned that any Iranian confrontation with US forces might also target Gulf nations that he said had invited them into the region. — Reuters

Hasina rejects calls for fresh elections amid rigging claims

DHAKA: Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday rejected calls for a new vote after being declared landslide winner in an election marred by deadly violence that the opposition slammed as "farcical" and rigged. Hasina's ruling Awami League party and its allies won 288 seats in the 300-seat parliament, with the main opposition securing only six seats. Hasina, who gets a record fourth term, swept aside opposition protests over clashes between rival supporters that left at least 17 dead and allegations of ballot box stuffing and intimidation.

"The election was totally free and independent. There is no doubt about it," the 71-year-old Hasina said. "I have nothing to hide. Whatever I do I do it for the country. My conscience is clear," she added in comments to reporters. Hasina insisted she had no desire "to remain in power" and that



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina

voters had backed her party because of Bangladesh's economic growth during her decade-long rule.

The opposition alliance led by the Bangladesh National Party (BNP) said it had been the target of a crackdown for months leading up to Sunday's poll and called for a rerun. "We are demanding that a fresh election is held under a neutral government as early as possible," alliance leader Kamal Hossain told reporters. Election authorities said they had not received a single complaint against the vote and that there was "no scope to hold a fresh one".

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UAE, Bahrain, Egypt uphold jail sentences of activists

NICOSIA: Courts in the Gulf and Egypt have upheld jail terms against leading activists in a crackdown on protesting through social media, marking a somber end to 2018 for rights campaigners. In both Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, prominent campaigners lost their appeals yesterday against lengthy prison terms over their online posts. Award-winning human rights activist Ahmed Mansoor saw his 10-year sentence upheld by the UAE's Federal Supreme Court. Amnesty International said. Elsewhere in the Gulf, Amnesty decried the "utterly outrageous" five-year jail term handed down to prominent Bahraini activist Nabeel Rajab.

Mansoor was convicted in May of attempting to harm his country's relations with its neighbors by spreading misinformation in Facebook and Twitter posts, according to local media. The upper court also confirmed a fine of one million dirhams (\$270,000) for Mansoor, 49, who will be kept under surveillance for three



Ahmed Mansoor



Nabeel Rajab

years after his release. Amnesty said the final ruling "confirms there is no space for free expression in the United Arab Emirates".

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Local

Symbolic value of Al-Mutlaa city lots cut from KD 5,000 to KD 3,000

Cabinet touts certificate check panel; fake degrees 'mastermind' in custody

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Dr Janan Bushehri announced yesterday that the Cabinet has agreed to reduce the symbolic value of Al-Mutlaa city's residential lots from KD 5,000 to KD 3,000 (from \$17,000 to \$10,000). The move comes upon the directives of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. In a press statement after the weekly cabinet meeting, Bushehri said that at the behest of His Highness the Prime Minister and his support for the housing issue and a presentation tabled at the meeting, the Cabinet decided to approve this issue.

She added that the Public Authority for Housing Welfare submitted to the Cabinet a study on the symbolic value of Al-Mutlaa city's residential lots, noting that the number of beneficiaries of this reduction exceeds 28,000 Kuwaiti families. The Minister of Housing stressed keenness of Public Authority for Housing Welfare to support the citizens and ease their financial burdens, especially in the modern housing units and border cities, thanking His Highness the Prime Minister for his continuous support to the housing issue and citizens.

Certificate check

Meanwhile, the Cabinet commended the efforts of an ad hoc committee entrusted with checking the university documents of Kuwaiti citizens and residents alike. This came during the cabinet's discussion of the com-

mittee's report on the recently raised issue of forged university documents at a customary weekly meeting held at Bayan Palace and presided over by Acting Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

The cabinet also listened to a briefing from Minister of Education and Higher Education Hamed Al-Azmi, who doubles as the head of the committee, Deputy Premier and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh said in a statement following the meeting. Having checked a total 6,050 certificates, the panel has sent a number of forged documents to the Public Prosecution as a prelude to legal action against those involved in the case, Saleh said.

Al-Qabas daily had reported yesterday that an Egyptian man, who had masterminded the forgeries of degrees in Kuwait and then fled to Egypt, Turkey and UAE in an attempt to escape arrest, is finally in Kuwaiti custody. After his name was sent to Interpol, security sources said UAE security authorities arrested the suspect, notified Kuwait and handed him over. During initial interrogations, the suspect admitted that another Egyptian working at a university outside Cairo had been providing him with blank degrees from various Egyptian universities and that he later filled in holders' data as required. The suspect also stressed that he has full information about those he had sold the fake degrees to, noting that they are mainly Kuwaitis.



KUWAIT: Acting Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah chairs the Cabinet's weekly meeting yesterday. — KUNA

Ministers congratulated

Also locally, the Cabinet congratulated the newly appointed ministers, wishing them the best of luck in serving their respective country's national interests, he added. Internationally, the Cabinet offered heartfelt condolences to UAE President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan on the victims of a recent helicopter crash. The Kuwaiti ministers also deplored a recent

attack on the Libyan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which left a number of people dead or injured. They further voiced vehement condemnation of a tourist bus blast in Egypt's Giza Governorate. In this regard, the cabinet resounded Kuwait's unwavering position based on decrying violence and terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, reiterating that it stands side by side with Libya and Egypt. — KUNA



Newly appointed ministers congratulated

Manpower authority highlights 2018 achievements

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Director of the Public Authority for Manpower Ahmad Al-Moussa said the authority seeks to improve the labor market by limiting the numbers of marginal laborers, developing the national workforce, supervising the manpower working for the private sector and the oil sector and those on govern-

ment contracts, protecting the rights of these workers and training the authority's employees.

Speaking about the authority's achievements in 2018, Moussa said the authority issued work permit regulations, responded to 2,301 inquiries made over social media networks, signed memos of understanding with the International Labor Organization (ILO) on the Kuwait Decent Work Country Program, signed a memo of understanding to link the authority's systems with those of its peers in Egypt in 2019-2020, took part in 14 Arab and international conferences, won Kuwait the chairmanship of the Arab Labor Organization (ALO)'s board of directors, hosted the 4th GCC labor ministers' meeting in Kuwait, launched e-service access for employers to file absconding reports, launched the GPS

search system, set the regulations to be followed on assessing the needs of laborers, launched an online portal to support SME projects and spent over KD 391 million on national labor support allowances.

Shrimping ban

Kuwait Fishermen Union Chairman Thaber Al-Sowayyan said shrimping in Kuwaiti waters will be banned from Jan 1, 2019 till July 31, 2019. Sowayyan expressed hope that the ban period will be enough for PAAAFR to consider adopting a new mechanism for shrimping, noting that Kuwait lost hundreds of tons of shrimps this year. He also called for coordinating with neighboring countries to synchronize the ban and avoid allowing the sale of fresh shrimps from these nations in Kuwait during the ban.



KUWAIT: Ambassador of Turkey to Kuwait Ayse Hilal Sayan Koytak visited Kuwait Times yesterday and discussed matters of mutual concern with Editor-in-Chief Abd Al-Rahman Al-Alyan. — Photo by Joseph Shagra

News in brief

Maids accuse sponsors of torture

KUWAIT: A case has been filed by the lawyer of the Philippine Embassy on behalf of two Filipina housemaids working for a Kuwaiti couple, accusing them of assault and abuse. The maids allege they were tortured daily by heated metal objects and were locked up, until they managed to flee the house and reached their country's embassy in a terrible condition. However, on summoning the suspects, they claimed that one of the maids had stolen KD 1,000 from the house, a charge which both the maids denied. A case was filed and further investigations are in progress. — Al-Rai

227,000 passengers depart

KUWAIT: Manager of the engineering department at the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) Saleh Al-Fedaghi said 227,000 passengers had departed Kuwait over the past few days on board 1,667 flights. Fedaghi added that DGCA had fully prepared for the new year with a plan set in collaboration with various bodies at all terminals, including the interior ministry, the customs department and other service providers. He added that additional backup teams had been deployed in various departure lounges from Dec 26 till Dec 31 and that the same teams will be deployed in arrival lounges from today, Jan 1, 2019. — Al-Rai

Ministry ready for new year

KUWAIT: The Interior Ministry's relations and security media department said that various field security sectors have completed preparations for security measures in anticipation of the New Year, noting that a special security and traffic plan has been set for the safety and security for both citizens and expats on various roads and in various ceremonial locations. The department added that police patrols will be extensively deployed everywhere in addition to coastguard patrols at various beaches and Kuwaiti islands. The department added that environmental police will also be deployed to strictly deal with any environmental violations. — By Hanan Al-Saadoun

Health Ministry to extend some expats' contracts

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health (MOH) obtained monitoring bodies' approval to extend the contracts of some expats working at Sabah, Farwaniya and Jahra medical zones for varied periods at a total cost of KD 2.6 million, well-informed ministry sources said. The sources explained that the contracts of medical services employees in Sabah zone were extended for nine months effective Jan 5, 2019 at a total cost of KD 1.9 million. The sources added that the contracts of a similar group of technical staff members in Farwaniya and Jahra medical areas were extended for three months effective Feb 5, 2019 at a total cost of KD 757,000.

In another health concern, MOH's assistant undersecretary for legal affairs Mohammed Dowaihi Al-Subaei said that the ministry issued 52,725 birth certificates in 2018 including 30,954 for citizens and 21,771 for expats, in addi-

tion to 3,933 death certificates for citizens and expats. Subaei added that birth rates slightly decreased in 2018 compared to 2017, when total births were 60,022. He also noted that MOH issued 1,650 birth certificates and 134 death certificates to stateless people in 2018. He added that due to the fact that the maternity hospital at Sabah medical zone witnesses around 40 percent of births in Kuwait, a new birth and death center will open there soon.

Murder suspects sentenced

The court of cassation annulled a death sentence and sentenced two suspects to 10 years in jail over charges of killing a citizen in a shopping mall in Hawally. Notably, a fight had started between two citizens and a group of five including the two suspects, when the first suspect stabbed one of the citizens in the chest, killing him instantly, while the second suspect stabbed the other citizen in the shoulder, injuring him.

Land part of Sheikh Jaber Causeway opened

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Roads and Transportation (PART) announced yesterday the opening of the land section of the Doha-link of the Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah Causeway. Acting Director of PART Suha Ashkanani said in a press conference that the project comes in accordance with international standards, and aims to link Doha with Shuwaikh from the beginning of Al-Ghazali Bridge to ease traffic congestion. She added that the 4.7 kilometer-long land section serves an army camp and the Doha area. Meanwhile, project director Mohammad Abdeen said that a 12.4-kilometer bridge across the south of Kuwait would link Shuwaikh Port with the Doha motorway. The Doha-link cost around KD 165.7 million (around \$545 million). — KUNA



KUWAIT: A picture showing the extension of the bridge with its surface and marine components. — KUNA photos

Consumer protection denies 'fake discount' rumors

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Recently, an image of a 'fake discount' offered by a popular international furniture store went viral on social media. It was a photo of a bill of that store showing a piece of furniture originally cost KD 24 before the sales season, while the same piece during the sales period cost KD 29 before the discount and KD 26 after the discount. The social media user who spread this picture charged the store is cheating consumers, "who are now smart to figure out fake sales". He claimed sales are not real as he knew the price of the product and was waiting for the sales period to buy it.

Kuwait Times confirmed the veracity of this claim with the Consumer Protection Department of the Ministry of Commerce, which is in charge of probing cases of cheating. The inspector said the price of the product was KD 24 more than a year ago, but the store later hiked the price up to KD 29. And during the sales period, they discounted the price to KD 26.

"After we saw this picture on social media, we went on an inspection to this store to seek clarification of the claim, which turned out to be false news. We are not sure if the social media user who spread it had the intention to tarnish the reputation of the store on purpose, or if he was not aware that the original price was old and not valid," the inspector named Mohammed told Kuwait Times.

The Consumer Protection Department rarely receives complaints about fake sales. "We have only received a few complaints from customers complaining a store was cheating during the sales period. But when we went to check the store, we found the customer was wrong. The big and popular stores don't make such mistakes and they usually follow the law," he added. All stores should obtain permission from the Ministry of Commerce to hold sales. "After the store gets the permission, our inspectors check the store to confirm the discounts are for real. In case of any violation, the store will pay a fine," Mohammed pointed out.

Local

Amir, Crown Prince receive Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. — Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received separately at Bayan Palace yesterday His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. In other news, His

Highness the Amir expressed his deepest sympathies yesterday over the victims of landslides and flooding in the Philippines, triggered by a tropical cyclone that brought heavy rains to the Southeast Asian archipelago. His Highness the Amir extended his condolences in a cable he sent to

Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte, saying he was distraught over the tragic loss of life caused by the natural disaster. His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar messages to the Filipino leader. — KUNA

Kuwait's diplomatic achievements through 2018 UNSC seat vital: Permanent Representative

Kuwait proved it is a nation involved in important global issues: Otaibi

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the UN headquarters in New York Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi.

Meanwhile, Ambassador Otaibi said that Kuwait had scored some vital diplomatic achievements through its 2018 non-permanent seat at the UN Security Council (UNSC). Speaking on the most significant efforts by the State of Kuwait during the first period of its second membership, Ambassador Otaibi said that after four decades from its first run, Kuwait had proved to the world that it is a nation involved in important global issues.

On June 2, 2017, Kuwait gained 188 of 192 votes necessary to join the UNSC as a non-permanent member, said Ambassador Al-Otaibi, affirming that Kuwaiti diplomacy had always stood on a moderate and balanced platform, which championed world peace as well as welfare and justice for all. "Chairing the UNSC in the second month of membership was not an easy task," he said, lauding the Kuwaiti leadership and Ministry of Foreign Affairs for their supportive stance during Kuwait's tenure.

In its February Presidency of the UNSC, five resolutions were passed, four press statements issued, and 33 meetings were held, indicated Otaibi, noting that the main focus of Kuwait was to put forward Arab causes, specifically the plight of the Palestinian people suffering from the unethical and inhumane Israeli occupation of their land. He added that the Kuwait efforts in the Palestinian regard was crowned with Palestine's President Mahmoud Abbas participation in a Kuwait-chaired UN Security Council meeting.



Kuwait donated \$50 million to UNRWA

Syrian crisis

On Syria, Ambassador Otaibi said that alongside Sweden, Kuwait managed to push for the approval of resolution 2401, unanimously adopted on February 24, 2018. It called for a nationwide ceasefire in Syria for 30 days. The senior diplomat also touched on Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah's participation in several UNSC meetings, namely the one organized by Kuwait on maintaining global peace and security with the participation of current UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and former General Secretary Ban Ki-Moon. Back on Syria, the Kuwaiti senior diplomat said that Kuwait and Sweden pushed on December 13, 2018 for a renewed mechanism of humanitarian aid deliveries in Syria, which was resolution 2449.

In regards to Yemen, Kuwait had played an important role to put an end to the conflict in the fellow Arab country through its UNSC membership, said Otaibi. Kuwait was part of the efforts to approve resolution 2451 regarding the humanitarian situation in Yemen, said Ambassador Otaibi who called on all involved parties of the conflict to abide by the results of the national dialogue, UNSC resolutions concerning Yemen, and the outcome of the recent Sweden Yemen talks.

Kuwait, recently, transported Yemeni delegations to the Stockholm talks, as well as providing \$250 million to various humanitarian entities and organization to ease the pain of those caught in the conflict of Yemen, affirmed the Ambassador.

Returning to the issue of Palestine, Ambassador Otaibi said that Kuwait tried to push for UNSC resolutions for the sake of Palestinians; however, the veto - regularly used by a number of UNSC permanent mem-



KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the UN headquarters in New York Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi. — KUNA

bers - usually stood in the way. Kuwait had always been keen on supporting the humanitarian cause in Palestine, donating this year a sum of \$50 million to UNRWA, revealed Otaibi.

Rohingyas' plight

Beyond promoting Arab causes whether in Iraq, Libya, Sudan, Somalia, and Lebanon, the State of Kuwait also managed to stand with humanitarian causes such as the plight of the Rohingya Muslim minority in Myanmar, noted Ambassador Otaibi. He indicated that via Kuwait-State-owned planes, Kuwait transported UNSC members from the UK and Peru and other countries to the region of conflict to have a better understanding of the horrific situation.

On other Kuwaiti achievements during the membership, Otaibi said that Kuwait launched the idea of pre-

ventive diplomacy, a stance in which diplomats and diplomatic measures play an important part in halting aggression and maintaining security and peace. In coordination with the Netherlands, Sweden, and Ivory Coast, the State of Kuwait forwarded approved resolution 2417, a document strongly condemning the starving of civilians, unlawfully denying humanitarian access as warfare tactics.

In connection with the liberation of Kuwait in 1991 from the Iraqi aggression and occupation of 1990, Ambassador Otaibi highlighted the environmental impact of the horrific past event on the environment during several UNSC proceedings. On his predictions for the second year of Kuwait's membership, Al-Otaibi said that the State of Kuwait would chair the UNSC in June of 2019, affirming that his country will continue to promote just causes as well as security and peace in the deliberations. — KUNA

KRCS delivers winter aid to 120 families in Kuwait



KUWAIT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) yesterday distributed crucial winter supplies to some 120 needy families across the country, the venerable charity said. Lifting people out of poverty remains KRCS' primary goal, its public relations officer Khaled Al-Zaid said in a statement. Such altruistic endeavors leave an indelible

mark on people's lives, he added, thanking all volunteers who contributed to the charity's projects in any way. He highlighted the Kuwaiti charity's resoluteness to assist all those in need, in addition to its eagerness to cooperate with other humanitarian organizations for the good of humanity. — KUNA

Deputy FM meets US Ambassador

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah and US Ambassador to Kuwait Lawrence Silverman yesterday discussed bilateral relations. During the meeting,

they also addressed the latest regional and international developments. The meeting was attended by Assistant Foreign Minister for the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister's Office Affairs Ambassador Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, Assistant Foreign Minister for the Deputy Foreign Minister's Office Affairs Ambassador Ayham Al-Omar and Assistant Foreign Minister for the Americas' Affairs Minister Plenipotentiary Reem Al-Khaled. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah meets with US Ambassador to Kuwait Lawrence Silverman. — KUNA

Local

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Kuwait's flag flies high as Kuwait City's skyline is seen in the background. — Photo by Mustafa Al-Bader (KUNA)

People share their 'strangest traditions' on New Year's Eve



Eating round fruits is popular on New Year's Eve in the Philippines, where roundness signifies prosperity.



In Denmark, people smash plates on the doorsteps of friends to show how much they value them.



Eating twelve grapes on New Year's Eve is a popular tradition in Spain.

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: When it comes to New Year celebrations, people have some of the strangest traditions. Yeng Banares, 34, told Kuwait Times that in the Philippines, they believe roundness signifies prosperity. "On New Year's Eve, people surround themselves with round shapes by wearing clothes with polka dots, filling their pockets with coins or eating round fruits like oranges. So dress up in dots if wealth is your New Year wish," she said.

Isaline Francois, 29, said she used to live with her family in Torgny, a village in Belgium. "My grandfather used to take his livestock seriously. He believes when he wishes his cows a happy new year, he will get enough milk from them." She added that she also lived for a while in Denmark, where people smash plates on the doorsteps of friends to show how much they value them.

"It's a measure of your popularity to find a heap of broken plates on your doorstep at midnight, which presumably comes as some comfort while you're cleaning up. On New Year's Eve, people also stand on chairs and then jump off them at midnight. Leaping into January is supposed to banish bad spirits and bring good luck," said Francois.

Xaviar, 34, explained that eating grapes on new year is a must for most Spaniards. "Eating twelve grapes during the 'Nochevieja' is our tradition. When the clock bells strike midnight, they accomplish one of the most ritualistic elements that best characterizes Spanish tradition: Eating twelve grapes to have 12 months of luck. If you miss one grape, you may have bad luck in the coming year," he said. The tradition of eating twelve grapes originated in 1909, when Vinalopo grape producers promoted consumption of the fruit due to an overproduction that occurred that year.



KUWAIT: Kuwait Dive Team worked with young volunteers yesterday to clean up Um Al-Naml island as part of its campaign to protect the island that is considered a nature reserve south of Kuwait Bay. — KUNA



'Mother of humanity':
Bangladesh's democracy
icon-turned-iron lady

Probe used to track Indian miners as hopes fade

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Turkish-backed Syrian fighters gather during a military training in the north of Aleppo province, in preparation to be deployed on the outskirts of Manbij area. —AFP

2018 death toll Syria war's lowest

A total of 19,666 people were killed this year

BEIRUT: Syria's nearly eight-year-old conflict saw its lowest annual death toll in 2018 as the regime reasserted its authority over swathes of territory, a war monitor said yesterday. A total of 19,666 people were killed this year as a result of the conflict, which erupted in 2011, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group reported. "2018 was the lowest annual toll since the start of the conflict," Observatory chief Rami Abdel Rahman told AFP.

The Britain-based monitor relies on a vast network of sources across Syria to document the war that broke out after the brutal repression of nationwide anti-regime protests in 2011. The death toll for 2017 stood at more than 33,000 and the highest annual figure was reached in 2014 — the year the Islamic State jihadist group proclaimed a "caliphate" over large parts of Syria and neighboring Iraq — when 76,000 people were killed. Among those killed in 2018 were 6,349 civilians, 1,437 of them children, Abdel Rahman said.

Eastern Ghouta

"Most of those killed during the first part of the year were killed in regime and Russian bombardment of opposition areas, including Eastern Ghouta," Abdel Rahman said. "The majority of those killed in the second half of the year were killed in coalition air strikes," he added. The first months of 2018 were marked by major Russian-backed government operations to retake rebel and jihadist bastions in and around the capital Damascus.

The bloodiest of them was an assault on Eastern Ghouta, a densely-populated area east of Damascus that remained besieged for years. The most active front of the past few months has been the battle against the remnants of the Islamic State group in eastern Syria. The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), backed by a US-led coalition carrying out air strikes, launched an offensive on September 10. Jihadist fighters defending the last rump of their once sprawling proto-state, near the Iraqi border along the Euphrates River, have put up fierce resistance but seem close to collapsing. While fighting has ended or is winding down in several parts of the country, 2019 could see its share of military flare-ups.

Threatened Turkish offensive

Besides the continued threat posed by IS sleeper cells even after it loses its last pocket in eastern Syria, two other areas remain of concern. Turkey has threatened a major offensive against the Kurdish militia that controls regions along its border in northeastern Syria. The announcement made by Donald Trump two weeks ago that he had ordered a full troop pullout from Syria

left the US-led coalition's Kurdish allies more exposed.

Thousands of rebel fighters and jihadists also remain in Idlib, a northern province where many of them were transferred as a result of deals to end government assaults on other areas across the country. Under an agreement reached in Russia, Turkey was tasked with disarming some of the groups active in Idlib but little progress has been achieved. President Bashar Al-Assad has consistently said that his forces would seek to reconquer the entire Syrian territory. According to the Observatory, the government and its allies now controls 60.2 percent of Syrian territory, while the SDF hold 28.8 percent.

The Kurds last week asked for the regime's help against the threat of a Turkish offensive, a move that will put pay to their ambitions of increased autonomy. By comparison, the US-based Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project puts the number of conflict-related deaths in Afghanistan at more than 40,000 this year.

IS arrests

In related news, Iraq sentenced more than 600 foreigners including many women and dozens of minors in 2018 for belonging to the Islamic State group, the judiciary said yesterday. Iraq declared "victory" over IS at the end of 2017 after a three-year war against the jihadists, who once controlled nearly a third of the country as well as swathes of neighboring Syria.

Around 20,000 people suspected of links to IS have been arrested since 2014. Judicial spokesman Abdel Sattar Bayraqdar said yesterday that "616 men and women accused of belonging to IS have been put on trial" in 2018 and sentenced under Iraq's anti-terrorism law. They comprised 466 women, 42 men and 108 minors, he said. Bayraqdar did not, however specify the punishments. Under Iraq's anti-terrorism law courts can issue verdicts, including death sentences, against anyone found guilty of belonging to the jihadist group, including non-combatants.

In April, judicial sources said that more than 300 suspects linked to IS had received death sentences and more than 300 others were sentenced to life, which in Iraq is equivalent to 20 years. Most of the women sentenced for IS links were from Turkey and republics of the former Soviet Union. Three French citizens — two women and a man — have been sentenced to life imprisonment while a German woman, a Belgian man and a Russian man have been sentenced to death. Many women had travelled to Iraq with their children to join their husbands who fought in the ranks of IS. Some are still waiting to be repatriated to their home countries. —AFP

JOINT OPERATIONS WAFRA

SAUDI ARABIAN CHEVRON INC. (SAC) - KUWAIT GULF OIL COMPANY

Joint Operations (Saudi Arabian Chevron Inc. / Kuwait Gulf Oil Company), announces the under-mentioned Public Tenders for procurement of materials.

Kuwaiti and Saudi Merchants, registered with either Company wishing to participate in any of the under-mentioned Tenders are invited to collect the Tender documents from purchasing section, Purchasing & Logistic Division, Administration Building, Ground Floor, Joint Operations, Wafra, during the official working hours from **2 JAN 2019** up to **14 JAN 2019** for a non-refundable fee mentioned against tender.

Tender Fees to be deposited in the National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) Account No.1001132057. Saudi Suppliers can collect the tender documents from Saudi Arabian Chevron office in AI-Khobar Telephone No.:(013) 8645104 - Fax No.:(013) 8985436

The closing date for the following Tender will be on **Monday, 21 JAN 2019 @ 09:00 AM.**

S.NO.	TENDER NO.	MATERIALS	FEES (IN KD)
1	2427968	SIF BYRON JACKSON PUMP	5

Notes:

- Gate Passes are required for Suppliers entering JO-Wafra Administrative Offices to collect the tender document and gate pass processing time is 48 hours. Please send request for gate pass along with legible copies of Authorization letter, CMI ID, Car Registration, Supplier Registration (KGOC or SAC) to email : HBJH@chevron.com or MYDG@Chevron.com at least 48 hours prior to arrival.

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Telephone No.: 23982614 - Fax No.: 23981315

International

White House chief now says Trump is not building a 'wall'

'Illegal immigrants, overwhelmingly, are not bad people'

WASHINGTON: Outgoing White House chief John Kelly said in an interview published Sunday that he had "nothing but compassion" for undocumented migrants crossing into the US, and undercut President Donald Trump's claims to be building a "wall" at the Mexico border. As a partial government shutdown entered a ninth day due to an impasse over Trump's demands for funding the US-Mexico border barrier, the president's chief of staff told the Los Angeles Times: "To be honest, it's not a wall."

