



3 Some Africans in Kuwait reconsider travel plans



5 Dutch find Omicron a week before S Africa flight cases



16 Messi wins Ballon d'Or for the seventh time



Health Ministry says situation is 'assuring' but urges caution

Foreign Ministry calls on citizens to defer travel plans

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health yesterday told the Parliamentary Health Panel that the pandemic situation in the country is 'assuring' but called for caution and for complying with health conditions. Head of the Assembly Health and Labor committee

MP Saleh Al-Mutairi said the committee discussed the latest developments regarding COVID-19 virus, adding that the "Ministry of Health stressed that the situation is assuring but called for caution".

He said the Ministry has its policy of dealing with the pandemic and is calling on the public to continue wearing face masks and observing necessary health

conditions. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs meanwhile, called on Kuwaiti citizens to defer travel plans at present unless it is necessary in the second appeal by authorities in a few days following the discovery of a new COVID-19 variant known as Omicron.

In a statement, the Ministry urged Kuwaitis to comply with a statement by the Council of Ministers

on Sunday to postpone travel now because of the new variant. The Ministry said that travel should be postponed until necessary in order to avoid rapidly changing policies by various countries while countering the spread of the new variant. It also called on Kuwaitis currently outside the country to contact nearest Kuwaiti missions abroad.

WHO pleads for calm as Omicron spreads fast

GENEVA: The WHO yesterday urged countries to remain calm and take "rational" measures against the fast-spreading Omicron coronavirus variant, as Germany's next chancellor voiced support for compulsory vaccinations. The emergence of Omicron, first reported to the World Health Organization in South Africa less than a week ago, has already spread rapidly across the globe with borders shutting and dozens of countries rolling out travel restrictions in defiance of WHO advice.

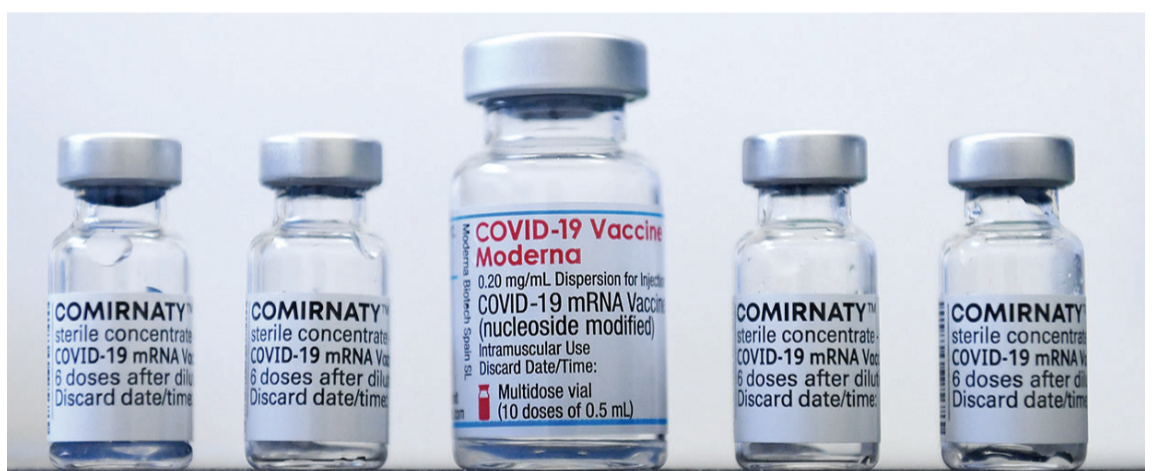
While so much is still unknown - no deaths have been reported from Omicron and it could take weeks to know how vaccine-resistant it could prove - the new strain underscores how besieged the

world remains by COVID-19, nearly two years after the first cases. "We call on all member states to take rational, proportional risk-reduction measures," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a briefing to countries.

"The global response must be calm, coordinated and coherent." The WHO chief said it was understandable that countries wanted to protect their citizens "against a variant that we don't yet fully understand," yet the UN health agency fears that blocking travel could be unfair and dissuade surveillance.

"I am equally concerned that several member states are introducing blunt, blanket measures that are not evidence-based or effective on their own, and which will only worsen inequities," said Tedros. Governments, particularly in western Europe, have already struggled with rapid rises in case numbers and have reintroduced mandatory mask-wearing, social-distancing measures, curfews or lockdowns - leaving businesses fearing another grim Christmas.

