

YEARIN REMIDW 2018 KOREA: WHEN TWO ALMOST BECAME ONE Page 3



&FINALLY OLA FARAHAT MARRIESIN INSTA-WORTHY BEACH WEDDING Page 16





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The Voice of a Changing Region

DISAGREEMENT

envoy quits over pullout from Syria

Trump loses another top security official

Arab News Jeckien

The US envoy to the global coalition fighting Daesh has resigned in protest at President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw US forces from Syria.

Brett McGurk was appointed by Barack Obama in 2015 and retained by Trump. He joins Defense Secretary Jim Mattis in quitting the Trump administration over the pullout of the remaining 2,000 American troops.

McGurk's resignation takes effect on Dec. 31. Less than two weeks ago he said: "It would be reckless if we were just to say, 'Well, the physical caliphate is defeated, so we can just leave now. I think anyone who's looked at a conflict like this would agree with that."

A week before that, Gen. Joseph Dumford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the US had a long way to go in training local Syrian forces to prevent a resurgence of Daesh.

In his letter of resignation to US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, McGurk said the militants were on the run but not yet defeated, and that the premature withdrawal of American forces from Syria would create the conditions that gave rise to Daesh in the first place.

He said there had been gains in accelerating the campaign against Daesh, but the work was not yet

McGurk's resignation, Trump continued to defend his decision to withdraw US troops, "We were originally going to be there for three months, and that was seven years ago - we never left,"

he said on social media. "When I became President, Daesh was going wild. Now Daesh is largely defeated and other local countries. including Turkey, should be able to easily take care of whatever remains. We're coming home!"

McGurk, 45, is a former deputy assistant secretary of state for Iraq and Iran. During the negotiations by the Obama administration for the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, he led secret side talks with Tehran on the release of Americans imprisoned there.

McGurk was a senior official covering Iraq and Afghanistan during President George W. Bush's admin-

FASTFACT

Brett McGurk said the premature withdrawal of American forces from Syria would create the conditions that gave rise to Daesh in the first place.

istration, and was briefly considered. for the post of ambassador to Iraq.

A former US Supreme Court law clerk to the late Chief Justice William Rehnquist, he worked as a lawyer for the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq after the 2003 US-led invasion and joined Bush's National Security Council staff. In 2007 and 2008, he was the lead US negotiator on security agreements with Iraq.

He will be replaced as coalition envoy by his deputy, retired Lt. Gen. Terry Wolff. Jim Jeffrey, the veteran diplomat appointed special representative for Syria engagement in August, is expected to stay in his position.

Al-Ain's dream ended ... by the Real thing



Real Madrid's Sergio Ramos and teammates celebrate with the trophy after winning the FIFA Club World Cup in Abu Dhabi. Real Madrid lifted the cup for a record fourth time after thrashing local side Al Ain 4-1 in the final with the help of impressive distance strikes in either half from midfielders Luka Modric and Marcos Llorente. Report P15

Reuters

DIALDQUE PAYS OFF

UN team arrives in Yemen to monitor cease-fire

Arab News Jeddah

UN monitors arrived in Yemen on Saturday to monitor a fragile cease-fire in the Red Sea port city of Hodeidah.

The head of the team, retired Dutch general Patrick Cammaert, flew into Aden in southern Yemen. seat of the internationally recognized government backed by the Saudi-led coalition.

He will travel later to the capital, Sanaa, which is held by Iranbacked Houthi militias, and then by road to Hodeidah. Other members of the team flew directly to Sanaa from Amman in Jordan.

The sides in Yemen's war agreed at UN-sponsored talks in Sweden

this month to stop fighting in Hodeidah city and its province and withdraw forces. The truce began on Tuesday but skirmishes contin-

ued on the outskirts of the city. On Friday the UN Security Council unanimously approved an initial 30-day deployment of Cammaert's advance monitoring team.

They will not be uniformed or armed, the UN has said, but will provide support for the management and inspections at the ports of Hodeidah, Salif and Ras Issa, and

strengthen the UN presence. The agreement reached in Sweden, the first significant breakthrough in peace efforts in five years, is meant to pave the way for

BITING PRICE HIKE

HIGHLIGHT

The head of the team, retired Dutch general Patrick Cammaert, flew into Aden in southern Yemen, seat of the internationally recognized government backed by the Saudi-led coalition.

a wider cease-fire in Yemen and a second round of talks in January on a framework for political negotiations.

The UN views confidence-building measures in Hodeidah, and preventing a full-scale government and coalition military assault

on the city, as a crucial first step.

The port is the main entry point to Yemen for food and humanitarian aid, but it is also a key smuggling route for Iranian arms and ammunition to the Houthis, including parts for missiles fired at Saudi Arabia.

government Yemeni pledged its commitment to the agreement reached in Sweden and said it would work "in a positive spirit" with UN envoy Martin Griffiths toward a lasting political agreement to end the war.

Khalid Manzalawi, Saudi Arabia's deputy permanent representative to the UN, said the UN resolution meant the Houthis "would lose their margin of maneuver."

SAUDI MUSICIANS

Jeddah-based music duo Statues of Sinking Men are known for their stirring live performances - an irony since the band tries to stay out of the spotlight. P5

BANGLADESH VOTE

Electioneering in Hangladesh is in full swing as two major contenders in the running announced their election manifestos earlier this week. P8

DUBAI TARGET

Dubai has set a target to grow its Islamic economy sector to be worth 10 percent of GDP by 2021, it emerged on Saturday. The Islamic economy is currently worth 8.3 percent of GDP. PTI

Arab News Jeddah

At least 22 people have died in four days of protests in Sudan after the price of bread tripled, the Sudanese opposition leader Sadiq Al-Mahdi said on Saturday.

Government officials put the death toll at eight since demonstrations erupted across the country on Wednesday when the price of a loaf rose from one Sudanese pound to three - about two to six US cents.

The protests began in the eastern city of Atbara before spreading to Al-Qadarif, also in eastern Sudan, and then to the capital Khartoum and its twin city Omdurman. Two demonstrators were killed in Atbara and six others in Al-Qadarif,



Opposition Umma Party leader Sadiq Al-Mahdi, left, said the protests would 'continue because the people are driven by collapsing services.' AFP

Opposition leader claims 22 dead in Sudan bread price protests

as protesters torched the offices of President Omar Al-Bashir's ruling

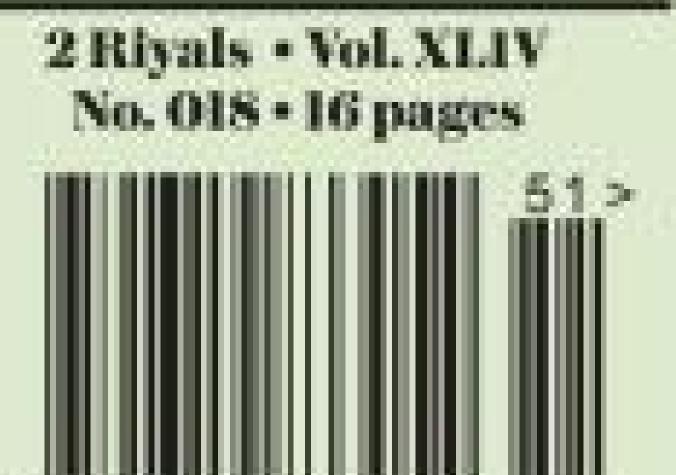
National Congress Party. Opposition Umma Party leader Sadiq Al-Mahdi, who returned to Sudan last week after nearly a year in self-imposed exile, said the protests would "continue because the people are driven by collapsing services." He accused the government of concealing the death toll

and said at least 22 people had died. A fixture of Sudanese politics since the 1960s, Mahdi was prime minister from 1966 to 1967 and again from 1986 to 1989. His government was the last one to be elected in Sudan before. Bashir toppled it in a coup in 1989.

Government spokesman Bashar Jumaa said authorities would "not

he lenient" with protesters who set state buildings on fire or caused other damage to public property.

Fourteen opposition leaders were arrested on Saturday, including Farouk Abu Issa, 85, head of the National Consensus Forces, "Their arrest is an attempt by the regime to stop the street movements," spokesman Sadiq Youssef said.





KSA today



Dammam

Sea world

It is a treat for marine enthusiasts belonging to all age groups. It provides an opportunity to see many rare sea creatures in aquariums designed to keep the actual deep-sea environment. Interested people can visit Al-Dareen Mall from 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. until Jan. 5,



Riyadh

Janadriyah Fest

It is a national event held to celebrate the rich history of the Kingdom as well as to celebrate its evolution. The festival includes opera, camel racing and art exhibition etc. The three-week festival is underway at Janadriyah outside Riyadh.



Dammam

Comedy night

House of Comedy is staging a play "Habl Ghaseel" (Clothesline) at the Culture and Arts Association until Dec. 29 The improvised performance features audience interaction, wit and humor from a talented cast of local performers.



Riyadh

Fun time

Catch Cirque du Soleil's debut offering in Saudi Arabia, inspired by James Cameron's award-winning movie Avatar. The circus has pitched its tent outside Granada Mall until Dec. 29, with a pop-up restaurant and other fun-filled activities, lined up for audiences to enjoy.

The Register



Prince Talail bin Abdul Aziz. File photo

Abdul Aziz passed away on Saturday, a Saudi royal court statement said.

The news of his death was confirmed by his son Prince Abdul Aziz bin Talal on Twitter on Saturday. He said the family members will accept condolences from Sunday until Tuesday between sunset and evening prayers.

He also said prayers will be held on Sunday afternoon at the Imam Turki Grand Mosque in Riyadh. Prince Talal, the brother of King Salman and father of Prince Alwaleed bin Talal, served as minister of communications and minister of finance and national economy in the 1950s and 60s, and held other various positions.

A philanthropist, Prince Talal offered education scholarships to Saudi students. Born in 1931, the prince headed the Arab Gulf Fund for Development, a UN body that promotes education and health in developing countries.

As part of AGFUND, he has led the board

of trustees of the Arab Network for NGOs based in Cairo and established Arab Open University. He has also supported training of women through AGFUND. Through AGFUND, he provided significant monetary support for UNICEF and the UN's children agency declared him its special envoy in 1980. He became UNESCO's special envoy for water in 2002 to encourage the development of safe water.

He founded the Kingdom's first school for vocational training in 1954 and the first girls' school in Riyadh in 1957.

What's Trending Today's hot topics explained by Deema Al-Klundahr



PARTY

Celebrity wedding



Saudi television presenter and social media influencer Lojain Omran celebrated her daughter Jilan's wedding on Friday.

The wedding took place in Bahrain and was attended by a number of Arab celebrities and businessmen.

Saudi magazine Hia @hiamag tweeted: "It is noted that Lojain Omran and her daughter Jilan wore dresses designed by Syrian designer Houida Baridi. It is said that the Saudi media personality Lojain Omran has a son and daughter from her first marriage, Samir and Jilan, and Lojain is very keen on hiding their pictures from social media platforms."

@DrLalibrahim said: "Congratulations to the bride and the mother of the bride @ Lojain_Omran." HUGE HIT

#MaryPoppinsReturns



The sequel to the 1964
Mary Poppins, Mary
Poppins Returns (2018)
proved to be a huge hit at

the box office.

Dolby India @DolbyIn tweeted:
"Everyone's favorite
governess is back with
#MaryPoppinsReturns! The

Showman. It really is practically perfect in every way."

@beccaridout said: "#MaryPoppins
Returns was everything I wanted

it to be and more.

much since The Greatest

Nods to the first film were beautiful but this one stands on its own as a glorious sequel. I'm sure some of those tunes

will turn into firm favorites in
years to come."
@morgan_jade97 said:
"I don't think I'm going
to stop thinking about
#MaryPoppinsReturns
for a very long time. Need
to go and see it again
immediately."

*Last night, we went to see *MaryPoppinsReturns. It was lovely, magical and everything I hoped it would be! Have

you seen it yet? Are
you planning to?
#Marypoppins."
@wornwhite said:
"I could watch
this movie all
day long. In love.
#MaryPoppins

Returns"

Todays Number

395,933

It is the total number of pilgrims currently visiting the Kingdom to perform Umrah, according to statistics issued by the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah.

FaceOf



Alwi Shihab

r. Alwi Shihab has been the Indonesian president's adviser and special envoy to the Middle East and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation since 2006.

Prior to his current role, he held prominent positions in the Indonesian government. He served as the coordinating minister for people's welfare between 2004 and 2005, and as the foreign minister between 2004.

Dr. Shihab is a leading authority and scholar on the interaction of Christian and Muslim communities. He holds several degrees and served at Hartford Seminary in Hartford as a professor of religion. He was also a fellow and a visiting professor at Harvard University.

He obtained bachelor and master's degrees from Cairo's Al-Azhar University in 1966 and 1968 respectively.

He also earned a bachelor's degree in Islamic philosophy from IAIN Alauddin, Ujung Pandang, Indonesia in 1986.

Moreover, he received his Ph.D. from Cairo's University of Ain Shams in 1990. He again continued his education and went on to obtain another master's degree from Temple University in the US followed by yet another Ph.D. from the same university in 1995. Between 1995 and 1996, Dr. Shihab received another post-doctorate degree from Harvard University's Divinity School.

He served as a professor at several universities in Indonesia and the US,

Dr. Shihab has authored many books and articles on Islam and Christianity relations. His vision is focused on peace advocacy. He is dedicated to eradicating radicalism that plagues both Islam and the West and highlighting the similarities between Islam, Christianity, and Judaism.

He also established various businesses including Glass Priangan Factory in Indonesia, and Alfa Contracting Co. in Jeddah. Dr. Shihab expressed his country's pride at being a guest of honor at the Janadriyah Festival.

TheRegion

The Middle East Roundup

Arab News Dubei

- Learn more about the Emirati
 culture through the Emirati
 Traditional Games Exhibition
 at the Al-Qattara Arts Centre in
 Al-Ain. The exhibition displays
 artworks inspired by games
 created by the previous Emirati
 generation like Al-Saggala,
 Al-Gaheef, Um Al-Eyal, Khoosa
 Boosa and Adim Al-Serra.
- The annual Beirut Chants
 wraps up today after 23 days
 of enchanting music and
 performances across the Lebanese
 capital from world-class artists and
 musicians. South Korean pianist
 Seong-Jin Cho will cap the festival
 tonight at the St. Maroun Church.
- Emerging Egyptian artist Mohamed Monaiseer showcases his unique dreamlike art through a solo show

titled "Taxidermy Dreams," at the Townhouse Gallery in Cairo. Taxidermy is a process of stuffing animal skins to portray a lifelike state.

Surreal film "The Workly Cave" by Chinese filmmaker Zhou Tao is still running at the Jameel Arts Centre in Dubai's Jaddaf Waterfront. The film was shot in various locations around the world, and explores themes like globalization.

Prayer Times in Saudi Arabia

Dec. 23	Fajr	Sunrise	Dhuhr	Asr	Maghreb	Isha
Makkah	5:34	6:54	12:20	3.24	5:45	7(15
Madinah	5:39	7:01	12:21	3:20	5:40	7:10
Riyadh	5:11	6:34	T1:53	2:51	5:11	6:41
Abha	5:18	6:37	12:09	3:18	5:41	7:11
Dammam	5:00	6:24	11:39	234	4:54	6.24



When two almost became one

The two Koreas took a huge step towards reconciliation, but a reunification is still far-fetched

#WHATCHANGED

Jeff Sung Secul

The Moon Jae-in administration's strenuous effort to engage North Korea laid the groundwork for inter-Korean rapprochement throughout the year despite lingering worries over Pyongyang's nuclear threat.

Three rounds of historic summit talks between President Moon and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un highlighted the unprecedented peace mood on the Korean Peninsula, which has been divided since the 1950 - 1953 Korean War, The war ended in a truce, not a permanent peace treaty.

The first Moon-Kim summit at the truce village of Panmunjom in the Demilitarized Zone on April 26 was in the global spotlight, as the face-to-face meeting was seen as a success following years of Pyongyang's nuclear provocations.

While holding hands, the two leaders stepped across the Military Demarcation Line, raising hopes of ending conflicts and bringing peace on the peninsula. Kim became the first North Korean leader to set foot in the South territory.

Speaking after the summit to the media, Moon and Kim issued the so-called Panmunjom Declaration to usher in a "new era of peace."

The two leaders agreed to cease all hostile acts and work toward establishing a peace regime in place of the current armistice treaty, which had been signed by

the US, China and North Korea at the end of the Korean War.

