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Inside Today: Our festive special

NO OVERALL WINNER IN CATALAN POLL, SAYS OPINION POLL

Barcelona.— An election in Catalonia will fail to conclusively resolve a political crisis over an independence drive in the region, the final surveys before the 21 Dec. vote showed.

The ballot will result in a hung parliament, a Metroscoopia poll showed, with

parties favouring unity with Spain tipped to gain a maximum of 62 seats and pro-secession factions 63, both short of a majority in the region's 135-seat legislature.

Spain's worst political crisis since its transition to democracy four decades ago erupted in October, when Madrid

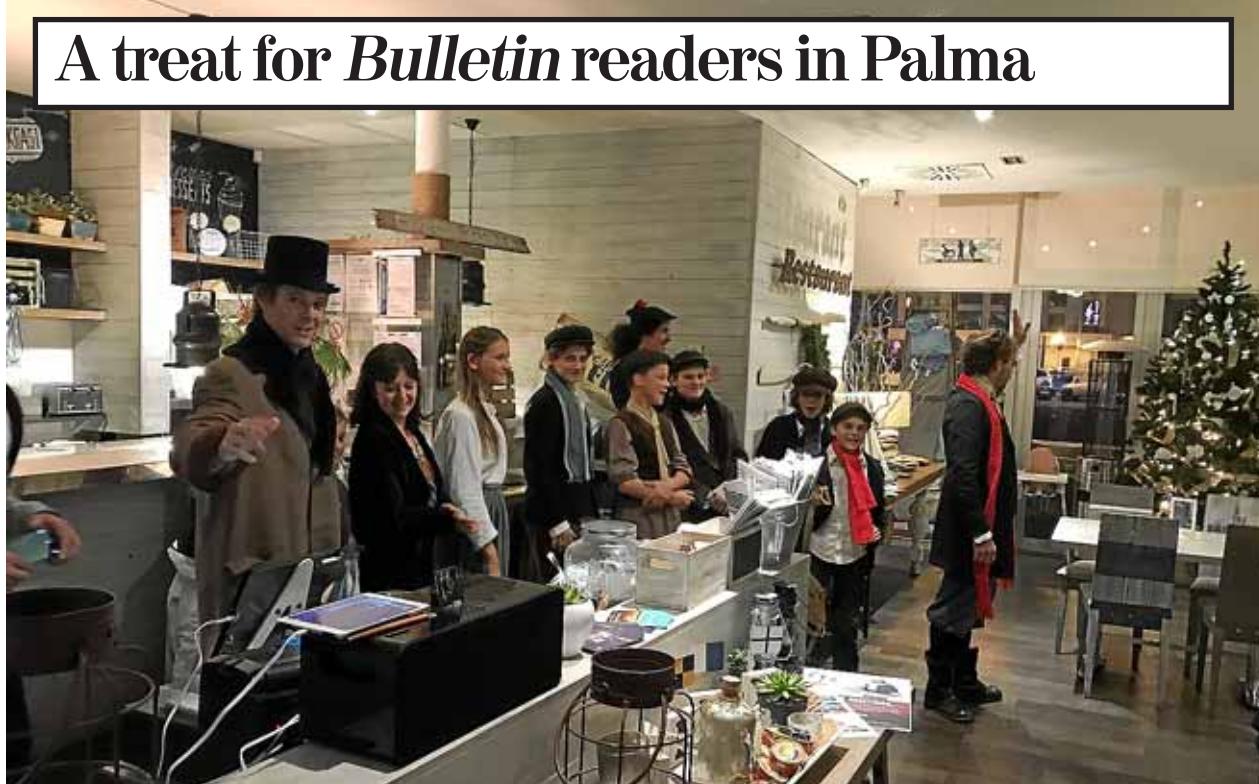
cracked down on an independence referendum it had declared illegal and took control of the wealthy northeastern region. The standoff has bitterly divided society, led to a business exodus and tarnished Spain's rosy economic prospects, with the central bank yesterday blaming

events in Catalonia for a cut in its growth forecasts for 2018 and 2019.

Both the Metroscoopia poll, published in *El País*, and a second survey in another newspaper, *La Razón*, predicted a record turnout for a Catalan election.

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A treat for *Bulletin* readers in Palma



Isla Theatre gave *Bulletin* readers a sneak preview of their *Christmas Carol* performance at the Boat House in Palma last night when some of the cast members arrived in full costume before the curtain went up. A group of our readers were enjoying mulled wine and mince pies before heading across to the auditorium to see their version of *A Christmas Carol*. Photo by Ashlee Caliz Cox.

European Union launches next phase of Brexit

London.—The European Union agreed yesterday to move talks forward with London on Britain's exit from the bloc as leaders warmed to the British premier, but there was little clarity on trade, as well as on some issues already discussed. On the second day of a Brussels summit, EU leaders agreed "sufficient progress" was made after a deal on citizens' rights, the Irish border and Britain's outstanding payments, giving negotiators a mandate to move on to the main phase of talks.

"EU leaders agree to move on to the second phase of Brexit talks. Congratulations PM Theresa May," European Council president Donald Tusk, who chairs EU summits, said on Twitter. Discussion of a transition period to calm nerves among businesses is due to start in the new year, although talks on a future free trade pact will not begin until after March -- a date underlined by "guidelines" that set out how to proceed as Britain seeks to unravel more than 40 years of membership. See page 19