Continued on Page 2



SONTHOFEN: Vials of the COVID-19 vaccines by Pfizer/BioNTech and the Moderna vaccine (center) against the novel coronavirus stand on a table in a vaccination center in Sonthofen, southern Germany, amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. — AFP

Kuwait Speaker hails delegation at IPU summit

MADRID: Speaker of the Kuwaiti National Assembly Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem has praised participation of the caucus delegation in the 143rd conference of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) that wrapped up yesterday - lauding the legislators' performance at the international event. The Kuwaiti delegation has exerted tremendous efforts within the framework of the governing council, the general assembly, permanent and interim committees, during the convention, the Speaker said.



Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem

Delegations of the Arab, Islamic and Gulf countries engaged in the highest level of cooperation and worked out some schemes for the next convention due in Bali, Indonesia, next year, he said, indicating that some differences among a number of Arab delegations had been thrashed out.

Kuwait's late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the (current) Amir His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah had contributed to the efforts to tackle the rifts in the inter-Arab ties "and this impacted directly on parliaments' performance." This conference was of particular significance, considering that the gatherings had been held virtually for some time, he indicated. He thanked the Kuwaiti Ambassador to Spain Ayadah Al-Saeedi for his efforts to facilitate the delegation's participation in the IPU event. — KUNA

UAE: Rich Gulf state looking beyond oil

DUBAI: The United Arab Emirates, which turns 50 on December 2, is a wealthy Gulf oil state and economic hub that has turned into one of the region's most influential countries.

The UAE is a federal state of seven emirates: Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Sharjah Umm Al-Qaiwain and Ras Al-Khaimah. Ninety percent of its 10 million inhabitants are foreigners. The capital Abu Dhabi, and above all Dubai, are extremely well-connected air hubs and also home to the regional

headquarters of thousands of companies. The UAE has in recent years relaxed its residency regulations to boost its economy and attract more foreign investment.

With an economy second only to Saudi Arabia in the Gulf, the Emirates is one of the easiest countries in the world to do business, according to the World Bank. One of the top oil producer in OPEC, the federation's rapid growth since the 1970s has been driven by its oil and gas wealth. But having diversified its economy over the decades, it relies less and less on petrol, with revenues now making up only 30 percent of its GDP. In August, the UAE joined the nuclear club, with the Barakah nuclear power station, the first in the Arab world, coming on line.

Continued on Page 2



YAS ISLAND: Photo shows a view of one of the self-driving taxis being used in the UAE capital Abu Dhabi, to transport passengers to the nearby Yas Island. — AFP

Iraqi cleric Sadr's bloc declared the biggest winner

BAGHDAD: Iraq's Shiite Muslim firebrand cleric Moqtada Sadr was confirmed yesterday as the biggest winner of last month's parliamentary election, that had sparked charges of voter fraud from pro-Iranian factions. The announcement of the results had been put off for weeks amid tensions over allegations of fraud and violence, that culminated on November 7 in an assassination attempt targeting Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi, from which he emerged unharmed.

The attack was not claimed by any group. Sadr's movement won nearly a fifth of seats - 73 out of the assembly's total 329 - the election commission said, after a lengthy manual recount of hundreds of ballot boxes. Trailing behind Sadr's bloc in the Shiite camp with 17 seats was the Fatah (Conquest) Alliance, the political arm of the pro-Iran Hashed Al-Shaabi former

paramilitary force, which is now integrated into Iraq's state security apparatus.

Hashed leaders had rejected the preliminary result - which was sharply down from their 48 seats in the outgoing assembly - as a "scam", and their supporters have held street protests chanting "No to fraud". Their activists have staged sit-in protests outside Baghdad's ultra-secure Green Zone district, where the government, the assembly and many foreign embassies are located.

Despite the significant loss of seats, the Hashed remains a powerful force in the Iraqi political scene, backed by Iran and with a strength of 160,000 fighters. It can also count on a key ally that made a surprise comeback in the polls - former premier Nuri Al-Maliki's pro-Iran State of Law Alliance clinched 33 seats in the legislature. Analysts have warned that - in a country still recovering from decades of war and chaos, and where most parties have armed wings - political disputes could spark a dangerous escalation.

The final results must now be sent to the federal court for ratification. The parliament will then hold its inaugural session and elect a president, who will in turn appoint a prime minister to be approved by the legislature. In multi-confessional and multi-ethnic Iraq, the formation of governments has involved complex nego-

tations ever since a US-led invasion toppled dictator Saddam Hussein in 2003. Posts and ministries have typically been handed out according to compromises reached by the main blocs in backroom talks, rather than to reflect the numbers of seats parties have won.