"The president still says 'wall.' Oftentimes frankly he'll say 'barrier' or 'fencing,' now he's tended toward steel slats," Kelly said. "But we left a solid concrete wall early on in the administration, when we asked people what they needed and where they needed it," he added. Building a solid "wall" along the 2,000-mile US-Mexico frontier was a central plank of Trump's 2016 election campaign, and he has tweeted about it almost 100 times this year alone. "Either we build (finish) the Wall or we close the Border," Trump — who has adopted the 2020 re-election mantra "promises made, promises kept" — posted as recently as Friday.

A former Marine general who led the military command responsible for Latin America, Kelly was Trump's Homeland Security secretary before becoming White House chief of staff in July last year. His relationship with the president reportedly deteriorated, however, and he is to be replaced at the end of the year by Mick Mulvaney, the current budget director. "Illegal immigrants, overwhelmingly, are not bad people," Kelly told the LA Times, adding that many had been manipulated by traffickers. "I have nothing but compassion for them, the young kids." The remarks were in sharp contrast to the rhetoric of the president who regularly appeals to his overwhelmingly white political base by taking a hard line on immigration.

'Pathetic immigration policies'

Trump has spoken of an "invasion" of migrants and

complained of "many gang members and some very bad people" among a thousands-strong caravan of immigrants that traveled to the US in October. Migrants from Central America say they want to reach the US to escape poverty and gang violence. Trump has threatened to end aid to Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, despite a State Department announcement on December 18 that the US was ready to offer \$4.5 billion in investment in Central America and southern Mexico, and that the administration was requesting an additional \$180 million in assistance to the region.

On Saturday Trump blamed opposition Democrats "and their pathetic immigration policies" for the deaths of two Guatemalan children who crossed the border illegally with relatives who were taken into custody by US Border Patrol. In a departure from the stance taken by his boss, Kelly said the way to halt illegal immigration was to "stop US demand for drugs, and expand economic opportunity" in Central America. Kevin McAleenan, the commissioner of US Customs and Border Protection, said on ABC's "This Week" that investment in Central America was one element of a "multi-faceted problem" that also requires funding border security.

'Wasting taxpayer dollars'

He called for a "sober-minded non-partisan look at our immigration laws" as part of the solution to an upsurge in family and child arrivals. "We've asked for about 1,000 miles of wall... And what we're talking about is not just a dumb barrier," McAleenan said. "We're talking about sensors, cameras, lighting, access roads for our agents, a system that helps us secure that area of the border."

The Democrats are refusing to provide billions for Trump's border wall project and the president insists he will not fully fund the government unless he gets the money. As long as the debate holds up approval of a wider spending bill, about 800,000 federal employees



CALEXICO: An off-road vehicle with a "Trump 2020" campaign flag drives near the US-Mexico border fence at the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area. —AFP

are not getting salaries and non-essential parts of the government are unable to function. Kellyanne Conway, a close Trump advisor, said on "Fox News Sunday" that whether the border barrier was a "wall" or not was "a silly semantic argument," adding that the president had already compromised, since he had originally asked for \$25 billion.

Mulvaney told Fox last week that the administration had shown movement on the latest \$5 billion demand for border security. "We actually came off of our \$5 bil-

lion slightly," he said. Democratic Congressman Hakeem Jeffries agreed on ABC's "This Week" that immigration reform and enhanced border security were needed. "At its core, our responsibility in government is to manage public money. We can either manage it efficiently or we can waste taxpayer dollars," he said. "And what Donald Trump and the Republicans want to do is waste \$5 billion in taxpayer money on an ineffective medieval border wall that is a fifth-century solution to a 21st century problem." —AFP

Iran says Taliban were in Tehran for peace talks

TEHRAN: Iran said yesterday that the Afghan Taliban have visited Tehran for a second round of peace talks in just a few days aimed at bringing an end to 17 years of conflict. Iran has made a more concerted and open push for peace in neighboring Afghanistan since US President Donald Trump indicated there would be a significant withdrawal of American troops.

"Yesterday (Sunday), a delegation of Taliban were in Tehran and lengthy negotiations were held with Iran's deputy foreign minister... (Abbas) Araghchi," said spokesman Bahram Ghasemi at a televised news conference. That came just days after Ali Shamkhani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, visited Kabul and told reporters that talks had been held with the Taliban in Afghanistan.

"The Islamic Republic has always been one of the primary pillars of stability in the region and cooperation between the two countries will certainly help in fixing Afghanistan's security issues of today," Shamkhani told the conservative Tasnim news agency. There have been reports in the past of talks between Iran and the Taliban, but they have typically been denied by Tehran. Ghasemi said Iran's priority was "to help facilitate negotiations between Afghan groups and the country's government".

The current peace push will be viewed with concern by hawks in Washington, who fear that Trump's planned withdrawal of troops from Syria and Afghanistan will cede regional influence to Iran. An American official told AFP on December 21 that Trump had decided to pull out "roughly half" of the 14,000 US forces from Afghanistan, but the White House has yet to confirm the widely-publicised move.

Senior Republican senator Lindsey Graham met with Trump on Sunday and urged him to delay any withdrawal from Syria to make sure "Iran doesn't become the big winner of our leaving". Stanley McChrystal, the former commander of US and international forces in Afghanistan, told ABC: "Iran has increased influence across the region now. If you pull American influence out, you're likely to have greater instability."

'Peace development'

The Taliban also met with the United States, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia in the United Arab Emirates earlier in December, but refused to meet a delegation from Afghanistan. Araghchi will travel to Afghanistan in the next two weeks, Iran's foreign ministry said, without giving further details. "Considering our long border with Afghanistan and the cultural and historical ties, and our important role in the region's stability, the Islamic republic was interested... to enter and play a more important role in peace development in Afghanistan," Ghasemi added.

Iran and Afghanistan share a nearly 600-mile border, and have had a complex relationship in recent years. Tehran has long supported its co-religionists in Afghanistan, the Shia Hazara minority, who were violently persecuted by the Taliban during its rule in the 1990s. Iran worked alongside the United States and Western powers to help drive out the Taliban after the US-led invasion in 2001. But there have been allegations, from Western and Afghan sources, that Iran's Revolutionary Guards have in recent years established ties with the Taliban aimed at driving out US forces from Afghanistan. —AFP

Probe used to track Indian miners as hopes fade

CHIRANG DISTRICT ASSAM: The Indian Navy yesterday sent an underwater probe into a flooded mine in a bid to trace 15 miners who have been missing for more than two weeks, officials said. The so-called "rat-hole" miners have been trapped since December 13 when water gushed into Ksan mine from a nearby river in the remote northeastern state of Meghalaya.

The navy has sent divers and search equipment to the mine after a public outcry over the slow pace of the rescue, with many of the miners' families fearing it is now too late for them to be found. "Rat hole" mining involves digging into the side of hills and then burrowing tun-

nels up to five feet high to reach a coal seam. The remotely controlled probe was the latest initiative in the increasingly desperate search for the men.

Authorities have been struggling to pump out water from the 380-foot deep mine so that divers can approach the area where the men are believed to be. Navy divers entered the mine on Sunday but failed to trace anything. "The Navy will commence diving again once the water level is brought down," Frederick M Doph, deputy commissioner of East Jaintia Hills district, told AFP. Rescuers say there has been no sign of life but insist it is still possible the miners may have found an air pocket.

Santosh Kumar Singh from the federal National Disaster Relief Force told AFP that the emergency crew "is doing their best and they can only hope for good". At least 15 miners were killed after they were trapped in a flooded rat hole mine in Meghalaya in 2012. Their bodies were never recovered. A federal environment court banned wildcat mining in the mineral-rich state in 2014 after local com-

Merkel: Germany must fight for 'our convictions'

BERLIN: Chancellor Angela Merkel yesterday said Germany must "stand fast, argue, and fight for our own convictions" and assume greater responsibilities at a time when multilateralism is coming under intense pressure. In her New Year's address to Germans, Merkel said long-held certainties about international cooperation were being put to the test. Global challenges including climate change, immigration and the fight against terrorism could not be solved by countries going it alone, she warned.

"For our own interests, we want to solve all these questions, and we can do that best when we also take into consideration the interests of others," she said in a speech to be broadcast in full later yesterday. "That is the lesson from two world wars of the last century," she said, warning however that "certainties about international cooperation is falling under pressure."

"In our own interest, we must take on more responsibilities," she said. With an eye to Germany taking on a non-permanent seat in the UN Security Council in 2019 and 2020, the leader of Europe's biggest economy said her country would

push for "global solutions". She also pledged to raise spending for humanitarian and development aid, as well as defense. Although Merkel did not name US President Donald Trump in her speech, she has on previous occasions rejected his criticisms of multilateralism.

In his second appearance before the UN's annual gathering in September, Trump told the General Assembly that he and his administration "reject the ideology of globalism, and we embrace the doctrine of patriotism". A week later, Merkel had warned Trump against "destroying" the UN. "I believe that destroying something without having developed something new is extremely dangerous," Merkel said at a regional election campaign event then.

Channel crossing plan

In other news, Britain and France have agreed to boost bilateral cooperation over a spike in migrants trying to cross the Channel, the UK's Home Office said Sunday. In the coming weeks, the two countries will increase surveillance patrols and focus on measures to dismantle trafficking gangs and improve awareness about the dangers of sea crossings in one of the world's busiest shipping lanes.

"The UK and France will build on our joint efforts to deter illegal migration — protecting our borders and human life," said Britain's Home Office minister Sajid Javid, after speaking on the phone with French counterpart Christophe Castaner.

Russia detains American suspected of espionage

MOSCOW: Russia said yesterday its security services had detained a US citizen in Moscow accused of spying, the latest in a series of espionage cases between Russia and the West. The FSB domestic security service said the American was arrested on Friday "while carrying out an act of espionage".

A criminal case had been opened, the FSB said in

a statement, under Article 276 of the Russian Criminal Code, which allows for sentences of up to 20 years in prison. The statement identified the American in Russian, using a name that appeared to translate as Paul Whelan. No other details were immediately available.

The arrest came with Moscow embroiled in a number of spy scandals with the West and after President Vladimir Putin accused Western nations of using espionage cases to try undermine an increasingly powerful Russia. US intelligence services have accused Moscow of interfering in the 2016 presidential election and earli-



KSAN: In this photo taken on December 30, 2018, Indian Navy divers go down in the mine with a pulley during rescue operations after 15 miners were trapped by flooding in an illegal coal mine. —AFP

er communities complained it was polluting water sources and putting the lives of miners at risk. But the practice continues, with mine owners and the state government challenging the ban at India's Supreme Court. —AFP



BERLIN: German Chancellor Angela Merkel poses for a photograph after the recording of her annual New Year's speech at the Chancellery. —AFP

Attempts to cross the English Channel have been increasing since October, with authorities on both sides struggling to stop them.

Javid, who has previously said the rise is being treated as a "major incident", has faced criticism from the opposition and from within his own party for responding too slowly. "More than 200 migrants have arrived on the Kent coast in small craft in the past two months. The scale of the problem is unprecedented," Charlie Elphicke, the MP for Dover on the south-

east coast of England, told the Daily Mail.

A particular increase in arrivals has been recorded over the Christmas period, with British authorities finding 43 people in English waters on Christmas Day and December 26. On Thursday, British border officials found 23 Iranians in three locations in Kent on England's southeast coast, hours after French maritime authorities intercepted 11 migrants in a small boat near Sangatte. And on Sunday, authorities intercepted six Iranians near Kingsdown beach in Dover. —AFP

er this month convicted Russian Maria Butina of acting as an illegal foreign agent. Butina faces up to six months in prison, followed by likely deportation.

Prosecutors said she launched a plan in March 2015 to develop ties with the Republican Party with the aim of influencing US foreign policy. Russian military intelligence agents were also accused in the poisoning earlier this year of former double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter in Salisbury, England. The Skripals survived but a local woman died after picking up a discarded perfume bottle that police think was used to carry out the attack. —AFP

International

Tense DR Congo counts vote in presidential poll

‘We had cases where our observers were molested and violated’

KINSHASA: The Democratic Republic of Congo yesterday began counting ballots from a presidential election marked by delays and fears of violence and vote-rigging, straining hopes for its first-ever peaceful transfer of power. Sunday's elections went ahead after two years of delays and sporadic clashes in the unstable country, but the influential national conference of Catholic bishops declared the vote had been "relatively calm."

Among reported incidents, some electoral observers were harassed and a clash took in the restive eastern province of South Kivu that left four people dead. The DRC has never had a peaceful transition of leader since it gained independence from Belgium in 1960. Worries of a new spiral into violence deepened after President Joseph Kabila, in power since 2001, refused to quit two years ago when his constitutionally-declared limit expired. Tension and suspicion were further stoked by repeated delays, a bloody crackdown on anti-Kabila protests and accusations that electronic voting machines would help to rig the result. But Kabila appeared on public television late Sunday to congratulate the Congolese for having voted "in peace and dignity".

Provisional results are due to be announced on January 6, final results on January 15 and the new president sworn in on January 18. From Kinshasa to Goma, 2,000 kilometers further east, polling stations already put up first results on Monday morning. In Kisangani, the country's third-largest city, observers hired by the political parties slept on the floor or on desks at a polling station to keep their eye on the vote count, an AFP reporter said.

Meanwhile, a spokesman for Catholic Church observers, who were present at 78 percent of polling stations, said some had been forced to leave the voting centers. "We had cases where our observers were molested and violated," Luc Lutala told AFP yesterday morning. On Sunday evening, violence erupted at a

polling station in the Walungu area of South Kivu province after an electoral official was accused of trying to rig the vote in favour of Kabila's preferred successor, according to an opposition figure. The electoral official was killed along with a policeman and two civilians, said Vital Kamerhe, who has been campaigning for Felix Tshisekedi.

Victory claims

Kabila's champion Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary declared Sunday to Actualite.cd news site: "I'll be elected, I'll be president." Separately, Tshisekedi, one of his biggest rivals and the head of a veteran opposition party, UDPS, predicted: "Victory is ours." However, the scant opinion polls that have been conducted in the diverse, sprawling country made Martin Fayulu — until recently a little-known legislator and former oil executive — the clear favourite.

He garnered around 44 percent of voting intentions, followed by Tshisekedi with 24 percent and Shadary with 18 percent, said Jason Stearns of the Congo Research Group, based at the Center on International Cooperation at New York University. If the elections are "free and fair," an opposition candidate will almost certainly win. However, "the potential for violence is extremely high," he warned. "Roughly half of survey respondents said they would reject the result if Shadary — a hardline former interior minister who is facing EU sanctions for a crackdown on protesters — was declared winner.

Voting hitches

While turnout failed to reach 50 percent at some polling stations, many voters said they were exhilarated at taking part in the first elections after the nearly 18-year Kabila era. But there was also much evidence of organizational problems, including with the contested voting machines. The vote for a new president took place alongside legislative and municipal polls.



KINSHASA: Late voters check the voting list in a school in Kinshasa on December 30, 2018, during Democratic Republic of Congo's general elections. —AFP

A country almost the size of continental western Europe which straddles central Africa, the DRC is rich in gold, uranium, copper, cobalt and other minerals. Little of that wealth trickles down to the poor. Poverty, corruption and government inertia are etched into the country's history, along with a reputation for violence. In the last 22 years, it has twice been a battleground for wars drawing in armies from central and southern Africa. That legacy endures in eastern DRC, where mili-

tias control swathes of territory and battle over resources, wantonly killing civilians.

Insecurity and an ongoing Ebola epidemic in part of North Kivu province, and communal violence in Yumbi, in the southwest, prompted the authorities to postpone the elections there until March. Around 1.25 million people in a national electoral roll of around 40 million voters are affected. Despite this, elections in the rest of the country went ahead. —AFP

Police fire tear gas as protesters rally in Sudan capital

KHARTOUM: Police fired tear gas at protesters in Sudan's capital yesterday ahead of a planned march on President Omar Al-Bashir's palace calling on him to "step down" following deadly anti-government protests. Crowds of men and women chanting "freedom, peace and justice" and "revolution is the people's choice" gathered in downtown Khartoum, but they were quickly confronted by anti-riot police, witnesses told AFP.

Hundreds of policemen and security forces deployed to key squares across the capital in the early morning to prevent the march. Bashir has told police to abstain from using excessive force against the demonstrators after 19 people, including two security personnel, were killed in clashes in the initial days of demonstrations that erupted on December 19. Angry protesters took the streets after the government raised the price of a loaf of bread from one

Sudanese pound to three (from about two to six US cents).

Bread price protests quickly evolved into anti-government rallies in Khartoum and several other cities. Yesterday's march was called for by a group of professionals including doctors, teachers and engineers, after it organized a similar rally on December 25. "We will march towards the presidential palace calling for President Omar Al-Bashir to step down," the Sudanese Professionals' Association said in a statement late Sunday.

Opposition groups and prominent rebel chief Abdel Wahid Al-Nur from war-torn Darfur have also urged their supporters to participate in the march. On Sunday, Bashir met top police officers in Khartoum and instructed them to refrain from using excessive force against demonstrators after the United Nations called for an investigation into the deaths and violence during the demonstrations. "We want to maintain security and we want the police to do that by using less force," Bashir said.

"We admit that we have economic problems... but they can't be solved by destructions, lootings, and thefts," Bashir said, referring to the buildings and offices of the president's ruling party



KHARTOUM: Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir arrives to meet with police officials at the headquarters of the "police house" in the capital. —AFP

torched by protesters in several cities during the demonstrations. Sudan is facing an acute foreign exchange crisis and soaring inflation despite Washington lifting an economic embargo in October 2017. Inflation is running at 70 percent and the Sudanese pound has plunged in

value, while shortages of bread and fuel have regularly hit several cities. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has appealed "for calm and restraint" and called on "the authorities to conduct a thorough investigation into the deaths and violence". —AFP

4 dead, more missing after gas explosion hits Russia high-rise

MOSCOW: Four people were killed and nearly 70 unaccounted for after a gas explosion tore through a residential building in Russia yesterday, leaving hundreds without a home in freezing temperatures on New Year's Eve. A large section of the building collapsed after a gas explosion around 6am local time at the high-rise in the industrial city of Magnitogorsk, nearly 1,700 kilometers east of Moscow in the Ural mountains.

Four people were confirmed dead and another four, including two children, were hospitalized, officials said, citing the latest information. Sixteen people including seven children have been evacuated. The whereabouts of 28 people have been established but the fate of nearly 70 was unclear. National television said some 50 people could be trapped under the rubble. National

television broadcast footage of rescue workers combing through mangled heaps of concrete and metal in temperatures of minus 18 Celsius (minus 0.4 F).

Temperatures in Magnitogorsk were expected to plunge to minus 23 Celsius on New Year's night, the biggest holiday of the year in Russia. Officials warned that two more sections of the Soviet-era high-rise on Karl Marx Street were in danger of collapsing. Local resident Anna Koroleva told Echo of Moscow radio that the explosion shattered windows of nearby buildings. The Kremlin said President Vladimir Putin had been "immediately notified of the tragedy in Magnitogorsk".

'Common tragedy'

Located in the mineral-rich southern Ural region, Magnitogorsk, with a population of more than 400,000 people, is home to one of the country's largest steel producers. The high-rise was built in 1973 and was home to around 1,100 people. Residents were evacuated to a nearby school. Volunteers offered money, clothing and essentials to the victims, and some said they were ready to provide temporary shelter to those in need.

Regional governor Boris Dubrovsky said authorities planned to buy apartments for people who had lost their homes. Staff from the local Magnitogorsk Iron and Steel



MAGNITOGORSK: This handout picture shows emergency officers as they take part in search and rescue operations after a gas explosion rocked a residential building in Russia's Urals city of Magnitogorsk. —AFP

Works (MMK), one of the country's largest steelmakers, took part in the rescue operation. Billionaire Viktor Rashnikov, who controls the plant, called on city residents to help the victims. "This is our common tragedy and pain," he said in a statement, adding that MMK would provide financial assistance to those in need.

Investigators opened a criminal probe into the accident, with the FSB security service confirming the blast had been the result of a gas explosion. Such deadly gas explosions are relatively common in Russia where much of the infrastructure dates back to the Soviet era and safety requirements are often ignored. —AFP

Macron faces new embarrassment from ex-bodyguard

PARIS: Emmanuel Macron's disgraced ex-bodyguard said he continued to exchange messages regularly with the French president even after he was forced out of his job in July over a scandal. Alexandre Benalla caused the most damaging controversy of Macron's presidency after he was caught on video roughing up protesters at a demonstration in May while wearing a police helmet. And he was at the centre of more embarrassing headlines for the embattled 41-year-old head of state last week when it emerged he had retained his diplomatic passports even after losing his job. In an interview with investigative website Mediapart, Benalla said Sunday that he continued giving advice to Macron via the Telegram messaging app, which the president uses intensively. "We exchange messages on lots of different subjects. It's often like, 'how do you see things'. It could be about the 'yellow vests', the views on someone or security issues," Benalla said.

The 27-year-old former bouncer began working as a bodyguard for Macron during his campaign for the presidency in 2016 before being promoted to a senior security role in the presidential palace in May 2017. Benalla's role and the ties between the two men have been the focus of intense media scrutiny and the latest comments undermine efforts by Macron to distance himself publicly. The French president is to give a televised New Year's address later on Monday evening at 8:00 pm (1900 GMT) — the same time as "yellow vest" protesters have called for a new demonstration on the Champs-Elysees in Paris.

The protest movement, which swelled up from rural and small-town France in November, has waned in intensity in recent weeks after Macron announced a series of measures for low-income families. Benalla admitted visiting around a dozen countries in recent months and he said he always gave an account of his trips to the president or his aides. He met with Chad's President Idriss Deby earlier in December, and Le Monde newspaper has reported that he held talks with the Republic of Congo's President Denis Sassou-Nguesso, as well as top officials in Cameroon. "I explain that I've seen so and so and what was said. Afterwards they can do what they like with it," Benalla told Mediapart.

He added, however, that since the revelations about his diplomatic passport emerged "the link has been cut" with the presidency. Last Tuesday, the French presidency said that Benalla was "not an official or unofficial emissary". But Benalla denied suggestions from the foreign ministry that he had used his diplomatic passports illegally, something which prosecutors are now examining. "If they don't want me to use these passports, they could deactivate them," he said. "When you travel abroad with a diplomatic passport, the French embassy knows when you arrive," he added. —AFP

Presidential campaign starts in heavily conflicted Ukraine

KIEV: Campaigning began for a key presidential vote in Ukraine yesterday with President Petro Poroshenko facing an uphill re-election battle among voters disillusioned with

corruption and the slow pace of reforms. Poroshenko, whose government is locked in a conflict with Moscow-backed insurgents in the industrial east, trails two-time ex-prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko in the latest opinion polls.

Voting will take place on March 31, with a second round three weeks later if no candidate takes more than 50 percent. Poroshenko, a 53-year-old chocolate tycoon, sailed to victory in a May 2014 election after a popular uprising ousted the Moscow-backed regime of Viktor Yanukovich. He promised to pivot the ex-Soviet country of nearly 45 million people towards the West and has sought to push through

ambitious reforms. But critics say the economy is in tatters, corruption is rampant and Poroshenko has done little to rein in fellow oligarchs.

One poll this week showed 16.1 percent of expected voters planning to vote for Tymoshenko, ahead of Poroshenko with 13.8 percent. After the 2014 uprising, Moscow annexed Crimea and supported Russian-speaking separatists in Ukraine's east, in a conflict that has claimed the lives of more than 10,000 people. The war has been a huge burden for the country's struggling economy, with Poroshenko forced to rely on assistance from the West. This month the

International Monetary Fund confirmed it would give Kiev a \$4 billion, 14-month loan.

Poroshenko is widely expected to stand for re-election even though he has not yet confirmed he is running. His re-election chances looked even more bleak in November when a Ukrainian comic and showman, Volodymyr Zelensky, overtook him as the country's second-most-popular likely presidential candidate. But Poroshenko's popularity ratings increased after he oversaw the creation of a Ukrainian Orthodox Church independent of Moscow. —AFP

International

'Mother of humanity': Bangladesh's democracy icon-turned-iron lady

Lauded by supporters for overseeing a decade of economic growth

DHAKA: To her supporters, Sheikh Hasina is Bangladesh's "mother of humanity" for giving Rohingya refugees shelter, but to her detractors she's a creeping autocrat who has jailed opponents and muzzled dissent. Hasina, the daughter of Bangladesh's founder, won a historic fourth term as prime minister with a landslide victory in Sunday's election that the opposition claimed was rigged. The 71-year-old is lauded by supporters for overseeing a decade of impressive economic growth in the impoverished South Asian nation that was more commonly known for its frequent floods and cyclones.

Opponents, however, accuse her of jailing arch-foe Khaleda Zia on politically motivated charges, of orchestrating mass arrests, enforced disappearances and passing draconian anti-press freedom laws to try to cling to power. Hasina was abroad in August 1975 when a group of renegade military officers assassinated her father, Bangladesh's first president Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, his wife and three sons. She started her political career as a hero of the people, returning from exile in 1981 to take over as Awami League leader and begin a long struggle to restore democracy in Bangladesh. Hasina joined forces with Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) to help oust military dictator Hussain Muhammad Ershad in 1990 but the pair soon fell out and were branded the "Batling Begums".

Economic growth

Their rivalry has dominated Bangladeshi politics for the last 30 years. Hasina was first elected prime minister in 1996 but she struggled to emerge from the shadow of her father during her first term and lost the 2001 contest. The pair were then imprisoned on corruption charges in 2007 by a military-backed government which had taken power in a coup.

The charges were dropped and they were freed to con-

test the December 2008 election, which Hasina won by a landslide. She has been in power ever since, presiding over economic expansion of more than six percent every year since 2009. GDP growth last year was 7.86 percent and Hasina has promised to take that into double digits. Under her watch, Bangladesh is on course to graduate from a least-developed country to a middle-income nation.

Poverty has been brought down to around 20 percent and nearly 90 percent of the country's 165 million people now have access to electricity. Her fans also praise her for opening Bangladesh's doors to some one million Rohingya refugees fleeing a military crackdown in western Myanmar. She has earned plaudits from Western nations for allowing the refugees to stay in camps in Bangladesh's southeast, while her supporters insist she should be given a Nobel Peace Prize.