"We bade farewell to the frozen relationship between North and South Korea, which was a nightmare. And we announced the beginning of a warm spring to the world," Kim Jong-un said during a press conference.

The Panmunjom summit became the catalyst for the landmark June 18 summit in Singapore between the leaders of the US and North Korea.

At the one-day talks, US President Donald Trump and North Korea's Kim signed a document in which both committed to work toward the "complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula."

Trump announced that US-South Korean military drills would be suspended to help facilitate denuclearization talks with North Korea. In return, Kim pledged to destroy a missing engine testing site as a step toward removing its nuclear arms following the destruction of the Punggye-ri muclear site in May.

While the US and North Korea, however, were in a tug-or-war over detailed procedures for denuclearization after the Singapore summit, President Moon was further accelerating efforts to move forward the inter-Korean relationship.

Following a brief summit with Kim at the northern part of the truce village, about 200 separated families from South and North Korea reunited at the Mt. Geumgang resort in the North in August, the first such reunions since 2015.

Moon flew Pyongyang in September his third for get-together with Kim. During the three days of summit from Sept. 18 to 20 in the North Korean capital, both leaders agreed on a set of sweeping measures to ease

INNUMBERS

Kim Jong-un became the first North Korean leader to cross the military demarcation line: dividing the two Koreas as well as to hold a summit with an American president.

South and North Korean leaders held three round of summits this year to lay the groundwork for ending hostile acts and establishing peace on the Korean Peninsula.

Frontline guard posts were removed as part of agreements to defuse military tension.

military tension along the Demilitarized Zone and reboot crossborder business projects.

"The tension-reducing agreemeaningful practical steps toward declaring an end to the Korean War since the two militaries began disarming hot spots for conflicts and turning them into peaceful spots," Yang Moo-jin, a professor at the University of North

The two presidents planted a commemorative pine tree as an expression of wishes for peace during their first meeting in more than a decade.

Rorean Studies in Seoul, told Arab News. The militaries of both Koreas completed withdrawing troops and firearms from 20 frontline guard posts (GPs) — 10 from each side - in early November and subsequently destroyed the watchtowers, South Korea has 60 more such guard posts whereas North Korea is believed to have

160 more. Both militaries also finished removing firearms and troops from the Joint Security Area at Paramuniom, where South and North Korean armed troops used to stand face-to-face.

"This irreversible destruction of GPs is the most visible and symbolic effort to prevent accidental clashes between the two militaries and build mutual trust," Gen. Kim Yong-woo, chiefof-staff of the Republic of Korean Army, said during his visit to the GP destruction site near the border on Nov.12.

Preparations for reconnecting cross-border railways are under way, On Nov. 30, a South Kerean train with a sign reading "Seoul to Shimuiju" crossed into the North for a long-stalled joint inspection of railway sections there.

It was the first time in a decade that a South Korean train has traveled on rail tracks in the North. Both Koreas plan to hold a

groundbreaking ceremony for the railway reconnection project on Dec. 26 after completing the 18-day tion of the lines inspecon the west

> coast. In spite of tangible progress inter-Korean relations, however, the talks over North

denuclearization Korea's been in a prolonged stalemate due mainly to disagreements over the

terms of denuclearization. Washington is holding fast to its policy of exerting maximum economic pressure on North Korea though President Trump has claimed progress in denuclearizing the North. In the latest move to squeeze the North, the US Treasury Department blacklisted three top aides to Kim Jong-un over serious rights abuses and censorship.

North Korea experts here believe the timetable for the North's denuclearization should be amended inevitably because of the deadlock in the US-North Korea nuclear disarmament talks.



The agreements are practical steps toward declaring an end to the Korean War

"North Korea is believed to be ina dilemma over how to respond to the US sanctions and implement the denuclearization pledge agreed upon at the Singapore summit," said Hong Min, a researcher at the state-funded Korea Institute for National Unification.

"Attention is now on the new year's message of Kim Jong-un," Hong said, adding that the North Korean leader could issue a fresh message to break the nuclear deadlock.

On the contrary, should Kim send a negative message on the denuclearization process, the peace initiative led by President Moon could collapse, said Cho-Sung-ryul, a senior researcher at the Institute for National Security Strategy.

"We should brace for a negative

situation in which the North Korean leader sends a skeptical message on his nuclear pledge," Cho said. As skepticism about denuclearization North's effort grows among American lawmakers, Trump's "top-down" initiative of engaging the North could not work anymore, he said.

If and when the North Korean leader will make his return visit to Seoul is a matter of primary concern. When Moon met Kim in Pyongyang, the North Korean leader agreed to visit Seoul at an early date, but he has yet to accept Moon's invitation to visit by the end of December.

The South Korean government was preparing for Kim's December visit with a large artwork showing two leaders smiling and shaking hands being installed the presidential Blue House,

South Korean citizens have been divided over the North Korean dictator's visit to Seoul.

A group of young citizens called "welcome committee for a great man" leads a campaign to encourage Kim's visit with a slogan of "I am a fan of Kim Jong-un."

Other groups of conservative citizens are engaged in a counterattack campaign to "expel Kim Jong-un."

With only two weeks to, however, Blue House officials have acknowledged that Kim would not be able to come to Seoul within this year.

Said Yim Jae-cheon, an associate professor of North Korean studies at Korea University In Seoul, said: "If it happens, I expect Kim's Seoul visit would likely be made before the second summit of Trump and Kim. That's because the inter-Korean summit in Seoul could certainly serve as a stepping stone for the US-North Korean summit."

News Saudi Arabia



Heritage Artists perform at the Qassim pavilion at the Janadriyah Festival on Saturday. Visitors to the Janadriyah Festival can explore the great cultures and heritage of its small villages, with participants who have come from across the Kingdom to play a part in this national event. The festival captures the great history and heroism of the Saudi people since the unification of Saudi Arabia.

SPA

HUMANITARIAN AID

Saudi project removes 26,609 land mines in Yemen

KSRelief continues operations in Syria

Arab News Jeddah

The Saudi Project for Landmines Clearance in Yemen launched by the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSRelief), removed 64 anti-personnel mines, 1,430 anti-vehicle mines, 85 explosive devices and 955 unexploded ordnance during the second week of December.

The mines were planted by the Iranian-backed Houthi militia in Yemen. In the last week of November, members of the project managed to dismantle some 1,462 land mines to reach 6,677 mines planted by the Houthi militia in schools and residential areas throughout the month.

The militia has attempted to hide the land mines via several methods, which has led to the death or severe injury of children, women and elderly men.

Since the beginning of the project, 26,609 mines have been removed.

Food aid

KSRelief dispatched 6,300 cartons of dates to Marib governorate on Saturday and also distributed 1,836 cartons of dates and 700 food baskets among the needy people in Lahj governorate.

Medical relief

KSRelief has provided treatment for more than 21,000 injured Yemenis, both inside and outside Yemen. A total of 6,462 Yemenis received treatment in private sector hospitals in Yemen, while 1,000 received treatment in Yemeni medical centers specializing in eye injuries. In addition, 12,795 cases were transferred to Saudi Arabia, 534

to Jordan, 280 to Sudan and one to India.

The injured Yemenis expressed appreciation to KSRelief for its

KSRelief provides health services to all Yemeni people in coordination with the Yemeni Higher Relief Committee represented by the Yemeni Ministry of Health and Population, and local and international partners.

HIGHLIGHTS

efforts to treat them.

The mines were planted by the Iranian-backed Houthi militia in Yemen.

KSRelief dispatched 6,300 cartons of dates to Marib governorate.

The center also distributed 1,836 cartons of dates and 700 food baskets among the needy people in Lahj governorate.

More than 14,000 Syrians in the north of the war-torn country have benefited from KSRelief projects.

Child soldiers

KSRelief aims to help at least 2,000 former child soldiers, along with children who have lost a parent or were seriously injured by land mines, to reintegrate successfully

into their families, schools and communities.

Operations

Dr. Aqeel Al-Ghamdi, the assistant general supervisor of KSRelief, has highlighted Saudi Arabia's pioneering role in humanitarian and relief operations.

He was speaking at a meeting in New York of the Senior Donors Group to the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, during which a number of humanitarian crises and OCHA's field operations were reviewed.

KSRelief said more than 14,000 Syrians in the north of the war-torn country had benefited from projects to supply direct support, heating fuel and cooking gas during the first half of December. Through such projects, funded by the Kingdom, the center seeks to help Syrians recover from the war.

In Yemen, KSRelief distributed 37 tons of food to about 3,000 displaced people in the villages of Al-Jouf governorate on Thursday. The center distributed a further 102,170 food baskets to people in nine other Yemeni governorates. To date, Saudi Arabia has implemented 302 humanitarian projects to help the Yemeni people.

Dr. Abdullah Al-Rabeeah, the supervisor general of KSRelief, on Wednesday chaired a meeting during which a GCC Relief and Humanitarian Aid Coordination Office for Yemen was launched to make it easier for Gulf nations to coordinate relief projects in the country.

Road/02:30

Saudi logistics sector: Huge prospects in transport projects

BASIL M.K. AL-GHALAYINI

This week, I will try to explain the importance of transportation — a key pillar of the Saudi logistics sector — and its growth potential.

Means of transportation are vital for creating an attractive investment environment in every field. They facilitate the progress of the national economy by mobilizing passengers and goods and attract private investments in key transportation projects.

In a push to diversify its economy, Saudi Arabia is determined to increase the role of the private sector in the development of its transport infrastructure, as well as in the operation of seaports, railroads, airports and related supply channels.

Public-private partnerships are being pursued to fund several key schemes, while a number of the country's publicly operated facilities are being earmarked for full privatization. The plan is to attract investments in the transportation sector worth over SR70 billion by 2020.

Although Saudi Arabia has 26 airports of which three are international, six regional and 16 domestic, the local and international cargo contribution to the Saudi transportation pillar is still limited compared with seaports and land channels.

As for seaports, the country has the largest seaport network in the Middle East with 10 major ports and around 200 piers. There are three industrial and six commercial ports. All ports are managed, operated and maintained by private sector companies under long-

term contracts. The ports authority supervises the development of major seaports and modernizing major ports through a strategic investment plan worth SR30 billion (\$8 billion).

Rail transport in the country is vital for driving economic development as it provides a cost-effective and competitive mode of transportation, primarily for the mining industry.

A network is also being developed through significant investments. Between 2015 and 2024, the Saudi Arabia General Investment Authority (SAGIA) plans to invest more than \$141 billion on rail-related projects.

Road-based transport is also a major form of freight transportation. The government is planning to further expand the road network and improve safety under the National Transformation Plan 2020. The Saudi road logistics market is highly fragmented and competitive, with a number of major players participating, including Crescent Transportation, Almajdoule Transport, and Saudi Land Transport Co.

With several projects and initiatives already underway with strong private sector participation, I strongly believe that considerable investment opportunities await domestic and international players who are eager to participate in the development of Saudi Arabia's promising transportation sector.

Basil MR. Al-Ghalavini is the Chairman and CEO of BMG Financial Group.

The Days FIGURES

26

Children enrolled Elterate adults Students utilizing transportation (3-8 years) creer-Saudis) in Public schools

SPENDING ON EDUCATION

Source: NTP 2020

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Preparations

Minister discusses Hajj with officials from Mauritania

Saudi Arabia's Minister of Hajj and Umrah Dr. Mohammad Salih Bentin met Mauritania's Minister of Islamic Affairs and Traditional Education Ahmed Ould Ahl Dawood, They discussed issues related to Hajj.

On Thursday, the Saudi minister held talks with Egyptian Maj. Gen. Mohammad Amr Ali Lutfi, assistant minister of interior for administrative affairs and his delegation in Makkah on Thursday.

They discussed cooperation in the field of Hajj and Umrah. Last week, Bentin separately received Sudanese, Algerian and Palestinian delegations. Meanwhile, Dr. Abdulfattah bin Suleiman Mashat, deputy minister of Hajj and Umrah, held discussions with Sheikh Maksatbek Toktomushev, the mufti of Kyrgyzstan.

The Ministry of Hajj and Umrah organized a workshop under the theme "The comprehensive scheme for pilgrims' movement within the Hajj system, milestones and visualization."

The undersecretary of the Hajj Ministry for Hajj Affairs, Dr. Hussein Al-Sharif, said the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah and its partners in the Hajj system are constantly endeavoring to improve pilgrims' experience. AN Jeddah

Unity

King's guests offer Friday prayers in Makkah

The I3th batch comprising
203 Umrah performers of the
Guests of the Custodian of the
Two Holy Mosques Program for
Umrah offered Friday prayers at
the Grand Mosque in Makkah.

The guests thanked King
Salman and Crown Prince
Mohammed bin Salman for the
generous hospitality, services
and facilities provided for them
since they left their countries.

They are from eight African countries: Ethiopia, Senegal, Comoros, Djibouti, Mali, South Africa, Nigeria and Uganda.

With the arrival of the 13th batch of guests, the total number has reached 2,803 from various countries since the start of the program.

Serving the Two Holy Mosques is a great honor for the Saudi leadership and people, and the Kingdom harnessed all its potential and capabilities to serve pilgrims so they could perform their rituals in ease and comfort.

The pilgrims lauded the program and described it as an important source of communication between Muslims from across the world.

They said such endeavors help forge unity among Muslims. AN Jeddah

Cooperation

KSA, France to boost cooperation at all levels

The Saudi-French Parliamentary Friendship Committee chaired by Dr. Fahd bin Hamoud Al-Enezi held talks with a delegation of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the French National Assembly headed by Claude Guess Gen.

The two sides reviewed ways to enhance cooperation between the Saudi Shoura Council and the French National Assembly. They also discussed issues of common interests and the regional and global political and economic situation.

Saudi Arabia and France enjoy cordial ties. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's recent visit to France was the cornerstone of investments amounting to \$18 billion. The bilateral trade exceeds \$9.22 billion.

France ranks third among countries investing in Saudi Arabia, and has 80 companies operating in the Kingdom.

Saudi investments in France amount to about \$900 million, mostly in the real estate sector, according to French statistics. The Saudi-French CEO Forum in Paris in April resulted in the signing of 20 memoranda of understanding amounting to \$18 billion. AN Jeddah



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Some pieces of pottery dating back to the pre-Islamic period were found by chance during house construction in Al-Ahsa a few years ago.

SENTIMENTAL NIGHT

Art or music? Jeddah duo finds freedom in both

Statues of Sinking Men celebrate release of debut album with rooftop launch party

Hala Tashkandi Jeddah

Jeddah-based music duo Statues of Sinking Men are known for their stirring live performances — an irony since the band make every effort to stay out of the spotlight.

"The idea is for the audience to notice us as little as possible," said Abdullah Babrouk, who produces art and visuals to accompany Abdulmalik Zubailah's beats and vocals. "The focus is meant to be on the music."

Sinking Men Statues celebrated the release of their debut album on Friday night with a rooftop launch party. The selftitled album is the first offering from the band since their formation in 2017, and has been in development since October that year.

Zubailah's music is only part of the duo's show, with Babrouk's mesmerizing visuals the main focal point.

more than a

synthesizer and a microphone, Zuboilah manages to create music that is both complex and catchy, with soulful lyrics that express a variety of emotions.

"Statues of Sinking Men is an outlet for me to express everything I could never say with words alone," said Zubailah, "The good, the bad and everything in between, with full freedom."

Babrouk uses computer program to create visual effects live and in time with the music — a demanding process that requires concentration. intense combined effect of music and art is ethereal, as much live art performance as musical performance.

Winter breeze

The launch party was hosted by Mnassa and held on the roof of their office in Al-Zahraa, Admission was free, and a sizeable crowd showed up to support the musicians on a cool December night, accompanied by a full moon and a winter breeze.

Up-and-coming musician



Abdulmalik Zubailah. Photo/Supplied

Ghada opened the show with her haunting, powerful vocals.

Later, she told Arab News that she was delighted to have been asked to perform at the event. "I

never thought that I would actually be doing this. I'm still processing everything that's happening. But I'm glad it is happening."



Statues of Sinking Men is an outlet for me to express everything I could never say with words alone. The good, the bad and everything in between, with full freedom.

Abdulmalik Zubailah Musician

performed their latest album, with visual accompaniments projected on to a wall behind the stage.

Zubailah stepped on stage in a custom-made sea captain's jacket, styling himself "The Deceased Captain Bartholomew Bellik." With Babrouk as his scafaring companion "Xabris Black," the performers told the story of a failed sea voyage, an untimely death and, ultimately, a rebirth.