Sadr, a former leader of an anti-US militia who has often surprised observers with his political manoeuvres, has called for a "majority" government with other leading blocs - possibly excluding powerful Shiite actors like Fatah. Analysts said he could strike deals with Sunni and Kurdish groups, such as those of outgoing parliament speaker Mohammed Al-Halbousi's bloc, with 37 seats, or the Kurdistan Democratic Party, with 31. "Now it's a matter of who will back down," said Hamdi Malik of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

"So far, neither side has given in to pressure. That is why the chance of escalation and clashes is high at this stage." Iraq, an oil-rich country of 40 million, is still recovering from years of conflict and turmoil. Major fighting has stopped since a military alliance including the Hashed defeated the Islamic State jihadist group in 2017, but sporadic violence continues. Military bases housing US troops have been targeted with dozens of missile and drone strikes which Washington blames on pro-Iran factions. — AFP

Local

Kuwait's Crown Prince receives visiting GCC Secretary General

Enhancing efforts to support joint Gulf action



KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets GCC Secretary General Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf. — KUNA photos



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets GCC Secretary General Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf.



Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets GCC Secretary General Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) Secretary General Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf during his visit to Kuwait yesterday. The Crown Prince's Diwan Chief Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Director of the Crown Prince

office Jamal Al-Theyab, Foreign Affairs Undersecretary in the Office of His Highness the Crown Prince Mazen Al-Issa and Assistant Foreign Minister for GCC Affairs Ambassador Hamad Al-Marri attended the meeting.

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah also

received Dr Hajraf, currently on a visit to Kuwait. Head of the Prime Minister's Diwan Abdulaziz Dekheel Al-Dekheel and Ambassador Meri attended the meeting. Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah met the GCC General Secretary on the occasion of his visit to the

country. During the meeting, both sides discussed ways to enhance efforts to support the joint Gulf action towards more bonding and solidarity within the framework of the Gulf system. They also reviewed the efforts of the council's Secretariat to develop and boost the GCC's economies. — KUNA

Zain hosts unique programs, activities for Kuwaiti students in US



CHICAGO: NUKS USA Director Abdulaziz Al-Kandari recognizes Waleed Al-Khashti for Zain's support.

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, hosted a number of social, cultural, and entertainment programs for Kuwaiti students in the United States throughout two consecutive days in Chicago. The company's contribution came as part of its Platinum Sponsorship of the 37th annual conference of the National Union of Kuwaiti Students in the United States of America (NUKS USA), which was held under the patronage of HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

Zain's support to this annual event for the past 17 years came as part of its Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility strategy towards the youth and education sectors. The company is proud to have become an integral part of this event's success, through which it connects with the country's youth abroad. The event, considered the largest gathering of Kuwaiti students abroad, made a return after a halt of nearly two years due to the COVID pandemic.

As it does every year, Zain took part in the conference by hosting a number of unique social, cultural,

and entertainment programs for the attending students. The company sponsored a health seminar titled "Kuwait Faces the Pandemic", which featured Ministry of Health Spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad, who flew to the United States to share a behind-the-scenes look at the ministry's efforts to curb the COVID outbreak last year. Sanad showcased the Kuwaiti government's speedy actions and the brave sacrifices of frontliners in facing the pandemic.

Zain also sponsored a special sports seminar titled "Kuwaiti Sports Across Generations", which featured many distinguished Kuwaiti athletes from current and past generations. The guests shared the most prominent historical achievements and milestones of Kuwaiti sports, and discussed the challenges faced by the sports sector and explored the best ways to overcome them.

In addition, Zain hosted many entertainment programs for the students, hosted by Kuwaiti presenters Dhari Al-Blaihees and Mohammed Al-Hamli. The event featured a unique atmosphere filled with a sense of



Waleed Al-Khashti (right) honors Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad (center) with the presence of Dhari Al-Blaihees.

national unity, where Zain presented valuable prizes to the crowds.

Zain also hosted ZAINPHONIC, a special workshop that shared tips and tricks of smartphone photography, giving the students a chance to learn the best techniques for taking pro-level photos with their smartphones and helping them unleash their creativity.

Zain's presence in the event conveyed its enthusiasm to interact with the future generations of Kuwaiti youth, especially those who pursue their education abroad, as the NUKS USA conference is considered the largest gathering of Kuwaitis outside of Kuwait, and welcomes students from all over the US.

The event appeals to students on both intellectual and social levels, and serves as an open forum for them to exchange opinions and views regarding important domestic issues with the presence of distinguished national figures from the Kuwaiti community, including academics, media personalities, athletes, doctors, and more who fly to the US for the purpose of meeting with the students and sharing

their experiences with them.

Zain sees its annual participation in the conference as part of its responsibility as a leading national company to help provide bright and enthusiastic young Kuwaitis with a great social experience, as well as listen to their ideas and experiences while pursuing their education abroad.