Going after Islamists

Hasina's fans have lauded her for cracking down on Islamist extremists in the Muslim-majority nation, after five homegrown terrorists stormed a Dhaka cafe, killing 22 people — including 18 foreigners — in 2016. She also launched trials of the powerful Islamist opposition over crimes committed during the 1971 independence war. Five top Islamist leaders and a main opposition stalwart were executed.

Her opponents branded the war crimes trials a farce, saying they were a politically motivated exercise designed to silence dissent. Instead of healing the wounds of war, the trials have triggered mass protests and deadly clashes. Hasina showed similar resolve in holding the trial of her main opponent and two-time former premier Zia, who was sentenced to 17 years in jail in two separate graft cases earlier this year.

Analysts said the jailing effectively ended Zia's political career and weakened the opposition ahead of Sunday's par-



DHAKA: A Bangladeshi man walks past a photo of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. —AFP

liamentary vote, the country's 11th since independence. They say Hasina's regime has slid into authoritarianism since she pushed on with an uncontested general election in 2014. "She has crushed the opposition and created a one-party dominant political system in Bangladesh," says Ataur Rahman, a political science professor at Dhaka University.

Hasina married nuclear scientist MA Wazed Miah in

1968. They have two children, who are both US citizens, including son Sajeeb Wajed, who is an advisor to her government. Hasina ignored calls by opponents to let a neutral government oversee Sunday's election, which extended her reign as Bangladesh's longest-serving leader after a campaign marred by violence and arrests of opposition activists. —AFP

Philippine storm death toll surges

MANILA: The death toll from a storm that struck the Philippines shortly after Christmas rose to 68 with the number of fatalities expected to climb even higher, civil defense officials said yesterday. Fifty-seven people died in the mountainous Bicol region, southeast of Manila, while 11 were killed in the central island of Samar, mostly due to landslides and drownings, the officials said. "I am afraid this (death toll) will still go up because there are a lot of areas we still have to clear," said Claudio Yucot, Bicol civil defense director.

The weather disturbance locally named "Usman" hit the country on Saturday. While it did not have powerful winds it brought heavy rains that caused floods and

loosened the soil, triggering landslides in some areas. Many people failed to take necessary precautions because Usman was not strong enough to be rated as a typhoon under the government's storm alert system. Yucot said. "People were overconfident because they were on (Christmas) vacation mode and there was no tropical cyclone warning," he told AFP.

Although Usman has since moved westward away from the country, many affected areas were still experiencing seasonal rains, hampering rescue and recovery efforts, he added. At least 17 people are still missing and more than 40,000 were displaced nationwide due to the storm, the civil defense office said. An average of 20 typhoons and storms lash the Philippines each year, killing hundreds of people and leaving millions in near-perpetual poverty. The most powerful was Super Typhoon Haiyan which left more than 7,360 people dead or missing across the central Philippines in 2013. —AFP



This handout photo taken and released by the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) shows a woman standing in front of her damage house in Lope De Vega Town in Northern Samar. —AFP

Pakistan airline fires pilots with fake school degrees

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's national flag carrier has fired 50 staffers including three pilots for holding fake high school degrees, an airline official said yesterday, in the latest embarrassing mishap to hit the troubled airline. Pakistan International Airlines (PIA), which was considered a global leader in commercial aviation until the 1970s, has been plagued by myriad controversies in recent years and saddled by billions of dollars in debt. "The airline has dismissed from service its 50 staffers including three pilots for holding fake high school degrees," PIA's spokesman Mashood Tajwar said.

He said at least six additional pilots had been fired recently on the same grounds. The airline has cancelled the pilots' licenses, Tajwar added. He did not specify what the other PIA staff who were sacked did for the airline. PIA was widely mocked in 2016 for sacrificing a goat next to a turboprop ATR plane to ward off bad luck, weeks after one of its planes crashed killing 47 people in one of Pakistan's worst air disasters.

Last year it had to apologize after forgetting two corpses due to be transferred to Pakistan from New York. And in 2013 one of its pilots was jailed in Britain for being drunk before he was due to fly from Leeds to Islamabad with 156 people on board. PIA employees have also been periodically investigated for drug-muggling, especially after drugs were seized from a Dubai-bound flight in 2016. —AFP

Taiwan rebuffs China tourist snub with record 2018 arrivals

TAIPEI: A record 11 million tourists have visited Taiwan in 2018, the government said yesterday, a boon for the island as it courts holidaymakers across Asia to make up for a shortfall from China. The number of Chinese mainlanders visiting Taiwan has dropped dramatically since the 2016 election of president Tsai Ing-wen who has refused to acknowledge Beijing's stance that the island is part of "one China".

Beijing still sees Taiwan as part of its territory to be reunified, despite the two sides being ruled separately

since the end of a civil war on the mainland in 1949. China has cut off official communication with Tsai's government and stepped up military and diplomatic pressure. Tour group numbers from the mainland took a nosedive, sparking speculation that Beijing was deliberately turning off the taps to punish Taiwan for electing Tsai.

In response, Tsai's government went on a charm offensive across Asia, launching advertising campaigns and making it easier for people to visit, particularly from South and Southeast Asia. That strategy — dubbed the "southbound policy" — has reaped rewards. The 11 millionth visitor, a Japanese doctor, arrived Sunday in what Taiwan's tourism bureau described as "a new landmark". The island recorded 10.7 million arrivals in 2017 and 10.6 million in 2016. The government has yet to release a full breakdown in nationalities for 2018. Japanese and Chinese tourists still make up the bulk of arrivals. But last year's data showed the number of Chinese nationals

coming to Taiwan had dropped from 4.18 million in 2015 to just 2.73 million in 2017.

Some 2.46 million people from the mainland visited in the first 11 months of 2018, suggesting that decline has continued. In contrast, arrivals from Southeast Asia rose to 2.1 million in 2017 from 1.4 million in 2015, while Taiwan has also seen increases from across the rest of Asia. Designed to make the island less economically dependent on Beijing, the "southbound policy" is aimed at ramping up business and cultural exchanges with 16 South and Southeast Asian countries, as well as Australia and New Zealand. Last week 152 Vietnamese who arrived on group tours went missing with authorities suspecting them of coming to work illegally. Around 400 tourists have previously gone missing under the program, according to the tourism bureau, although it is not clear how many of them have since been found. —AFP

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Volunteers strive to stave off shutdown chaos at US parks

Sabra Purdy is just back from Joshua Tree National Park in southern California, which was crammed with tourists. It is high season, and to prevent chaos from the partial shutdown of the US federal government, she put on her gloves, cleaned toilets and picked up trash. The 40-year-old businesswoman joined other members of the business community who benefit from park-related tourism, and together they performed some serious maintenance in the 790,737-acre park while waiting for politicians in faraway Washington to end their budget impasse.

The shutdown began on Dec 22, with Congress at loggerheads over whether to include the \$5 billion sought by Donald Trump to fund a wall on the border with Mexico, a central pillar of his election campaign and of his presidency. The result: Hundreds of thousands of federal workers were sent home without pay, including 21,383 employees of the National Park Service (NPS), responsible for 418 facilities nationwide, including national parks, monuments, historic sites and even the White House.

But most parks were left open, and without the usual entry fee. "In the long run, the rangers who work here are committed to preserve the area and just their mere presence probably keeps things from happening that shouldn't," said Sherman Craig, who was visiting Joshua Tree from New York. A Park Service statement issued for a shutdown earlier in the year laid out a bare-bones plan. "The NPS will not operate parks during the shutdown - no visitor services will be provided," it said.

"NPS will cease providing visitor services, including restrooms, trash collection, facilities and roads maintenance (including plowing), campground reservation and check-in/check-out services, backcountry and other permits and public information." That is where the community around Joshua Tree came in, determined to help keep the magic in the air. The Sonora and Mojave deserts meet on the park's west side, amid a spectacular backdrop of rocky mountains, boulders and a type of cactus called the Joshua Tree that gives the area its name.

Disorder but 'no chaos'

Since the shutdown began, dozens of volunteers have been traveling to the park to clean overused bathrooms, remove mounting piles of garbage and carry out other, equally unfragrant work. Purdy, who eight years ago opened a tour company for climbing trips with her husband Seth Zaharias, said that when she arrived at Joshua Tree on Friday she found disorder but "no chaos". There were "a lot of people with dogs where they shouldn't be, camping where they shouldn't be. But it could certainly be much worse," she said. "Unfortunately, this isn't the first shutdown, and probably not the last."

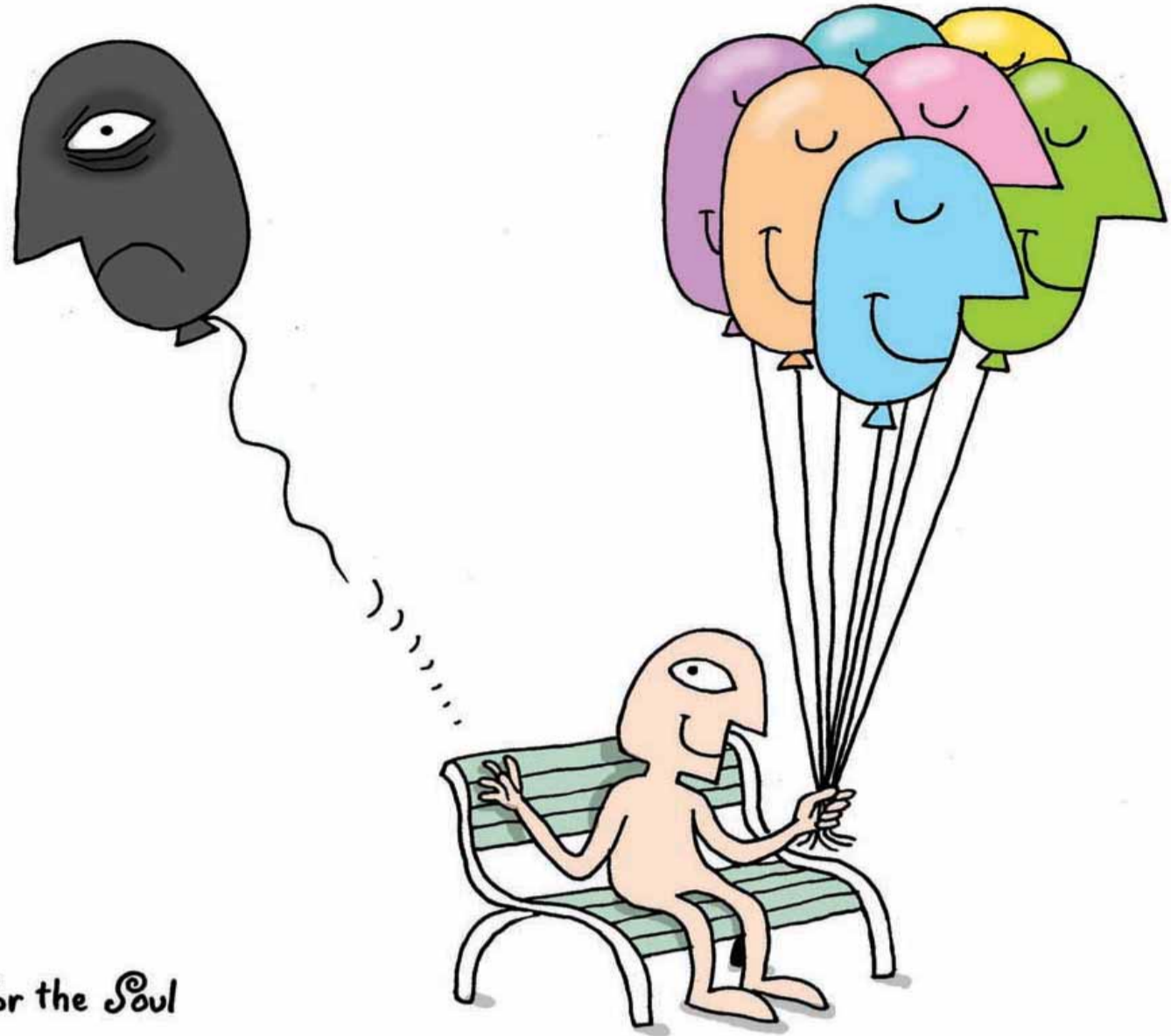
Volunteers often take the opportunity to guide tourists and explain the rules about protecting the park's precious and delicate ecosystem - rules often flouted during the shutdown. Local businesses started organizing their fairly informal grouping even as Congress was failing yet again to get its budget deal done. All supplies for the effort come from the pocket of local businessmen, though some donations are starting to arrive from other park lovers.

Striving for 'normalcy'

"There are about 150 latrines in the park. And I estimate that we have distributed more than 500 rolls of paper; I do not think we have reached all the bathrooms, only the most important ones," said John Lauretig, executive director of the NGO Friends of Joshua Tree National Park, which is helping coordinate while also working to protect local wildlife. "We are trying our best to maintain normalcy, but you know, we don't really have the authority or the power or the ability to stop people from doing really egregious acts: Driving off-road, or chopping down trees or stealing artifacts. I haven't seen any of that. But you know the potential is there," he said.

On Twitter, someone posting as "Defend Joshua Tree" decried an "absolutely ridiculous" breakdown of conditions in the park - with trash piling up, people driving off-road and even stringing Christmas lights between delicate Joshua Tree cacti. The poster called for the park to be closed until the budget showdown ends.

But for Purdy, Lauretig and many others dependent on tourism, that would be the worst possible turn of events: The time between Christmas and New Year's is among the park's busiest. When the park was shuttered for 17 days in 2013, "it was devastating for us financially," Purdy said. Lauretig shared the concern. "Back in 2013 when the park was closed and people were not visiting, the local restaurants and the local community were laying people off. They were sending people home because there just wasn't any money or visitors," he said. — AFP



Cartoon for the Soul

Expect 2019 to test global stability

The resignation of US Defense Secretary James Mattis stands not only as a radical disassociation from the actions of the president he served, but as a foreboding for the future, a warning for 2019 - and beyond. And, for all the assurances that the world is getting better, such as Steven Pinker's "Enlightenment Now," there are huge geopolitical challenges to face and master to make that optimism real.

The key passages of Mattis' resignation letter include statements asserting that the United States cannot protect its interests or effectively serve its role as "the indispensable nation in the free world" without maintaining strong alliances and showing respect to its allies. "We must use all tools of American power to provide for the common defense, including providing effective leadership to our alliances," says Mattis. "It is clear that China and Russia... want to shape a world consistent with their authoritarian model."

These are implicitly harsh criticisms of Donald Trump, a president who has denigrated and insulted allies as close as Canada, Britain and Germany, and deferred to Russian president Vladimir Putin, often treating him as a friend. More, Mattis' remarks are red flags signaling the prospective collapse of the institutions and common policies of democratic states - now in increasing peril.

As the United States under Trump retreats to Fortress America, China under Xi Jinping retreats behind that version of Marxism which brooks no competitor on the political or ideological levels. The Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang have over the past year seen many of their number taken to re-education camps to purge them of their devotion to Islam: some Chinese authorities have ordered Christmas displays in shopping and office centers to be taken down. China's news media have been squeezed into conformity with the Party line for the past few years. The internet and social media provide some space for dissent, but it's usually quickly cut off - consistent, as Mattis might say, with Beijing's authoritarian model.

Putin both retreats and advances. He publicly embraces Orthodox Christianity and refers glowingly to the doctrine of Eurasianism which stresses Russia's separation from Europe. At the same time, he advances

- piling pressure on neighboring Ukraine, most recently in the Sea of Azov which lies between the two countries, where Russian warships fired on poorly-armed Ukrainian vessels - part of Moscow's overall strategy to, as Orysia Lutsevych writes, "prevent the Ukrainian state from delivering security, economic prosperity and closer integration with the EU and NATO for its citizens."

Putin is also ratcheting up pressure on Belarus, the smallest of the three Slavic states, to integrate more closely with Russia - a move which the Belarusian president, Alexander Lukashenko, has so far resisted. Were Russia to bring Belarus back under direct Russian control and engineer a pro-Russian government in

to underpin them. 2019 will be a huge test for the Union - not just because the UK is due to leave it at the end of March, but also because the EU parliamentary elections in May are likely to see a large influx of populist and Eurosceptic deputies, dedicated to returning centralized power to national parliaments.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union at the beginning of the 1990s, a new spirit went abroad. Call it the export of democracy: the certainty that democratic practices and the institutions of civil society - as non-governmental pressure groups, independent research centers, the news media - could, once released from servitude, rapidly change into free societies on the Western model. They would do so because their people wanted freedom - the revolutions in the former Soviet bloc and elsewhere seemed to prove it.

In the United Nations, steam built up behind a project named "genocide prevention and the responsibility to protect" - the view that all rulers had a duty to protect their citizens, and to refrain from subjecting them to "war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity." If leaders did descend to attacking their own people - as did Saddam Hussein of Iraq throughout much of his 24-year reign - then they would be the target of sanctions, and even military force.

The debacle of Iraq, above all else, convinced many Western publics and leaders that idealistic imperialism led to disaster, and always would. Those espousing it - as had Hillary Clinton - faded. Both a liberal like Barack Obama and a populist like Donald Trump tacitly agreed that such foreign adventures were, on any large scale, a thing of the past. Thus, both the "new soft power" of the European Union and the idealistic imperialism to which the "responsibility to protect" gave birth have been seen to have demonstratively failed.

We are left with hard power in the ascendant - powers at whose summits are men (in every case) who use nationalism and the projection and growth of military force to bolster their popularity, and who saw liberal globalism as having offered a threat to their ruling strategies - but which is now ceasing to do so. And because large sections of the Western publics experienced marginalization, a loss of identity and no rises in income, they too turned against the liberal vision. — Reuters



Hard power is in the ascendance

Ukraine's capital Kiev, Putin's new Slav empire would be a reconstruction of much of the Soviet Union.

India, forecast to be the world's most populous nation in three years' time, becomes at one both more populist and more authoritarian in the fifth year of Narendra Modi's rule. The country's democratic institutions survive and debate is often robust, but a relentless centralization of authority and a sapping of the strength of formerly relatively independent institutions - as, this month, the Central Bank of India - are warnings of potentially unchecked executive power.

The largest project of a different kind of power, the European Union, now learns the hard way that the soft powers of education, culture, democracy, civil society and common markets - all of which the EU actively champions - can go only so far without military power

Yemen girl's tragic story makes her symbol of war

Buthaina Mansur Al-Rimi's life has changed drastically since last year - orphaned in Sanaa, the little girl controversially ended up in Saudi Arabia for medical care and has just returned to Yemen's capital. Her entire immediate family was wiped out in an air strike by a Saudi-led coalition that backs Yemen's government, using an explosive device Amnesty International says was made in the US. Images of Buthaina's rescue and a picture of her swollen and bruised at a hospital trying to force open one of her eyes with her fingers were beamed worldwide.

That international fame saw her become something of a propaganda pawn in the war between Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels and Saudi media. In an interview with AFP, Buthaina and her uncle Ali - her legal guardian - recall the strike that killed her parents, four sisters, only brother and another uncle.

'The house fell'

"I was in my mother's room with my father, sisters, brother and uncle," Buthaina tells AFP from rebel-held Sanaa, where she has returned from Saudi Arabia to live with Ali and her cousins. "The first missile hit, and my father went to get us sugar to get over the shock, but then the second missile hit, and then the third," she says. "And then the house fell," adds the little girl, who says she is eight. It was the night of Aug 25, 2017. The uncle who died was her "favorite", she says.

Along with her family, eight other civilians - including two children - were killed in a house nearby. A few days later, the picture of Buthaina attempt-

ing to force open her right eye went viral. The Saudi-led alliance admitted responsibility for the air strike describing it as a "technical mistake". But it drew strong international condemnation. In the week ahead of that strike, 42 people were killed in other air strikes, according to the UN.

A month after her close family was wiped out, pictures of Buthaina appeared in Saudi media showing her being treated in Riyadh. The circumstances surrounding her move from Sanaa to the Saudi capital remain unclear. The Houthi rebels say Buthaina, her uncle Ali and his family were "kidnapped" by the coalition and taken to government-held Aden, before travelling onwards to Riyadh. Saudi media said she was brought to the Saudi capital at the request of the internationally-recognized Yemeni government.

Although the Saudi government has never commented officially on Buthaina's case, pictures of her apparently boarding a private jet from Riyadh to Sanaa were published by the Al Riyadh newspaper on Dec 19. The Houthis' Al-Masirah media outlet has published stories welcoming them back from the "grasps of Saudi Arabia". "Eye of humanity exposes the enemy", ran one headline. Mahdi Al-Mshat, head of the rebels' Higher Political Council, has ordered Buthaina and her remaining family be offered a home and salary, according to the rebels' Saba news agency.

'She doesn't forget'

Buthaina says she is looking forward to going to school for the first time. Looking healthy, she sits on the floor of her uncle's home in Sanaa. She plays alongside her cousins with a doll, braiding its hair. "I want to go to school and become a doctor," she tells AFP, her own hair tied in a ponytail. "I want the war to stop and for us to live in peace... for the children of Yemen to live in peace," she says. Her uncle, sitting behind her, nods.

While the Houthis have been accused of widespread and indiscriminate use of landmines, the coalition has



This combination of pictures shows Yemeni girl Buthaina Al-Rimi in a hospital in Sanaa on Aug 28, 2017 (left); and as she mimics her face then while sitting in her uncle's house in Sanaa on Dec 26, 2018 (right). — AFP

come under fire for air raids that have killed civilians in rebel-held areas. Buthaina's return to her home city comes amid a ceasefire agreement in the lifeline port city of Hodeida - part of a peace push seen as the best chance yet of ending four years of devastating conflict. It has been a long journey back home for the little girl, who became a symbol of Yemen's war. Ali says that she still struggles with the loss of her family.

"She doesn't forget her mum and dad. She feels sad when she sees things that remind her of her parents or siblings... or when she hears the songs her father used to listen to," he says. "We tell her to hold on and that they are in heaven... and heaven is a beautiful place. Ali says that Buthaina is his "flesh and blood" and considers her a daughter. Holding back tears, he says: "When their house collapsed, I asked God not to deny me from seeing my brother again, but it's ok. Thanks to him, Buthaina stayed with us." Yemen's war has killed nearly 10,000 people, including 2,200 children, according to the World Health Organization, but other groups say the toll is far higher. — AFP

Business

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LONDON: World stock markets staggered yesterday towards the end of their worst year since the global financial crisis a decade ago, rocked by rising interest rates, the global trade war and Brexit fears.

Dubai stocks end 2018 on a sluggish note

Bursa Kuwait buoyant; global equities lackluster

DUBAI: Dubai's stock market ended 2018 yesterday with a 25-percent annual loss, the worst year since the global financial crisis a decade ago, as the real estate and tourism sectors struggled. The plunge in the Dubai Financial Market Index was the biggest among Gulf and Arab bourses amid signs of a slowdown in the emirate's highly diversified economy. But it was not as bad as in 2008 when the Dubai stock market dived 72 percent after the financial crisis triggered a debt problem for the emirate. Boursa Kuwait ended 2018 trading in the green zone as the premier market index rose by 0.14 points to reach 5079.5 points. The main market index rose by 15.4 points to reach 4738.5 points, same as all share market index went up by 3.2 points to stand at 5267.3 points. The value of trades was at KD 17.9 million with the volume reaching KD 140.4 million shares done through 4,716 deals.

In 2018 Oman's small bourse dropped 15 percent while stock markets in other energy-rich Arab Gulf monarchies ended the year in positive territory, buoyed by an increase in oil prices. The Qatar Stock Exchange led the gainers with a 21-percent rise despite an 18-month-old economic and political blockade by its neighbors led by Saudi Arabia.

The Saudi stock market, the largest in the Arab world, ended the year up 8.3 percent despite dipping to a three-year low in October after Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi was murdered in the kingdom's Istanbul consulate. In December, the Dubai Financial Market Index dropped to a five-year low before slightly recovering to close the year at 2,529.75 points.

The stock market's dive was attributed to a sharp drop in real estate sales and prices due to oversupply and weak demand. The property market, which makes up around 13 percent of Dubai's gross domestic product, has been in decline since 2014 but its slide accelerated in 2018. In the third quarter alone, the price of houses dropped 7.4 per-

cent in Dubai, according to the UAE central bank, after declining by more than six percent in the first half of 2018. Shares in Emaar Properties, the largest developer in the Middle East, lost almost half their value over the past year, mirroring sharp falls for the sector as a whole.

Economic growth in Dubai, which is not directly dependent on oil, is expected to have slowed to 2.3 percent in 2018, from 2.8 percent the previous year, according to the central bank. A glut of housing units and weak demand are also key reasons for the property market downturn, the Standard and Poor's ratings agency said earlier this year.

Meanwhile, world stock markets staggered yesterday towards the end of their worst year since the global financial crisis a decade ago, rocked by rising interest rates, the global trade war and Brexit, dealers said.

London and Paris wobbled in holiday-shortened trade on New Year's Eve-but nursed dizzying double-digit annual falls after an exceptionally volatile 2018.

Hong Kong rose yesterday after US President Donald Trump hailed "big progress" on resolving Washington's trade war with Beijing, but was down almost 14 percent over the year. Equities have been hammered in 2018 by tighter monetary policy—from both the US Federal Reserve and also the European Central Bank, which halted its quantitative easing stimulus policy this month.

"Global stocks are set for their worst year since the financial crisis, thanks to the tightening monetary policies adopted by several central banks around the globe—especially the Federal Reserve and the ECB," said ThinkMarkets analyst Naeem Aslam.

"The Fed stopped printing easy money a few years back and increased interest rates four times this year. The ECB also ended its quantitative easing program and there has been discussion on ... normalizing interest rates." The

Bank of England meanwhile hiked British interest rates in August for the second time since the financial crisis to help tame inflation, despite worries that Brexit could wreak havoc on the economy.

'America First'

Sentiment was also slammed by US President Donald Trump's 'America First' trade policy which has sparked a damaging trade war with China and others.

Wall Street did however mark the longest-ever "bull market" in August, a run that began amid extraordinary crisis-era monetary policy—but for which Trump has claimed credit after his tax cuts and regulatory rollbacks.

Yet markets have since spiralled lower on slowing global growth, Italy's fiscal woes, a US government shutdown and Trump's attacks on the Fed. Investors also ran for cover as the uncertain nature of Britain's looming exit from the European Union in March 2019 casts a long shadow.