"I was on the sea with them when I listened to the music," one concertgoer said after the show.

"I heard the waves in it. I felt the salt spray. It was bizarre, but it was interesting. I loved it. I can't wait to attend another performance."

The band also had a few surprises for the crowd. While performing "Criminal," audience members were invited to "be criminals with them" as Babrouk handed over a PlayStation controller, which audience members could use to deliver the PlayStation classic "Hotline Miami" in accompaniment to the song.

Babrouk and Zubailah said they were exhausted, but immensely happy at the success of the event.

"I never thought this would be happening here in my hometown," said Zubailah. "It's so liberating."

Asked if he had anything else to add, Zubailah replied with a grin: "Come to one of our shows and embrace the sentimental night."

Statues of Sinking Men can be found on Twitter and Instagram, and their music is available on major music streaming and purchasing providers.

The Al-Ahsa

Archaeological

Al-Hofuf contains

archaeological

pieces, SPA

and Heritage

Museum in

valuable

RICH HERITAGE

Al-Ahsa museum provides a detailed history of Eastern Province

Arab News Jeddah

The Al-Ahsa Archaeological and Heritage Museum in Al-Hofuf, which opened in 1983, contains valuable archaeological pieces and other treasures from Al-Ahsa's long and storied history. Each room is dedicated to different eras from the Stone Age, through the Dilmun period to the Babylonian and Assyrian eras — and the civilizations that emerged during those periods.

As well as displaying historical items, the museum is also responsible for their restoration, if necessary, and hosts regular lectures.

The museum houses more than 1,400 antiquities, as well as photographs, coins, manuscripts and other documents.

The first room visitors enter is home to Stone Age items dating back to 5000 BCE. You can see a history of the geology of the area beginning millions of years ago, and learn of the commercial and agricultural importance of the area and of the wider Arabian Gulf.

The room also displays tools and valuables from Ain Qannas and Al-Dosriyah that show the influence the area had on neighboring civilizations during the three periods of the Stone Age — Paleolithic, Mesolithic, and Neolithic.

Flora and fauna

The museum's courtyards showcase early life in the Kingdom's Eastern Province, including the flora and fauna of the desert around Al-Ahsa. There are prototypes here of some ancient boats and tools used by pearl divers and fishermen in the Gulf.

The area dedicated to the Dilmun civilization (which began in the 3rd milleanium BCE and continued until around 500 BCE) provides a history of the emergence of camelherders in the Gulf (around 1700) BCE) and of cities in the eastern part of the Arabian Peninsula.

The museum also features maps of trade routes (both land and sea) in the Arabian Peninsula and its surroundings, in addition to examples of the languages prevalent in the eastern part of the peninsula before Islam, along with an overview of writing and



calligraphy in Islamic heritage. Visitors will also learn how Arab. tribes were united in the Sasanian Empire, which was kingdom before the rise of Islam and was a major power for more than 400 years.

Khalid bin Ahmed Al-Farida, director of the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage (SCTH) in Al-Ahsa, said the museum's oldest exhibits are tools from the Neolithic period that were discovered in Al-Ahsa, Yabrin and Ain Qannas. The style of these tools, he explained, suggest that flora and fauna were abundant in the region at that time.

HIGHLIGHTS

The museum houses more than 1,400 antiquities, as well as photographs, coins, manuscripts and other documents.

The museum's courtyards. showcase early life in the Kingdom's Eastern Province, including the flora and fauna of the desert around Al-Ahsa.

There are prototypes here of some ancient boats and tools used by pearl divers and fishermen in the Gulf.

The museum was established, Al-Farida told the Saudi Press Agency, in order to protect heritage sites and facilitate their exploration, to store, document and maintain pieces of historical and archaeological importance, and to help introduce local history and heritage to the people of Saudi Arabia.

He highlighted that the museum includes a room divided into three areas, which features a map of archaeological sites in the Eastern Province, a painting of Al-Ahsa museum, and another painting of the development of modernday Saudi Arabia. Photos of King Abdul Aziz inaugurating various projects in the Eastern Province. are also on display, along with old photos of Al-Ahsa from the 1930s.

and 1940s. Much of the museum, he noted. focuses on the rise of Islam and the establishment of caliphates in the eastern part of the Arabian Peninsula, including the construction of the oldest mosques in Hagar. Al-Ahsa and Uqair by the Banu Abdul Qays tribes.

Other rooms, he said, highlight the reigns of local rulers of Al-Ahsa. including the Uyunids, Jabrids and Usfurids, up to the era of King Abdul-Aziz. There are tools and materials that shed light on the lives of

Bedouins, rural and urban communities, and the cities and markets of Al-Ahsa.

There are even some pieces of pottery found by chance by a man who was having a house built in the eastern part of Al-Ahsa a few years ago, Al-Farida said.

These turned out to date back to the pre-Islamic period and are the oldest pieces of pottery to have been unearthed in the Kingdom.

Prince Sultan bin Salman, president of the SCTH, and Prince Badr bin Mohammed bin Jalawi, governor of Al-Ahsa province, have both examined these pottery pieces in person, Al-Farida said.

Mike Pompeo US Secretary of State



ANTI-DAESH COMMITMENT

US still committed to fighting Daesh in Iraq and other areas, says Pompeo

The US secretary of state calls Iraqi PM to explain the details of the upcoming withdrawal from Syria



A fighter from the Kurdish women's protection units (YPJ) attends the funeral of an Arab fighter in the town of Tal Tamr, Syria on Friday. AFP

Reuters, AFP Cairo, Tehran

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo assured Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi that the US is still committed to fighting Daesh in Iraq and other areas despite its planned troop withdrawal from Syria, Abdul Mahdi's office said on Saturday.

President Donald Trump has begun what will be a total withdrawal of US troops from Syria, declaring on Wednesday they had succeeded in their mission to defeat Daesh and were no longer needed.

The plan has drawn criticism from allies such as Britain and France who say the militants are not fully beaten.

"Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi received a phone call from US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo who explained the details of the upcoming withdrawal from Syria and affirmed the US is still committed to fighting Daesh and terrorism in Iraq and other areas," Abdul Mahdi's office said in a statement.

Abdul Mahdi and Pompeo also discussed Washington's decision to extend for 90 days a waiver granted to Iraq from sanctions against Iran that would allow Baghdad to keep importing Iranian gas that is critical for Iraqi power production.

The Trump administration reimposed sanctions on Iran's energy exports in November, citing its nuclear program and meddling in the Middle East, but has granted waivers to several buyers to meet consumer energy needs.

Washington gave Iraq a 45-day waiver for imports of gas from

FASTFACTS

The withdrawal plan has drawn criticism from allies such as Britain and France who say the militants are not fully beaten.

Mahdi and Pompeo also discussed US decision to extend for 90 days a waiver granted to Iraq from sanctions against Iran that would allow Baghdad to keep importing Iranian gas that is critical for Iraqi power production.

Iran when it reimposed sanctions on Iran's oil sector on Nov. 5. Iraqi officials have said they need around two years to find an alternative source.

Iraq relies heavily on Iranian gas to feed its power stations, importing roughly 1.5 billion standard cubic feet per day via pipelines in the south and east,

Iran reaction

Iran's Foreign Ministry said on Saturday that the US military presence in Syria had been "illogical and a source of tension," Iranian state news agency IRNA reported.

"From the start, the entry and presence of American forces in the region has been a mistake, illogical and a source of tension, and a main cause of instability," Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qasemi was quoted by IRNA as saying.

In its first official reaction to Trump's decision to withdraw troops, it said that the US presence in Syria had been "wrong and illogical" from the start.

"The presence of American forces was from the very start, in principle, a wrong and illogical move and a primary cause of instability and insecurity in the

region," said Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Ghasemi on his Telegram channel.

Trump vowed Thursday that the US would no longer be the "policeman of the Middle East" as he ordered troops back from Syria.

Iran has been a key supporter of the Syrian government. Iran's Revolutionary Guards have a contingent of commanders and advisers deployed in Syria in support of Bashar Assad, and have ferried weapons and thousands of militia fighters to the front-lines from various countries.

The US currently has around 2,000 forces deployed in Syria in two areas along the Iraqi border that was partly aimed at keeping Iranian forces in check.

A senior Kurdish politician on Friday called on France to play a larger role in Syria following the US withdrawal.

300,000 Syrians return home after military operations

Reuters Istaribul

Nearly 300,000 Syrians have returned to their country after Turkey's two cross-border operations in northern Syria, Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu was quoted as saying on Saturday.

Turkey has carried out two operations, dubbed "Euphrates Shield" and "Olive Branch," against Kurdish YPG militia and Daesh in northern Syria. Ankara regards the US-backed YPG as a terrorist organization.

Turkey hosts more than 3.5 million Syrian refugees who have fied the conflict in their homeland. Some Turks view them as an economic burden and a threat to jobs.

"The number of Syrians that returned to their country after the Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch operations is 291,790," Soylu was

NUMBER

3.5m Syrian refugees who have fled

the conflict in their homeland have taken refuge in Turkey.

quoted by state-owned Anadolu news agency as saying.

The Turkish military pushed into Syria northwest in two offensives, carving out a de facto buffer zone.

The first, "Euphrates Shield" in 2016, drove Daesh from territory along the border. The second, "Olive Branch," wrestled the nearby Afrin region from the hands of Syrian Kurdish forces this spring.

Soylu also said that more than 250,000 illegal migrants had been caught in Turkey in 2018, without specifying their nationalities, adding that this showed a jump of more than 50 percent from the previous year.

DISPUTE OVER MINISTERIAL CANDIDATE

Formation of new Lebanese government delayed

Najia Houseari Bairut

The six Sunni deputies allied with Hezbollah have opposed the candidate Jawad Adra, whom they had agreed earlier as their representative in the next Lebanese government, which has hampered the formation of the government.

According to the initiative put forward by President Michel Aoun, Adra would have entered the government as a member of the president's bloc after the prime minister-designate, Saad Hariri, refused to have the minister in his bloc. Adra did not attend the meeting called on Friday by the six deputies to inform him of the need to abide by their position, which is that although he would be part of the president's bloc, be would represent the position of the six deputies rather than that of the President in the government.

The Lebanese media reported that the six deputies were "deceived," while the pro-Hezbollah media accused

Gebran Bassil, minister of foreign affairs, of "trying to have Adra join the Strong Lebanon bloc, which may set back the formation of a government."

"President Aoun's candidate has to be committed to the president," said Yacoub Sarraf, defense minister in the caretaker government and a loyal supporter of the president.

The pro-Hezbollah "Al-Akhbar" daily reported that: "The choice of the name of Adra, among the many names put forward by the six deputies, came out of Hezbollah's and the Amal movement's wish to satisfy Aoun, who made the offer of a ministerial seat, by proposing someone with a good relationship with him (the president) and Bassi, instead of choosing a member of the March 8 Alliance."

It is worth noting that Adra was proposed by one of the six deputies, Qasim Hashim, who is a member of the parliamentary bloc of Speaker Nabih Berri.

Parliamentary sources told Arab



Hundreds of Lebanese take to street calling for an end to a stalemate over forming a government seven months after elections, on Dec. 16. AP

News that the main problem is "the question of who gets the 'blocking third' in the government, that is, who is the decision-maker. It is a secret conflict between Hezbollah and the Free Patriotic Movement, who are supposed to be political allies according to a previous agreement."

President Aoun, Minister Gebran
Bassil and General Director of
Public Security Major General
Abbas Ibrahim met on Sunday in
the presidential palace.

Major General Bashim was

Major General Ibrahim was commissioned by Aoun a few days ago to publicize his initiative to resolve the Sunni problem inside the government.

Ibrahim was able to convince the six deputies to name an external figure to represent them in the government because of Prime Minister Hariri's refusal to accept one of them.

Speaker Nabih Berri also met Prime Minister Hariri in private.

At the end of these meetings, Maj. Gen. Ibrahim said he had completed his mission "and the ball is now in the court of political forces."

The name of Ali Hamad has emerged as a substitute for Adra. Hamad is the director of presidential affairs in the Lebanese Parliament, and his name had been proposed by MP Qasim Hashim as an alternative to Adra to represent the six deputies.

The parliamentary sources pointed to a second problem that may face the process of forming the government. This "concerns the distribution of ministerial portfolios and the desire of certain parties to replace some portfolios with others, The problem revolves around the of the Media, Environment, Culture, Industry, Agriculture and Works ministries."

Walid Jumblatt, leader of the Progressive Socialist Party, tweeted that "It seems that the national unity government is no longer recognized locally. After consultation, there seems to be a need for further consultation."

News Middle East

EXECUTION

Iran executes trader for economic crimes

The new Islamic revolutionary courts, whose rulings cannot be appealed, were set up in August

AFP, Reuters Tehnan, Dubai.

Iran executed a trader known as the "Sultan of Bitumen" on Saturday over charges of fraud and large-scale smuggling of the oil product, the judiciary's news agency Mizan online reported.

He was sentenced to death by a fast-track court set up to fight economic crimes, state television reported, following an outcry against profiteering and corruption that has seen dozens of people jailed.

Bagheri Dermani, Hamidreza 49, is the third businessman to be

executed since an anti-corruption drive was launched over the summer.

He was convicted of "corruption on earth" — a broad charge used for the most high-profile and serious cases - after swindling over 10 trillion rials (around \$100) million at the current rate) through "fraud, forgery and bribery," Mizan reported.

The new Islamic revolutionary courts — whose rulings cannot be appealed, except in the case of death sentences - were set up in August after Ali Khamenei

to confront an "economic war" by foreign enemies after the US reimposed sanctions.

Dermani, who was arrested in August 2014, reportedly forged dozens of documents of fake real estate to acquire bank loans.

He then used front companies to procure more than 300,000 tons of bitumen — an oil-based substance used in asphalt and other products and one of Iran's most profitable businesses — Mizan said.

Dermani was also accused of ties to business magnate Babak Morteza Zanjani, who is awaiting

SPEEDREAD

Known as the 'Sultan of Bitumen, Hamidreza Bagheri Dermani, 49, is the third businessman to be executed on Saturday over charges of fraud and large-scale smuggling of the oil product.

embezzling \$2.7 of in 2016 billion while helping the government circumvent international sanctions.

The judiciary said Dermani's called for "swift and just" action—execution after being convicted loans were facilitated by former—pay Dermani's bail last year.

central bank governor Mahmoud Reza Khavari, who was convicted in absentia last year after fleeing to Canada in the wake of yet another major embezzlement scandal.

of Dermani's execution was presented in dramatic fashion on state television, with an action-movie soundtrack and full documentary about his crimes.

The footage showed documents claiming Iranian journalist and women's rights activist Hengameh Shahidi, sentenced earlier this month to 12 years in prison on unspecified charges, had tried to

Iran has seen a sharp economic downturn this year, fueled in part by US President Donald Trump's decision in May to withdraw from a landmark 2015 nuclear deal and crippling unilateral reimpose sanctions.

The authorities have been keen to show they are cracking down on "economic disruptors" accused of exploiting shortages and fluctuations in gold and currency prices.

Dozens have been tried and in November a trader dubbed the "Sultan of Coins" and his accomplice were executed for exploiting a surge in gold demand.

AT IT AGAIN

16 killed in Somalia blastsnear presidential palace

AP, Reuters, AFP Mogadishu

At least 16 people were killed and 20 wounded in a car bomb attack claimed by Al-Shabab close to the president's residence in the Somali capital Mogadishu, police said on Saturday.

Police had earlier said the first carbomb at the checkpoint killed 13, mostly soldiers and that the death toll was likely to rise.

"The security forces have cordoned off the area and an investigation is ongoing," local police spokesman Ibrahim Mohamed said.

Among those killed were a journalist, two security personnel and a driver working for local station Universal TV, whose car was passing the checkpoint at which the first blast went off, another reporter

working for the station said. Somalia's London-based Universal.

TV said three of its staff were among the fatalities, naming one as Somali and British dual national Awil Dahir.

The first explosion happened at a checkpoint outside the national theater, some 500 meters from the palace. The second blast, more powerful according to witnesses, came minutes later at a nearby crossroads. "The second blast was very big," Idil Hassan, who witnessed it, told AFP.

"I saw the dead bodies of several people, including members of the security forces."