The National Union of Kuwaiti Students in the United States of America (NUKS USA) serves nearly 14,000 Kuwaiti students studying in the United States. The union aims, through its events and programs, to connect Kuwaiti students with each other on one level, and with their nation and the latest updates of the Kuwaiti community on another. NUKS USA was publicized in the USA and was granted the recognition of the United States government. The achievement is considered a proud milestone for Kuwait's youth, and is a direct result of the great relations between the State of Kuwait and United States. Such a recognition is a clear reflection of the strategic relations between the two nations.



Waleed Al-Khashti with national team players Soud Al-Mujamid and Hamad Al-Enzi during the sports seminar.



From one of Zain's entertainment programs at the event.

WHO pleads for calm as Omicron...

Continued from Page 1

In the European Union's largest economy, Germany's next chancellor Olaf Scholz indicated his support for compulsory COVID vaccines, with a source from his centre-left Social Democratic Party telling AFP he "signaled his sympathy for such a regulation". Scholz held crisis talks with regional leaders and was due to meet outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel over introducing new restrictions amid soaring coronavirus cases and hospitalizations.

Germany's constitutional court ruled that sweeping restrictions such as curfews, school closures and contact restrictions were lawful, likely to pave the way for further curbs. In neighboring France, Health Minister Olivier Veran warned the situation was worsening rap-

idly after the first Omicron variant was found on the French island of Reunion, with 1,700 COVID patients now in critical care.

With 47,000 new cases reported over the past 24 hours, he said average daily cases are rising 60 percent a week. "If these trends continue, they could surpass the peak of the third wave by the end of this week," he told lawmakers, referring to the surge in cases last spring. In the Netherlands, health authorities revealed the Omicron variant had already entered the Netherlands before a cluster of cases emerged from two flights from South Africa.

Belgium and Germany have also reported finding Omicron cases before South Africa officially notified the WHO on November 24, while Japan confirmed its first case one day after barring all new foreign arrivals just weeks after relaxing tough regulations. Markets in Asia, Frankfurt, London and Paris fell, while US markets and oil prices also tumbled after the boss of US vaccine manufacturer Moderna warned vaccines might be less effective at fighting the new variant. — AFP

UAE: Rich Gulf state looking...

Continued from Page 1

It also has one of the most vaccinated populations in the world against Covid-19, according to official sources.

With little oil but the most diversified economy in the Gulf, Dubai has gone from a fishing village to a major financial, transport and media hub in the space of a few decades. Known for its glitzy shopping centers and its forest of skyscrapers, including the tallest in the world, the Burj Khalifa, it has become a major tourist destination. Abu Dhabi is home to a branch of the Louvre, with its art collection housed in a spectacular museum designed by French architect Jean Nouvel. Expo 2020 Dubai

opened its doors in October after being postponed because of the COVID pandemic. The first time one of the world fairs has been held in the Arab world, it is expected to attract millions of visitors before it closes on March 31.

The Emirates and Gulf ally Bahrain last year normalized their relations with Zionist entity amid rising tensions with Iran, which they have accused in the past of stoking tensions in the region. The UAE and Teheran have been at loggerheads since 1971 over three disputed islands in the Gulf that Iran occupied. The Emirates also rowed back diplomatic ties with Tehran in 2016 as rivalry between its neighbor Saudi Arabia and the Islamic republic escalated. Despite the tensions, the two states have maintained business links. Earlier this month the UAE drew criticism from its US allies when its chief diplomat Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahyan met Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad in the first official visit to Damascus since the 2011 start of Syria's civil war. — AFP

Local

Africans in Kuwait reconsider travel and vacation plans amid Omicron

Avoid travel 'unless it is essential'

By Chidi Emmanuel, Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: As more countries joined the rush to ban some southern African countries after the emergence of a new COVID variant - Omicron, some African expats are beginning to have a rethink on their travel plans. Kuwait on Saturday joined dozens of countries across the globe to imposed travel restrictions on South Africa and its neighbors since its scientists flagged the variant last Thursday. This in turn, has affected many Africans in the region as they weigh their options. The nine African nations that were affected include: South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Lesotho, Eswatini, Zambia and Malawi.

For South African school teacher Jolene GJ who has been preparing for a vacation to celebrate Christmas with her family, the ban has affected her so much. Unfortunately, the new variant has shattered her vacation plans. Jolene had booked her ticket for her scheduled flight to South Africa (December 3, 2021) and to return to Kuwait by New Year. "I cannot proceed with my plans because of the ban. The past few days have been so depressing for me. I was looking forward to spending the Christmas with my family and friends," she said.