"Stock markets have been on a wild ride this year and the United States has been at the center," Oanda analyst Craig Erlam said. "Tax reforms hugely boosted earnings, bringing an economic boost with it," he said. However, "the trade war with China and skirmishes elsewhere have weighed heavily on the relevant domestic markets which has dented investor sentiment."

Washington and Beijing imposed tit-for-tat tariffs on more than \$300 billion worth of goods in total two-way trade earlier this year, locking them in a conflict that has begun to eat into profits and contributed to stock market plunges. In Europe yesterday, London's benchmark FTSE 100 index dipped 0.1 percent to finish at 6,728.13 points, marking a sharp annual loss of 12.5 percent.

The Paris CAC 40 climbed 1.1 percent to end at 4,730.69 points—which was drop of nearly 11 percent for the year. Many investors were away for Christmas and



RIYADH: The Saudi stock market ended 2018 up 8.3 percent.—AFP

New Year holidays, while trading hubs including Frankfurt, Rome, Tokyo, Shanghai and Seoul were shut.

Return to recession?

"2018 has been characterized by a shift from low volatility, high liquidity and expectations of equity out-performance to high volatility, low liquidity and the return of a bear market in equities," said VTB Capital economist Neil MacKinnon. "For 2019, a global economic slowdown—perhaps recession—looks increasingly likely," he warned. Key Asian markets also limped towards the end of the year in bear market territory—meaning that they are 20 percent below their most recent peaks. Tokyo's benchmark Nikkei index had rounded out 2018 on Friday with its first annual loss since 2011, and Shanghai became the worst-performing major global stock market, dropping by nearly a quarter. — Agencies

China factory activity shrinks as year ends

BEIJING: China's factory activity contracted for the first time in over two years in December, highlighting the challenges facing Beijing as it seeks to end a bruising trade war with Washington and reduce the risk of a sharper economic slowdown in 2019.

The increasing strain on factories signals a continued loss of momentum in China, adding to worries about softening global growth, especially if the Sino-US dispute drags on. Trade frictions are already disrupting global supply chains, fuelling concerns of a bigger blow next year to world trade, investment and shaky financial markets. The official Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) - the first snapshot of China's economy each month - fell to 49.4 in December, below the 50-point level that separates growth from contraction, a National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) survey showed yesterday. It was the first contraction since July 2016 and the weakest reading since February 2016. Analysts had forecast it would dip to 49.9 from 50.0 the previous month. China is expected to roll out more economic support measures in coming months on top of a raft of initiatives this year. A prolonged downturn in the factory sector, key for jobs, would likely spark further attempts to juice domestic demand.

In November, industrial output rose the least in nearly

three years, while earnings growth at industrial firms fell for the first time in nearly three years. A PMI sub-index on overall factory output prices fell to 43.3 in December from 46.4, signalling earnings erosion. A gauge on overall production fell to 50.8, the lowest since February, from 51.9. New orders - an indicator of future activity - continued to soften, reinforcing views that business conditions in China will likely get worse before they get better.

A sub-index for total new orders contracted for the first time in at least a year, falling to 49.7 amid persistently weak demand at home and softening global growth.

New export orders shrank for a seventh straight month, with the sub-index falling to 46.6 from 47.0.

Trade war uncertainties

Many analysts doubt that Beijing and Washington can bridge their many differences and reach a comprehensive trade deal in the latest round of talks. US President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping agreed early this month to a 90-day ceasefire that delayed a planned Jan 1 US increase of tariffs on \$200 billion worth of Chinese goods while the two sides negotiate.

Trump said over the weekend that a possible trade deal was progressing well, but few concrete details have emerged. The trade war has resulted in billions of dollars of losses for both sides this year, hitting industries from autos and technology to US agriculture. "There are many short-term orders from overseas but few long-term orders received by Chinese factories as caution remains amid the trade uncertainties," said Nie Wen, economist at Hwabao Trust in Shanghai. "The medium to long-term export prospect is not optimistic particularly." Warehouses across the US are bursting with Chinese goods after retailers



SHENYANG: This photo taken on Sunday shows a customer buying New Year decorations at a market ahead of New Year's day in Shenyang in China's northeastern Liaoning province. — AFP

stocked up before fresh tariffs, suggesting little chance of a near-term export rebound even if a trade deal is reached.

Consumer caution

One bright spot in the downbeat data was a modest pick-up in the services sector. The official non-manufacturing PMI rose to 53.8 from 53.4. While that offers some cushion - services account for over half of the economy - consumers remain cautious. China's auto sector has been

particularly hard hit. Sales in the world's biggest auto market are on track to fall for the first time since at least 1990. "Last December we saw overall China carmakers' capacity utilisation rate at around 56 percent, but now we estimate it is roughly 50 percent," Shanghai-based senior analyst Alan Kang at LMC Automotive told Reuters. "Carmakers in general are cutting production." China's stock market tumbled about 25 percent in 2018, while the yuan has lost around 5 percent versus the dollar. — Reuters

Business

Tokyo court extends Ghosn's detention to January 11

Move after prosecutors re-arrest Ghosn for fresh allegations

TOKYO: Former Nissan boss Carlos Ghosn will be spending the beginning of 2019 behind bars after a Tokyo court yesterday extended his detention through to January 11.

The move comes after Japanese prosecutors re-arrested Ghosn for fresh allegations on December 21, dashing his hopes of being home for Christmas. "The decision to extend the (detention period) was issued today. The detention expires on January 11," the Tokyo District Court said in a statement.

The growing case against the auto tycoon represents a stunning reversal of fortune for a man once revered in Japan and beyond for his ability to turn around automakers, including Nissan.

Since his stunning arrest on November 19, the twists and turns of the case have gripped Japan and the business world and shone a light on the Japanese legal system, which has come in for some criticism internationally. Authorities are pursuing three separate lines of enquiry against the 64-year-old Franco-Lebanese-Brazilian executive, involving alleged financial wrongdoing during his tenure as Nissan chief. They suspect he conspired with his right-hand man, US executive Greg Kelly, to hide away around half of his income (some five billion yen or \$44 million) over five fiscal years from 2010.

They also allege he under-reported his salary to the tune of four billion yen over the next three fiscal years apparently to avoid criticism that his pay was too high.

The extension that prosecutors won Monday allows them to continue investigating a complex third claim that alleges Ghosn sought to shift a personal investment loss onto Nissan's books. As part of that scheme, he is also accused of having used Nissan funds to repay a Saudi acquaintance who put up collateral money. Prosecutors have pressed formal charges over the first allegation but not yet over the other accusations.

'Cup noodle'

Yesterday's extension deals a new blow to Ghosn's

hopes of being released from the Tokyo detention center where he has been held since his shock arrest. Earlier this month, he appeared on the verge of winning bail after a court rejected a request from prosecutors to extend his detention on the second allegation against him.

But by filing the new claims, prosecutors were able to restart the clock on his detention.

The once jet-setting executive, who denies any wrongdoing, was initially held in a tiny single cell but has now reportedly been moved to a more comfortable room.

He has complained about the cold and the rice-based menu, sources say, though he has told embassy visitors he is being well-treated although he has shed a lot of weight. According to the Asahi Shimbun daily, Ghosn will be offered cup noodles on New Year's Eve-based on the Japanese tradition of eating noodles at the turn of the year to wish for a long life.

He will reportedly be allowed access to his lawyers on January 2 and 3, which are both Japanese holidays.

'Dark side'

While he has failed to win bail, his alleged accomplice Kelly won a court-ordered release on Christmas Day. Kelly's bail conditions prevent him from leaving Japan, and he is reportedly now seeking treatment for a spinal condition at a Japanese hospital.

Ghosn's lengthy detention has sparked criticism, especially from abroad, but Japanese prosecutors have defended the legal system, which allows suspects to be "re-arrested" several times over different allegations. And his arrest has laid bare tensions in the alliance he helped forge between Nissan, Mitsubishi Motors and France's Renault.

While Nissan and Mitsubishi Motors swiftly ousted Ghosn from his leadership posts after his arrest, Renault has responded more cautiously to the allegations.

The French firm has also repeatedly called on Nissan to hold a shareholders meeting, and is reportedly seeking increased representation on the board of the Japanese



TOKYO: Pedestrians looking at a television news program featuring former Nissan chief Carlos Ghosn, in Tokyo in this file photo. Ghosn will be spending the beginning of 2019 behind bars after a Tokyo court yesterday extended his detention through to January 11, local media reported. — AFP

automaker. Nissan has rejected the calls for a shareholder meeting at this stage, and says it is waiting until a commission looking into governance at the firm releases its findings. The Japanese automaker has also so far failed to agree on who should succeed Ghosn as chairman.

While the tycoon was once so beloved for his role in

turning around Nissan that he was immortalised in manga comic form, his former colleagues have since harshly criticized him.

Nissan's CEO Hiroto Saikawa, a one-time Ghosn protégé, has accused his former boss of accruing too much power and referred to his tenure's "dark side." — AFP

US companies repatriate over half a trillion dollars in 2018

NEW YORK: US companies have sent home over half a trillion dollars of cash they held overseas in 2018 to take advantage of tax changes, but data suggest the pace is slowing, potentially removing a key source of support for Wall Street.

Dollar repatriation in the July-September period fell to \$93 billion, around half of second-quarter volumes and less than a third of the \$300 billion or so sent home from January to March, US current account data shows. The repatriation bonanza followed new regulations that allowed the US government to tax profits accumulated overseas, regardless of where the money was held. Prior rules allowed companies to "defer" US tax on worldwide profits unless they repatriated the money.

The change offered a powerful incentive to bring home some of the \$3 trillion US firms were believed to hold in jurisdictions ranging from Ireland to Switzerland, either in cash or in securities such as US Treasuries.

But investment bank JPMorgan said the flows were on "a rapidly decelerating trajectory".

The current account data shows repatriation in all sectors. Looking at just non-financial companies, JPMorgan calculates \$60 billion was repatriated in the third quarter, versus \$225 billion in the first quarter and \$115 billion in the second quarter.

Because companies had probably already pre-booked a one-off tax hit for the year, repatriation will have dwindled further in the last quarter, it predicted. Repatriation flows are also evident from data released by the US Treasury International Capital, or TIC. That shows Treasury bond holdings falling in locations that are well known as low-tax jurisdictions or overseas bases of US companies or that host significant fund management or custody business.

Ireland, which hosts the European hubs of US technology and pharmaceutical companies such as Apple and Pfizer, saw Treasury holdings drop by \$40 billion between end-2017 and end-October 2018, TIC data released on Dec. 17 shows. The holdings fell by over a tenth in January-October to \$287.6 billion.

Shrinking repatriation is likely to affect markets, because the flows helped fund this year's record \$1 trillion in US share buybacks. A Jefferies analysis of a Federal Reserve paper looking at the use of repatriated cash concluded it had significantly enhanced buybacks, effectively placing a floor under stock markets. But US equities have endured a dismal few months as worries have grown for economic growth. The last quarter of 2018 has been the worst for the S&P500 index since the end of 2008 when the Lehman Brothers crisis erupted.

Should flows dwindle further, "the extra boost that US repatriation provided to US equity and bond markets via share buybacks and corporate bond redemptions would likely dissipate next year," JPMorgan told clients. Bond markets meanwhile saw reduced issuance, as companies drew instead on repatriation proceeds.

The 10 biggest US multinationals, including six tech companies, sold zero bonds in 2018, after raising \$80 billion annually on average in the previous three years, Goldman Sachs said, noting this had supported bond performance in 2018. The dollar may be affected less—a significant part of the offshore-held cash is already believed to be in dollars, whether cash or Treasuries. However, repatriation probably supported the currency at the margins by tightening dollar supply outside the United States, so dwindling flows could act as another drag on the greenback. — Reuters

Hong Kong stocks gain over 1% in shortened session

HONG KONG: Hong Kong shares climbed over 1 percent yesterday, closing an otherwise bearish 2018 on a firm note, on the back of optimism about Sino-US trade relations, and gains in technology stocks. The Hang Seng index rose 1.3 percent to 25,845.70, while the Hang Seng China Enterprises index gained 1.3 percent. The market is closed in the afternoon on New Year's Eve.

The Hang Seng lost 13.6 percent of its value this year, the worst decline since 2011. The market tracked the sorry state of the Chinese stock market in 2018, whose blue-chip index was the worst performer in Asia. H-shares also shed 13.5 percent in 2018. The Hang Seng recorded a 2.5 percent fall in December, and lost almost 7 percent this quarter, while H-shares accumulated losses of 4.7 percent in December and 8.1 percent in the fourth quarter of 2018.

Gains were seen across the board yesterday. The sub-index tracking the financial sector ended the session 1.4 percent higher, the property sector rose 1.3 percent, while energy stocks added 1.5 percent, due to firmer oil prices.

Kenyan GDP growth at 6% in Q3 2018

NAIROBI: Kenya's economy expanded faster in the third quarter of this year than in the same period last year due to strong performance in the agriculture and construction sectors, the statistics office said yesterday.

The Kenya National Bureau of Statistics said the economy grew 6 percent in the third quarter of 2018, compared with 4.7 percent in the same period in 2017. It said the agriculture sector expanded by 5.2 percent compared with 3.7 percent in the third quarter of 2017, helped by better weather. "Prices of key food crops remained low during the quarter compared to the corresponding quarter of 2017, an indication of relative stability in supply," KNBS said.

Manufacturing grew by 3.2 percent from a 0.1 percent contraction in the third quarter of 2017, KNBS said. It said that the electricity and water



A farmer works in his farm in Nyeri County, Central Kenya.

supply sector grew by 8.5 percent from 4.5 percent in the third quarter of 2017, mainly due to a big increase in the generation of electricity from hydro and geothermal sources.

Gross foreign reserves increased to 1,222.5 billion from 1,085.6 billion in the same period of last year.

The current account deficit nar-

rowed by 23 percent to 116 billion Kenyan shillings (\$1.14 billion), it said. This was mainly due to lower imports of food and higher value of exports of goods and services. The government forecasts that the economy will expand by 6.2 percent in 2019, up from a forecast 6.0 percent this year. — Reuters

A euro curse? European banking stocks' lost decades

LONDON: Fearing his country's pay-as-you-go pension scheme is unsustainable, a 40-year old French engineer - let's call him Jean Dupont - makes a New Year resolution.

Hoping the introduction of the euro the next day will mark a new era of prosperity for the European economy, Dupont decides to invest in the bloc's banking sector every single trading day for the next two decades. His strategy is simple: buying and holding on what he believes is the best proxy to play the region's dynamic economy.

And why not? Europe is expanding at its fastest rate in about 10 years, Germany has turned its economy around since reunification in 1990 and, with more than 10 Eastern and Central European countries queuing up to join the EU, there seems to be no shortage of growth on the horizon.

Moreover, a dot-com boom is fuelling belief in a promising IT-based "new economy".

What could possibly go wrong?

Paris, December 31, 2018:

Now 60, Dupont must come to terms with the fact that his investment strategy has misfired horribly.

Excluding dividends, he finds that he has lost money on his 20 years of daily investments in the euro zone banking sector a staggering 98.5 percent of the time.

Only about 1.5 percent of his investments were made at a lower level than the index's close on Dec. 28, 2018. He is not sure who to blame.

The great financial crisis of 2008 seems a credible culprit. But his American cousin Jonathan Bridges, who 20 years ago followed a parallel strategy of daily investments in the US banking index, has had a success rate of about 50 percent. That's even though the subprime loans that were a major factor in the crisis were centred on the United States. Dupont might also look for clues in the euro zone economy's sluggish growth rate, the sovereign debt crisis of 2011 or ultra-low, and at times negative, interest rates.

But none of that can fully explain to him why the bloc's banking index has lost about two-thirds of its value over 20 years. If he wasn't such a rational man, he'd almost think the euro was cursed. — Reuters



December, the country's factory activity contracted for the first time in more than two years, but services activity picked up after a two-month slowdown, according to official data released yesterday morning. The top gainer on the Hang Seng was Country Garden Holdings Co Ltd, which gained 6.4 percent.

The top gainers among H-shares were China Tower Corp Ltd, up 3.5 percent, followed by China Petroleum & Chemical Corp, gaining 3.3 percent, and CRRC Corp Ltd, up 2.4 percent.

The short and one-factor leveraged Hang Seng index, which is designed to replicate the payoff of a short or leveraged portfolio and is linked to the movements of the Hang Seng Index, was lower by 1.3 percent on the day at 5,358.44 points. — Reuters

Dollar drifts in year-end trade as clouds gather

LONDON: The dollar was broadly steady in thin year-end trading yesterday with the Australian dollar leading gainers as tensions over a trade dispute between the United States and China faded on expectations of progress in trade talks. The Australian dollar gained 0.4 percent to \$0.7063 but on the year is down 10 percent. The Aussie has suffered against the greenback this year due to tensions between the world's two biggest economies because of its status as a currency highly correlated to global trade.

In a tweet which provided relief to financial markets, US President Donald Trump said on Sunday that he had a "long and very good call" with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping and that a possible trade deal between the United States and China was progressing well. The dollar was broadly steady at 96.43 but is set to close the year up nearly 5 percent against its rivals on trade tensions and rising interest rates.

China and the United States have been in a trade war for much of 2018, shaking world financial markets as the flow of hundreds of billions' worth of goods between the world's two largest economies has been disrupted by tariffs. Going into 2019, the outlook for the dollar is more subdued with growing expectations that a three-year rate hiking cycle in the United States has come to a close. Markets currently expect no rate hikes next year.

"Along with growing expectations of no more rate hikes, the familiar issues of the twin deficits is expected to weigh on the dollar next year," said Alvin Tan, a currency strategist at Societe Generale in London. The dollar has been relatively stable going into the end of 2018 despite falling US Treasury yields. The US 10-year Treasury bond yield was at 2.71 percent on Monday, having fallen nearly 30 basis points in December.

The euro was last quoted at \$1.1440, flat versus the dollar. Although the single currency has gained versus the dollar in recent weeks, economic growth and inflation in Europe remain much weaker than the European Central Bank's expectations. The euro is set to lose nearly 5 percent versus the dollar in 2018.

Elsewhere, sterling, which has been battered this year by Brexit woes, rose to a three-week high in quiet trade. It rose 0.3 percent at \$1.2732 but has lost more than 6 percent of its value versus the dollar this year. — Reuters

Business

NBK announces winner of KD 250,000 in Al-Jawhara draw during a live show

Rami Jamil Yacoub wins KD 250,000 in quarterly draw

KUWAIT: Ending the year with more prizes and rewards, the National Bank of Kuwait continues to launch campaigns and hold activities that reward every segment of its customers. Most recently the bank held a fun-filled activity on FM 88.8 Kuwait Pulse with "Diwanyat Al-Yaqout W Al-Ansari" program, where the lucky winner of KD 250,000

in the Al-Jawhara quarterly draw was announced live on air, in addition to the winners in the previously-launched GAC campaign and a winner of Al-Jawhara account credited with KD 400, in the special competition that was held live on air.

The activity started with an interview with Sara Al-Doukhi, Consumer Banking Group, National Bank of Kuwait, whom highlighted the advantages and value-added services offered by Al-Jawhara account. Al-Doukhi said, "Al-Jawhara account gives customers access to many features and benefits. It is a great way of saving and winning big all-year-long. With this unique and rewarding account, we ensure that our customers are enjoying every step of their banking experience with weekly, monthly and quarterly draws. Customers automatically enter the draws by simply opening an Al-Jawhara account and double their chances of winning when they do not withdraw or transfer amounts from their account during the required period."

Since 2012, NBK has rewarded loyal customers with

prizes worth a total of up to KD 2,200,000 annually through the weekly, monthly and quarterly draws in which customers receive a chance to enter the draw for every KD 50 deposited in their Al-Jawhara account. Al-Doukhi added, "Customers of Al-Jawhara account benefit from a free Visa Debit Card and access to NBK Online Banking and NBK Mobile Banking for viewing and managing the account wherever the customer is in the world."

Winner of KD 250,000

During the live show, NBK announced Rami Jamil Yacoub as the winner of KD 250,000 in Al-Jawhara's quarterly draw. The draw was held live in the presence of the representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. NBK also recently announced the winners in Al-Jawhara account's weekly draws for the month of December, announcing Thamer Ebrahim Arab, Rashed Jassim Mohammad AlMesri and Mohamad Adil Al-Timimy as the winners.

Winners of the GAC Motor cars campaign

Also during the live show, NBK revealed the winners of its recent campaign that gave customers the chance to enter the draw and win one of two GAC Motor cars, GS8 or GA8, when using NBK Mobile Banking App or the Interactive Teller Machine (ITM). The winner, Mohammad Ahmed Anas Ahmad Abduljawad had the chance to choose between the GS8 and GA8 models. Under the same campaign, an additional car a GS4 was exclusively dedicated to Al-Shabab account holders, the GS4 was won by Al-Shabab account holder, Jassim Haider Jassim Hasan.

Winner of the live competition and draw

Committed to rewarding customers in every campaign



Al-Jawhara quarterly winner

and activity, NBK's live radio activity gave every listener a chance to win an Al-Jawhara account credited with KD 400 by simply answering questions of the live competition

about the Al-Jawhara account. Participants who gave a correct answer entered the live draw and the winner was the announced live on air.

Gulf Bank announces winners of Al-Danah weekly draw

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank held its Al-Danah weekly draw on the 30th of December 2018 announcing the names of its winners for the week from the 23rd December till the 27th of December 2018, in which five winners will receive KD 1,000 each, every week.

The winners this week are:

- * Lena Ibrahim Eid Eid
- * Ahmed Abdulrazag Bandar Abdulla
- * Ali Thamer Mostafa Al-Sayegh
- * Kazem Abdullah Mal Allah Hasan
- * Hamad Abdulaziz Khaled Al Anjari

Gulf Bank's Al-Danah 1st quarterly draw for KD200,000 prize was held on 28 March, and the 2nd Al-Danah quarterly draw, for the prize of KD 250,000 was held on 27th June and the 3rd quarterly draw for the prize of KD 500,000 was held on 26th September. The final Al-Danah draw for KD 1 million will be held on 10th January 2019, where the Al-Danah millionaire will be announced.

Gulf Bank encourages customers to increase their chances of winning with Al-Danah by depositing more into their Gulf Bank accounts using the new ePay (Self-Pay) service, which is available on Gulf Bank's online and mobile banking services.

Al-Danah offers a number of unique services to customers, including the Al-Danah Deposit Only ATM card, which allows account holders to deposit money into their accounts at their convenience. Account holders can also calculate their chances of winning the draws through the 'Al-Danah Chances' calculator available on the Gulf Bank website and app.

Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account is open to Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti residents of Kuwait. Customers require a minimum of KD 200 to open an account and the same amount should be maintained for customers to be eligible for the upcoming Al-Danah draws. If the customer's account balance falls below KD 200 at any given time, a KD 2 fee will be charged to their account monthly until the minimum balance is met.

Customers who open an account and/or deposit more will enter the daily draw within two days. To take part in the Al-Danah 2018 upcoming quarterly and yearly draws, customers must meet the required hold period for each draw.



KIB awarded 'Fastest Growing Islamic Bank MENA' 2018

KUWAIT: For the third consecutive year, KIB was awarded 'Fastest Growing Islamic Bank MENA 2018' by Capital Finance International (CFI.co), an organization specializing in the finance and banking sectors. KIB received this award based on the result of a judging panel, which included a group of specialized editors. Accordingly, the bank was recognized for its remarkable growth in the banking sector and the success of its new strategy. This new strategy has been a key component driving the bank's fast-paced growth and expansion in the banking



Sheikh Mohammed Jarrah Al-Sabah

sector, propelling KIB to the forefront of the sector locally and regionally. The bank was judged against several key criteria, namely financial performance, risk management, corporate governance, customer service, innovation, corporate social responsibility, market leadership, transparency, response to market demands, and number of votes.

On this occasion, Chairman of KIB, Sheikh Mohammed Jarrah Al-Sabah, congratulated all KIB staff for winning this prestigious award, saying: "We have made great strides with our new strategy, making KIB a partner in every aspect of people's lives, particularly our customers." Al-Jarrah added saying: "This new strategy focuses on enhancing the overall customer banking experience, there-

by ensuring customer satisfaction by providing them with the latest innovative technological banking services and improving the Bank's efficiency. By doing so, we are able to expand and grow despite the highly-competitive market."

Al-Jarrah also noted that KIB continues to adopt a solid strategy to develop and strategically market its products and services, aiming at meeting diverse needs of the community. The bank has also built a strategic network of relationships with both public and private institutions across Kuwait and the region. Additionally, KIB actively contributes to the financing of local development projects: a core component of the Bank's operations.

CFI.co is an international, independent assessment body specializing in finance and banking. A prominent, London-based organization, CFI.co is dedicated to recognizing both individuals and institutions that demonstrate high standards of innovation and performance excellence in the global financial market. The organization also sheds light on leading institutions across various specialized fields that display outstanding performance amidst challenges in the financial sector.

500-euro note gets last print run

PARIS: The eurozone is moving to stop printing 500-euro banknotes, the violet-colored bills that authorities fear are favored by criminals, with most of the 19 nations in the currency bloc to halt issuing them next month.

"As of 27 January 2019, 17 of the 19 national central banks in the euro area will no longer issue 500-euro banknotes," the European Central Bank said on its website.

However, Austria and Germany will both continue printing the banknotes until April 26 "in order to ensure a smooth transition and for logistical reasons", the ECB said. The 500-euro notes in circulation remain legal tender and can be used to make payments. The ECB announced in May 2016 that it would halt issuing new 500-euro notes, saying at the time that it expected to do so around the end of 2018, due to "concerns that this banknote could facilitate illicit activities".

The largest denomination banknote in the single currency area is one of the world's most valuable bills, alongside the 1,000 Swiss franc (\$1,017, 888 euros) note. Because of its high value and portability, experts believe the 500-euro note had become prized by criminals for money laundering and even terrorist financing, earning the nickname "Bin Laden" in some circles. According to ECB statistics, 500-euro bills account for just 2.4 percent of the total number of banknotes in circulation, but a little over 20 percent of the total value. At the end of November there were 521 million of the banknotes in circulation. The 500-euro banknotes were actually last printed in 2014, with demand satisfied since from stocks. —AFP



The government, though, has faced criticism from some economists for running deficits and adding higher spending commitments to future budgets.