"My colleague Awil Dahir Salad died in the blast together with the driver and two security guards. They were killed by the first blast as they drove. May Allah rest their souls," journalist Abdiasis Ibrahim who also works for Universal TV. told Reuters. Another witness, Osman Fahiye, said a leading official from Banadir, a region which surrounds Mogadishu, was hurt in



A man walks near destroyed buildings after a bomb blast in the capital city of Mogadishu, Somalia, on Saturday. AP

the second blast.

"He was lightly wounded but several of his security guards were killed in the blast," said Fahiye.

Al-Shabab, in comments broadcast on its Radio Andalus, claimed responsibility for both blasts and said the second was also a car bomb.

The group's "martyrdom operation" had targeted "a security checkpoint that used to protect the presidential palace," an Al-Shabab statement said. Ahmed Abdi, another police officer, said the car-

FASTFACTS

Al-Shabab claims responsibility for the deadly attack.

Somalia's London-based Universal TV said three of its staff were among the fatalities. bomb exploded at a checkpoint some 400 meters from the president's residence.

Al-Shabab carries out frequent attacks in Mogadishu. Its members want to dislodge the government

and impose its rule. The group was forced from Mogadishu in 2011 and has lost many of its strongholds but maintains a footbold in some regions. It has killed thousands of Somalis and hundreds of civilians across East

Africa in a decade-long insurgency.

But it retains control of large rural swathes of the country and continues to wage a guerrilla war against the authorities. The group has vowed to topple the internationally backed government.

The worst carrage to date in Somalia occurred on Oct. 14 last year when 512 people were killed in Hodan, a busy commercial district in the capital.

Nobody claimed responsibility but the authorities believe Al-Shabab were behind it.

FUNERAL

Thousands of Palestinians attend burials of four killed in Israeli firing in Gaza

AP Gaza City

Thousands of Palestinians have attended the burials of four people killed by Israeli fire during protests along the Gaza-Israel frontier. Funerals were held across the

Gaza Strip on Saturday, a day after the four were shot, including 16-year-old Mohammed Jahjouh.

An 18-year-old Palestinian shot by Israeli forces died of his wounds on Saturday, the fourth fatality in clashes along the Gaza border a day earlier, health officials in the Hamas run enclave said.

Ayman Shehr was shot in the stomach in Deir Al-Balah in central Gaza, Health Ministry spokesman.

Ashraf Al-Qudra told AFP. Palestinians, other Three including a 16-year-old, were killed on Friday by Israeli fire during protests and clashes along the Gaza border, according to the ministry.



Relatives of a teenage Palestinian, who was killed by Israeli troops, mourn at the family home during his funeral in Gaza City, on Saturday. AP

Israel's military said it had opened fire "according to operational procedures" in place.

More than 40 Palestinians including two journalists and

four first aid responders - were wounded, Qudra said.

At least 239 Palestinians have been killed since the protests by Palestinians in the Gaza Strip

began on March 30, mostly by Israeli fire during border clashes but also by air and tank strikes.

Two Israeli soldiers have been killed over the same period, one by a Palestinian sniper and another during an aborted special forces operation inside Gaza.

Protesters are calling for Palestimian refugees to be allowed to return to their former homes now inside Israel. Friday's protests were the deadliest in a month and a half of relatively restrained protests that saw one fatality.

Hamas has staged the rallies to pressure Israel and Egypt into easing the blockade they imposed when the militant group seized Gaza in 2007.

Hamas leader Ismail Top -Haniyeh told mourners that his movement complained to mediators over deaths and vowed to keep up the protests.

DANGER ZONE

Israeli military still silent over journalist shooting

AP Jerusalem

One month after the shooting of an Associated Press cameraman in the Gaza Strip, the Israeli military still has not commented on the incident or provided any updates about the status of an investigation.

Rashed Rashid was covering a protest near Gaza's northern border with Israel on Nov. 19 when he was shot in the left ankle, apparently by Israeli fire.

Rashid was wearing protective gear that clearly identified himself as a journalist and standing with a crowd of other journalists some 600. meters away from the Israeli border when he was hit.

Rashid, 47, was allowed to enter Israel for medical treatment. He has been hospitalized at Hadassah Medical Center in Jerusalem to repair multiple fractures and a

gaping hole in his left leg. Doctors say the injuries are not life threatening.

AP urged the army to conduct a thorough investigation. The army says it typically inves-

tigates such incidents and it has

At the time of the shooting, the

implied that it is looking into Rashid's shooting. But it has not responded to repeated requests for comment or

updates about the investigation. It also has not attempted to interview Rashid or other AP staffers who witnessed the incident, or asked to view AP footage of the shooting.

"The Associated Press urges the Israeli military to conduct a prompt and thorough investigation into the shooting of its cameraman, Rashed Rashid, who was shot while doing his job," said Lauren Easton, the AP's director of media relations.

US singer Demi Lovato says she feels 'lucky to be alive.' She was taken to hospital in July for an apparent drug overdose and has been treated.



News International

Bangladesh electioneering in full swing; vote on Dec. 30



Supporters of the ruling Bangladesh Awami League join in a campaign ahead of the 11th general election in Dhaka. Factors

Shehab Sumon Dhaka

Electioneering in Bangladesh is in full swing as two major contenders in the running announced their election manifestos earlier this week.

The ruling Assami League (AL) declared its 21-point manifesto, which emphasizes economic growth, while its largest opponent, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), has promised to implement sweeping reforms to strengthen democracy and the rule of law and make Parliament and the judiciary more effective.

Bangladesh's parliamentary elections are slated for Dec. 30.

AL's piedges include a 10 percent gross domestic product (GDP) increase over the next five years and a more than 12 percent reduction in the powerty rate, which currently affects more than one-fifth of the country's population.

AL also promises to eradicate poverty by 2041 and create around

13 million jobs within five years. It e-Islami candidates to run in elecalso piedges equal wages for menand women and subsidies for farm-

On the other hand, BNP's promises include an II percent increase in the GDP within a specific timeframe, a corruption investigation into the country's pending megaprojects, and 10 million jobs within five years.

The BNP also pledges farming subsidies and increasing the minimum wage for the country's 4 million workers in the garments indus-

The AL-led Moha Jot will compete against the BNP-led Jatio Oikya Front (JOF) in the upcoming elections, while the opposition Jatio Party (JP) is considered the country's third most prominent political group in the country.

However, the Jamaat-e-Islami conservative movement is garnering an increasing supporter base despite its eradication as a political. party by Bangladesh's high court. Consequently, the BNP has had to nominate 22 of the former Jamaattions to ensure a supporter base of its own.

There was much uncertainty about comprehensive parliamentary elections since the BNP had demanded the dissolution of Parliament ahead of elections.

The incarceration of the party's head over graft charges also proved

HIGHLIGHT

BNP's promises include an II percent increase in the GDP within a specific timeframe, a corruption investigation into the country's pending megaprojects, and 10m jobs within 5 years.

a big blow to the opposition group. Khaleda Zia had filed nomination papers to compete in the election from prison, but lost all three appeals. The formation of the JOF proved a major breakthrough in the country's election politics, while the AL has spared around 30 seats for the JP. Since the nine-year rule of Gen.

Hussain Mohammad Ershad's government came to an end in 1991, the BNP and AL have each led the country thrice.

This year, AL is seeking power for the third consecutive term since its landslide victory in 2008 (despite the BNP boycotting the election in 2014 over allegations of voter franch.

A total of 18 candidates, including If from the BNP, have been disqualified from contesting the polls on grounds of ethics violations.

Among the 300 constituencies, there are at least 10 in which heavyweight candidates from major alliances are vying against each other.

The AL's second-in-command and the country's de facto communications minister, Obaidul Kader, is competing from his hometown of Noakhali, while Mirza Fakhrul Islam, the BNP's second-in-command and its secretary-general, is competing from his hometown of Thakur-

In Dhaka, three heavyweight candidates are competing against. each other.

THE BEST OF THE REST

Shocking accident

23 dead in Nepalstudent bus crash

Twenty-three people died in western Nepal when a bus carrying school students and teachers back from a botanical field trip plunged into a gorge, police said.

The students were aged mostly between 16 and 20. Two teachers: and the driver also died in the accident early evening on Friday in a remote area. The vehicle was carrying 37 people, with 22 killed at the scene and another in a nearby hospital. Fourteen people were treated for injuries.

"Our preliminary investigation shows the cause of the incident was speed," police officer Bel Bahadur Pandey said, Last week, a truck accident in central Nepal killed 20 mourners returning from a funeral ritual. AFP

Drone misadventure

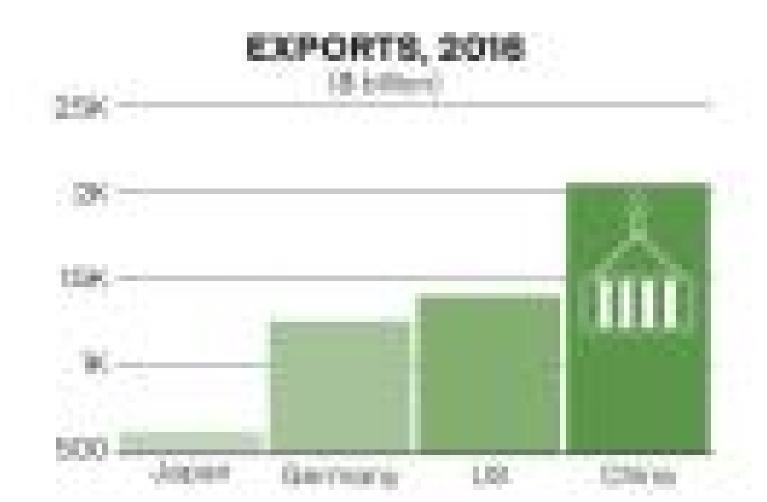
Man and woman held over Gatwick drone disruption

Police have arrested a man and a woman after rogue drone operators crippled London's Gatwick Airport for three days by repeatedly flying onto the airfield, sparking a major security response.

Britain's second-largest airport was back in operation on Saturday after it was forced to close its runway in the run-up to Christmas when drones flew near the site south of London in the most disruptive incursion from unmanned aerial vehicles at any major airport.

Police said they had made two arrests late on Friday, a 47-yearold man and a 54-year-old woman who were from the local area, AFP

The Days FIGURES



What We Are Reading Today

FROM AROUND THE WEB & IN PRINT

Creatures of Cain

ERIKA LORRAINE MILAM

realitions of

After World War II, the question of how to define a universal human nature took on new urgency. Creatures of Cain charts the rise and precipitous fall in Cold War America of a theory that attributed man's evolutionary success to his unique capacity for murder, according to a review on the Princeton University Press website.

Drawing on a wealth of archival materials and indepth interviews. Erika Lorraine Milam reveals how the scientists who advanced this "killer ape" theory capitalized on an

expanding postwar market in intellectual paperbacks and widespread faith in the power of science to solve humanity's problems, even to answer the most fundamental questions of human identity.

The killer ape theory spread quickly from colloquial science publications to late-night television, classrooms, political

debates, and Hollywood films. Behind the scenes, however, solentists were sharply divided, their disagreements centering squarely: on questions of race and gender.

VACANCIES FOR MUSCAT

Large Business Group with interest in structural steel fabrication & Erection for industrial, Oil8. Gas and PEB commercial and residential projects require the following personnel to meet expansion needs:-

FINANCE MANAGER

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US govt partially shut down in fight over Trump's wall

DEADLOCK

Reuters Washington.

The US government was partially shut down on Saturday in a fierce dispute over President Donald Trump's demands that Congress assign \$5 billion for a wall along the border with Mexico.

After failing to strike a budget on Friday, congressional leaders and the White House pledged to keep talking through the weekend in search of a deal to end the shutdown ahead of the Christmas holiday.

The impasse came after Trump threw a wrench into the works earlier in the week by refusing to agree to a short-term funding deal cut by Democratic and

Republican senators because it did not include the funds for his border wall.

The US House of Representatives, where Republicans have majority until Democrats take over on Jan. 3, then passed a bill that included the \$5 billion, but it ran aground in the Senate and the shutdown began at midnight on Friday.

After it became clear the House bill lacked the votes to pass, Senate leaders huddled with Vice President Mike Pence and other White House officials to try to figure out a path forward. They failed and lawmakers in

both houses of Congress were sent.

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A Saudi freelance (PhD, LLM), who is recently retired, seeks to utilize his law skills gained through long extensive experiences in the areas of government construction disputes, as well as commercial disputes by studying & writing legal cases. Those who may benefit the most from his expertise are: international & local

companies, and businesspersons in Riyadh and elsewhere. He can be contacted at +966553345586 Best regards.

Unending conflict

Indian troops kill six militants in Kashmir

Soldiers on Saturday killed six militants from a group believed. to be an affiliate of Al-Qaeda in Inclian-administered Kashmir during a brief firefight, sparking clashes between protesters and police. All six rebels belonged to Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind, a small Kashmiri rebel group whose now only surviving member is its chief Zakir Musa, top police officer

Soldiers zeroed in on a militant hideout in an orchard during searches in southern Traland fired warning shots, triggering a brief firefight that left. the six militants dead, inspector general of police Swayam Prakash Pani said. Eyewitnesses said hundreds of locals came out on the streets and clashed with police, who had to fire tear gas to disperse them, after the encounter with the rebels. AFP

Munir Ahmad Khan told AFP.

Chaos continues

France's 'yellow vests' block borders

Three days from Christmas, French "yellow yests" turned out in small numbers for a sixth Saturday of protests in cities and border points as a fatal road accident brought the death toll to 10 since the movement began last month.

Near the border between France and Spain hundreds of protesters disrupted traffic as they gathered around an autoroute toll booth. Police fired tear gas to disperse the "yellow yests" who retreated to a bridge, throwing objects on the road, an AFP photographer at the scene said.

"The autoroute is now being cleaned to allow traffic to resume normally," local authorities said.

France borders the Catalan region of Spain, and the French protesters were joined by Catalan pro-independence activists, also wearing yellow vests. AFP



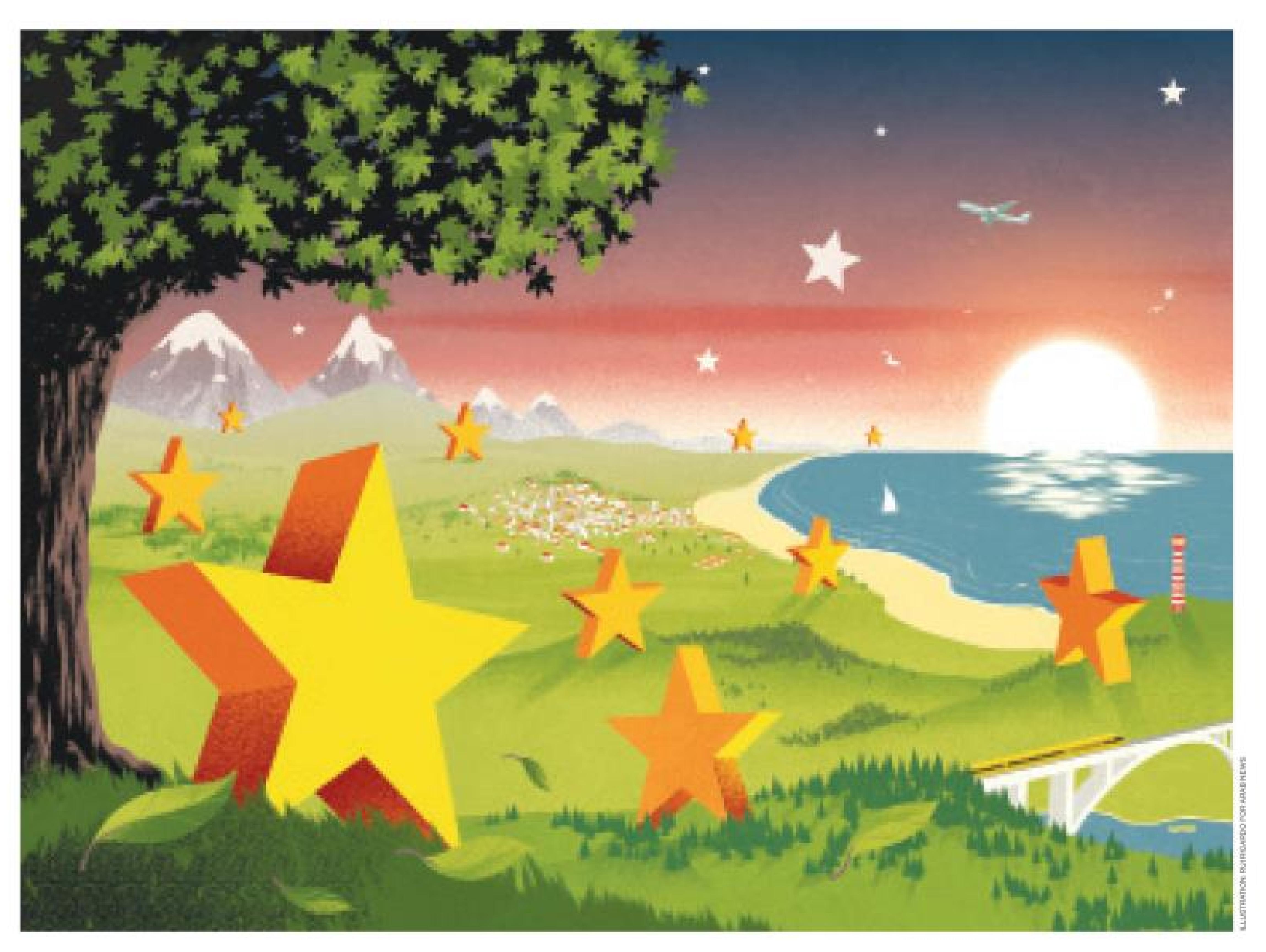
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YOUR DAILY ARABIC PROVERB

Sad is he who does not know how to speak, and sadder is he who does not know how to remain silent. Ibrahim Al-Kouni

(A. L.Bayser weither)





The world needs Europe

s we usher in a new year, the future direction of the EU has never been more important, both for Europe and for the rest of the world. In these increasingly tumultuous times, the EU can provide the stability and hope that the world so desperately needs. For decades, Europe has been the poster child for

integration and cooperation in a fractured world. Since the end of the Second World War, the continent has been living proof that multilateralism works. Europe's troubled past has given way to a peace spanning seven. decades, and to a union of 500 million citizens living in freedom and prosperity. By any metric, Europe is now the most tolerant, free, and equal place to live anywhere in the world.