In addition to the travel restrictions, Kuwait's Council of Ministers ban entry of passengers from the nine southern African countries unless they spend 14 days in a third country with a negative PCR test result before boarding a flight to Kuwait. "So now, I have to call off my vacation plans. I have not seen my family for a long time due to the airport closure last year," she said.

Chimwemwe Vitto Mwineya from Malawi is also affected by the recent development. Mwineya, who was also preparing to take vacation next month has to call it off immediately and informed his travel agent to cancel the ticket. "I booked my ticket on October and was excited to go home as I didn't take my vacation for the last three years. I was eager to see my kids. Now, I don't want to leave Kuwait and get stuck in Malawi. Right now, I am temporarily holding up my vacation plans," he said.

Avoid travel

Meanwhile, Sierra Leone's Ambassador in Kuwait Haja Ishata Thomas advised African expats to be cautious - urging them to follow all the necessary



precautionary measures. "We should be careful always. We should take all the appropriate measures so as to combat this virus. Unless it is essential, it is not advisable to travel this time around," the ambassador advised.



Africa 'should not be penalized': UN

For Mike and his friends, it is risky to travel this time around. "We actually planned to celebrate this Christmas at home with our families but with the look of things, we cannot go again. Corona has overridden our plans," Mike said as his friends nod-

ded in agreement. "We hope to travel during Easter. By then, things would have gotten better." Mike's friend Tony told Kuwait Times as they enter inside the Church in Kuwait City.

Omicron is widely spreading around the world, with new cases found in the Netherlands, Denmark and Australia even as more countries have imposed travel restrictions. The detection has triggered a global alarm - and governments around the world scrambled to impose new travel curbs. Meanwhile, an outraged South African President Cyril Ramaphosa on Sunday said the curbs were scientifically unjustified and called for them to be "immediately and urgently" reversed.

Also, the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has weighed in, urging nations to avoid the blame games. "The people of Africa cannot be blamed for the immorally low level of vaccinations available in Africa-and they should not be penalized for identifying and sharing crucial science and health information with the world," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said.

these antibodies when exposed to HIV. Research into a vaccine has meant studying those rare responses, understanding how they work, and trying to replicate them in healthy people's immune systems.

An mRNA jab?

Several dozen vaccines are being studied, with one by US firm Moderna seeking to use the same mRNA delivery method as its popular Covid vaccine. The June report describing the research explains how the mRNA jab is meant to deliver instructions for a process called "germline targeting". This means "guiding the immune system, step by step, to induce antibodies that can counteract HIV", the report explains. So far, the technique is complex, involving an initial shot to activate important B-cells before several jabs attempt to spur the body into producing a range of antibodies.

Being able to visualize a way forward has given researchers hope, and some say it's thanks in no small part to the pandemic. "These last few years have seen unprecedented growth in our understanding of the immune system," Serawit Bruck-Landais of French AIDS organization Sidaction said. But even with seeming breakthroughs, Bruck-Landais says, progress on an HIV jab is "not enough to be able to say we will have an AIDS vaccine soon". The US clinical trials for the Moderna vaccine that were set to begin in August are still listed on the National Institutes of Health website as "not recruiting".

'Lack of investment'

Researchers looking into vaccines say they are overlooked in terms of funding. "The market is too weak for pharmaceutical groups and there's a disappointing lack of investment," says Nicolas Manel, a research director at the French National Institute of Health and Medical Research (INSERM). "Many researchers are very motivated, but they have to make do with the funds they have." In the absence of a vaccine, focus has historically been on promoting preventative measures like protected sex, clean needles, and overall better access to healthcare for marginalized populations.

Some 38 million people across the globe live with the virus. Monsef Benkirane, research director at the France-based Institute of Human Genetics, points to important improvements in medicine that allow many people with HIV to live longer, healthier lives. Importantly, by reducing an infected person's viral load, HIV treatments today can vastly decrease or eliminate a person's chances of transmitting HIV to another person. — Agencies

sion of Kuwait in 1990 or any information about the Kuwaiti properties, namely documents, the Amiri archive, and report back rapidly. They called for communicating with the two departments, or the Iraqi diplomatic missions abroad or the team of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Baghdad. The Iraqi departments, that included phone numbers for the informants, noted the keenness on leaving no stone unturned to locate remains of missing Kuwaitis and Kuwaiti items, in line with Iraq's relevant international obligations. The file of the missing Kuwaitis and the Kuwaiti archive had been restricted to the Iraqi human rights ministry before it was shifted to the defense ministry. And later, the foreign affairs department was added. — KUNA

News in brief

Severe cold ahead

KUWAIT: Kuwait's astronomer Adel Al-Saadoun said that from December 7, Kuwait will see the arrival of the "Marbaaniya" (forty days of cold) season which is known as one of the coldest seasons during the year. He said meanwhile that most Kuwait's areas did not receive enough rainfall, as usually the case this year. Marbaaniya, which lasts until January 14 is divided into two phases, the first phase is of 20 days which will end on December 27, and the second phase begins on December 28 until January 14, he added. A severe cold winter awaits Kuwait, he warned, where temperatures are expected to drop. He added that the weather will be colder in the second period of the Marbaaniya season as temperatures may reach zero degrees Celsius. "We will also witness cold humid and foggy days during early mornings where the average temperatures are expected to reach 8 degrees Celsius," he added.