"We will be moving around zero," Schillerova said on Czech Television on Friday evening, according to an article on the broadcaster's website.

"I will give the exact figure at a news conference on Jan. 3, but I can confirm that we are talking about a balanced state budget."

She added investment spending rose this year. The central budget - which makes up the bulk of the Czech Republic's overall fiscal balance - ended 2017 with a deficit of 6 billion crowns, much lower than planned. The lower house this month approved a 2019 central state budget with a deficit of 40 billion crowns. — Reuters

Euronext secures majority backing for Oslo Bors bid

PARIS/OSLO: Euronext NV has secured the backing of a majority of shareholders in Norway's Oslo Bors which it aims to buy, the European exchanges operator said on Friday, while the target firm's CEO said it would explore alternatives to the deal. Euronext, which operates bourses in Paris, Amsterdam, Brussels, Lisbon and Dublin, has offered to buy Oslo Bors for 625 million euros (\$716 million).

It said shareholders representing 50.6 percent of the capital of Oslo Bors had agreed to sell their shares ahead of a tender offer which Paris-listed Euronext plans to launch in the coming weeks.

However, holding company Oslo Bors VPS took issue with how Euronext had gone about its approach and said it would arrange a meeting with Euronext in early January and had hired brokerage Arctic Securities as adviser. "We are open to speak to other parties also in addition to Euronext ... We want to have a wider process on behalf of shareholders, to have the best price for the share," Oslo Bors VPS CEO Bente Landsnes told Reuters.

She said Euronext's offer came as a surprise. "We did not know it was coming. We were notified last weekend that Euronext was to bid," she said in an interview. "We have been told that it was an auction called a compact auction. We don't know who participated. As far as we

know Euronext came with the best offer," she said.

She added that, after the auction, "more than one strategic party" approached Oslo Bors VPS to say that they had not been invited. She did not name them.

"Exceeding the 50 percent of total outstanding shares threshold shows the interest from Oslo Bors VPS shareholders ... satisfying one of the conditions required for its completion and strengthening Euronext's confidence on its successful outcome," Euronext said in a statement.

Euronext owns a 5.1 percent stake in Oslo Bors. Owning more than 10 percent would require approval from the Norwegian government, which may hinge on the contents of Euronext's upcoming offer document.

While some Norwegian opposition politicians have been skeptical about the deal, a junior government minister struck a conciliatory note on Friday. "This could result in even better, cheaper services for Norwegian investors via increased investment in new technology. It'll be interesting to see what the (Oslo Bors) board says," Svein Flaatten told business daily Finansavisen.

The Norwegian finance ministry said it would take a position on the issue only after it has received an offer. "We don't know when, or if, we will receive an offer," said a ministry spokeswoman.

"Both Euronext and Oslo Bors have informed us about the situation. The FSA has no comments at this stage," said Anne Merethe Bellamy, deputy director general of capital markets supervision at the Norwegian Financial Supervisory Authority. Euronext is looking to expand its pan-European portfolio but opportunities are scarce as operators either already belong to groups such as the London Stock Exchange or Nasdaq Inc or because their shareholders want to remain independent. — Reuters



Czech budget will end 2018 balanced, says finance minister

PRAGUE: The Czech central state budget will be balanced at the end of the year, beating forecasts for a deficit of 50 billion crowns (\$2.22 billion), Finance Minister Alena Schillerova said.

The budget has been boosted by a growing economy and unemployment at a two-decade low, increasing wages.

Science & Technology

NASA spaceship zooms toward farthest world ever photographed

US space agency to ring in New Year with a live online broadcast

TAMPA, US: A NASA spaceship is zooming toward the farthest, and quite possibly the oldest, cosmic body ever photographed by humankind, a tiny, distant world called Ultima Thule some four billion miles (6.4 billion kilometers) away.

The US space agency will ring in the New Year with a live online broadcast to mark historic flyby of the mysterious object in a dark and frigid region of space known as the Kuiper Belt at 12:33 am January 1 (0533 GMT today). A guitar anthem recorded by legendary Queen guitarist Brian May—who also holds an advanced degree in astrophysics—will be released just after midnight to accompany a video simulation of the flyby, as NASA commentators describe the close pass on www.nasa.gov/nasalive.

Real-time video of the actual flyby is impossible, since it takes more six hours for a signal sent from Earth to reach the spaceship, named New Horizons, and another six hours for the response to arrive.

But if all goes well, the first images should be in hand by the end of New Year's Day. And judging by the latest tweet from Alan Stern, the lead scientist on the New Horizons mission, the excitement among team members is

palpable. "IT'S HAPPENING!! Flyby is upon us! @NewHorizons2015 is healthy and on course! The farthest exploration of worlds in history!" he wrote on Saturday.

What does it look like?

Scientists are not sure what Ultima Thule (pronounced TOO-lee) looks like—whether it is round or oblong or even if it is a single object or a cluster. It was discovered in 2014 with the help of the Hubble Space Telescope, and is believed to be 12-20 miles (20-30 kilometers) in size. Scientists decided to study it with New Horizons after the spaceship, which launched in 2006, completed its main mission of flying by Pluto in 2015, returning the most detailed images ever taken of the dwarf planet. "At closest approach we are going to try to image Ultima at three times the resolution we had for Pluto," said Stern.

"If we can accomplish that it will be spectacular." Hurting through space at a speed of 32,000 miles (51,500 kilometers) per hour, the spacecraft aims to make its closest approach within 2,200 miles (3,500 kilometers) of the surface of Ultima Thule.

The flyby will be fast, at a speed of nine miles (14 kilometers) per second. Seven

instruments on board will record high-resolution images and gather data about its size and composition. Ultima Thule is named for a mythical, far-northern island in medieval literature and cartography, according to NASA. "Ultima Thule means 'beyond Thule'—beyond the borders of the known world—symbolizing the exploration of the distant Kuiper Belt and Kuiper Belt objects that New Horizons is performing, something never before done," the US space agency said in a statement.

According to project scientist Hal Weaver of the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory, mankind didn't even know the Kuiper Belt—a vast ring of relics from the formation days of the solar system—existed until the 1990s. "This is the frontier of planetary science," said Weaver. "We finally have reached the outskirts of the solar system, these things that have been there since the beginning and have hardly changed—we think. We will find out."

Despite the partial US government shutdown, sparked by a feud over funding for a border wall with Mexico between President Donald Trump and opposition Democrats, NASA administrator Jim Bridenstine vowed that the US space agency would broadcast



A handout file photo made available by NASA shows an artist's concept of the New Horizons spacecraft as it approaches Pluto and its largest moon, Charon.

the flyby. Normally, NASA TV and NASA's website would go dark during a government shutdown. NASA will also provide updates

about another spacecraft, called OSIRIS-REx, that will enter orbit around the asteroid Bennu on New Year's Eve, Bridenstine said. — AFP

Climate change takes toll on French oyster farmers

CANCALE, France: Gulping down oysters has long been a favorite New Year's Eve ritual for the French, but as winters get warmer and summers get drier many growers worry there will soon be fewer of the prized mollusks to go around. "Twenty years ago, we'd be shivering in the warehouse while preparing the holiday orders. Today it's 15 degrees (60 Fahrenheit)," says Brittany oysterman Mathieu Le Moal, his sleeves rolled up in front of a tractor carrying dozens of bulging oyster sacks.

"We don't have seasons anymore—but oysters need all four," Le Moal adds. "They need the winter, it's when they can rest, use

less energy." Inside a wooden hanger redolent of salt and the sea, around a dozen of his workers are sorting, weighing and packing oysters into crates in the Brittany port of Cancale. Le Moal and other farmers along this stretch of France's Emerald Coast say the long drought which struck swathes of the country this summer took a heavy toll, leading to smaller harvests, and smaller shellfish. Without summer rains that wash crucial minerals into the oyster beds, "there's no plankton, the main food for oysters, so they don't grow," explained fellow oysterman Bertrand Racinne, weaving his way between baskets and stacked crates.

"In the end, we have oysters but not enough of the big ones," said Racinne, who like most growers sells more than half his yearly production in December.

Cold weather normally encourages a needed rest for oysters to mature, said Yoann Thomas of France's IRD research institute. But this winter has so far been unusually warm and, paradoxically, too rainy.

Rains may bring minerals that favor plankton growth—but they also mean the mollusks

spend too much energy eating. This year's harvest are likely to start the spring "fragile and vulnerable", warned Racinne. "We've found that periods of extreme mortality (more than 25 percent of oysters) come several months after mild and rainy winters," Thomas said.

"Ten grams fewer for each one, that makes a difference in sales," said Philippe Le Gal, president of the CNC national shellfish producers' association. In 2017 the roughly 4,500 oyster growers in France sold 100,000 tons, at an average price of 5,000 euros (\$5,700) per ton.

"Oyster farmers will see volumes down by 20 to 30 percent this year," Le Gal said. "Climate warming is starting to have an impact." Warmer water temperatures are also a risk because they facilitate the spread of viruses that are especially harmful to oyster larvae, or spat, and young oysters.

Scientists point in particular to a Herpes virus, OSHV-1, that has been present in French oyster waters since 1991 but has become more aggressive recently, for reasons still unknown. — AFP



As winters get warmer and summers get drier growers worry there will be fewer mollusks.

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Kuwait Times
248 33 199

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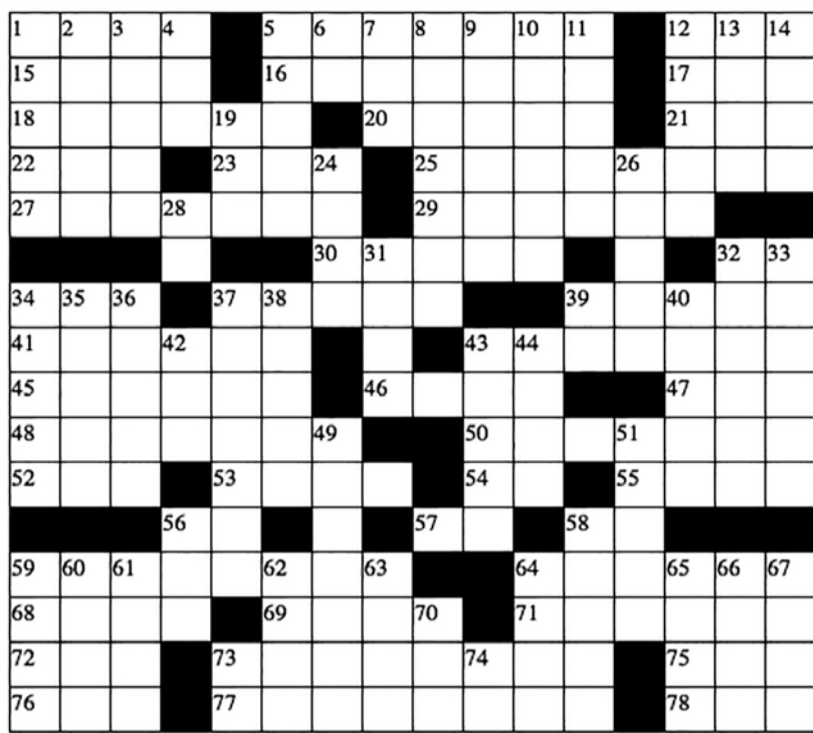
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Stars

CROSSWORD 2099



ACROSS

1. Fastened with stitches.
5. A movement that is a response to a stimulus but is not oriented with respect to the source of stimulation.
12. Charge against a citizen's person or property or activity for the support of government.
15. An ancient Hebrew unit of dry measure equal to about a bushel.
16. Scottish insurgent who led the resistance to Edward I.
17. Any of various trees of the genus *Ulmus*.
18. Boas and pythons.
20. A chain of more than 200 islands about 400 miles long in the western central Pacific Ocean.
21. The cry made by sheep.
22. A transuranic element that has not been found in nature.
23. A crystalline rock that can be cut and polished for jewelry.
25. Disability of walking due to crippling of the legs or feet.
27. A Powhatan Indian woman (the daughter of Powhatan) who befriended the English at Jamestown and is said to have saved Captain John Smith's life (1595-1617).
29. A hostel for pilgrims in Turkey.
30. At full speed.
34. A metric unit of length equal to 10,000 meters.
41. Any member of a ship's crew.
45. An organ in its earliest stage of development.
46. Fleshy and usually brightly colored cover of some seeds that develops from the ovule stalk and partially or entirely envelops the seed.
47. A self-funded retirement plan that allows you to contribute a limited yearly sum toward your retirement.
48. A bar of sand.
50. Pastry made with a cream cheese dough and different fillings (as raisins and walnuts and cinnamon or chocolate and walnut and apricot preserves).
52. Used of a single unit or thing.
53. Any place of complete bliss and delight and peace.
54. A soft gray malleable metallic element that resembles tin but discolors on exposure to air.
55. A reason for wanting something done.
57. A gonadotropic hormone that is secreted by the anterior pituitary.
59. A membrane (one of 3) that envelops the brain and spinal cord.
68. An Arabic speaking person who lives in Arabia or North Africa.
69. A Loloish language.
71. A republic in southwestern Africa on the Atlantic Ocean.
72. Support resembling the rib of an animal.
75. Having leadership guidance.
76. The basic unit of money in Romania.
77. A great raja.
78. An edge tool with a heavy bladed head mounted across a handle.

DOWN

1. The oily secretion of the sebaceous glands.
2. (possibly Roman) Goddess of horses and mules and asses.
3. A card game for four players who form two partnerships.
4. A coenzyme derived from the B vitamin nicotinic acid.
5. Trailing grass native to Europe now cosmopolitan in warm regions.
6. A state in midwestern United States.
7. The branch of information science that deals with natural language information.
8. Resembling or characteristic of or appropriate to an elegy.
9. Highly seasoned fatty sausage of pork and beef usually dried.
10. Someone who cuts and delivers ice.
11. A waste pipe that carries away sewage or surface water.
12. The fourth month of the civil year.
13. By bad luck.
14. A Christian holiday celebrating the birth of Christ.
19. Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
24. A flat-bottomed volcanic crater that was formed by an explosion.
26. In such a manner as could not be otherwise.
28. A doctor's degree in optometry.
31. Any of various minerals consisting of hydrous silicates of aluminum or potassium etc. that crystallize in forms that allow perfect cleavage into very thin leaves.
32. A kind of heavy jacket ('windcheater' is a British term).
33. Flightless New Zealand birds similar to gallinules.
35. A language group of the Hoka family.
36. English writer of stories for children (1882-1956).
37. Perennial plant of Europe and America having racemes of white or purplish flowers and intensely bitter trifoliate leaves.
38. (Greek mythology) One of the mountain nymphs.
39. Before noon.
40. A promontory in northern Morocco opposite the Rock of Gibraltar.
42. A boy or man.
43. The distance around a person's body.
44. The twelfth month of the civil year.
49. (Old Testament) Wife of Isaac and mother of Jacob and Esau.
51. A member of a Turkic people of Uzbekistan and neighboring areas.
56. Top part of an apron.
58. The capital and largest city of Yemen.
60. A member of an Iroquoian people formerly living on the south shore of Lake Erie in northern Ohio and northwest Pennsylvania and western New York.
61. (Babylonian) God of wisdom and agriculture and patron of scribes and schools.
62. Offering fun and gaiety.
63. One of the two main branches of orthodox Islam.
64. A pilgrimage to Mecca.
65. Among the largest bony fish.
66. A large genus of dicotyledonous trees and shrubs of the family Aquifoliaceae that have small flowers and berries (including hollies).
67. (of a young animal) Abandoned by its mother and raised by hand.
70. The month following March and preceding May.
73. A metric unit of length equal to 1000 meters (or 0.621371 miles).
74. (Akkadian) God of wisdom.

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Today is a day of emotional overload. High energy and high emotions could find you coming across as very forceful in what you say and in the way you think. You seem to be able to really get your point across to others. Careful not to offend anyone with the forceful way your words are flowing. Bite your tongue if you must but be sure and use your words wisely today.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

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



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

You may be experiencing a time of drastic change in your world. Renovations to your home, buying or selling real estate, or new furnishings may be something you are dealing with now. You will have to work hard to keep a balance between change and continuity. Change like this can be shocking and hard to adjust to. You may find yourself in the middle of a bit of drama. You may find yourself working hard to resolve conflict. You could be faced with having to handle someone who has opposing views, and different opinions from yourself. This is a time of decision. Changes have to be made. Get the facts, Gemini. Make sure you have all of the facts before you make any decisions.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Today finds you more materialistic than usual. "Things" never have much importance to you. You know in the end it is not going to be what you have, but who you are that matters. Today finds you having unfamiliar desires. You actually may be feeling a need to reward yourself for all of the hard work you do. You make sacrifices daily to take care of and provide for others. Do not feel bad about doing things for yourself. Spoil yourself, Cancer. That new pair of shoes may be calling your name.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

You should find great pleasure in working with others today. You could find yourself being offered a new position or asked to take the lead on a new project. You seem to begin to develop a desire to start taking your health seriously. Join the gym, take the walk, or start the meal planning. You won't be able to shake this urge. You know to take care of all that you responsible for you first have to take care of yourself. You not only want to feel good about who you but how you look. This is a step in the right direction for you. The beginning of wonderful new time in your life. You have a lot to look forward to.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

You may be experiencing a time of drastic change in your world. Renovations to your home, buying or selling real estate, or new furnishings may be something you are dealing with now. You will have to work hard to keep a balance between change and continuity. Change like this can be shocking and hard to adjust to. You may find yourself in the middle of a bit of drama. You may find yourself working hard to resolve conflict. You could be faced with having to handle someone who has opposing views, and different opinions from yourself. This is a time of decision. Changes have to be made.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

This is a great time for you to experience the breakthrough you have been focusing on. Everything seems to be working in your favor. You may find yourself being drawn to all that represents romance. Take a stroll in the park, have a nice lunch with someone dear to you, a great time to curl up with a book or just a nice long bath may be just what you need today. You may find yourself helping a friend in need today. You are often a source of support and help to others. A friend that everyone wants to have is you are looked at with admiration. Libra, enjoy yourself today and appreciate the fact you are loved by so many.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Talk about bringing home the bacon and frying it up in the pan! This is you all day every day. You are able to balance career and home life all with ease. You are a jack of all trades. You have a deep desire to strengthen the foundation you have built for all. You desire a sense of roots and family, home, and relatives are where your focus is. You want to feel as if you belong on a personal and private level. You have an intimate desire to know that you are needed. Leo. The energy and effort you put into taking care of others does not go unnoticed.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 18)

This a great period of mental activity for you. Your communication levels are heightened. It seems as though you have so many ideas to share and you are able to fascinate everyone with what you have to say. You are smart as a fox and you feel empowered by the fact others are taking note of this. In general this a time you feel great and feel as if you are at your intellectual best. You not only feel great about who you are, you feel wonderful about where you are in life. Things seem to be going your way. Happiness is a wonderful emotion. Enjoy this time in your life.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

You may find yourself getting carried away and not as focused on the reality of what is best for you. You may be too focused on your wants rather than what you truly need. You may find that others will be quick to offer unsolicited advice when your actions aren't what they expected nor see as the best option for you. You may feel as the world around you is one big blur. This is a nice time to take a step back and focus on the decisions you are making and possibly put them off for a time your mind is clear. You may find that others are not as drawn to you when you are in this dreamy state.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

This is a wonderful time to surround yourself with the ones you hold near and dear to your heart. It is a great time of understanding in your life and you may be able to really bond with a special someone. You are happy and there is a feeling of peace and harmony in your world. Your mind is quick today and your words are sharp. You could find your words to be the only weapon you need when dealing with a conflict that may arise in the workplace. You know who you are and are full of self confidence. This may be bringing out a bit of jealousy from a co-worker. You will be able to handle this calmly and quickly. You are who you are and your work ethic is strong.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

This may be a great day to enjoy a good book or catch a movie. An escape from reality may be just what you need. This could clear your mind and leave you feeling refreshed and rejuvenated. You feel your most secure when surrounded by friends. You may be feeling a real need for a change in your life. You may feel as if you want to throw out the old and bring in the new. You have had this on your mind for a while and today seems the day you really begin to act on it. It seems a change in the right direction may bring great reward into your life. You will send enjoy world you have no desire to escape from.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Pet Dog

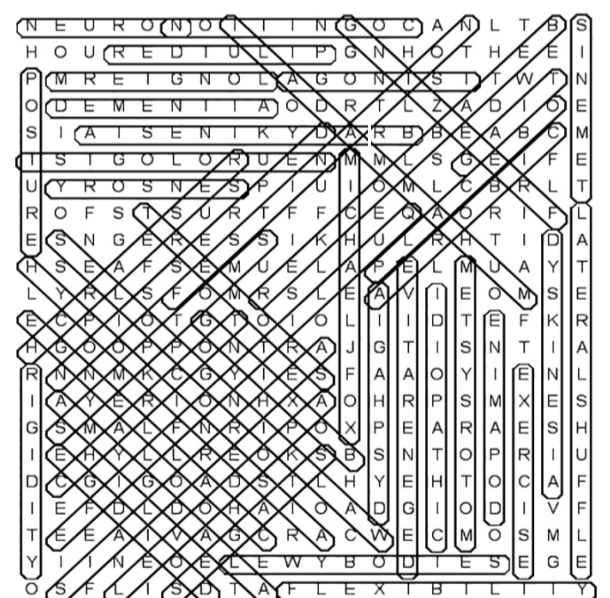
Find and circle all of the words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining 26 letters spell a secret message.



- | | | | |
|-----------|---------|--------|------------|
| BARK | FEECH | ID TAG | PUPPY |
| BATH | FETCH | JUMP | ROLL OVER |
| BONE | FOOD | KENNEL | SHAMPOO |
| BOWLS | FRIEND | LEASH | SLEEP |
| CANINE | GROOM | LICK | TRAIN |
| CHASE | GROWL | LOYAL | TREATS |
| CHEW TOY | GUARD | OWNER | TRIM NAILS |
| COLLAR | HAIR | PANT | WAG TAIL |
| COMPANION | HARNESS | PAWS | WALK |
| FAITHFUL | HOUSE | PLAY | WATER |

Yesterday's Solution

Parkinson's Disease



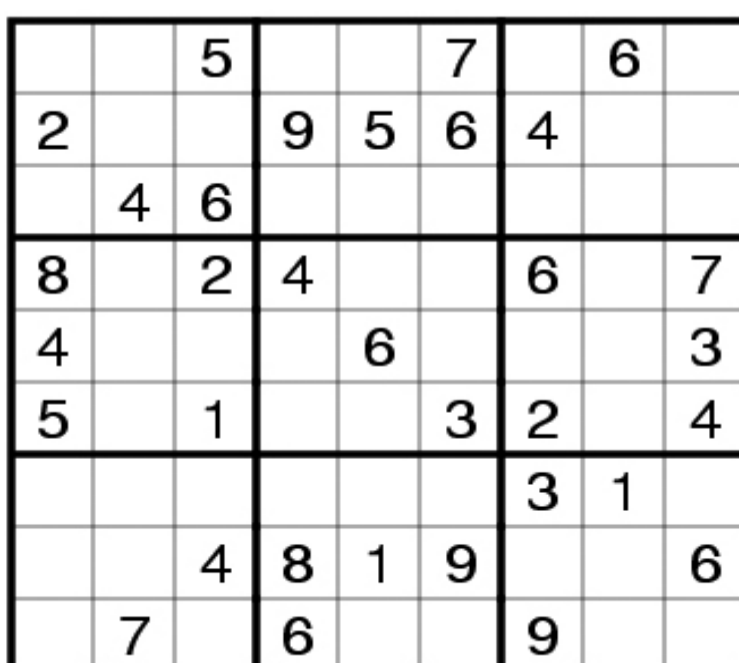
- | | | | |
|--------------|-------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| AEROBIC | DOIDGE | LATERAL SHUFFLE | QUALITY OF LIFE |
| AGONIST | DOPAMINE | LEVODOPA | RED TULIP |
| AMYGDALA | DYSKINESIA | LEWY BODIES | RESEARCH |
| BETA BLOCKER | DYSPHAGIA | LONG TERM | RIGIDITY |
| BOXING | EXERCISE | MICHAEL J FOX | SENSORY |
| BRADYKINESIA | FESTINATION | MOTOR SYSTEM | SIALORRHEA |
| CHALLENGE | FLEXIBILITY | MUHAMMAD ALI | SINEMET |
| CHARCOT | FREEZING | NEUROLOGIST | STAGES |
| COGNITION | GAIT | NEURON | SYMPTOMS |
| DEGENERATIVE | HYPOKINESIA | PLACEBO | TREMORS |
| DEMENTIA | IDIOPATHIC | POSTURE | WALKING POLES |
| DEPRESSION | | | |

The hidden message is: ALTHOUGH THE WORLD IS FULL OF SUFFERING, IT IS FULL ALSO OF THE OVERCOMING OF IT

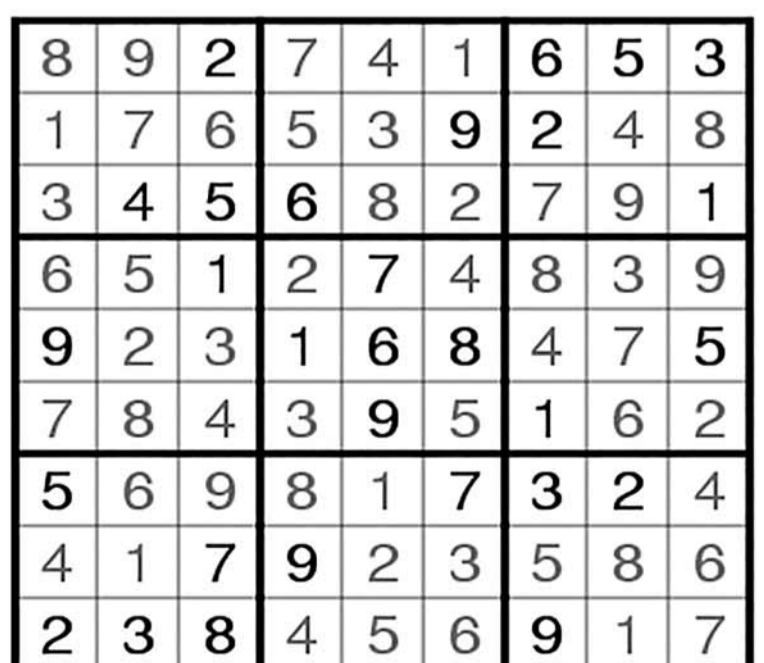
Yesterday's Solution



Daily SuDoku



Yesterday's Solution



Lifestyle

TUESDAY, JANUARY 1, 2019



New Year's Eve fireworks explode over the Harbor Bridge and Opera House during the traditional early family fireworks show held before the main midnight event in Sydney yesterday. — AFP

Mourners pay tribute to Israeli writer and peace advocate Oz

Mourners paid tribute on Monday to Amos Oz, the revered Israeli writer and peace advocate who died aged 79, at a memorial ahead of his burial later in the day. Hundreds of people lined up at a small theatre in central Tel Aviv, where Oz's closed casket lay on the stage ahead of eulogies from speakers including Israeli President Reuven Rivlin. Family members, politicians and average Israelis touched by Oz's works and deeds slowly filed past the black coffin ahead of the ceremony.