But the EU is not a given. Peace is not inevitable, and war is not implausible. The year 2018 marked the centenary of the end of the First World War, the lessons of which must still be heeded. The Europeans of 1913 thought that war was impossible, that they were too interlinked to turn on one another. We Europeans have a rich tradition of ignoring premonitions of ruin at our own peril.

Given this history, today's re-emergence of a dangerous brand of nationalism should be sounding alarm bells across our continent. I believe we owe it to generations past, present and future to fight unchecked nationalism with all our might.

That means getting our own house in order, particularly on the economic front, by boosting investment through new forms of public and private partnerships. Moreover, to reduce risk across the EU, we need to fix our banking sector. That means shoring up a strong and stable eurozone, and deepening the Economic and Monetary Union. It also means not waiting for the next crisis to hit, but rather working proactively to make the EU more united and democratic than ever before.

Moreover, fighting nationalism at home means taking our destiny into our own hands. And yet, in a globalized world. Europe cannot secure its interests and values by itself. From migration and security to new technologies and ecological pressures, the collective challenges we face are multiplying by the day. As the divisions within societies and between countries deepen, the imperative to work together grows stronger.

By cooperating with friends from around the world, Europe's member states can become more resilient, both individually and collectively. Now is the time to offer responsible global leadership. Now is the time to renew



JEAN-CLAUDE JUNCKER



#WHATCHANGED

Jean-Claude Junoker's President of the European Commission. @ Project Syndicate, 2018. www.project-syndicate.org

and redefine the ties that bind countries around the world, much as we are doing within our union. Our brand of leadership is not about putting "Europe first." Rather, it is about being the first to answer the call for leadership when it matters.

Europe continues to set a global example as a region. upholding the value of global solidarity. In 2016, Europe offered asylum to three times as many refugees as the US, Canada and Australia combined. And, for years, Europe has provided more than half of the world's development.

and humanitarian aid. For Europe, responsible global leadership also means setting fair standards. Only by putting people and their rights at the heart of the brave new digital world can we ensure that technological progress serves our people, as well as our planet. Whether it be brokering the Paris climate agreement, negotiating a deal with Iran to suspend its nuclear program, ridding our oceans of harmful plastic, or setting data protection standards, the EU is leading the charge on addressing the world's most pressing problems.

Cooperation, after all, is in our DNA. Individual European countries simply do not have the clout to shape global affairs on their own, and that is not going to change. By 2060, no single European country will have more than I percent of the world's population. Europeans must, therefore, continue to pool and share their national sovereignty, with the goal of establishing a stronger common sovereignty for all. As members of the world's largest single market — one that accounts for one-fifth of the global economy — each EU country is better placed. to defend its national interests and to shape global events than it would be alone.

Looking ahead, our task is to strengthen this European sovereignty even further. That means speaking with one voice, sticking to our values, and delivering for our citizens ahead of the European Parliament election in May 2019.

History does not repeat itself, but it often rhymes. The world has been fractured before, and we have seen how this can lead to powerty, discord and war. Europeans know — or should know — this pattern all too well. So we must fight the populists of this world, those who peddle the false hope of new dawns, and those who replace fact with fiction and conjure "enemies" old and new.

Europe must provide the counterweight to these tendencies by demonstrating that we can still champion. compromise and consensus over the politics of strongmen. What the world needs now is fairness and progress. The world needs Europe.

Opinion

As the US quits, will Iran be next?

CAMELIA ENTEKHABIFARD

t would be an understatement to say that President Trump's withdrawal of the remaining US troops from Syria came as: a surprise, both to American politicians and to people in the region. While some support the decision as helpful in stabilizing Syria and paving the way for the withdrawal of other foreign troops, others have raised concerns about Iran and its regional ambitions.

There is also the question of Russia, whose interests are less about spreading its influence, unlike the Iranians, and more about showing its power and its ability to confront the West.

President Putin welcomed Trump's decision, and said he



Trump has only enhanced Russia's presence on the International stage.

broadly agreed with the US president's claim that Daesh had been defeated in Syria. The conclusion from what both presidents have said is that since the US is leaving the field in Syria because the militants have been vanquished, then Iran should do so too. Iranian military commanders and politicians have always claimed that they are in Syria to fight terrorism. at the request and invitation of the Syrian leader Bashar Assad. Since terrorism has been defeated, there is no longer any reason for them to be there. It will be interesting to see their reaction to the US withdrawal.

For the same reason, Israel should also welcome the US pullout. Israel has always trusted

the Russians not to allow Iran to act against its interests. Equally, Russia turns a blind eye when Israel attacks Hezbollah or Iranian assets inside Syria. That will continue, with or

without a US presence. Bashar Assad would also be better off having only the Russians to deal with, and not Iran too. Moscow's interests are of a purely military and security nature, while the Iranians are more concerned. about creating sectarian and religious division, which is the last thing Syria needs at this crucial time of political transition.

Iran, Russia and Turkey are currently involved in the committee to draft Syria's new constitution under the supervision of the UN. Syria will slowly have to find a way to return to the international community and to normalize its relations with other countries. For this transformation to work, Syria's Arab neighbors will have to participate in the reconstruction of Syria, despite the strong bonds Assad has with the Iranians. In these circumstances, it would make sense for Assad to limit the presence of his "friends" in Tehran.

The visit to Damascus by Sudan's President Omar Al-Bashir may be seen in the context of these efforts. to normalize Syria's relations with Arab nations and to welcome it back to the Arab League.

So those who fear that the departure of US troops will deliver Syria into Iranian hands should relax. In fact, Trump has only enhanced Russia's presence on the international stage.

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YOSSI MEKELBERG



n the complex triangle of Israel, the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Hamas, the main losers are those who want to live peacefully with one another, or at least to coexist free of violence. But instead of a peace agreement or even a peace process, neither of which seem to be in the offing, outbursts of violence and tensions along the Gaza border, and more recently in the West Bank, are becoming more frequent, signalling a threat of further escalation and more bloodshed.

The recent shootings attributed to Hamas militants at Israeli bus stops inside the occupied West Bank represent an escalation that the West Bank hasn't experienced for several years. Israel also killed five Palestinians, in some cases during attempts to arrest them, which seemed to some eyewitnesses to be more like summary executions than genuine attempts at capture.

In the current Israeli government, the forces who advocate a considered and proportionate response to such violent incidents are outweighed by those who support harsh punitive measures, including the repugnant practice of collective punishment. These hardline right-wingers are cynically exploiting such tragedies to enhance their credentials as defenders of the Jewish state and the settlers who sent them to the Knesset and into government. In their naked populism they push the government to order the security forces to take measures that the chiefs of those forces, whether the military or the internal security service, are totally opposed to.

Education Minister Naftali Bennett and Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked, who are always in the front row of those calling for harsher measures against Palestinians, pushed to pass a law that gives the security forces the power to expel families of Palestimian militants from their homes. This was not only something that Israel's security chiefs consider counterproductive, but it is also illegal by the standards of international law. It is of course the prerogative of politicians to make the final decisions on such matters. However, when there is a united legal and security front that views measures such as expulsions and house demolitions as counterproductive, it is irresponsible of the government to ignore such advice.

There is another facet to the recent spate of violence that poses the question: Is this a concerted effort by Hamas to open a new front, or is it being carried out by a rogue element? According to PA sources, the leader of the "West Bank Group" responsible for the shootings is Jasser Barghouti, who was released as part of the 2011 prisoner swap that freed abducted Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. It is hard to argue for exchanging Hamas prisoners for captured Israelis if some of those released are re-engaging in militant activities, especially against civilians. Considering that any long-term truce between Israel and the Hamas requires prisoner exchange, the involvement of Jasser Barghouti could prove to be detrimental to the promotion of such an agreement.

In the middle of it all is the PA, and its somewhat out-of-sorts President Abbas. He depends on the Israelis, despises Hamas, has been completely abandoned by Washington. and receives little help from the Europeans or the Middle East's regional powers. Add to this a dwindling legitimacy due to his security cooperation with Israel and the absence of a democratic process within the PA, and we see the bleak picture of conditions that are empowering those who would like to return to the armed struggle and confront both Israel and the PA.

It remains to be seen whether Hamas is attempting to move the armed struggle to the West Bank. If they do, it will pose a challenge to Israel and the PA, but it is unclear whether the response will be a joint one. However, if Netanyahu, and especially his colleagues who represent the Jewish settlers, believe that harsher occupation and expansion of the settlements are the answer, they may once more apply the old tried-and-failed methods, which will only fail again. Successful longterm containment of violence can succeed only through a viable political process of negotiation, one which, for those who live under occupation and an increasingly authoritarian Palestinian president, would restore hope for a life of dignity, security and prosperity.

Yosal Mekelberg la professor of international relations at Regard's University London. where he is head of the International Relations and Boolal Sciences Program. Twitten @YMekelberg

India and the Gulf states are a perfect match

HAFED AL-GHWELL



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International Studies.

Twitten giHafedAlGhwell

louds of uncertainty contimue to swirl over the global. economy, with the US Federal Reserve's recent rate hike proving especially controversial. Europe is bracing for a "no-deal" Brexit while China and the US remain embroiled in a needless trade war. For most of the Arab world, uncertainty and investor wariness are troubling, especially when investment from overseas falls while reforms are underway to make economies more attractive to investors.

It remains unclear when and if the global market will experience another downturn similar to the 2008 financial crisis, but the alarm bells have been ringing for a while now, despite White House rhetoric. It is imperative that the Arab world, particularly the GCC, hedge against potential losses in mature markets by committing to high-growth markets such as India.

The timing has never been better, especially with the Indian economy poised to grow by 7.7 percent per year until 2021. India's population of 1.3 billion is second only to China, so there is a massive market for consumer goods and services. This presents key opportunities for investment in construction, real estate, tourism, household goods, financial services, information technology and energy.

For now, there has been some GCC investment in India beginning with DP World investing more than \$2 billion for terminals and port concessions and the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company agreeing to supply nearly 6 million barrels for India's strategic reserve. The GCC and the subcontinent have consistently benefited from trade relations spanning centuries - from the spices, cotton and coffee of old to technology, oil and gas of today. The GCC supplies more than half of India's oil and gas needs and in turn India's exceptional engineering, information technology and manufacturing talent is a boon to the Middle East region seeking to

diversify beyond petroleum, gas, real estate and tourism. There are mutual benefits for the region and the subcontinent should there. be a free trade agreement or other forms of close cooperation aiming at economic development.

More recently, India and the UAE have signed a currency swap agreement, joining the trend to deleverage trade from the US dollar, another development likely to upend the global economy. Such a development will be welcomed by investors in both countries. looking to alleviate exchange rate volatility and lower transmission costs.

Prime Minister Modi's recent trip, coupled with commentary from government officials in India, is a clear sign that there is a lot of interest in attracting GCC funding to the subcontinent.

It is estimated that India will need more than \$1 trillion in infrastructure investments over the next decade in order to keep up with surging demand, rising incomes and rapid urbanization.

The timing is almost perfect for India to pursue the once-sought-after free trade agreements, banking on ongoing trade, mutual investments and the GCC's pursuit of new investment destinations for its sovereign wealth funds. Should turbulent conditions and markets still persist in Europe and the US, it is likely that the GCC will seek highgrowth markets, if only to pare losses in the wake of Brexit and a perpetual US-China. trade spat.

The GCC must now bank on India's large market and need for investments in critical sectors. In exchange, India's renowned information technology and related innovations would accelerate the GCC's economic diversification plans with increased manufacturing, education, health care and innovative tech.

It is indeed high time to have a GCC-India economic bloc, with the GCC's funding capability and India's large markets, skilled labor, and impressive technological advances.



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of view.



Modern technology is the principal driver in the expansion of the Islamic economy.

> Sultan bin Saeed Al-Mansouri Chairman of DEDC



GDF BOOST

Dubai sets Islamic economy target

Arab News London

Dubai has set a target to expand its Islamic economy sector so that by 2021 it forms 10 percent of gross domestic product (GDP).

The Islamic economy is currently worth 8.3 percent of GDP, while the halal industry makes up 5.8 percent of the emirate's total trade volume, according to statistics quoted by the Dubai Islamic Economy Development Center (DIEDC).

The center said that there are plans to boost the Islamic economy. which includes business in areas such as Shariah-compliant finance, halal food, family-friendly holidays.

Sultan bin Saeed Al-Mansouri, minister of economy and chairman of DIEDC, said modern technology will serve as the "principal driver" in expanding the Islamic economy.

Essa Kazim, secretary general of DIEDC, said that initiatives and activities in the sector would be broadened in 2019, cementing Dubai's status as "the global capital of Islamic economy."

According to a separate report by the Department of Economic Development (DED), Dubai has set a record in Islamic banking, with a total nominal value of 217.33 billion dirhams (\$59 billion) in sukuk — or Islamic bond — listings.



CODER

The Islamic economy refers to business in areas such as halal food. family-friendly tourism, and Shariahcompliant goods, services and financial transactions.

The DED's Dubai Economic Report 2018, also published on Saturday, said that Dubai's GDP stood at 389.4 billion dirhams in 2017, a growth of 2.8 percent on 2016, and ahead of the growth rate of the UAE as a whole, which stood at 0.8 percent.

The emirate ranked fourth among the world's most visited cities in 2017, attracting 15.8 million visitors an annual increase of 6.7 percent, with a combined spend of 109 billion dirhams.

"The report confirms that Dubai's economy is firmly on its ambitious path toward excellence and establishing its position as a financial and business hub, regionally as well as internationally," said Sami Al-Qamzi, director-general of DED.

Dubai's budget deficit — which is partly due to increased public spending on infrastructure projects and investments ahead of the Expo 2020 event — is expected to rise to about 1.5 percent of GDP by the end of 2018, the report noted.

All main sectors recorded yearon-year growth in 2017, with the exception of value-added financial services, the report noted. Dubai's tourism and real estate sectors grew by 8 and 7.3 percent respectively; the construction sector grew by 3.5 percent in 2017, recovering from a 3.4 percent contraction in 2016.