TEC CEO resigns

KUWAIT: Touristic Enterprises Company (TEC) announced yesterday the resignation of its Chief Executive Officer Abdulwahab Ahmed Al-Marzouq, which has been accepted by the Board of Directors. Marzouq took the reins of the TEC in January 2015 and has overseen the company's transformation.

Birds' import ban

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Public Authority for Agriculture Affairs and Fish Resources (PAAAFR) yesterday banned importing birds from Hungary, Kazakhstan and Poland, due to the outbreak of the bird flu (H5N1) in these countries. In remarks to the press, the authority's spokesperson Talal Al-Daihani said this came after the recommendations of World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) after observing multi cases in these countries. Daihani also stated that all birds' shipments must be tested by official laboratories according to OIE procedures, adding that any shipment showing infection will be rejected and returned on the expense of the exporting country.

Kuwaiti specialist: AIDS remains one of deadliest epidemics

KUWAIT: AIDS remains one of the deadliest epidemics in modern times, the head of the AIDS office at the Kuwaiti Ministry of Health, Dr Fajr Al-Assaf, warned yesterday. Dr Assaf, in a statement marking World AIDS Day which falls on December 1 (today), noted that Kuwait has dedicated attention to this epidemic since 30 years ago - issuing necessary relevant legislations and establishing "the immunity need bureau," tasked with following up on cases and securing specialists for the sick. The official staff examine suspected cases with total privacy, she noted.

Still no vaccine

COVID vaccines began to show promise just months after the novel coronavirus started spreading across the globe. So why have decades of HIV/AIDS research yielded so little progress on a jab to prevent a disease that claimed some 680,000 lives in 2020? As the globe marks World AIDS Day today, why is there still no vaccine to protect people from the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)?

One answer is that the political will and colossal investment that have spurred on COVID vaccine development have largely been missing from AIDS vaccine research since HIV was discovered in 1983. But another lies in the complexity of the science behind HIV. "With COVID vaccines, researchers worry about the vaccine being able to fend off a handful of variants that have become particularly worrisome," reads a June report by the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI).

"But for HIV, there are millions and millions of different viruses that have resulted from the virus's stealth ability to rapidly mutate... It is this astonishing level of diversity that any HIV vaccine must contend with," Olivier Schwartz, head of the viruses and immunity unit at the Pasteur Institute in Paris, says that while most people can recover naturally from an initial coronavirus infection and thus acquire immunity, this is not the case for HIV.

"HIV mutates much more easily than COVID and so it is more difficult to generate so-called broadly neutralizing antibodies that could prevent infection," he said. Only a handful of people naturally produce

Iraq's ministries call for info about missing Kuwaitis, properties

BAGHDAD: Iraq's foreign and defense ministries renewed a call upon Iraqi citizens yesterday to report any information regarding remains of missing Kuwaitis or Kuwaiti properties. The two ministries, in a written humanitarian appeal distributed yesterday, urged Iraqis or any person who may possess information about burial locations of Iraqis or Kuwaitis, lost in the beginning of the Iraqi inva-

On the occasion of the



Subscribe or renew your subscription
KD 20 instead of KD 30 for 1 year

For individuals only

Tel: 24833199 ext.: 163-325-353- 354 or 66500982



kuwaittimes.net

Local

Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First Daily in The Arabian Gulf

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF
ESTABLISHED 1961

Founder and Publisher
YOUSUF S. AL-ALYAN

Editor-in-Chief
ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYAN

EDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432
ADVERTISING : 248356167
FAX : 248356201
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 163
ACCOUNTS : 24833199 Extn. 125
COMMERCIAL : 24835618
P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.net



The Central Queensland University (CQU) building.

Successful academic audit for ACK attained

KUWAIT: The Australian College of Kuwait (ACK) has accomplished a successful audit period conducted by its strategic partner Central Queensland University (CQU). The audit took place virtually from the 8 to November 11, 2021.