Yona Kranz, 74, from the central city Givatayim, vividly remembered the first time he saw Oz decades ago, when the author visited his kibbutz to talk about his first book. Kranz said he came to say farewell to Oz, who died on Friday, because he "epitomized a myth of an Israel that might have existed and might have not, but I loved that myth". "If there is such a thing as a real Zionist, I think he was one," Kranz said of Oz. Following the memorial in Tel Aviv, Oz's burial was set to take place at the Hulda kibbutz in central Israel at 3:00 pm.

Oz was a celebrated novelist whose stirring memoir "A Tale of Love and Darkness" became a worldwide bestseller that was adapted into a film by Hollywood actress Natalie Portman. His death led to an outpouring of tributes within Israel and from abroad. While his writing is widely acclaimed, he was perhaps equally known as one of the earliest and most forceful critics of Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory captured in the Six-Day War of 1967.

In recent years, Oz spoke out against the poli-

cies of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, shunning official Israeli functions abroad in protest at what he has called the "growing extremism" of his government. Netanyahu, currently visiting Brazil, paid brief tribute to Oz on Friday, calling him "one of our literary giants". "We will always remember his contribution to Hebrew literature and the Hebrew language," he said.—AFP



Israeli President Reuven Rivlin delivers a speech near the coffin of Israeli writer Amos Oz during a memorial service yesterday in Tel Aviv. — AFP photos



People cry near the coffin of Israeli writer Amos Oz during a memorial service.

Lifestyle | Gossip



Selena Gomez is excited for 2019

The 26-year-old singer entered a treatment facility at the beginning of October after she suffered an "emotional breakdown" following multiple hospitalizations due to issues related to Lupus and her kidney transplant last year. And since leaving rehab last month, she's been continuing to work on her health, with sources now saying she's ready to start 2019 with the "new skills" she's learned to help her "navigate daily life". One insider said: "[Selena is] excited for the new year. She's feeling like this is a fresh start and she has new skills to help her navigate daily life. She's doing

well and is feeling great. She's following a simple daily routine that involves a work out, either hiking, Pilates or hot yoga, therapy sessions and spending time with friends." The 'Wolves' hitmaker has reportedly started "going to church", and is "working with several professionals" who are helping her put together a routine so she can stay healthy. And Selena has also been enjoying "chill nights at home" with her close friends, who are all remaining supportive of her health journey.



Simon Cowell rescues stray dog by adopting her

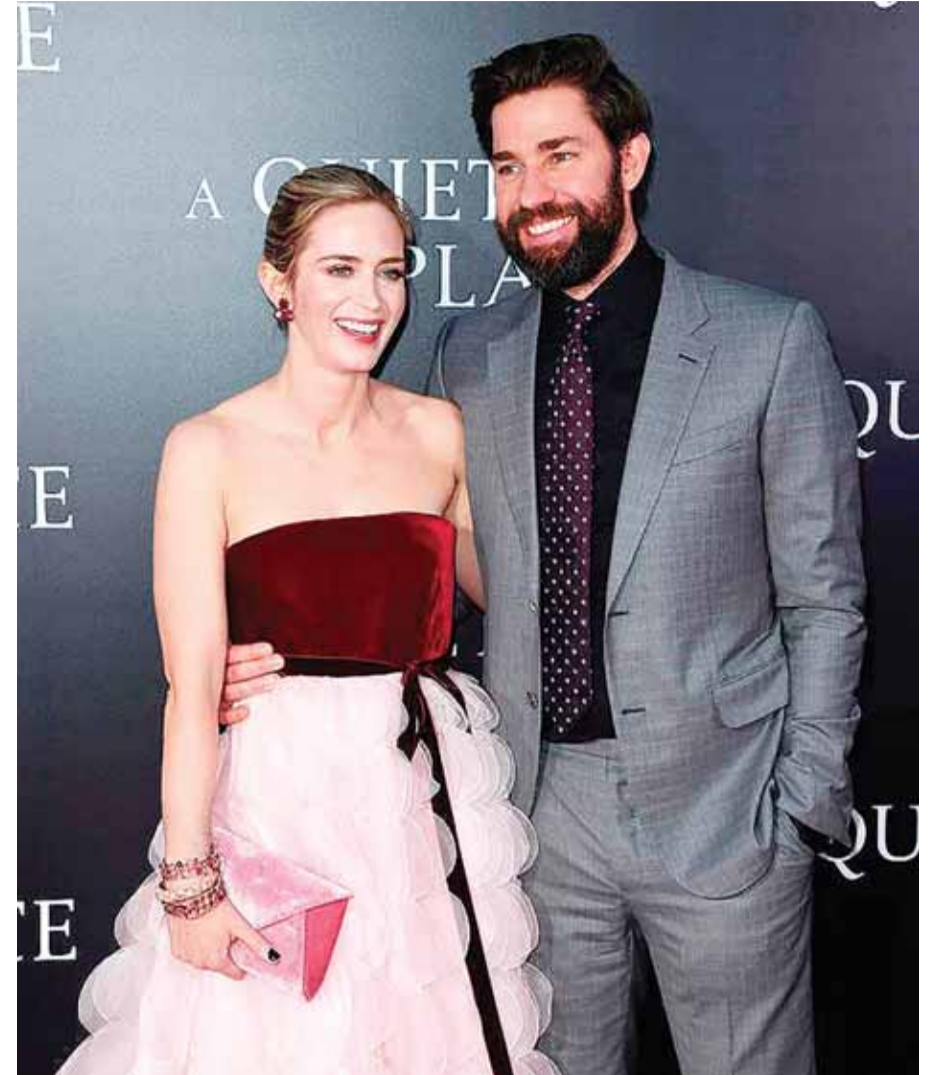
The 59-year-old entertainment mogul was at his annual auction for homeless dogs in Barbados when he met the terrier cross named Daisy, who was abandoned with her two puppies before being nursed back to health by pooch charity K9 Friends, of which Simon is a patron. According to The Sun newspaper's Bizarre column, the 'X Factor' boss is said to have fallen "in love" with Daisy, and is bringing her back home to the UK on his private jet when he leaves Barbados. Daisy will be the fourth dog to join Simon's family, with Yorkshire terriers Squiddly and Diddy, and Freddy, his mother's dog which he took on after her passing

in 2015. The pooch rescue comes after the Syco helmer - who has four-year-old son Eric with his girlfriend Lauren Silverman - revealed he has "thoroughly looked into" cloning his dogs, so he never has to live without them. He said: "I am 100 per cent cloning the dogs, all of them. We've thoroughly looked into it, got all the details and I can prove to you I'm going to clone them. There is documentation. "I am doing it because I cannot bear the thought of them not being around. I might actually do it sooner rather than later, which will mean we have six dogs running around."

Kelly Clarkson

vows to shed her holiday weight

The 36-year-old singer treated herself over Christmas as she says she's put on some weight this festive season, but has made it her mission to lose the extra pounds "starting January 1". On Twitter, the 'Because of You' hitmaker joked: "To the person that lost weight over the holidays... Don't worry, I found it and I will get it back to you starting January 1st #TightPants #ButSoWorthIt (sic)" But hitting the gym will likely be a chore for the 'Piece By Piece' singer though, as she admitted in November that she "hates working out". She said on social media at the time: "This just in... I still hate working out. I'm sweaty, red, and not any thinner. People say it's good for your heart... but people also say red wine is good for your heart... I mean, I'm just stating facts here people. Who am I to ignore science?! #cardioversuswine. (sic)" Kelly - who has River, four, and Remy, two, with her husband Brandon Blackstock - has often faced criticism for her weight, but she previously claimed she didn't feel pressured to drop any pounds, because her curves help define how "happy" she is in her life.



John Krasinski grateful to have Emily Blunt on the set of 'A Quiet Place'

The 39-year-old actor says his wife was the "best collaborator" he's ever worked with and it was nice having his spouse around on the set. He said: "It was unilaterally helpful for me, because I had everything going for me with her. I had someone who could deliver a performance when we were running out of time, running out of budget. She would hit her mark, and hit her performance every single time. I had that. I also had someone that, after she did her scenes, would stay around, and not only be there for me, but be there for the entire cast and crew ... She was my best collaborator."

Whilst Emily added: "I feel the same. I think that we do collaborate really well. It turns out we do work really well together. There were scenes that were certainly traumatic to do ... and you can't help but be upset by some of those scenes when you're doing them. They creep under your skin before you know it. But I do feel that John and I are able to find levity in most places." And John - who directed and starred in the thriller movie - revealed how Emily admitted that this was the first movie where she had the same fears as her character did.

Dwayne Johnson surprises his mother with a new home

The 46-year-old actor and professional wrestler revealed on social media on Saturday (29.12.18) that he has presented his mother Ata, 70, with a "golden ticket", which entitles her to any house she wants, wherever she wants. Posting a video on Instagram, Dwayne wrote: "Surprise! Bought my mom a new home for Christmas." In the clip, Ata opens a card with the ticket inside and starts to read it before crying tears of joy, and hugging her son. Then, speaking to her granddaughter Jasmine, three, she said: "Guess what? I get a brand-new house!" In the caption of the video, the 'Fast and Furious' star revealed how he and his family often

moved house when he was younger and so never truly created a home anywhere. He wrote: "All our lives growing up we lived in little apartments all across the country. Lived like gypsies on the road from one state to another. The first home my parents ever lived in was the one I bought for them in 1999. They divorced about 5yrs later and as with life, stuff happens and things got a little complicated. Since then I always made sure my mom and dad have everything they'll ever need - houses, cars etc." Dwayne went on to praise his "good mama" for turning him into a "decent human being", and said he hopes she'll enjoy her new home.



Kevin Hart gifted his whole team a range of classic muscle cars

The 39-year-old comedian concluded his 'Irresponsible Tour' last week, and took to Instagram on Saturday to reveal he has sent his thanks to the eight members of his backstage crew by buying them each an "old school" vehicle. In a video, he said: "So the tour is over, and I told my guys I was going to do something special for them. They had no idea what it was. I just surprised my whole team with old schools. "I mean it when I say I love my team, I would not be where I am or who I am today if it wasn't for my team. We're celebrating, and I love the fact that they're gone. They're blown away, and for me, that's all I needed, nothing else." The 'Night School' star continued the fun to Sunday, when he took to Instagram again to reveal he and his friends had started a car club with the new rides he'd gifted them. Kevin's kind deed comes after he recently stepped down as host of the 2019 Oscars, when Twitter users resurfaced old tweets in which he made homophobic comments.



Younes Bendjima hails Kourtney Kardashian

The 25-year-old model split from the 'Keeping Up with the Kardashians' star in August after almost two years of dating, but it seems he can't get her out of his head as he took to Instagram on Sunday to heap praise on his former beau, insisting he has nothing but "love" for her. Younes was reflecting on his year on his Instagram story when he posted a picture of Kourtney - who has

Mason, eight, Penelope, six, and Reign, three, with former partner Scott Disick - and wrote: "let's not forget about this beautiful woman inside and out, I'm not the type of man that forget moments like that, you [sic] an amazing woman and mum and I hope you will find happiness for you and your children, it's all love at the end of the day. we don't know what can happen tmw so there you go. (sic)" Since splitting with Younes, 39-

year-old Kourtney recently romanced 20-year-old Luka Sabbat, but she put an end to their "fun fling" in October. And despite their age gap of almost two decades, Kourtney's friends were thought to be fans of Luka, as he offered a nice change of pace for the star, who had "distanced herself from her sisters" during her romance with Younes. — Bang Showbiz



Sydney kicks off global *New Year* parties with dazzling spectacle



New Year's Eve fireworks explode over the Harbor Bridge and Opera House during the traditional early family fireworks show held before the main midnight event in Sydney. — AFP photos

Biggest-ever fireworks display



A 3D image inspired by local schoolchildren is projected on the walls of Los Angeles City Hall, as the city prepares for 'New Year's Eve L.A.'

Australia's largest city Sydney put on its biggest-ever fireworks display in a spectacular welcome to the New Year, kicking off a wave of celebrations for billions around the world. A record amount of pyrotechnics as well as new fireworks effects and colors lit up the city's skyline for 12 minutes and dazzled the more than 1.5 million spectators who packed the harbor front and parks.

An earlier thunderstorm did not dampen the spirits of revellers who camped out at vantage points, some since the morning. To mark the international year of indigenous languages in 2019, the harbor also hosted a ceremony celebrating Aboriginal heritage that included animations projected onto the bridge's pylons.

In the Indonesian capital Jakarta, more than 500 couples tied the knot in a free mass wedding organized by the government, with fireworks shows cancelled out of respect for tsunami victims. New Year's Eve celebrations were also called off in nearby Banten province, where the disaster struck on 22 December killing more than 400 people.

In Japan, locals flocked to temples to ring in 2019, as US boxing superstar Floyd Mayweather came out of retirement to beat Japanese kickboxer Tenshin Nasukawa in a multi-million-dollar "exhibition" bout outside Tokyo. "It was all about entertainment. We had fun," Mayweather said in the ring after the event, which pitted him against an opponent less than half his age. "I'm still retired... I did this just to entertain the fans in Japan," added the 41-year-old.

Around the world

The party atmosphere is set to sweep across major cities in Asia, Europe, Africa and the Americas as the clock ticks past midnight. A strong police presence has become a key element of the festivities, to protect crowds that could be targeted in terror and vehicle attacks.

Hong Kong: Glittering fireworks will be sent skyward from five barges floating in Victoria Harbour in a 10-minute display watched by 300,000 people on the shore.

Moscow: Concerts and light shows will be held across the city's parks and more than 1,000 ice rinks have been opened for merry-makers.

Paris: A fireworks display and sound and light show under the theme "fraternity" is set to go ahead on the Champs-Elysees despite plans for further "yellow vest" anti-government protests at the famed avenue.

Berlin: Music lovers will party at a concert at the Brandenburg Gate, but a popular German tradition of setting off fireworks to mark the occasion has been banned in some other cities over safety concerns.

London: Britain's capital will usher in the New Year by celebrating its relationship with Europe amid turmoil over the Brexit referendum vote to leave the EU, with the fire-

works display at the London Eye to feature music from the continent's artists.

Edinburgh: The Scottish capital's traditional Hogmanay celebrations will also take on a pro-European theme ahead of the year in which Britain is due to exit the union.



People pose for photos in front of an illuminated '2019' sign on a square in central Moscow.

Looking ahead to 2019

As the world parties, many will also look forward to 2019 and wonder whether the turmoil witnessed during the previous year will spill over into the next. The political wrangling in Westminster over Brexit was one of the key stories of this year, with a resolution yet to be reached ahead of the scheduled March 29 departure.

US President Donald Trump dominated headlines in 2018 as he ramped up his trade war with China, quit the Iran nuclear deal, moved the American embassy to Jerusalem and met his North Korean counterpart Kim Jong Un in Singapore for a historic summit. North Korea's commitment to denuclearization will remain a major political and security issue into next year, as will Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad's reassertion of control after Trump's shock military withdrawal announcement.

The war in Yemen, which started in 2014 and has already killed about 10,000 people and left some 20 million at risk of starvation, could take a crucial turn after a ceasefire went into effect in mid-December. Numerous countries go to the polls in 2019, with key elections in India, Afghanistan, Indonesia, South Africa, Argentina and Australia. Major sporting events on the calendar include the Rugby World Cup in Japan, the cricket one-day international World Cup in England and the athletics World Championships in Qatar. — AFP



This photo shows a vendor waiting for customers at his market stall ahead of New Year's day in Shenyang in China's northeastern Liaoning province.

Classifieds

Tuesday, January 1, 2019

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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Partly cloudy with light to moderate freshening over costal areas north easterly wind to north westerly wind, with speed of 12 - 40 km/h with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times.

BY NIGHT: Cold with light to moderate north westerly wind to light variable wind, with speed of 06 - 26 km/h with a chance for fog forming over some areas.

WEATHER WARNING			Thunder Rain	
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	SFC. CHART 31/12/2018 0000 UTC	
KUWAIT CITY	20 °C	13 °C		
KUWAIT AIRPORT	19 °C	11 °C		
ABDALY	20 °C	10 °C		
BUBYAN	-- °C	-- °C		
JAHRA	17 °C	10 °C		
FAILAKA ISLAND	18 °C	13 °C		
SALMIYAH	17 °C	13 °C		
AHMADI	17 °C	13 °C		
NUWAISIB	19 °C	14 °C		
WAFRA	19 °C	11 °C		
SALMY	17 °C	10 °C		

4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Tuesday	01/01	Clouds will increase gradually	20 °C	07 °C	NW-VRB	06 - 26 km/h
Wednesday	01/02	Partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for scattered light rain	22 °C	12 °C	SE	15 - 40 km/h
Thursday	01/03	Cloudy to partly cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times	24 °C	14 °C	SE-NW	20 - 50 km/h
Friday	01/04	Mostly Sunny	19 °C	10 °C	NW-VRB	10 - 32 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	05:17
Sunrise	06:42
Zuhr	11:50
Asr	14:41
Sunset	17:00
Isha	18:22

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	18 °C
MIN. Temp.	07 °C
MAX. RH	97 %
MIN. RH	36 %
MAX. Wind	NE 25 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

EMERGENCY

112
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Airlines

Kuwait Airways	171
Jazeera Airways	177
Wataniya Airways	22 066 536
Turkish Airlines	1884918
American Airlines	22087425
	22087426
Jet Airways	22924455
FlyDubai	22414400
Qatar Airways	22423888
KLM	22425747
Royal Jordanian	22418064/5/6
British Airways	22425635
Air France	22430224
Emirates	22921555
Air India	22438184
Sri Lanka Airlines	22424444
Egypt Air	22421578
Swiss Air	22421516
Saudia	22426306
Middle East Airlines	22423073
Lufthansa	22422493
PIA	22421044
Bangladesh Airlines	22452977/8
Indian Airlines	22456700
Oman Air	22958787
Turkish Airlines	22453820/1
Aeroflot	22404838/9

Directorate General of Civil Aviation Home Page (www.kuwait-airport.com.kw) DIAL161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

Arrival Flights on Tuesday 1/1/2019				Departure Flights on Tuesday 1/1/2019			
Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
JZR	1736	Cairo	00:05	JZR	405	Kochi	12:45
JZR	254	Amman	00:05	MEA	405	Beirut	12:55
JZR	406	Kochi	00:10	QTR	1075	Doha	13:00
JAI	572	Mumbai	00:15	KAC	545	Cairo	13:30
JZR	734	Cairo	00:50	JZR	113	Doha	13:30
THY	772	Istanbul	00:50	SAW	702	Damascus	13:30
JZR	722	Alexandria	00:55	MSC	412	Dubai	13:30
KAC	102	London	01:20	JZR	123	Dubai	13:40
RJA	642	Amman	01:35	MSR	611	Cairo	14:10
UAE	853	Dubai	01:45	UAE	872	Dubai	14:15
THY	764	Istanbul	01:50	AXB	394	Kozhikode	14:15
IGO	1757	Kochi	01:55	IAW	158A	Al Najaf	14:55
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:15	QTR	1079	Doha	15:00
KLM	446	Bahrain	02:30	FDB	060	Dubai	15:10
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30	QTR	8512	Doha	15:25
QTR	1086	Doha	02:40	GFA	222	Bahrain	15:25
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55	KAC	673	Dubai	15:40
RBG	211	Luxor	03:05	SAW	501	Jeddah	15:45
KKK	1268	Istanbul	03:05	IAW	158B	Al Najaf	15:50
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:05	KAC	775	Riyadh	15:50
MSR	612	Cairo	03:15	KAC	743	Dammam	15:55
QTR	1076	Doha	04:00	KNE	530	Jeddah	15:55
LMU	5510	Cairo	04:00	KAC	615	Bahrain	16:05
KAC	414	Bangkok	04:00	KAC	619	Doha	16:10
IGO	1751	Chennai	04:10	KAC	563	Amman	16:10
KAC	418	Manila	04:25	ETD	304	Abu Dhabi	16:20
KAC	784	Jeddah	04:30	FEJ	342	Sohag	16:25
DHX	170	Bahrain	04:35	KAC	283	Dhaka	16:30
FDB	069	Dubai	05:00	OMA	646	Muscat	16:35
KAC	382	Delhi	05:05	KAC	785	Jeddah	16:40
KAC	1544	Cairo	05:10	JZR	261	Beirut	16:40
JZR	404	Hyderabad	05:10	ABY	128	Sharjah	16:45
THY	770	Istanbul	05:10	JZR	105	Bahrain	16:55
KAC	284	Dhaka	05:15	SYR	342	Damascus	17:00
JZR	112	Doha	05:25	FDB	052	Dubai	17:40
KAC	346	Ahmedabad	05:30	UAE	858	Dubai	17:45
KAC	332	Trivandrum	05:40	QTR	1073	Doha	17:50
JZR	402	Mumbai	06:05	KAC	331	Trivandrum	18:00
KAC	302	Mumbai	06:10	JZR	733	Cairo	18:10
THY	6376	Istanbul	06:30	JZR	253	Amman	18:15
KAC	678	Dubai	06:55	SVA	511	Riyadh	18:15
BAW	157	London	07:05	GFA	216	Bahrain	18:20
JZR	708	Luxor	07:15	JZR	127	Dubai	18:35
KAC	358	Kochi	07:35	JZR	403	Hyderabad	18:40
KAC	354	Bengaluru	07:35	JZR	501	Lahore	18:40
FEJ	241	Alexandria	07:40	KAC	381	Delhi	18:55
FDB	053	Dubai	07:50	FDB	064	Dubai	19:20
KAC	384	Delhi	08:00	JZR	721	Alexandria	19:20
UAE	855	Dubai	08:35	UAE	876	Dubai	19:30
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	09:05	MSR	2621	Cairo	19:30
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:05	QTR	1081	Doha	19:55
QTR	1070	Doha	09:30	RJA	641	Amman	20:00
IRA	675	Lar	09:40	RBG	556	Alexandria	20:05
IGO	1753	Ahmedabad	09:40	ABY	124	Sharjah	20:05
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40	GFA	218	Bahrain	20:15
SVA	512	Riyadh	10:00	NIA	0162	Cairo	20:30
JZR	410	Delhi	10:00	FDB	058	Dubai	20:35
IAW	157	Al Najaf	10:00	KAC	353	Bengaluru	20:55
SAW	703	Damascus	10:30	KAC	301	Mumbai	20:55
IRC	6507	Shiraz	10:30	JZR	401	Mumbai	20:55
KAC	624	Doha	10:40	KAC	357	Kochi	21:00
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40	OMA	648	Muscat	21:20
QTR	1074	Doha	11:35	DLH	624	Dammam	21:30
JZR	216	Jeddah	11:45	DHX	171	Bahrain	21:50
MEA	404	Beirut	11:55	QTR	1089	Doha	22:00
KAC	614	Bahrain	12:25	ETD	308	Abu Dhabi	22:10
MSC	411	Asyut	12:30	KAC	1543	Cairo	22:15
SAW	701	Damascus	12:30	KAC	205	Islamabad	22:15
JZR	714	Sohag	12:35	MEA	403	Beirut	22:20
UAE	871	Dubai	12:50	ALK	230	Colombo	22:25
KAC	742	Dammam	12:50	GFA	220	Bahrain	22:30
JZR	142	Al Najaf	12:50	KAC	383	Delhi	22:30
MSR	610	Cairo	13:10	KLM	445	Bahrain	22:50
AXB	393	Kozhikode	13:15	KAC	783	Jeddah	22:55
QTR	1078	Doha	13:35	UAE	860	Dubai	23:00
QTR	8511	Doha	13:55	JAI	573	Mumbai	23:00
				KAC	411	Bangkok	23:00
				ETD	310	Abu Dhabi	23:05
				RBG	214	Sohag	23:10
				KAC	795	Madinah	23:15
				QTR	1083	Doha	23:20



GAZA: A Palestinian horseman rides into the sunset on a beach on New Year's Eve yesterday. — AFP

Democratic senator Warren takes step to challenge Trump in 2020

WASHINGTON: US Senator Elizabeth Warren, a liberal firebrand and Wall Street antagonist, took the first step toward a 2020 White House run yesterday, becoming the most prominent Democrat to announce a challenge to Republican President Donald Trump. Warren said she had formed an exploratory committee, which will allow her to begin raising campaign funding as part of what is expected to be a crowded Democratic field before the November 2020 presidential election.

Warren, 69, who became a senator from Massachusetts in 2013, has frequently clashed with Trump, who has cast aspersions on Warren's claim to Native American ancestry and mockingly referred to her as "Pocahontas". Warren released a video in which she outlines her vision of a path to opportunity for all Americans, not just the wealthy. "Every person in America should be able to work hard, play by the same set of rules, & take care of themselves & the people they love," she said in a Twitter post. "That's what I'm fighting for, & that's why I'm launching an exploratory committee for president. I need you with me."

Warren said in September she would take a "hard look" at running for the Democratic nomination to challenge Republican Trump in 2020. The former Harvard Law School professor campaigned with Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton in 2016 and attacked Trump as an "insecure money grubber" driven by greed and hate. Earlier this month, Julian Castro, 44, who was mayor of San Antonio and secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development under Democratic President Barack Obama, said he was forming an exploratory committee and would announce his intentions on Jan 12. In 2017, former Democratic congressman John Delaney of Maryland said he would seek the party's nomination.

Warren has been a strong voice in the US Senate on financial issues and a self-described defender of the ordinary American against powerful interests. Following the 2007-2009 global financial crisis, she emerged as a leading critic of Wall Street and continues to advocate for stiffer regulation and oversight, including reinstating a rule that would separate banks' retail business from their riskier investment banking activities.