WEEKLY ENERGY RECAP

World oil crisis looms as supply levels under threat

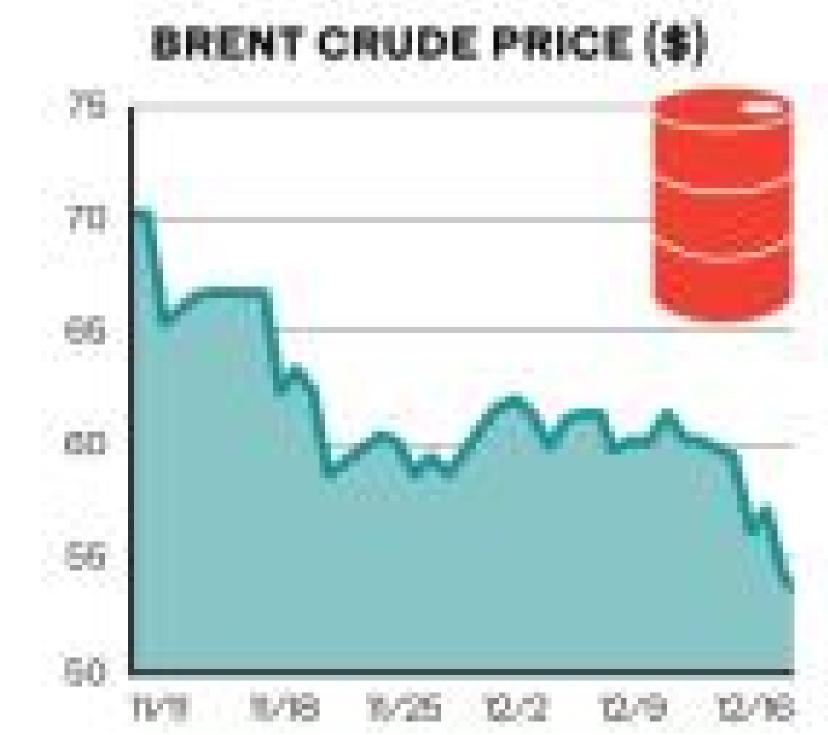
Finisal Mirza Riyach

Oil prices continued their decline last week, with the market adversely affected by global financial turmoil, slowing growth and deteriorating liquidity.

The week ended with losses of about \$5 per barrel — the steepest decline in three years - with prices now around \$33 lower than three months ago.

The recent OPEC+ deal - in which the producer group and its allies agreed to cut oil production by 1.2 million barrels per day from January — is not yet reflected in the movement of future prices. However, it is effectively reflected in the physical market, where Brent has flipped back into backwardation after being in contango since early November, amid the US sanctions waivers on Iranian oil exports.

The oil price fall at the end of this year triggered speculative short



positions and an enormous self-off in the US stock markets ahead of New Year holidays. That came simultaneously with the US Federal Reserve's interest rate increase, which intensified the equities sell-

Some market participants have suggested that the market might not be in equilibrium as we go into the first half of 2019, with the supply and demand balance in question, given the anticipated slowing global economy - which could affect oil demand.

Despite the growth of US shale, S&P Global Platts reported that the 2019 capital budgets for some. of the upstream operators in the Permian basin have been slashed, something attributed to the recent: plunge in oil prices. Therefore, supply shortages following the upstream capex cut will offset any slowdown in oil demand.

The broader picture, however, is that oil demand growth rates are at historic highs. And if oil prices continue falling further, there will be a world oil crisis in a few years, with a serious oil supply shortage. Despite Brent trending above \$70 per barrel for most of 2018, upstream investment has been lacking — except by Saudi Arabia, the only swing producer and the largest oil exporter.

Faisal Mrza is an energy and oil marketing consultant. He was formerly with OPEC and Saudi Aramoo. He is president of #Faisal_ Mirza Consulting



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AVIATION

New private Yemeni airline launches regular commercial flights to Jordan

Reuters Amman

Newly formed Yemeni airline Queen Bilqis Airways launched regular commercial flights on Saturday from the government-held port city of Aden to the Jordanian capital Amman, airport officials said.

Kjeld Binger, chief executive of Airport International Group (AIG) which operates Jordan's Queen

Alia airport, said the privately owned airline would operate three. flights per week between Amman and Aden.

The Yemeni capital Sanaa's international airport remains closed to international commercial flights as it has been since an Arab-led military coalition imposed a no-fly zone after Iranian-aligned Houthi militias took over the capital.

UN-sponsored peace talks in Sweden between the warring parties this month discussed the resumption of international flights to and from Sanaa on condition planes are inspected at Aden.

The airline officials did not say who owns the new airline. A group of Yemeni businessmen recently bought certain operating rights from the national airline.

Business News



"Trade and trade finance will be revolutionized by blockchain and other emerging technologies," says Ahmed Bin Sulayem, chairman of the Dubai Multi-Commodity Centre (DMCC), inset. Shutterstock

Blockchain revolution rolls on despite cryptocurrency crash

TECHNOLOGY

Analysts look back at a disastrous year for bitcoin, but say coins technology is here to stay

Richard Wachman London

It was the year cryptocurrencies fell to earth — the crash has been so severe that parallels have been drawn with the dotcom bust at the turn of the millennium.

Bitcoin is down 80 percent from just under \$20,000 12 months ago to about \$3,500 in December. Similar falls have been recorded by other cryptos such as ethereum.

The reasons for the bust are well rehearsed: Increased regulatory oversight, especially from the US and China, the emergence of scams linked to a proliferation of cryptocurrencies launched via initial coin offerings (ICOs), and disagreements among cryptocurrency's developers about how to update the underlying software,

But interviewees told Arab News that the market would recover and that, just as the dotcom boom went on to produce Amazon, so the world of cryptocurrencies shouldn't be written off.

Dubai-based entrepreneur and investor, Najam Kidwai, a board-adviser to Fusion.org, a not-for-profit foundation that aims to develop blockchain infrastructure for cryptofinance, told Arab News that all innovations needed time to mature and cryptocurrencies were no different.

He added: "Change needs to be regulated, but if you are doing everything above board, new technology should enhance the user experience, that's the idea of technology — to make life easier."

In the interim, he predicted, institutional money will flow into "the crypto space," even as retail investors take fright. Banks and hedge funds had been looking at cryptocurrencies, and building risk and compliance infrastructure to support trading, he said. Chris Beauchamp, senior market analyst at London-based IG Group told Arab News: "They (cryptocurrencies) aren't doomed, they're just not going to change the world overnight. Bitcoin still has the heft to remain part of the financial world, but others will probably fade or evolve over time, like the airlines and car firms of old,"

Despite the cryptocurrency crash, most observers agree that blockchain, the technology that underpins the new tokens, will continue to spur public and private investment, and perhaps nowhere more so than in the Gulf.

Here, there have been some major developments in 2018. Abu Dhabi-headquartered Al Hilal Bank has carried out a blockchain-based transaction for an Islamic bond worth \$500 million; Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) is collaborating with IBM to pilot a blockchain supply chain system; and KSA's central bank has signed an agreement with US fintech company Ripple to run a pilot project to help banks settle payments using blockchain.

Kidwai said: "Cities like Dubai have bet very heavily on block-chain. A lot of proof of concept work is going on as Dubai wants paperless government, so there is an initiative here called Smart Dubai, driven by the ruler of Dubai. There is a desire for transparency and speed in government."

At its heart, blockchain is a relatively straightforward concept. It's a ledger of blocks of information, such as transactions or agreements, that are stored across a network of computers. This information is stored chronologically, can be viewed by a community of users, and is not usually managed by a central authority such as a bank or a government. Once published, the information can't be changed.

e changed. Gartner analyst Rajesh Kandas-

HIGHLIGHTS

 Regulatory clamp-down hammers new token currencies.

But Gulf countries ramp up investment in blockchain technologies and projects.

Big brand names such as Amazon and IBM get aboard the blockchain bandwagon.

Solving security and compliance issues key to future of crypto trading.

wamy told Arab News that even though speculators had poured billions into cryptocurrencies, that didn't 'invalidate the under-

"Blockchain could allow various parties in a supply chain to interact without a middleman — and for all records to be secured in one place. That allows for further streamlining, more efficiency and cost reductions," said Kandaswamy.

Abdul Nasser Al Mughairbi, digital unit manager for Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) said that blockchain would "enhance our business processes with a shared, secure and transparent ledger.

"Blockchain is helping us track, irrefutably, every molecule of oil, and its value, from the well to the final customer," he said in an emailed response to questions from Arab News.

He added: "Every day there are large and complex production and accounting transactions among all of our businesses...that need to be accounted for. Until now this has been a laborious process but the blockchain application we have developed is streamlining this in one platform."

Operating costs could be cut via "eliminating time-consuming and labor-intensive processes." Blockchain would be a gamechanger in oil and gas transactions, he said.

Despite a huge increase in embryonic and pilot projects involving blockchain, Gartner's Kandaswamy said to his knowledge there had been "very few large-scale investments" in blockchain by enterprises. True, blockchain had been the number one search term when people looked at the Gartner website.

But inquiries were more about curiosity surrounding the technology and "not about allocating capital".

He added: "Our clients are struggling to see where blockchain would make sense in their business. When I did a webinar last year, firms were saying 'lack of business case' was the number one issue. They wanted to know how blockchain could do things better than other technologies already out there."

However, he said that there were some unique selling points emerging with blockchain. For example: The ability of different parties in an ecosystem to have the same sense of proof, data held at a single point that couldn't be tampered with.

Certainly, blockchain doesn't look like going away anytime soon. Walmart recently became one of the first retailers to explain how it

will be using the technology. The company said it would require lettuce suppliers to upload data about their foods to blockchain within a year. Large firms such as Accenture, Facebook, Google, IBM and Microsoft are developing patented products and services based on blockchain's digital-led-

ger open-source technology.

Last month, Amazon said that it would offer blockchain for developers using its cloud-computing services.

The global market for blockchain-related products and services is about \$700 million and is projected to exceed \$60 billion annually in 2024, according to Wintergreen Research.

IBM and Microsoft have been leading global blockchain development projects in 2018, according to Wintergreen.

Kandaswamy said a distinction should be made between a public blockchain system and a private one. The latter was for internal business processes, such as IBM's application enabling location and tracking of maritime shipments. The larger battlefield centered on public blockchain. For these public exchanges used for the likes of bitcoin, there was still work to be done following a number of hacking incidents in 2018.

Kidwai said custodial issues were "the biggest thing holding back cryptocurrencies — i.e. making sure that my crypto or bitcoin isn't going to be stolen."

Solutions to the problems were pending but not that far away, he said, perhaps no more than 12 months out.

Once the custodial issues were solved, "institutional capital would flow, if not gush into this space," he said.

As with the Internet, blockchain technology will catch on — "and like the Internet, in a very big way," said Kidwai.

GCC SEEKS GLOBAL BLOCKCHAIN STATUS

GCC states are spearheading developments in blockchain to underline their efforts to become a global tech hub that links trade and finance between East and West.

Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Kuwait have announced a number of initiatives adding to the blockchain buzz humming around the entire Arabian Peninsula. The UAE and KSA have launched a proof of concept (PoC) for experimenting with blockchain to help cross-border payments between the two countries.

Just this month, UAE Exchange and US start-up Ripple said they planned to launch crossborder remittances to Asia via blockchain from the first quarter of 2019.

Dubai has long sought to cement its position at the heart of a trading superhighway that connects China, Africa, Europe and the United States.

It has even talked about launching its own digital currency to oil the wheels of world trade even as the US/China tit-for-tat tariffs war continues.

Dubai is already home to a bitcoin exchange, BitOasis, and other start-ups and accelerators devoted to blockchain are springing up, as well.

Dubai's Crown Prince Sheikh
Hamdan bin Mohammed Al
Maktoum has said he wants all
government documentation —
such as visa applications, bill
payments and licence renewals
— to be transacted digitally using
blockchain by 2020.

In a recent report, Ahmed Bin Sulayem, chairman of the Dubai Multi-Commodity Centre (DMCC), said: "Trade and trade finance will be revolutionised by blockchain and other emerging technologies."

Business News

IMDB SCANDAL

Malaysia demands \$7.5bn from US investment giant

Reuters Koala Lumpur

Malaysia is seeking \$7.5 billion in reparations from Goldman Sachs Group over its dealings with scandal-linked state fund IMDB, the Financial Times (FT) reported, citing the finance minister.

Separately, Bloomberg reported that Singapore had expanded its criminal investigation of IMDB to include Goldman Sachs, in a sign of increasing scrutiny of the bank's role in the suspected multibilliondollar money laundering scheme.

Malaysian prosecutors this week filed charges against Goldman Sachs in connection with its role as underwriter and arranger of three bond sales that raised \$6.5 billion for IMalaysia Development Berhad (IMDB), the first criminal action against the US bank over the scandal.

Goldman Sachs has consistently denied wrongdoing, and said that certain members of the former Malaysian government and IMDB lied to the bank about the proceeds of the bond sales.

In addition to the bonds' total value, Goldman Sachs should

also return \$1 billion to cover \$600 million in fees paid to the bank and bond coupons that were "higher than the market rate," the FT quoted Malaysian Finance Minister Lim Guan Eng as saying.

Lim also told the FT that reparations should at least be more than \$1.8 billion, the sum Goldman Sachs has told investors it had set aside to cover potential losses related to 1MDB legal proceedings.

"Their figure is \$1.8 billion. Ours is \$7.5 billion," Lim said.

Malaysia is not currently negotiating with Goldman, but charges filed on Monday could bring the bank to the table, Lim said.

In an emailed response to Goldman Sachs Reuters, a spokesman said the bank would "vigorously contest these charges."

"The IMDB bond offerings were meant to raise money to benefit Malaysia. Instead, a huge portion of those funds were stolen for the benefit of members of the Malaysian government and their associates," the spokesman said.

members of that "Certain government and IMDB lied to Goldman about the use of proceeds from these transactions.

Critics have said the fees earned

BACKGROUND

Malaysia has sought jail terms and billions in fines from Goldman Sachs and four individuals who allegedly misappropriated about \$2.7 billion from 1MDB bond proceeds.

by Goldman Sachs were far in excess of the normal 1-2 percent a bank could expect.

Goldman has said the outsized fees related to additional risks: It bought the unrated bonds while it sought investors and, in the case of a 2013. bond deal which raised \$2.7 billion. LMDB wanted the funds quickly.

Malaysia has sought jail terms and billions in fines from Goldman Sachs and four individuals who allegedly misappropriated about \$2.7 billion from IMDB bond proceeds.

The US Department of Justice alleges that about \$4.5 billion was: misappropriated from IMDB and used to buy, among others, real estate in London and New York,

expensive jewelry and artwork, and a private jet.

Bloomberg that reported expanded Singapore criminal investigation into fund flows linked to IMDB to include Goldman Sachs,

Authorities in Singapore weretrying to determine whether some of the \$600 million in fees that Goldman earned from the three bond deals flowed to the Singapore subsidiary, it said.

In response to the report, the Singapore police said their criminal investigation into entities involved in IMDB-related offense in Singapore had been going on since 2015. They did not comment further.

A spokesman Goldman for Sachs said: "The firm continues to cooperate with all authorities investigating this matter."

Goldman Sachs (Singapore) PTE was one of the three units charged. by Malaysia this week.

Shares of the US investment bank fell to a two-year low this week after Malaysia filed the charges.

Two former Goldman Sachs bankers, Tim Leissner and Roger Ng, have been charged by Malaysia and the US Department of Justice.

BizBriefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Trump 'discussed firing US Fed chairman Powell'

US President Donald Trump has discussed firing Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell. Bloomberg said on Saturday.

Trump's frustration with the US central bank chief intensified after this week's interest rate increase and months of stock-market losses, the news agency said, citing four unidentified people.

The president has talked privately about firing Powell many times in the past few days, it said, citing two of the people.

White House spokesmen declined to comment, as did Federal Reserve spokeswoman Michelle Smith.

The Fed raised interest rates on Wednesday for the fourth time in 2018, and signaled

"further gradual" rate increases. Global financial markets had been hoping for a calmer policy outlook and sold off broadly. Reuters

India

Modi cuts sales tax rates after election losses

India slashed the sales tax rate on more than 20 items on Saturday in a move aimed at appealing to traders and the middle class after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling party lost elections in five states.

Modi is seeking a second term in the next five months amid voter frustration over the abrupt implementation of a nationwide goods and services tax (GST) in July 2017 that has resulted in job losses: for thousands of workers in small businesses.

The GST council, headed by Arun Jaitley, India's finance minister, agreed to lower the tax on some goods, including televisions, batteries and movie tickets.