The objective of similar audit sessions is to maintain the quality of education and continually improve Colleges offerings and services, continuing to fulfill Kuwait's Public Universities' Council (PUC) requirements and guidelines for institutional accreditation, to ensure the comparability programs and modules between ACK and CQU, and at last to reinforce the partnership between both universities.

The session attended by CQU representatives led by: Alastair Dawson, Vice President Global Development; Priscilla Stevens-Guiney, Director - Office of the Vice President Global Development; Prof Steven Hall, Dean - School of Engineering and Technology; Prof Talal Yusaf, Adjunct Professor - School of Engineering and Technology; Prof Anthony Weber - Deputy Dean (Learning & Teaching) School of Business and Law; Prof Grant Stanley, Vice President - Research; Pavle Jeric, Deputy Director - Online Systems and Future Proofing Digital Services Directorate; Prof Douglas Drury, Head of Aviation.

At the end of the audit, CQU compiled a list of commendations and recommendations for ACK. Among the commendations, ACK was praised for maintaining a high level of enthusiasm and provision of quality education throughout the COVID-19 period, with the auditors noting the College's leadership in teaching and learning developments in working towards the highest quality of support during the pandemic. ACK was also commended on its progress towards building a stronger research culture, and for its commitment towards supporting the well-being of its staff and students.

As for the recommendations, among them were that ACK implements consistent learning and teaching models to assist in its transition back to on-campus face-to-face education, and that the College consider improving its technology platforms and resources to include features such as virtual reality and artificial intelligence. ACK believes in the importance of audit sessions as a higher education institution for its continuous improvement and further develop its educational offerings and training services.

Dr John receives health care quality certification

KUWAIT: ABQAURP is pleased to announce the recent certification of Dr Aysha John, CHCQM. Dr John passed the Health Care Quality and Management (HCQM) Certification Examination on September 22, 2021 in Kuwait City, Kuwait.



Dr Aysha John

Dr John joins fellow Diplomates of ABQAURP who, for over 40 years, have shown their commitment to, and specialized focus on, quality care and patient safety; distinguishing them from their colleagues by becoming HCQM Certified.

HCQM Certification (www.abqaarp.org/certification) has always focused on streamlining the delivery of health care while maintaining quality and safety but now positions itself at the forefront of quality care as the Affordable Care Act (ACA) begins to implement its mandates to focus on safety and the continuum of care.

Professionals who have achieved HCQM Certification demonstrate deep commitment to patient safety, health care quality, and effective care, while addressing the need for effectiveness, efficiency, utilization review, safety, and timeliness.

Kuwait to UN session: Peace through ridding world of nuclear weapons

UN chief hails Kuwait's efforts for nukes-free Middle East

NEW YORK: There will be no peace, security, or stability unless the world is rid of nuclear arsenal and Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), a senior Kuwaiti diplomat said late Monday. Speaking to the Second Session of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction, Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the UN Headquarters in New York Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi said that his country would continue to adopt measures to lessen the usage of such weapons against humanity. He affirmed that Kuwait, as President of the current session, urged countries with influence in the region to take responsibility and join the Treaty of Non-Proliferation Treaty of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) signed in 1995.

Ambassador Otaibi added that Kuwait was against the spread of all kinds of conventional and nuclear weapons of destruction, partaking in all global efforts by the UN and other organizations to halt their spread regionally and internationally. He reiterated calls for Zionists to join the NPT, underlining that the Zionists were the only group in the Middle East who refused to contribute to the region's stability due to the presence of their nuclear arsenal and stockpile.

Arab countries had contribute to the decision in 1995 to have a Middle East clear of WMDs and nuclear arsenal, indicated Ambassador Otaibi, adding that 2010 review conference had ratified a work plan to implement resolutions concerning clearing Middle East from such weapons. The Kuwaiti diplomat expressed sorrow of the lack of determination in regards to clearing the region from nuclear weapons, saying that sides like Zionists specifically continue to thwart any efforts in this regard preventing reviews of the NPT in 2015 to implement the tenets of the agreement. He went on to say that, there was still a determination towards achieving the goal of a nuclear weapons-free Middle East, which involved all facilities being inspected by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to make sure that they were abiding by the NPT and other agreements. He expressed hopes that the current session would provide positive

results in the quest to protect the region from hazardous weapons be it nuclear or other.

Prior to the session, Ambassador Otaibi said that the five-day conference, held at the UN headquarters, aimed to pave the way for turning the Middle East into a region free from nuclear and mass destruction weapons similar to those created in South America, Africa, Southeast Asia, Pacific and Central Asia. Meanwhile, Ambassador Otaibi expressed, on the international day to support the Palestinian people, solidarity with his Palestinian brethren and their quest to establish an independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Lasting peace

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has lauded Kuwait's efforts to prove successful the second session of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction. "I commend the Presidency of the second session, the State of Kuwait,

for actively engaging participants during the intersessional period to learn from the other nuclear-weapon-free zones and continue moving the process forward," the UN official said at the inaugural session which was held in New York earlier Monday. He also extended warm congratulations to Kuwait's Permanent Representative

Ambassador Otaibi for his election as the President of the five-day conference.