Warren, a member of the Senate Banking Committee, has vigorously fought the Trump administration's efforts to weaken post-crisis financial rules, going as far as to attack moderate Democrats who backed a May rewrite of the 2010 Dodd-Frank reform law. In a September inter-



BOSTON: In this file photo taken on Nov 6, 2018 US Senator Elizabeth Warren addresses the audience at the Fairmont Copley Hotel. — AFP

view marking 10 years since the financial crisis, Warren was asked about wanting to break up big banks. "Oh yeah," she told the New York Times. "Give me a chance."

She also has opposed the administration's efforts to undermine the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, an agency she helped create, and has pressurized the Federal Reserve to take a tough line on scandal-hit lender Wells Fargo. In October, Warren released a DNA analysis she said supported her assertion that she had Native American lineage that goes back six to 10 generations. Trump, who had promised \$1 million to her favorite charity if she took a DNA test that showed she had Native American blood, greeted the results with a shrug, saying, "Who cares?"

Trump's use of the name Pocahontas refers to a 17th

century Native American woman associated with the British colony in Jamestown, Virginia, and was aimed at drawing attention to a controversy over her heritage raised during Warren's 2012 Senate race. Trump's mocking reference has drawn criticism from some Native American groups while others criticized Warren for trying to lay claim to a tribal nation.

The website announcing Warren's exploratory committee portrays her as a product of the American dream that has slipped out of reach for too many Americans. "America's middle class is under attack," Warren says on the website's video. "How did we get here? Billionaires and big corporations decided they wanted more of the pie and they enlisted politicians to cut them a fatter slice." — Reuters

Israeli spy sees possible threat from Iraq as Iran clout grows

TEL AVIV: Iran could use its growing clout in Iraq to turn the Arab country into a springboard for attacks against Israel, the top Israeli intelligence official said yesterday. Israel sees the spread of Tehran's influence in the region as a growing threat, and has carried out scores of air strikes in civil war-torn Syria against suspected military deployments and arms deliveries by Iranian forces supporting Damascus.

Iraq, which does not share a border with Israel, is technically its enemy but was last an open threat in the 1991 Gulf war. After a US-led invasion in 2003 toppled Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, Israel has worried that the country's Shiite majority could tilt to Tehran. "Iraq is under growing influence of the (covert Iranian foreign operations unit) Qods Force and Iran," Major-General Tamir Hayman, the chief of Israeli military intelligence chief, told a conference in Tel Aviv.

With US President Donald Trump signaling he sought to disengage from the region, Hayman said, the Iranians may "see Iraq as a convenient theatre for entrenchment, similar to what they did in Syria, and to use it as a platform for a force build-up that could also threaten the State of Israel". Citing Iranian, Iraqi and Western sources, Reuters reported in August that Iran had transferred short-range ballistic missiles to Shiite allies in Iraq. Baghdad denied the findings.

The following week, Israel said it might attack such sites in Iraq, effectively expanding a campaign now focused in Syria. Hayman predicted 2019 would bring "significant change" to Syria, whose President Bashar Al-Assad has beaten back rebels with the help of Russia, Iran and Lebanese Hezbollah reinforcements, and where Trump this month ordered a pullout of US troops. "This presence of Iran, with Syria's return to stabilization under a Russian umbrella, is something we are watching closely," he said.

Israel has also been monitoring Iranian conduct since Trump quit the 2015 nuclear deal with Tehran in May and reimposed US sanctions. The deal placed caps on nuclear projects with bomb-making potential, though Iran denied having such designs. Trump, with Israeli support, deemed the caps insufficient. — Reuters

UAE, Bahrain, Egypt uphold...

Continued from Page 1

The UAE's ruling families rarely tolerate opposition and during Mansoor's trial all court proceedings were conducted in almost total secrecy.

Rajab was also jailed for criticizing his country's rulers on social media, losing his appeal yesterday at Bahrain's supreme court, a judicial source said. A high-profile rights activist who is already serving a two-year term in another case, Rajab was first handed the sentence in February by a lower court and an appeals court confirmed it in June. Amnesty International said the ruling "exposes Bahrain's justice system as a complete farce".

Rajab was found guilty of insulting the state by "deliberately disseminating", false and malicious news on social media. He was also convicted of criticizing the Saudi-led military campaign in Yemen and publicly offending a foreign country, a reference to Saudi Arabia. Manama is part of the alliance spearheaded by Riyadh and Rajab was found guilty of endangering Bahrain's military operation in Yemen.

The Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy said the ruling had been carefully timed. "By arranging the final

verdict to fall during the holidays, a time when international attention will be minimal, the intentions of Bahrain's rulers have been made clear. This appears to be a planned outcome, prepared well in advance," it said in a statement. Rajab played a key role in anti-government protests in 2011, since when dozens of high-profile activists have been jailed by authorities in the kingdom.

Social networking sites, notably Twitter, are a major platform for rights activists in Bahrain. In March, authorities announced they would be taking "severe measures" to track down dissidents who use social media, as Bahrain tightens its grip on political opposition. Egypt has also clamped down on online platforms this year, introducing legislation to monitor social media users in the country as part of a broader tightening of Internet controls.

The law was ratified by the presidency in September and includes powers to suspend or block any personal account which publishes "fake news" or information inciting law-breaking, violence or hatred. Even before the new legislation, Egyptian authorities were widely criticized by rights groups for their zero-tolerance approach to critics.

In May, rights activist Amal Fathi was arrested over a video she posted online in which she spoke out against sexual harassment in Egypt. The 34-year-old was subsequently convicted of charges including "spreading false news". Yesterday she lost her appeal and was handed a two-year prison term, as well as a fine of 10,000 Egyptian pounds (\$560). — AFP

Hasina rejects calls for fresh...

Continued from Page 1

Hasina has been lauded for boosting economic growth in the poor South Asian nation and for welcoming Rohingya refugees fleeing a military crackdown in neighboring Myanmar. But critics accuse her of authoritarianism. Arch-rival and BNP leader Khaleda Zia was jailed for 17 years this year on graft charges that her party said were politically motivated. Deadly violence that blighted the election campaign spilled over into voting day, even though authorities deployed 600,000 security forces across the country.

Thirteen people were killed in clashes between Awami League and BNP supporters, police said. Three people were shot and killed by police who said they were protecting polling booths. An auxiliary police member was also killed by armed opposition activists, according to officials. Police have now confirmed 21 deaths during the election campaign and voting day.

The opposition alliance accused Hasina's party of stuffing ballot boxes and using other illegal means to

fix the result. BNP spokesman Syed Moazzem Hossain Alal said there were "irregularities" in 221 of the 300 seats. One voter, Atiar Rahman, said he was beaten by ruling party activists in the central district of Narayanganj. "They told me not to bother. 'We'll cast your vote on your behalf,'" he told AFP. The opposition said the unrest was stirred up to deter voters but the election commission reported 80 percent turnout.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was the first international leader to call and congratulate Hasina, the Bangladesh leader's press secretary said. China's President Xi Jinping also greeted her with Beijing's envoy handing over "congratulatory messages". Experts say Hasina's victory will be sullied by accusations that she hamstrung opponents. "This result might affect our democratic system and might also damage state institutions," Sakhawat Hussain, a former election commissioner, told AFP.

The opposition claims some 21,000 of its activists were detained during the campaign, crushing its ability to mobilize support. Thirty-five of its candidates were arrested over what they said were trumped-up charges or disqualified from running by courts, which Hasina's opponents say are government controlled. The leadership of Bangladesh has alternated between Hasina and Zia, allies-turned-foes, over the last three decades. — AFP

Sports

Leonard powers Raptors by Bulls, Lakers get by Kings with big surge in fourth

McCollum leads Blazers in season-best rout of 76ers

NBA results/standings				
Eastern Conference				
	W	L	PCT	GB
Milwaukee	25	10	0.714	-
Toronto	27	11	0.711	1.5
Indiana	24	12	0.667	1.5
Philadelphia	23	14	0.622	3
Boston	21	14	0.600	4
Charlotte	17	18	0.486	8
Miami	17	18	0.486	8
Detroit	16	18	0.471	8.5
Orlando	16	19	0.457	9
Brooklyn	17	21	0.447	9.5
Washington	14	23	0.378	12
Atlanta	11	24	0.314	14
Chicago	10	27	0.270	16
New York	9	28	0.243	17
Cleveland	8	29	0.216	18
Western Conference				
Denver	23	11	0.676	-
Golden State	24	13	0.649	1.5
Oklahoma City	22	13	0.629	1.5
LA Clippers	21	15	0.583	3
Houston	20	15	0.571	3.5
LA Lakers	21	16	0.568	3.5
Portland	21	16	0.568	3.5
San Antonio	20	17	0.541	4.5
Sacramento	19	17	0.528	5
Memphis	18	17	0.514	5.5
Utah	18	19	0.486	6.5
Dallas	17	18	0.486	6.5
Minnesota	17	19	0.472	7
New Orleans	16	21	0.432	8.5
Phoenix	9	28	0.243	15.5

TORONTO: Kawhi Leonard scored 27 points and grabbed nine rebounds and the Toronto Raptors defeated the visiting Chicago Bulls 95-89 on Sunday. Pascal Siakam added 20 points and 12 rebounds for the Raptors while Fred VanVleet and Danny Green added 10 points each. Lauri Markkanen scored 18 points and 10 rebounds for the Bulls. Wendell Carter Jr. added 16 points and 11 rebounds, Kris Dunn had 14 points, Zach LaVine scored 13, and Justin Holiday and Chandler Hutchison had 11 each. The Raptors, whose biggest lead of the game had been seven points, opened the fourth quarter on a 6-0 run to lead by nine points.

Trail Blazers 129, 76ers 95
CJ McCollum scored 35 points in just 28 minutes as Portland pounded visiting Philadelphia as Al-Farouq Aminu added 16 points, Damian Lillard 15 and Jusuf Nurkic 14. The Trail Blazers posted season bests in field-goal percentage (.590) and 3-point percentage (.545) in rolling up their largest margin of victory of the season. Portland beat the Minnesota Timberwolves 111-81 on Nov 4. Ben Simmons scored 19 points for the 76ers, who shot only .354 from the field, including .185 (8 of 43) from beyond the arc. The Blazers won the rebound battle 59-36.

Lakers 121, Kings 114
Kentavious Caldwell-Pope scored 26 points off the bench and Brandon Ingram was key down the stretch with 21 points as host Los Angeles rallied to beat Sacramento. The Lakers won for the first time in three games without an injured LeBron James while also avenging their last-second defeat at Sacramento on Thursday when Bogdan Bogdanovic hit a 3-pointer at the buzzer. De'Aaron Fox scored 26 points while Bogdanovic and Buddy Hield added 21 each as the Kings lost for the second time in three games, with both of the defeats in Los Angeles. The Kings lost to the Clippers 127-118 on Wednesday.

Magic 109, Pistons 107
Evan Fournier scored 13 points and made his second game-winning shot of the season to lift Orlando over visiting Detroit. Nikola Vucevic continued his hot streak with 22 points and 11 rebounds. He is averaging 24.7 points and 14.7 rebounds over the last three games. Detroit tied the game at 107 when Reggie Bullock was fouled on a 3-point attempt with 2.5 seconds remaining and made all three free throws. Orlando inbounded the



TORONTO: Kris Dunn #32 of the Chicago Bulls shoots the ball against the Toronto Raptors on Sunday at the Scotiabank Arena in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. —AFP

ball at the other end to Fournier, who drove to his right and hit a floater from the free-throw line at the buzzer.

Mavericks 105, Thunder 103
Harrison Barnes turned a last-minute steal into a pair of free throws and Dennis Smith Jr. hit a go-ahead shot with 24.8 seconds remaining to rally host Dallas over Oklahoma City. Paul George saved 13 of his game-high 36 points for the final 3:54, but missed a potential go-ahead jumper with four seconds left as the Mavericks held on for just the second win in their last nine games. Luka Doncic had 25 points to lead the Mavericks, who were coming off a home-and-home split with New Orleans on Wednesday and Friday. The Mavericks and

Thunder will meet again Monday night at Oklahoma City.

Timberwolves 113, Heat 104
Karl-Anthony Towns produced 34 points, 18 rebounds, seven assists and a career-high-tying six turnovers to lead Minnesota past host Miami, whose 20 turnovers led to 24 Timberwolves points. Towns, who made 12 of 24 shots from the floor and half of his six 3-point attempts, fouled out with 34 seconds left. It was his fourth foul-out of the season, but he had already done enough to lead Minnesota to victory. The Heat, looking to go over .500 for the first time since their fifth game of the season, fell to 17-18. Even so, Miami is 6-2 in its past eight games. — Reuters

Australia a 'soap opera' and 'I feel like a director', says coach Langer

MELBOURNE: Australia cricket coach Justin Langer admitted yesterday he feels like a "director of a soap opera" as speculation grew around the future of banned Steve Smith and David Warner. Debate about the pair reared again during the third Test against India in Melbourne, after Smith and Cameron Bancroft gave television interviews about the ball-tampering scandal in South Africa in March.

Their comments were widely interpreted as deflecting all blame onto Warner, with some former players slamming them for unnecessarily dredging it back up on Boxing Day, the most revered day in the Australian cricket calendar.

Australia's woeful batting in the match, which they lost by 137 runs, also focused attention on how much Smith and Warner were missed. Langer, who has previously described the Australia team as a "dysfunctional family", said the headlines were yet another headache.

"It's all just part of the soap opera we're in every day," he said in Melbourne before heading to Sydney for Thursday's fourth and final Test, with India leading

the series 2-1. "I feel like a director of a soap opera at the moment, I honestly do."

"Coaching is about man management and looking after people, caring for people, and that was just another distraction last week," he added. Bancroft, who was banned for nine months, made his return on Sunday evening for the Perth Scorchers in the Big Bash League, but only lasted three balls. Smith and Warner's suspensions run out in late March.

LEARNING ON THE RUN
Captain Tim Paine admitted on Sunday it was "pretty clear" they were being missed, with no batsmen other than tailender Pat Cummins scoring more than 50 in Melbourne. Langer said cricket authorities were "in touch with the boys all the time".

"There's a really good process we're going to go through to get the boys back into the team," he added of the trio. They could possibly return for a one-day international in late March, when Australia have pencilled in a series against Pakistan in the United Arab Emirates. According to the Cricket Australia website, the series was tentatively set for March 15-29, but Pakistan have reportedly proposed pushing it back to March 31-April 13. Smith and Warner's exile has left a big void in the Test team.

Aaron Finch has been unable to reproduce his limited overs form in the red ball game. Usman Khawaja has struggled and newcomer Marcus Harris at the top of the order is yet to post a big score. "We've got a lot of guys learning on the run at the same time," said Langer, acknowledging a lack of experience. "That's not easy for them, but we'll collectively be better for it over



MELBOURNE: File photo shows Australia's cricket coach Justin Langer (L) and captain Tim Paine (R) chat during training in Melbourne on December 24, 2018, ahead of the third cricket Test match against India. — AFP

time." Langer, a former opener who played 105 Tests and earned a reputation as a fighter, pointed to India's Cheteshwar Pujara and Virat Kohli as the consummate Test batsmen who Australia should be looking to emulate. "Probably at this time the difference in the series has been Pujara and Kohli. Pujara averages 53 and Kohli 45 or 46. The lesson we learn from that is keep absorbing the pressure," he said. "We have one of the best bowling attacks in the world and they keep rocking up and absorbing the pressure. Our guys are learning that, or hopefully they are learning that." —AFP

India's Mandhana named ICC women's cricketer of the year

NEW DELHI: India's Smriti Mandhana was crowned women's cricketer of the year yesterday by the sport's world governing body, capping off a prolific run-scoring season for the opener. The left-handed batswoman was also named ODI cricketer of the year for accumulating 669 runs off 12 one-day internationals. She scored 622 runs in 25 T20 matches this year. Mandhana, 22, is only the second Indian woman to win an International Cricket Council award after fast bowler Jhulan Goswami who was named the women's player of the year in 2007. "The awards are pretty special because as a player when you score runs, you want the team to win, and then when you get acknowledged for your performances through these awards, it motivates you to work harder and do well for your team," Mandhana was quoted as saying in the ICC release.

"The century I scored in South Africa (in Kimberley) was quite satisfying and then I had good home series against Australia and England. A lot of people used to say I do not score that much in India, so I had a point to prove to myself."

ICC chief executive David Richardson congratulated Mandhana, saying she was "a worthy winner" of the Rachael Heyhoe Flint Award, named after the legendary English player. Australia's wicketkeeper-batter Alyssa Healy was voted T20 player of the year after playing an important part in her team's World T20 triumph in the West Indies. She finished with 225 runs from six matches as Australia beat arch-rivals England in the final. England's teenage spinner Sophie Ecclestone was named emerging player of the year. — AFP



MUMBAI: In this file photo taken on March 25, 2018, Indian cricketer Smriti Mandhana plays a shot during the third cricket match of the women's Twenty20 (T20) Tri-Series between India and England at Brabourne Stadium in Mumbai. India's Smriti Mandhana was crowned women's cricketer of the year yesterday by the sport's world governing body. — AFP

Sri Lanka cricket rated most corrupt by ICC: Minister

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka has been rated as the most corrupt cricket nation by the world governing body, the country's sports minister said yesterday. The International Cricket Council feels "Sri Lanka's cricket administration is corrupt from top to bottom", Harin Fernando said, adding that he had been shown a confidential report on the matter at a Dubai meeting.

A host of scandals have rocked Sri Lankan cricket in recent years including a match-fixing controversy revealed in a sting operation carried out for a TV documentary. The ICC anti-corruption unit has regularly investigated cases in the island nation.

The crisis-ridden Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) is to hold delayed elections in February, which were due last May when the term of president Thilanga Sumathipala ended. Sumathipala has been accused of violating ICC rules by holding office despite alleged links to gambling. He denies the charges.

"Unfortunately Sri Lanka is being ranked as one of the worst or the top worst country for cricket corruption," Fernando told reporters after returning from the meeting with ICC anti-corruption chief Alex Marshall.

"They told me that the problem was not limited to bookies, but even the local game's links with the underworld," he said, adding that the corruption was more to do with cricket administration than players.

Last month former Sri Lankan fast bowler Dilhara Lokuhettige was suspended for corruption during a limited over league in 2017. Lokuhettige was the third Sri Lankan player charged for violating the anti-corruption code following cases against former captain and ex-chief selector Sanath Jayasuriya and former pacesman Nuwan Zoysa.—AFP

Iran coach eyes strong start to Asian Cup

TEHRAN: Iran coach Carlos Queiroz has demanded a high-intensity start from his top-ranked team in next month's Asian Cup opener against debutants Yemen. Iran head into the tournament in the United Arab Emirates as one of the favourites for the title and Portuguese Queiroz said they must make their presence felt starting with the first Group D clash in Abu Dhabi on Jan. 7.

"I want to develop this kind of instinct in my team, to keep all of our energy so that it explodes in the 90 minutes against Yemen," Queiroz told the AFC website. "And when we finish the game, then it's time to think about Vietnam and after that Iraq."

Queiroz described the clash against Yemen, ranked 25 places below Iran in the Asian standings, as a "crucial" match and urged his team not to underestimate their opponents. "The first game is always the most difficult because it's everything for the winner and almost nothing for the loser in a short competition of three games," Queiroz added. "There are no small teams... I was checking the results of the Iran team in different competitions, at under 17s, under 20s, and never has Iran beaten Yemen in official competition. — Reuters

Sports

Plain sailing for Dimitrov and Raonic in Brisbane International

Karolina Pliskova fights back to win opener

BRISBANE: Former champions Milos Raonic and Grigor Dimitrov stormed into the second round of the season-opening Brisbane International tennis tournament with comprehensive wins yesterday. Raonic, the 2016 champion, demolished Slovenia's Aljaz Bedene 6-0, 6-3 while Dimitrov, who won the following year, sailed past Japan's Yoshihito Nishioka 6-3, 6-4.

Both men have career-high world rankings of three, but Raonic and Dimitrov have each slipped over the past 12 months and sit at 18 and 19 respectively. The big-serving Raonic fired down 18 aces in his win over Bedene and won 93 per cent of his first serves in a match that only last 47 minutes.

Dimitrov was also in complete control against 23-year-old Nishioka, the world number 76. "I felt I was actually hitting the ball quite all right for our first match of the year," he said. "It was a good day overall. There were a few things that I would like to maybe improve on the next match, but overall I think it's off to a positive start."

Dimitrov was troubled by an ankle injury towards the end of last season and barely played in the last few months of 2018. But he said he used the time away from the court to re-evaluate his game. "I just actually felt that in those months I've learned a lot about myself," he said. Meanwhile, Pliskova, a former world number one, appeared headed for an early exit when she stumbled against Putintseva late in the first set. "I learned things that I need to do better, things that I could improve off the court. So overall I actually felt that they were very successful months off the court." Karolina Pliskova said she refused to panic despite falling behind a set and a break to Yulia Putintseva in the opening round of the Brisbane International yesterday.

But she recovered from 2-0 down in the second to

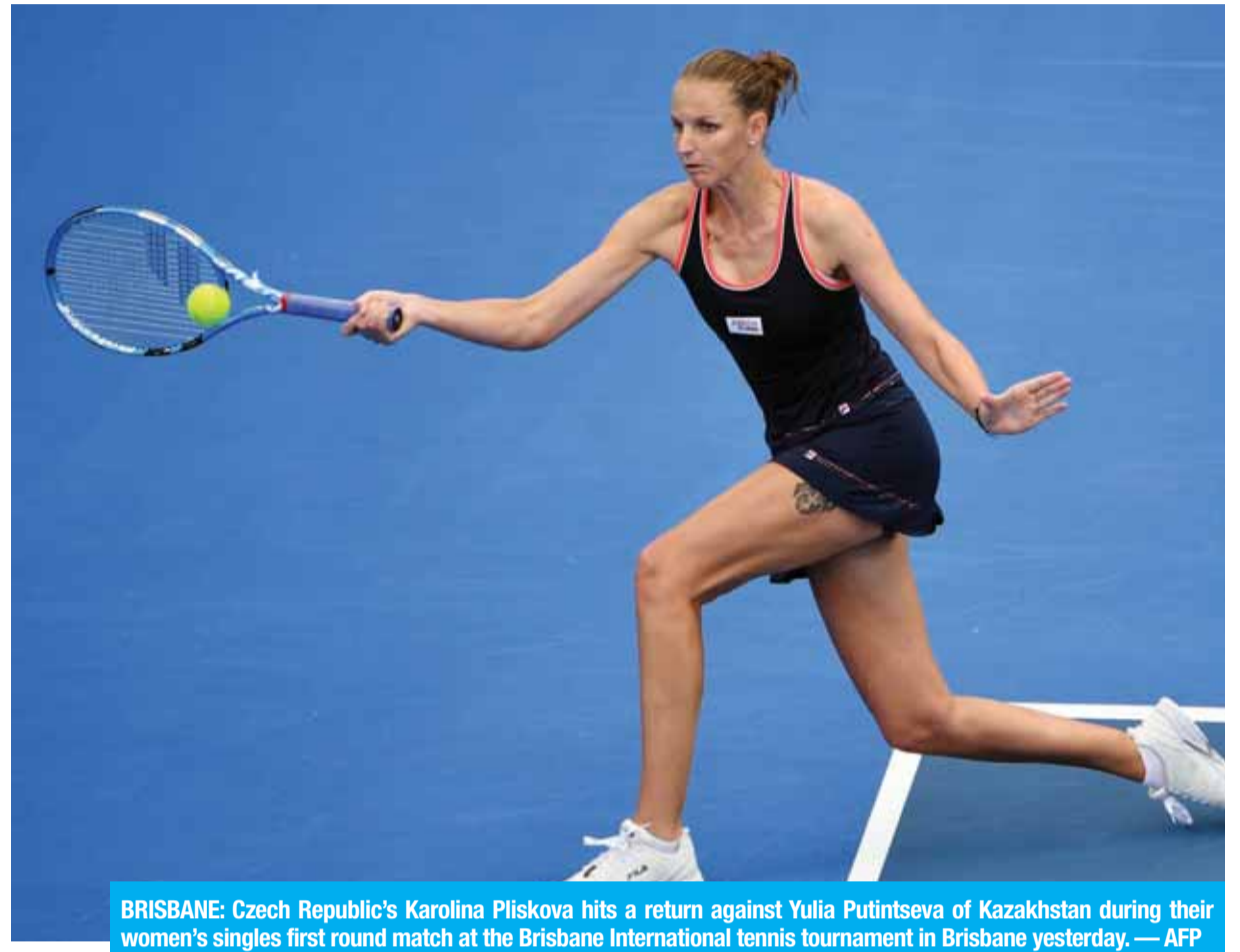
win 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 in two and a quarter hours at the Pat Rafter Arena. The 26-year-old Czech said despite surrendering the first set, she never felt in any real trouble against Putintseva.

"Even though I was losing a set and a break in the second, I was still pretty positive, because I felt (even though) I'm missing, it's only small margins here and there," she said.

"I just felt like the ball on the racquet felt pretty good." Pliskova has a good record in Brisbane, winning in 2017 and reaching the semi-finals in 2018. "I feel it's pretty fast, which is important for my game," Pliskova said. "I can hit some aces, which I did today, and if I play aggressive there is a chance that I am going to make a lot of points, so I feel good on this court for sure." Australian wildcard Kimberly Birrell pulled off a massive upset when she stunned world number 10 Daria Kasatkina in three sets. Birrell, 20, had only ever won one match on the main WTA tour but showed great composure to come from 3-5 down in the third set to win 5-7, 6-4, 7-6 (7/3) in three hours, six minutes. "I was just trying to stay positive—I was just telling myself to just keep fighting and keep asking the questions," Birrell said. She will now play Lesia Tsurenko in the second round after the Ukrainian beat Romania's Mihaela Buzarnescu 6-0, 6-2.

Birrell's fellow countrywoman Destanee Aiava also moved into the second round with a 6-3, 7-6 (7/2) upset over Frenchwoman Kristina Mladenovic and will now play reigning US Open champion Naomi Osaka.