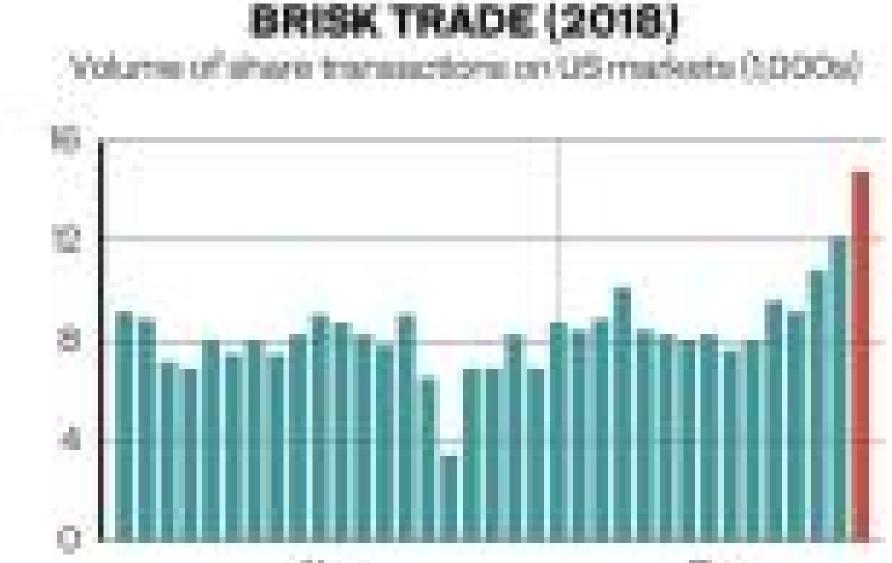
The council cut tax rates on six items from the highest tax rate of 28 percent to 18 percent and on one item - wheelchairs and parts — to 5 percent.

Reuters



About 27 billion shares traded on US exchanges on Thursday and Friday -the most for any two-day period in seven years.

Source: Bloomberg:



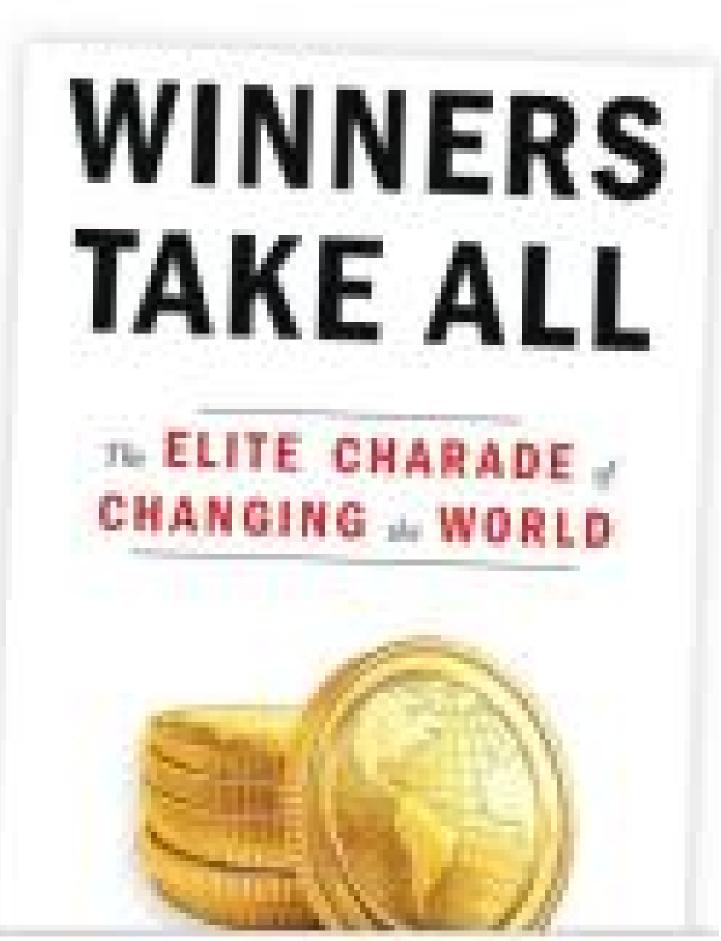
What Were Reading

FOR THE TRAIN OR ON THE PLANE

Winners Take All

ANAND GIRIDHARADAS

This hard-hitting book examines how the worthy super-rich use philanthropy to preserve the status quo and gloss over the fact that they helped cause many of the problems they seek to solve. The author, a former New York Times columnist, says the rich and powerful will fight for justice in any way except that which threatens their position in the social order.



Brazil

Court overrules injunction on airline tie-up

A Brazilian court on Saturday shot down a fresh injunction by a judge over a plan by planemakers Boeing of the US and Embraer of Brazil to create a \$5.26 billion joint venture. Brazil's state news agency said.

It was the second time this month an appeals court has overruled decisions by a Sao Paulo judge, Victorio Guizio Neto, seeking to temporarily block the deal.

The higher court said Saturday it was not up to Guizio Neto. to decide the future of the proposed joint venture, noting that the Brazilian government held a "golden share" in Embraer that allowed it to veto strategic decisions if it wished.

Embraer, the third-largest aircraft manufacturer in the world, was founded as a state group in 1969 before being privatized in 1994.

AFP

Germany

VW's 86.25bn repair bill on diesel scandal

Volkswagen's efforts to clean up a diesel cheating scandal will cost the company at least C5.5 billion (\$6.25 billion) in 2018 and around €2 billion in 2019, Chief Financial Officer Frank Witter told the German weekly Boersen-Zeitung.

Since 2015, the German car making group has paid more than C27 billion to settle investor and consumer lawsuits as well as regulatory. fines and remedies tied to resolving excessive emissions

levels in its diesel cars. In 2020, Volkswagen Group will face costs of €1 billion related to emissions cheating. Witter told the newspaper.

The company is sticking to plans to list its trucks business in 2019 and continues to see growth potential in China, the world's largest car market, Witter said.

Reuters



OGDO

The latest round of selling that dragged Nasdaq down to its lowest level since 2017 came two days after the US Federal Reserve raised interest rates. AFP

MARKETS

Nasdag mauled by bear market as tech topples

Reuters New York

The Nasdaq Composite Index has confirmed it is in a bear market for the first time since 2008, underscoring fears that the longest built run in history for US stocks could soon be over.

The index finished the day down 21.9 percent from its Aug. 29 record closing high, exceeding the 20 percent decline considered the threshold for a bear market. The Nasdaq is the first of the three

major US stock indexes to cross that threshold, with its drop in less than four months the latest sign that the bull market that began during the financial crisis a decade ago could be almost done.

Several other key indexes in recent days have confirmed they were in bear markets, including the Russell 2000 small-cap index and the Dow Jones transportation average.

The S&P 500, the benchmark for US stocks, is not yet in a bear market, though more than 60 percent of its components are.

The S&P 500 is down 17.5 percent. from its Sept. 20 record high close, while the Dow Jones Industrial Average is down 16.3 percent from its Oct. 3 record.

The Nasdaq's fall reflects a sharp move by investors away from what had been the market's leaders the so-called FAANG group of five favorite technology and Internet

"It's the old saying, the generals finally got hit," said Quincy Krosby, chief market strategist at Prudential Financial.

The latest round of selling, which on Friday dragged the Nasdaq down nearly 3 percent to its lowest closing. level since August 2017, comes two days after the Federal Reserve raised interest rates for a fourth time this year, as the US central bank continues to unwind the lowinterest-rate policy that supported stocks for nearly a decade.

Concerns of slowing economic growth have also led investors to flee stocks in technology and communication services.

In Nasdag's record-long bull

DECODER

A correction is Wall Street's term for an index like the S&P 500, the Dow Jones Industrial Average, or even an individual stock, that has fallen 10 percent or more from a recent high. A bear market occurs when the index or stock falls 20 percent or more from the peak. Corrections are common during bull markets, and are seen as normal and even healthy. The S&P 500, Dow and Nasdag entered a correction this month. The Nasdag slid into a bear market on Friday amid a sell-off in Apple, Google's parent Alphabet and other big names.

539 percent from its post-financialcrisis low on March 9, 2009. Including reinvested dividends, it delivered a total return of more than 611 percent in that time.

market, which ended with its all-time-high close on Aug. 29, the index gained more than

By contrast, in that same period,

with a total return of 425 percent. Even with the drop since August, Nasdag is almost

the S&P 500 gained 331 percent,

400 percent above its March 2009 low, with a total return of more than 456 percent. "Nasdaq is your more growthoriented story, so the biggest stocks

are driving the overall market,"

said Kim Forrest, senior portfolio

manager at Fort Pitt Capital Group in Pittsburgh. Past Nasdaq bear markets have lasted a long time and cut deeply. For instance, the Nasdaq fell 55.6 percent during its last bear market,

Some investors are not convinced the current bull market is over for the S&P 500.

March 9, 2009.

which ran from Oct. 31, 2007, to

"The market is caught up in this hysteria," said Ken Polcari. managing principal at Batcher-Joseph Asset Management in New York. But "it's an overreaction and if you're a long-term investor, the last thing you should be doing right now is seiling."

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The Community and Service Committee (CAS) at Alfaisal University in Riyadh broke a Guinness record for the largest blind taste test.



PRESS RELEASES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE WORLD OF BUSINESS AND COMMERCE

CAR EXPO

Nissan electrifies Jeddah motor show

Nissan unweiled on Monday the new Nissan Altima at the Saudi International Motor Show (SIMS) 2018 in Jeddah. The mid-sized sedan brings excitement to the segment with expressive styling, an uplifting interior and two new power plants, as well as Nissan Intelligent Mobility features. The Altima goes on sale in Saudi Arabia in February next year.

"This new Altima builds on 25 years and more than 5.6 million Altima sales to date — but to us, this is just a starting point," said Kalyana Sivagnanam, president of Nissan Middle East and vice president of Middle East, Africa and India. "That's why we decided to shake up the midsize segment in terms of design, driving enjoyment and technologies that are advanced and affordable,"

The car features Lane Departure Warning, Blind Spot Warning and Intelligent Forward Collision Warning, as well as Around View Monitor and Moving Object Detection giving a bird's-eye view to assist with parking.

Two new engines are introduced on the Altima, Replacing the previous-generation Altima's 3.5-liter V6 engine is the company's world's first production-ready variable compression turbo inline 4-cylinder. The engine delivers near V6level performance with 4-cylinder fuel economy. Standard on all 2019 Altima grade levels is a new 2.5-liter DOHC inline 4-cylinder direct-injection engine. More than just the gains in horsepower and torque, the new engine claims to offer improvements in noise, vibration and harshness, along with enhanced fuel economy and cleaner emissions.

The new Altima's expressive design was inspired by the award-



Missan is also showcasing the new Missan Leaf on the stand at the Saudi International Motor Show.

winning Nissan Vmotion 2.0 concept. Inside, the new premium interior features a wide "gliding wing" instrument panel — which accentuates the exterior's low cowl and hood, helping create an open, airy environment.

Nissan is also showcasing the new Nissan Leaf on the stand at the Saudi International Motor Show, the world's best-selling electric vehicle with more than

HIGHLIGHT

Nissan has joined the Saudi Electricity Company in a pilot project to develop the foundations of an electric vehicle infrastructure in the Kingdom, supplying Nissan Leaf cars to be used for the study.

380,000 on the roads. Nissan has joined the Saudi Electricity Company in a pilot project to develop the foundations of an electric vehicle infrastructure in the Kingdom, supplying Nissan Leaf cars to be used for the study. The car is on display in Jeddah to gauge the reaction of the Saudi public to electric vehicles.

"Through Saudi Vision 2030. Saudi Arabia is advancing the sus-

tainable energy agenda at an incredible pace," said Bader El-Houssami, managing director of Nissan Saudi Arabia. "We expect the appetite for new, smarter, cleaner technologies to be just as great in Saudi Arabia as in the rest of the world. There are so many synergies with our Nissan Intelligent Mobility vision we are thrilled to be developing our plans for the long-term in Saudi Arabia."

DAIRY

European butter pleases Middle Eastern palate

The Middle East is the second biggest market for European butter, in the UAE alone, the butter market was expected to grow at 3.6 percent in 2018 to reach a market value of \$80.6 million at the end of the year, according to data from World Dairy Situation, International Dairy Federation. Also, according to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (KSA) report published by ReportLinker Data, there will be close to a 2 percent increase in butter consumption consistently every year in Saudi Arabia till 2026.

In a book called "Butter of Europe," seven international chefs were interviewed about the ways in which they use butter. Whether they excel in kitchens in Beirut, Dubai, Riyadh, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Taipei and Paris, they are unanimous in the opinion that butter is a multifunctional product, both as an essential ingredient in cooking and as a flavor enhancer.

"Butter of Europe," also a campaign developed by the European Union and the French dairy board,

A chef participates in the 'Butter of Europe' workshop in Riyadh.

recently held two workshops on European butter in Riyadh. The event volume and value, after the US. For at Granada Mall was attended by media representatives, influencers and the general public, all of whom

sampled a variety of flavorful butter. Speaking at the workshop organized on Nov. 3 at the Embers restaurant in Riyadh, Chef Ahmad Fraijeh, chef and consultant at HMF Hospitality and European butter ambassador in the Kingdom, said: "Butter is a key ingredient in many baked goods and recipes; using quality butter is essential to creating beautiful pastries and gastronomic dishes. It can be used in many ways and will always enhance the aromas of your creations. French butter is of

> high quality, 100 percent natural and reliable, that's why I prefer using it. It allows me a lot of creativity in my cooking."



Briefs

Community Service

Alfaisal University's CAS sets Guinness record

The largest blind taste test consisting of 1,486 participants was achieved by the Community and Service Committee (CAS) at Alfaisal University in Riyadh recently.

The record was attempted at an event called "Noor," which means light in Arabic. It was part of a campaign to make Riyadh and its residents more educated and prepared to meet the needs of the visually impaired.

Saud Al-Yahya, president of the Community and Service Committee, said: "The committee's achievement of setting a Guinness World Record for the largest blind taste test is indicative of its ongoing efforts and services for the community. CAS will continue in its quest to offer outstanding services to all sections of the community. Without the dedication, professionalism and selfless contributions of the CAS team. these goals wouldn't have been achieved. Therefore, I would like to convey my deepest gratitude toward the amazing CAS team."

Flying High

Saudi Arabian Airlines wraps up Ad Diriyah E-Prix

Saudi Arabian Airlines (Saudia) has wrapped up a successful three-day event filled with activities, demonstrations and interactive features at the E-Village during the Ad Diriyah E-Prix, which took place from Dec. 13-15 in Ad Diriyah.

The airline showcased its products at its exhibition stand, where guests had a chance to win prizes, take photos with the fully electric Gen2 car, and much more. Alongside the booth was the Ad Diriyah E-Prix store, featuring limited edition merchandise and memorabilia for the historic race.

Visitors traveled from all over the world to watch the Formula E race, which took place for the first time in the Kingdom.

On race day, Saudia thrilled fans with a special fly-by of the Saudia Ad-Diriyah aircraft, which flew alongside the Saudi Hawks (the official aerobatic team of the Royal Saudi Air Force) before the start of the race.

The airline congratulated the winner of the Ad Diriyah race, Antonio Felix da Costa.

Business Skills

Inaugural Kaizen awards celebrate lean management

Improvements in business efficiency, increased agility and stronger profitability were all celebrated at the inaugural Four Principles Kaizen Awards ceremony at Riyadh's Four Seasons Hotel last week.

Launched by Four Principles, the first dedicated lean management consultancy in Saudi Arabia, the Kaizen Awards are designed to raise awareness of the Kaizen philosophy and the potential of lean management strategies to transform business performance.

Entrants were asked to share their lean success stories in one of two categories, "Continuous Improvement Process" and "Lean. Transformation." Entries had to include details such as the challenges faced by the company, the objective, cost and duration of the project, and number of employees involved, as well as the resulting improvements in terms of quality, lead times, costs and sustainability.

LuLu hosts Australian food festival

RETAIL



Australian Ambassador Ridwaan Jadwat inaugurated the festival in Riyadh. Photo/Supplied

LuLu Hypermarket is offering the many flavors and diverse food products of Australia in a weeklong food festival titled "Awesome Aussie."

The event, which runs until Dec. 22, was inaugurated by Australian Ambassador Ridwaan Jadwat at LuLu Hypermarket in Riyadh's Atyaf Mall.

LuLu Director for Saudi Arabia Shehim Mohammed said: "LuLu has always been committed to offering the best selection from across the world through not only a conductive shopping environment, but also through in-store activities and food-focused events that offer reasonably priced products. Perfect for the festivities this month,

this promotion will make Australian products a staple on the feasting tables for the holidays."

The Australian ambassador said he was delighted to inaugurate the Australian food festival at the popular retail chain.