Croatia's Donna Vekic was too strong for Magdalena Rybarikova of Slovakia, winning 6-1, 6-2 to set up a second-round clash against sixth-seeded Dutchwoman Kiki Bertens, who downed Belgian Elise Mertens 6-2, 6-7 (6/8), 6-4. — AFP



BRISBANE: Czech Republic's Karolina Pliskova hits a return against Yulia Putintseva of Kazakhstan during their women's singles first round match at the Brisbane International tennis tournament in Brisbane yesterday. — AFP

Sharapova campaign off to tough start in Shenzhen

BEIJING: Five-time Grand Slam champion Maria Sharapova had a tough start to her 2019 tennis season yesterday at the Shenzhen Open, edging out Switzerland's Timea Bacsinszky 6-2, 7-6 (7/3). In a battle of former Top 10 players, Sharapova's serve faltered early in the match but she regained composure to take the first set, cheered on by the spirited crowd at the Shenzhen Longgang Sports Center.

Bacsinszky put up a strong fight in the second set, claiming the first two games and forcing Sharapova to step up her game. The Russian powered through to take the match in one hour 42 minutes.

"It's been a few months since I've been out of playing competitively," Sharapova said in a post-match interview, calling Shenzhen a "warm-up tournament" for next month's Australian Open.

"Considering the opponent and everything I had to go through today I think it was a great practice for me." Sharapova, who won the last of her five Slams at Roland Garros in 2014, has endured a disappointing return to the majors since the end of her drugs ban in April of 2017.

She will next face 17-year-old Chinese wild card Wang Xinyu. Meanwhile, France's Caroline Garcia lost in straight sets to Serbia's Ivana Jorovic 6-4, 6-2. The tournament, which runs until Saturday, will see players battling for \$750,000 in prize money. — AFP

Serena wins Perth season-opener ahead of Grand Slam tilt

PERTH: Serena Williams overcame a sluggish start to win her opening match of the new season in Perth yesterday, two weeks out from 2019's first Grand Slam. The 37-year-old was a long way off her commanding best and was visibly frustrated with her own game early in her Hopman Cup singles match, but still did enough to beat Greece's Maria Sakkari in straight sets.

However, it was Sakkari and her team-mate Stefanos Tsitsipas who had the last laugh as Greece beat the USA 2-1 in the mixed doubles Group B tie. In her first tournament outing since the controversial loss to Naomi Osaka in the US Open final in September, Williams struggled early and her groundstrokes were erratic in the first set.

Sakkari, ranked 41st in the world, gained an early break and served for the first set but couldn't capitalise despite several gilt-edged opportunities. That opened the door for Williams, the bookmakers' favourite for the upcoming Australian Open in Melbourne, to power back and ultimately win 7-6 (7/3), 6-2 in an hour and 44 minutes.

Williams had her left ankle worked on at the end of the first set but it didn't stop her dominating the second, in which she looked more like the player who has won 23 Grand Slam singles titles. "I was making a lot of errors and I'm like 'it's okay, it's your first match, it'll get better,'" she said.

"It's never easy (first match), there are a lot of errors that are going to be made and I think we both did pretty good." Williams said her taped ankles weren't a concern so soon before 2019's first Grand Slam, blaming a little discomfort with her shoes.

Williams won her last Grand Slam in Melbourne in 2017, but wasn't able to defend her title due to the birth of her first child. Bidding to equal Margaret Court's record of 24 titles, she was beaten in last year's Wimbledon and US Open finals. — AFP

Colts muscle past Titans

NASHVILLE: Andrew Luck threw for 285 yards and three touchdowns Sunday night as the Indianapolis Colts claimed the AFC's final playoff spot with a 33-17 win over the Tennessee Titans at Nissan Stadium in Nashville. Luck, who completed 24 of 35 passes, finished the regular season with 39 touchdown passes, the most for a player who missed the previous season. He also enabled Indianapolis (10-6) to cap a comeback from a 1-5 start and earn a trip to AFC South champion and divisional foe Houston for a wild-card round game on Saturday. Tennessee (9-7) snapped a nine-year playoff drought last year with a home win over Jacksonville in Week 17, but wasn't able to repeat the feat this time. The short-handed Titans played without quarterback Marcus Mariota (stinger, plantar fascia) and Pro Bowl defensive tackle Jurrell Casey (knee), and their absences were clearly felt. Casey's injury left a massive gap in the interior defense that Indianapolis exploited with consistency. Besides Luck's passing, the Colts also pounded out 158 yards on 36 carries, enabling them to possess the ball for more than 40 minutes.

Patriots 38, Jets 3

Tom Brady tossed a season-high four touchdowns and became the fourth quarterback in NFL history to complete 6,000 career passes as New England clinched the No. 2 seed in the AFC by cruising past visiting New York. New England (11-5) clinched a bye for the 13th time in the Bill Belichick-Brady era since 2001 and the ninth straight season. The Kansas City Chiefs beat the Oakland Raiders later Sunday to clinch the top seed in the AFC playoffs and lock the Patriots in to the No. 2 seed. The Jets (4-12) finished the season by losing nine of their last 10 games and fired coach Todd Bowles with two years remaining on his contract. The Jets were 24-40 under Bowles, who took over in 2015 following Rex Ryan.

Eagles 24, Redskins 0

Nick Foles tied an NFL single-game record with 25 straight pass completions and visiting Philadelphia found a way into the NFC playoffs with a blowout win at Washington. The Eagles (9-7) clinched the second wild card spot when the Minnesota Vikings lost to the Chicago Bears 24-10. Philadelphia will visit Chicago, the NFC's third seed, Saturday afternoon. After throwing an interception on the opening drive, Foles recovered to finish 28 of 33 for 221 yards, two touchdowns and the pick before leaving with a chest injury in the fourth quarter. He was perfect in a stretch that began in the first quarter and ended late in the third. Washington (7-9) lost six of its final seven games as it was forced to use four different starting quarterbacks.

Bears 24, Vikings 10

Jordan Howard had 21 carries for 109 yards and two touchdowns and Chicago held on to eliminate host Minnesota from playoff contention. Tarik Cohen also had a rushing touchdown for Chicago (12-4), which finished with its best regular-season record since 2006. The Bears locked up the No. 3 seed in the NFC playoffs and will host the Philadelphia Eagles next Sunday afternoon. Stefon Diggs scored the lone touchdown for Minnesota (8-7-1). The Vikings could have earned a wild-card playoff berth

with a victory—which would have created a rematch in Chicago next week—but instead will go home early for the third time in five seasons under head coach Mike Zimmer.

Ravens 26, Browns 24

Lamar Jackson rushed for two touchdowns and accounted for 269 all-purpose yards as Baltimore clinched the AFC North title with a narrow win over visiting Cleveland. The Ravens (10-6), who went 6-1 with Jackson at quarterback after veteran Joe Flacco was injured midseason, will host the Los Angeles Chargers next Sunday at 1 p.m. ET in the wild-card round. Baltimore dumped Los Angeles 22-10 on Dec. 22 in Carson, Calif. Jackson completed 14 of 24 passes for 179 yards with no touchdowns or interceptions while rushing 20 times for 90 yards. Kenneth Dixon piled up 117 yards on 12 carries and Gus Edwards chipped in 76 yards on 12 attempts as the Ravens finished with 296 yards on the ground against the Browns (7-8-1). Cleveland's Baker Mayfield set a new NFL record for rookie touchdown passes with his 27th.

Steelers 16, Bengals 13

Rookie kicker Matt McCrane's third field goal, from 35 yards with 1:56 left, gave Pittsburgh a win over visiting Cincinnati, but it was not enough to ensure the Steelers' season would continue. With Baltimore beating Cleveland, the only way Pittsburgh (9-6-1) could make the playoffs was if the Tennessee-Indianapolis game Sunday night ended in a tie. The Colts won 33-17. The Steelers played without receiver Antonio Brown, who has a knee injury. Without a double threat, Juju Smith-Schuster faced stiff coverage, with five catches for 37 yards and a tying touchdown against the Bengals (6-10).

Chiefs 35, Raiders 3

Kansas City's Patrick Mahomes became the second quarterback in NFL history to pass for 5,000 yards and 50 touchdowns in a season as the Chiefs bashed visiting Oakland to lock up the top seed in the AFC playoffs. An 89-yard scoring bomb to Demarcus Robinson with 8:33 left in the third quarter was Mahomes' 50th TD strike of the season and pushed the first-year starter past the 5,000-yard plateau. The only other quarterback to reach both milestones in the same season was Denver's Peyton Manning in 2013, when he set records for touchdown passes (55) and passing yardage (5,477) in a season. Mahomes punctuated his MVP candidacy with 281 yards against the Raiders (4-12), going 14 of 24 with two touchdowns and one interception. Tyreek Hill led the Chiefs (12-4) with five receptions for 101 yards and scored touchdowns on a 67-yard reception and 15-yard rush.

Chargers 23, Broncos 9

Philip Rivers passed for 176 yards and a touchdown, linebacker Kyle Emanuel returned a fumble for another score and Los Angeles beat host Denver Broncos to end the regular season. With Kansas City's win over Oakland on Sunday, the Chargers (12-4) are locked into the No. 5 seed and will play at Baltimore next Sunday at 1:05 ET on CBS. Mike Williams had 65 yards receiving and a score and Austin Ekeler ran for 58 yards and a touchdown for Los Angeles, while Case Keenum was 31-for-48 passing for 292 yards, a touchdown and an interception for Denver (6-10).

Rams 48, 49ers 32

The Los Angeles defense set the tone with four first-half turnovers and a touch-



NASHVILLE: Derrick Henry #22 of the Tennessee Titans runs with the ball against the Indianapolis Colts during the fourth quarter at Nissan Stadium on Sunday in Nashville, Tennessee. — AFP

down on the way to a victory over visiting San Francisco that earned L.A. a first-round bye in the playoffs. The Rams (13-3) clinched the No. 2 seed in the NFC with the victory over their longtime rival and finished undefeated against the NFC West in the process. The opening-round bye is the first for the Rams since the 2003 season when the team was in St. Louis. Jared Goff passed for 199 yards and four touchdowns and C.J. Anderson rushed for 132 yards and a score against the 49ers (4-12) as the Rams were without starting running back Todd Gurley for a second consecutive week as he works his way through knee inflammation.

Seahawks 27, Cardinals 24

Sebastian Janikowski kicked a 33-yard field goal as time expired to give Seattle a win against visiting Arizona. Chris Carson rushed 19 times for 122 yards and a touchdown for the Seahawks (10-6), who had already clinched an NFC wild-card berth but cemented the No. 5 seed. Seattle will play at Dallas on Saturday night. Arizona (3-13) clinched the league's worst record and the No. 1 overall pick in the 2019 NFL draft.

Texans 20, Jaguars 3

Deshaun Watson capped his second season with a unique statistical accomplishment and host Houston claimed its third AFC South title in four seasons with a victory over woeful Jacksonville, becoming the second team to earn a division title after starting a season 0-3. With 234 passing yards plus another 66 yards on the ground with a touchdown, Watson is the first quarterback in NFL history to total 4,000 yards (4,165) and at least 25 touchdowns (26) passing while rushing for 500 yards (551) with another five touchdowns on the ground. Led by defensive end J.J. Watt, the Texans (11-5) harassed Jacksonville quarterback Blake Bortles throughout what likely was his last appearance with the Jaguars (5-11). Watt recorded 1 1/2 of the three sacks of Bortles, closing his season with 16. Watt and Hall of Fame member Reggie White are the only players in NFL history with four 15-plus sack seasons.

Cowboys 36, Giants 35

Dak Prescott threw four touchdowns passes and completed a two-point conversion to Michael Gallup with 1:12 left to lift Dallas Cowboys past host New York. Prescott, who threw for 387 yards, completed a 32-yard touchdown pass in the back of the end zone to Cole Beasley on fourth-and-15 to set up the two-point conversion. Originally, Beasley was called out of bounds on the field, but after review was ruled to

have gotten his knee down before his elbows landed out of bounds. Though running back Ezekiel Elliott sat out the game, Dallas played most of its starters and heads into the postseason having won seven of eight games. The Cowboys (10-6) earned the fourth seed in the playoffs and will host Seattle at AT&T Stadium next weekend. The Giants finish the season 5-11.

Lions 31, Packers 0

Detroit blasted listless Green Bay, ending the season on a positive note and earning back-to-back victories at Lambeau Field for the first time since the 1990-91 seasons. Matthew Stafford, throwing passes to the likes of Brandon Powell, Andy Jones and T.J. Jones instead of Kenny Golladay (inactive), Marvin Jones (injured reserve) and Golden Tate (traded), threw for 266 yards and a pair of touchdowns to T.J. Jones for the Lions (6-10). His counterpart, Aaron Rodgers, exited following the third series with a concussion. A week after rallying three times from two-touchdown deficits to beat the New York Jets, interim coach Joe Philbin's Packers (6-9-1) showed no fight against the Lions.

Bills 42, Dolphins 17

Josh Allen passed for three touchdowns and ran for two more as Buffalo defeated Miami in Orchard Park, N.Y. Zay Jones caught two touchdowns from Allen, who completed 17 of 26 passes for 224 yards with an interception. Allen also ran nine times for 95 yards. Buffalo forced four turnovers and enjoyed its highest-scoring game of the season. The game was the season finale for two teams out of playoff contention. Buffalo (6-10) finished 4-3 in its final seven games. Miami (7-9) concluded its season on a three-game losing streak, dropping nine of its final 13.

Panthers 33, Saints 14

Undrafted rookie quarterback Kyle Allen threw two touchdowns passes before leaving the game with a fourth-quarter shoulder injury as visiting Carolina won in New Orleans. With the Saints (13-3) secure in their No. 1 seed in the NFC playoffs, they rested several starters. Drew Brees missed only his third start since coming to the Saints in 2006. He finished the season with an NFL-record 74.4 completion percentage (364 of 489) with 3,992 yards, 32 touchdowns and just five interceptions. Carolina (7-9) scored touchdowns on its first three possessions, with Allen driving the Panthers 75, 89 and 90 yards—mostly against the Saints' starting defense—to forge a 20-0 lead, and it climbed to 30-0 late in the third quarter. — AFP

Sports

Mayweather floors Japan's Nasukawa in just two minutes

Mayweather best pound-for-pound boxer in the sport

TOKYO: Floyd "Money" Mayweather beat Japanese kickboxing phenomenon Tenshin Nasukawa by a technical knockout yesterday after just two minutes of a New Year's Eve "exhibition" bout that brought the US boxing superstar out of retirement for a big pay day.

In a mismatched contest, Mayweather floored Nasukawa, a kickboxer less than half his age, three times in the first round of the three-round contest before the Japanese fighter's trainer rushed in to stop the fight.

"Money" Mayweather has hinted on social media he was pocketing \$9 million for the fight, meaning he earned around \$4.5 million per minute for the spectacle. The American boxer at first appeared not to be taking the fight seriously, grinning at his opponent and aiming only soft punches at him.

But he then demonstrated his power, launching a series of jabs and hooks to the head of the 20-year-old Japanese fighter, sending him to the canvas after just one minute with a left hook. Sensing his opponent was struggling, Mayweather stepped in for the kill, unleashing a flurry of punches that left Nasukawa reeling again within just two minutes of the bout and facing his second standing count after a huge right hook to the head.

With the Japanese fighter clearly battling to stay on his feet, the trainer rushed in and stopped the fight with less than one minute of the first round remaining. "It was all about entertainment. We had fun," Mayweather said in the ring after the event.

"I'm still retired. I don't look forward to coming back to boxing but I did this just to entertain the fans in Japan," added the 41-year-old. The rules were very strictly defined: three, three minute bouts and boxing only-kickboxer Nasukawa was reportedly facing a \$5 million fine if he aimed a kick at Mayweather.

There were no judges, with only a knockout or technical knockout considered a victory in the bout, pro-

moted as a pure exhibition match. Crucially, the match did not feature on the record of either man, allowing them both to retain a cherished unbeaten record.

"This won't go on my record. This won't go on Tenshin's record. Tenshin is still undefeated. I'm still undefeated. This is just entertainment for the people," he added.

\$9M FOR 9 MINUTES

The purse for the event was not disclosed but "Money" hinted on Instagram that he would be making \$1 million per minute. "What if I told you I was making \$9,000,000 for nine minutes of sparring in Tokyo, Japan," he wrote on his official page. "Would you do the same if you were me? I like to call it a nine-minute walk thru," the post added.

Mayweather, a legend in the boxing world, has a perfect 50-0 record with 27 knockouts. He won world titles in five different weight divisions and was considered the best pound-for-pound boxer in the sport.

Virtually unknown outside the kickboxing ring in his own country, Nasukawa from Chiba near Tokyo also boasts an unbeaten record. He won the world junior karate championship, made his professional kickboxing debut at the age of 16 and has a 28-0 record with 21 wins by knockout. Promoters RIZIN have hailed him as "perhaps the best combat sports prospect the country has ever seen" and the 20-year-old himself had claimed he has a "punch that boxers don't have". But he hardly penetrated Mayweather's defences and barely made the older man break sweat.

ON-OFF FIGHT

This is the second time Mayweather has been coaxed out of retirement. Last year, he knocked out mixed martial arts fighter Conor McGregor in the 10th round of a super-hyped boxing match.



SAITAMA: US boxing legend Floyd Mayweather Jr (L) knocks down Kickboxer Tenshin Nasukawa of Japan (C) during their exhibition match at Saitama Super Arena in Saitama yesterday. Floyd Mayweather beat Japanese kickboxing phenomenon Tenshin Nasukawa by a technical knock-out in the first round of a New Year's Eve "exhibition" bout. — AFP

There are also unconfirmed rumours Mayweather could take on reigning UFC lightweight champion Khabib Nurmagomedov, who said last month any match-up would be "twice as interesting" as the McGregor fight.

Yesterday's Tokyo fight was on-off from the start. It was announced out of the blue on November 5, with Mayweather saying it had "always been a goal of mine

to go outside out of the US and display my talent".

However, just as abruptly as it was announced, it was called off just three days later. Mayweather said he had been "blindsided" into the contest by the organisers. But the promoter flew to the US to meet Mayweather and announced a week later that the fight was back on, saying that a "misunderstanding" had been resolved. — AFP

Solskjaer tells two-goal Pogba to cut out showboating

MANCHESTER: Ole Gunnar Solskjaer encouraged Paul Pogba to cut showboating from his game to recreate the "efficient" display that saw the Frenchman score twice for the second straight game in a 4-1 thrashing of Bournemouth at Old Trafford.

A third consecutive victory since Solskjaer took caretaker charge until the end of the season keeps United eight points adrift of Chelsea in the fight for a top-four finish. Pogba has been key to all three wins, but this was arguably his best display as he also teed up Romelu Lukaku's fourth goal and struck the post late on to just miss out on a first career hat-trick. "That is a top, top performance for a mid-field player because it's all-round: work rate, dangerous in the box, no showboating. It's touch, pass, move," said Solskjaer. "It's an efficient game and Paul knows he's at his best when it's an efficient game."

The change in mood around United in the 12 days since Jose Mourinho was sacked is palpable, no more so in the performances of Pogba, who was discarded from the Portuguese's starting line-up for his final three league games in charge.

"We are Manchester United and we need to be at the top of the league. It is just a reaction of all of the players and everyone is enjoying themselves," said Pogba. "It is different, we still won games with the old manager but it is just a different style of playing, we are more offensive and we are creating more chances and that is how we want to play." United have now scored 12 times in three games under the Norwegian, but Solskjaer insisted he has just tried to instill what he learned under Alex Ferguson during 11 seasons as a player at Old Trafford.

"This is how it was. I've just gone about the job as I experienced it as a player, and a coach," added Solskjaer. "We want to go attacking. We've been at home two games and we have to entertain the fans. I love working with good players and good people."

Pogba played a part in four of United's five goals at Cardiff last weekend to get Solskjaer off to a flying start



MANCHESTER: Manchester United's Belgian striker Romelu Lukaku (L) vies with Bournemouth's Dutch defender Nathan Ake (R) during the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and Bournemouth at Old Trafford in Manchester. — AFP

before scoring twice against Huddersfield on Boxing Day. Solskjaer has spoken of his desire to see Pogba break into the box more regularly and he had the simplest of tasks to prod the ball into an empty net after Marcus Rashford had bewildered the Bournemouth defence.

Nathan Ake and Diego Rico were left beaten by Rashford's combination of fleet-footed dribbling and pace before his cross perfectly picked out Pogba's run. Pogba then made it 2-0 with a bullet header from Ander Herrera's cross. Unlike Pogba, Nemanja Matic was one of Mourinho's most trusted lieutenants but the Serbian has also epitomised the change in tack orchestrated by Solskjaer with the former Chelsea midfielder much more willing to look for a forward rather than sideways pass.

And Matic began the move for United's third when he

picked out Anthony Martial's run and the Frenchman's cross with the outside of his boot was turned home by Rashford. For all the improvements of late, though, Solskjaer is still waiting for a first clean sheet since November as Ake beat Matic to power home David Brooks's cross.

Rashford should have added to his tally when put clean through by Pogba, but didn't get enough elevation on his attempted chip over Asmir Begovic before making way for Lukaku 20 minutes from time.

And the Belgian netted almost instantly when he squeezed the ball past Begovic on his weaker right foot from another Pogba pass. Only the post then denied Pogba a first ever hat-trick when his low strike from the edge of the box came off the woodwork. — AFP

Tottenham facing prospect of all-too-familiar collapse

LONDON: As Mauricio Pochettino offered an explanation of why Tottenham Hotspur's emerging Premier League title challenge had stalled so quickly, it was hard to avoid the view their bid for success on four fronts could once again leave the club empty-handed.

The 3-1 home defeat by Wolverhampton Wanderers on Saturday was utterly deflating for Pochettino's side, who had thrillingly moved into second place on the back of a 6-2 defeat of Everton and a 5-0 thrashing of Bournemouth.

Their time spent as the nearest challengers to leaders Liverpool, however, lasted just four days and they travel to Cardiff City today desperately seeking a win to revive the belief they can last the pace in the title race.

Pochettino, the Spurs manager, cited mental fatigue as a possible reason for his players' lethargic second half display against Wolves and you could see his point.

The north London club had more representatives in the semi-finals of the World Cup than any other and it would be hardly surprising if the effects of a draining, exhilarating but ultimately disappointing summer campaign for eight of those nine players—France's winning captain Hugo Lloris being the exception—lingered.

They certainly haven't returned to a straightforward season with their club. The delays to the opening of their new stadium means Wembley has unexpectedly remained Spurs' temporary home.

And the drama that accompanied the Champions League group stage means Pochettino's players have already endured more than their fair share of nerve-jangling cliffhangers as they qualified despite claiming just one point from the opening three games.

Tottenham's progress into January's two-legged League Cup semi-final with capital foes Chelsea was hardly sedate given they had to overcome a quarter-final visit to north London rivals Arsenal to claim a place in the last four.

Next Friday sees Spurs start their FA Cup campaign with a visit to fourth-tier Tranmere Rovers, a further addition to an already-congested holiday fixture schedule. The counter to all that is that a club with ambitions of challenging for major trophies must expect to face those kinds of demands. And that is where criticism of Tottenham's failure to bring in any new players during the pre-season transfer window resurfaces.

Squad depth is so often the key to success and while Tottenham's success in keeping the current group of players together was admirable, right now it appears as though fresh additions would be welcome.

That is particularly so given Son Heung-min will join up with South Korea at the Asian Cup in mid-January at a time when he is arguably Pochettino's form player. Pochettino will be assessing all the possible factors and with Manchester United reportedly on his trail, the Argentinian would appear to be in a strong position to influence Spurs' future direction, particularly in the transfer market.

Clearly after repeatedly falling short in recent title races, there is something preventing the club—last crowned champions of England way back in 1961 — making that next step up. Lifting the League Cup would be a good start. The trophy has proved to be a launchpad for a number of teams who have gone on to become champions



Mauricio Pochettino

having acquired the winning habit in the least prestigious of the English game's three main domestic competitions.

More important, though, would be to strengthen the squad. As impressive as Pochettino's side can be, they lack the consistency of Liverpool or Manchester City who can both change more players, more often with little negative effect on their results. — AFP

Live		Matches on TV
		(Local Timings)
ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE		
Everton FC v Leicester City	beIN SPORTS HD 2	12:30
Arsenal FC v Fulham FC	beIN SPORTS HD 2	15:00
Cardiff City v Tottenham Hotspur	beIN SPORTS HD 2	17:30
ENGLISH CHAMPIONSHIP LEAGUE		
Aston Villa v Queens Park Rangers	beIN SPORTS	15:00
Blackburn Rovers FC v West Bromwich Albion FC	beIN SPORTS	15:00
Brentford v Norwich City	beIN SPORTS	15:00
Derby County FC v Middlesbrough	beIN SPORTS	15:00
Hull City v Bolton Wanderers	beIN SPORTS	15:00
Ipswich Town FC v Millwall FC	beIN SPORTS	15:00
Reading FC v Swansea City	beIN SPORTS	15:00
Rotherham United v Preston North End	beIN SPORTS	15:00
Sheffield Wednesday FC v Birmingham City FC	beIN SPORTS	15:00
Stoke City FC v Bristol City FC	beIN SPORTS	15:00
Wigan Athletic v Sheffield United FC	beIN SPORTS	15:00
Nottingham Forest FC v Leeds United FC	beIN SPORTS	15:00

Ronaldo 'not obsessed' by individual trophies

LISBON: Portugal star Cristiano Ronaldo has insisted that he is "not obsessed" by individual trophies, having missed on this year's Ballon d'Or after winning it five times. The Juventus striker also missed out on FIFA and UEFA's player of the year trophies as former Real Madrid teammate Luka Modric, a World Cup runner-up with Croatia, swept all before him.

"I'm not obsessed by individual prizes," Ronaldo told Portuguese sports daily Record. "The most important thing is to win collective trophies and help the team. The rest comes naturally."

Ronaldo added: "I don't think all the time of beating records. I work above all to help the club and be at my best level. "The technical, tactical and physical level of all teams is better today," he said. "It's increasingly tough to win so I have to keep working hard to stay on top." Having missed the start of Portugal's Nations League campaign to better adjust to life with Juve, Ronaldo said that in 2019 he "envisages being at the disposal of the national coach". Portugal will host the inaugural Nations League finals in June, meeting Switzerland in the semi-finals. In the wide-ranging interview, Ronaldo also dubbed as "revolting" allegations of rape made against him dating back to 2009, something he strenuously denies. He added that he had a "calm conscience" and was "confident that everything will very soon be clarified". — AFP



Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah
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