"It is an important opportumity for LuLu's customers to get to know the excellent quality and diversity of Australian food products," Jadwat said.

LuLu, which has flown in more than 1,500 products in different categories, brings its customers a wide of range of specialty items, such as fruits and vegetables, meat, cheese, organic, dairies, and other packed and ready-to-eat food products, for

this promotion. The selection also includes gluten-free, vegan, sugarfree and organic products.

"With 157 stores operating worldwide, LuLu has continuously been exerting its greatest efforts to provide and sustain the supply of global products at the best rates. With the excellent combination of highquality offerings and an organized logistics system, LuLu remains to be the favorite shopping destination in the Kingdom when it comes to a broader selection of international products," the retailer said in

press release. LuLu Hypermarket is among the top 10 fastest growing retailers globally.

Sport News







After beating Arsenal in the League Cup quarterfinals, Tottenham Notspur face a tough run of fixtures with many of their stars struggling with injury. AFP

FOOTBALL

Pressure grows as injury-hit Spurs fight on four fronts

Arab News London

Since Jose Mourinho's sacking last week, Tottenham Hotspur have had to cope with unwanted attention on manager Mauricio Pochettino, with the Argentine now favorite to be Manchester United's next permanent manager.

But Pochettino is facing a tough 10 days in his current job with Spurs facing four winnable fixtures, starting at Everton today, that could propel them into the title race or limit ambitions to a top-four finish for a fourth straight season.

After Liverpool's win over Wolves on Friday, Tottenham trail the leaders by nine points and second-placed Manchester City by five. Meanwhile, Arsenal put the pressure on their North London rivals by beating Burnley 3-1 at the Emirates yesterday.

Yet with Liverpool facing a tough run of festive fixtures with the Gunners at home on Dec. 29 followed by a trip to City on Jan. 3,

there could be a chance for Spurs to cut the gap as they also face Bournemouth, Wolves and Cardiff before New Year's Day.

To do so, though, Pochettino will need to continue getting the maximum from a squad that remains alive in four competitions despite being ravaged by injuries to many of their World Cup stars, coupled with the lack of any summer signings.

"The most important thing is the belief," said Pochettino ahead of the trip to Goodison Park.

"It is difficult to translate to the fans or to the media the genuine belief in the squad.

"Of course, all the names and players are very important, but after that it's about the squad, about

the collective, about the team." The trust Pochettino has in his players is a principal reason he is so coveted, not just by United, but also by European champions

Real Madrid. However, failure to deliver a trophy in four years at Tottenham has put added weight on success in the League Cup this season.

Spurs gained revenge on rivals

Arsenal for a recent derby defeat in the league on Wednesday to progress to the last four.

However, that means after four games in 10 days over the festive period, Pochettino's men could face a further seven games in January should they avoid a shock defeat to Transmere Rovers in the FA Cup.

"If we want to achieve in the

FASTFACT



Tottenham are nine points adrift of leaders Liverpool ahead of today's clash with Everton.

end a trophy or arrive in the top four, or do a fantastic job in the Champions League or the different cups, we need everyone to be committed to the team." Pochettino said.

The question remains how far that commitment can carry Tottenham and whether this season will be their last chance for success under the Argentine's inspired leadership.

The club expect to finally be able to open their heavily delayed new stadium early in the new year, but the spiralling cost of completing 62,000-capacity home means Pochettino is unlikely to be handed funds to reinforce his squad in January.

Instead, young players such as 18-year-old Oliver Skipp, who made his Premier League debut against Burnley last weekend, will he used to plug the gaps.

Eric Dier, Mousa Dembele and Jan Vertonghen are not expected to return from injury before January, while Davinson Sanchez remains in doubt, meaning left-back Ben Davies could start for the third straight game in central defense.

"Some players are not available to play because they are injured or because they need to rest," said Pochettino. "(But) if you really believe, the way we believe in our squad, you can do a great job."

The fear for Tottenham fans everywhere is that Pochettino has done such a good job that he can't help but be noticed.

SportBriefs THE BEST OF THE REST

Football

Real Madrid break Al-Ain hearts in Abu Dhabi final

Real Madrid lifted the FIFA Club World Cup for a record fourth time on Saturday after beating local side Al-Ain 4-1 in the final in Abu Dhabi with the help of impressive distance strikes in either half from midfielders Luka Modric and Marcos Llorente.

Modric, recently crowned Ballon d'Or winner, took one touch before thumping the ball into: the bottom corner from outside the box to break the deadlock in the 14th minute after Al-Ain had missed two early chances to take a shock lead.

Madrid's home-grown midfielder Llorente doubled the European champions' lead on the hour with a superbly struck volley from outside the area. Real captain Sergio Ramos grabbed his side's third goal with a powerful header from a corner before Al-Ain, who shocked South American champions River Plate in the semifinals,

grabbed a late consolation goal through Japanese defender Tsukasa Shiotani. Madrid substitute

Vinicius Jr. burst through in stoppage time and fired in a shot which defender Yahia Nader diverted into his own net.

Real have won the last three editions of the tournament, also lifting the trophy in 2014, and moved ahead of Barcelona as the team to have won the competition the most times. AFP

The Sporting Read

WE DELVE INTO OUR BOOKCASE

Football Days: Classic Football Photographs

PETER ROBINSON

For something a little different, this is a fantastically intimate. personal insight into the world of football, with 300 spellbinding images that span decades. Robinson's photos not only highlight the changing face of the sport but also encapsulate the feelings and emotions of those involved - the players, coaches, fans and even the media.

A foreword by comedian, writer and football fanatic Michael Palin establishes why football truly

is the "global game" and explains the sport's impact around the world. Robinson's musings about his photographs and about

Basketball/NFL

football in general are intelligent and erudite. He refuses to shy away from the political or socio-cultural sides of the "beautiful game."

Chapters are divided into key topics, each representing a distinctive element of the sport, from the importance of the players' kit to the media. revolution in the way the game is consumed.

"Football Days" brilliantly explores the game's development, and Robinson's photos capture some of the sport's biggest personalities in an honest

> and human way. The photographer pays as much attention to the surrounding details as he does to the central figures of his images.

CRICKET

'Tough series': Hussey backs Kohli, Paine over clash

Arab News London

India and Australia lock horns once: again next week in the third Test with the series level, and all eyes will be on Virat Kohli and Tim Paine after their controversial clash in the match in Perth.

While several former cricketers have slammed Kohli for his behavior, one former Australian batsman has made a surprise defense of the Indian captain's actions.

Batting legend Michael Hussey, who played 79 Tests for the Baggy Greens between 2005 and 2013, said that the altercation between Kohliand Paine was not "aggressive." having said previously that Kohli's on-field behavior had been 'out of control."

He said: "It did not go over the top. It was not aggressive or abusive. This is a tough series and you expect the odd thing to be said. It did not get out of hand.

"I thought both players handled it well. It was nipped in the bud before it could escalate. It showed both teams will play tough cricket and they are not going to back down.

"They will stand up for what they

believe but doing it in the right way.

not getting abusive or over the top," he said. Hussey also said that he was

pleased to see Australia playing a tough brand of cricket in the series, considering the pressure faced by the side following the balltampering scandal earlier this year which put Paine in charge.

"For me, at the moment, I am seeing feel-good actions on the field (from Paine's team). Their skills are tough and they are not compromising on playing as hard as they can. They are giving 100 percent, but if something needs to be said, it is not abusive," he said.

"You can be aggressive, but you still need to respect your opposition and that to me is what the Australian cricket brand is.

"Maybe we have not always been like that and we certainly deserve



Virst Kohli came in for criticism after his clash with Tim Paine, AFP

some criticism for having gone over the top, but in my mind this team is playing a good Australian brand of tough cricket," he said.

Meanwhile, Indian legend Sumil Gavaskar has questioned the difference between Kohli the batsman and Kohli the captain,

with India chasing their first series victory over the Baggy Greens on Australian soil.

Gavaskar believes that should

India fail to win the series, the country's cricket authorities should consider making changes.

"We will know (the difference between Kohli as captain and batsman) as we go forward," he said.

"The Australia series is a good opportunity, but if India don't win the Test series, then we need to think what needs to change. and change from the top. But if we win, then it's a different case, altogether.

"The decision to field first in the Champions Trophy final, the omissions and selections in South Africa, the omissions and selections in England, and the selections and omissions in Australia - someone has to take responsibility for all these decisions. Someone has to be held accountable," he said.

The third Test starts on Dec. 26 in Melbourne.

Formula One

Charges Franchisch Deutstegungebie begriebeten Beitermann.

James slams 'slave mentality of 'old white NFL owners

LA Lakers star LeBron James hit out at NFL owners on Friday. calling them inflexible.

Speaking on his show, "The Shop," James said: "In the NFL. they've got a bunch of old white men owning teams and they've got that slave mentality.

"And it's like: 'This is my team, you do what I tell you to do, or we'll get rid of you all." The three-time NBA champion praised the basketball league's

commissioner Adam Silver for his role in the sport. "He doesn't mind us having a real feeling and expressing that. It doesn't even matter if Adam agrees ... he at least wants to

hear us out. "As long as we are doing it in a very educational, non-violent way, then he's absolutely OK with it," James said. AN

Wolff: Hamilton victim of 'envy and negativity'

Lewis Hamilton may be the greatest Formula One driver of all time but "negativity and envy" are denying him the recognition he deserves, his Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff said this week.

"Not everybody recognizes a great career, a great sportsman or greatness overall while it's happening. There is a lot of negativity and envy," Wolff said. "It's only once a career has ended that it is recognized as having been really great. We are extremely privileged in following a career of maybe the greatest racing driver of all time."

Hamilton set a string of records in winning a fifth title, and could go on to match Michael Schumacher's seven championships and 91 wins. Routers



Disney released its first look at the cast of the live-action film 'Aladdin' last week, with Naomi Scott as Jasmine, Will Smith as the genie and Mena Massoud as Aladdin.





NYE in Dubai

Check out our pick of the top New Year's Eve concerts in the city.



Mideast stars

Iraqi crooner Majid Al-Muhandi will perform alongside Lebanese pop star Elissa in a concert at the Ritz-Carlton, Dubai International Financial Center, Ticket prices start at \$558.



Arab entertainment

Lebanese singer Wael Kfoury,
Syria's Mohammed Khairi and
Mirna Tahan will all take to the
stage at the Le Meridien Hotel in
Dubai's Garhoud area for a night
to remember, with tickets
starting from \$163.



Desi night

Local favorites DJ Jeff, DJ Tushar and DJ Ashwin, among a host of other tune-spinners, will perform at V Hotel Dubai. Tickets start from \$27 per person.



Get dancing

Brit Award winners
Rudimental and British DJ Sigala
will entertain the crowd into the
early hours of Jan. 1 at the Zero
Gravity NYE Beach Festival.
Tickets start from \$68.



EDM and hip-hop

Dutch DJ duo BassJackers and hip-hop hype man Fatman Scoop will perform at Dubai beach club Barasti with entry prices starting from \$57.



Night at the opera

The Chinua Hawk band will storm the Dubai Opera stage with covers of classic pop songs before guests get the chance to watch the Burj Khalifa's midnight fireworks. Tickets start from \$194. CLOSE UP

Ola Farahat marries in Insta-worthy beach wedding

Arab News Dubai.

Dubai-based fashion blogger Ola Farahat got married on Friday in a picture-perfect beach ceremony attended by some of the Middle East's leading influencers.

The regional style icon married her longtime beau in a shoreline ceremony at Dubai's Nikki Beach Resort & Spa, complete with a white aisle against the backdrop of the coastline.

"No words can describe how this moment felt," Farahat posted on Instagram on Saturday morning.

"To my incredible father, thank you for always being there for me. and empowering me like no other and most importantly loving me with zero condition(s). You make me feel like I am the most perfect girl no matter how many mistakes I make along the way... And to my husband Hashim, you are my dream come true. I pray to God to give me the strength to be the best version of myself and to make you the happiest man alive. Lastly, thank you to everyone involved (in) my big day mnikkibeachhoteldubai and to all my beautiful guests," she added.

The blushing bride wore a full-skirted wedding dress by

Lebanese designer Nicolas Jebran.
The traditionally white gown
featured a Disney-worthy, layered
tulle skirt with a fitted bodice
boasting a sweetheart neckline
overlain with sheer embroidered
lace.

Farahat styled her hair in a decadent up-do and finished it off with a crown and flowing veil.

While the bride stole the show, her guests did not disappoint and turned up dressed to the nines, with red proving to be a popular color among the stylish attendees.

Almomen wore a scarlet off-theshoulder gown, while the fashionable blogger behind popular Instagram account @dubaistreetstyle wore a red cocktail dress with an a-symmetrical frill for a dash of sartorial flair.

For her part, influencer Maram Zbaeda chose an ice blue gown with a sheer lace skirt and a dramatic, oversized peplum.

"My most magical moment
walking with my hero to my
prince," Farahat captioned a sweet
snap of her father walking her
down the aisle — and the magic
continued well into the night,
with the happy couple enjoying a
first dance to a song performed by
Lucy Lascelles and then cutting
a tiered white cake as the guests
cheered them on.



Right: Dubaibased style star Ola Farahat is a well-known influencer. Gutty images Left: The blushing bride were a dress by Nicolas Jebran.

Instagram



ALLEGED ASSAULT

Case against Steven Seagal dropped

AFP Los Angeles

Hollywood action star Steven
Seagal will not face prosecution
after a woman accused him of
sexually assaulting her when she
was 17, prosecutors said Friday.

The Los Angeles County District
Attorney's Office said time had run
out to pursue the case brought
by a Dutch model who alleges
she was groped in a hotel room in
2002.

Prosecutors did not name the alleged victim, but lawyer Lisa Bloom identified her as Dutch model Faviola Dadis.

Dadis, who didn't come forward until several years after the alleged assault, accuses Seagal of attacking her during what she thought was an audition in the W Hotel in Beverly Hills. He has denied the claims of misconduct.



Felicity Jones.

FEMINIST FILM

Felicity Jones strives to do Ginsburg justice

AP Los Angeles.

The Ruth Bader Ginsburg film
"On the Basis of Sex" was about
to fall apart when Felicity Jones
got her hands on the script. The
origin story about the future US
Supreme Court justice written
by Ginsburg's nephew Daniel
Stiepleman had been in various
stages of development since 2012,
looking for the right star, the
right director and the right time
to finally hit go.

"I didn't take it on lightly"
Jones said. "It was really intimidating at first, like gosh how do I do justice to this person?"

This film, in US theaters on Dec. 25, focuses in on two very specific parts of Ginsburg's early days in law long before she would go on to be confirmed as an associate justice in 1993: First as one of the few female students at Harvard Law School in the mid-1950s, and then as a professor at Rutgers in the 1960s.

REVIEW

Turkish Netflix drama 'The Protector' a let-down

Gautaman Bhaskaran Checnal

"The Protector," the first-ever original Turkish series by Netflix, is a bit of a let-down despite its impressive production values.

Edited with imagination and splendidly photographed, it is nonetheless weak on performances.

The dubbing in English is awful with lip-syncing going haywire, and the subtitling is quite off the mark as well.

Directed by several people, "The Protector" is a fantasy of sorts, but there is a political undertone to it given Turkey's conflicting status that pulls it between Europe and Asia.

The protagonist of the series, Hakan Demir (played feebly by Cagatay Ulusoy), is an ordinary shopkeeper in Istanbul, where the drama unfolds.

When he realizes that he has special powers and is The Protector to save the city and its 15 million inhabitants, his life turns into a fascinating fable.

With his magical shirt and a sword, he is assigned to vanquish the lone surviving Immortal, who is out to destroy Istanbul.

Woven into this adventure are subplots. There is Zeyneb (played by Hazar Erguchu, whose performance stands out), who is bent on protecting The Protector but whose relationship with him is never defined clearly.

Is she in love with Demir, as his love interest Leyla Sancak (played by an attractive Ayca Aysin Turan) seems to suspect? The tension between the two women provides



Cagatay Ulusoy (L) and Hazar Erguelu star in the show. Supplied

an entertaining additional storyline.

There is also Faysal Erdem (played by Okan Yalabik, who is unusually stiff), with his business empire. His trusted lieutenant, Mazhar Dragusha (played by Mehmet Kurtulus), becomes a sworn enemy of Demir.

The series needs to work harder in its second season. But one standout feature is the wonderful, realistic portrayal of Istanbul and its many architectural wonders and quirks, from its many street cats to the endless cups of Turkish tea consumed by the show's characters.