Guterres stressed that establishing Middle East as Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone will help bring lasting peace to the chronically strife-torn region and make the world a safer, more secure place. "States must join forces and seek every opportunity to ease tensions, resolve conflicts and build lasting peace and security. This Conference represents one such initiative and could bring tangible benefits to the Middle East region and beyond," he said. The Conference, which aims to form a legally binding treaty to establish the zone, was first held in November 2019, following a request for such a gathering at the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. The



Kuwait shows solidarity with Palestinians

Kuwait, EU, international partners discuss women's empowerment solutions

KUWAIT: The General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development (GSSCPD), the Delegation of the European Union to the State of Kuwait, UNDP, UN Women, Al-Hamra Real Estate Company and the Women's Research and Studies Center at the College of Social Sciences at Kuwait University, supported by Kuwait's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, convened a high-level event which served as a platform for new private sector commitment to women's economic empowerment.

Topics addressed included Kuwait's path to accelerate gender diversity in the workplace in line with Kuwait's 2035 Vision and its international commitment and collaboration with global partners. The event also addressed the importance of women's full participation in the labor market, as the global economy recovers from the pandemic and businesses pursue more purpose and diversity-driven agendas.

Dr Khaled Mahdi, Secretary General of the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development; Dr Cristian Tudor, Ambassador of the European Union to the State of Kuwait and Dr Lubna Alkazi, Director, Women's Research and Studies Center at Kuwait University, gave the opening remarks, whilst Ambassador Talal Al-Mutairi, Assistant Foreign Minister for Human Rights, Kuwait Ministry of Foreign Affairs, provided the keynote address. Other speakers included senior government speakers, EU officials, UN experts and private sector leaders who are charting new pathways to accelerate gender equality in their organizations.

Speakers from across Kuwait and the European Union exchanged best practices both from the public and private sector, including Hana Alhajeri, Head of the Higher Council for Women's Affairs; Mr. Stefan Schleuning, Head of Unit, Foreign Policy Instruments at the European Commission; Abrar Al-Habib, Chief Administrative Officer of Al-Hamra Real Estate Co and Hedwige Nuyens, Chairwoman of Women on Boards and CEO of the International Banking Federation.

During the event, 14 new Kuwaiti private sector companies publicly committed to the UN Women's Economic Principles (WEPs), a roadmap for businesses on how to empower women in the workplace, marketplace and community. The seven principles highlight the gender dimension of corporate responsibility and are designed to support companies in reviewing and

NBK's Run kit collection centre receives applicants

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) opened a specialized center in Al-Shaheed Park to assist the registered applicants in its "NBK Run" and distribute the assigned T-shirts and numbers. The race kit collection will be open until Friday, 3 December 2021 at Al Shaheed Park Multi-purpose Hall in Phase 1 between 3:00 pm and 9:00 pm.

NBK Run is marked by a variety of fun, enter-

monitoring existing policies and practices-or establishing new ones-to realize women's empowerment.

Those include the Commercial Bank of Kuwait, Kamco Invest, Agility, Tamdeen Group, American University of Kuwait, Aljarida Newspaper, TABCO Foods, Wara Hospital Kuwait, Adlouni and Partners, Mona Abdullah Alarbash Law Firm, Rawd Al Saleheen Bilingual School, Khayal Consultants, ABCK-AM Kuwait, Royal Victoria Medical Center, who joined the thirty Kuwaiti companies who had already signed up to the WEPs. The new signatories expand the WEP community to new sectors, such as the private education and healthcare sectors.

Speaking on initiatives to promote higher gender equality at Al-Hamra Real Estate Co, AlHabib said:



KUWAIT: The participants in a group photo.

"Hosting the event for signing the Women's Empowerment Principles, and high-level dialogue today at our venue was an honor and testament to our goal to collectively create an inclusive corporate culture for everyone. Now, more than ever, we need to fortify our efforts to build resilient economies. With our current best practices in place that will continue to be reinforced, we have also identified several new strategies that will mobilize various resources to educate, strengthen, upskill, and empower the women workforce and our communities to be successful in the long run."

Addressing why women's empowerment matters to business, Nawal Mulla-Hussain, Managing

and health awareness-raising activities. All participants in the race will be eligible to enter the grand draw to win a new Nissan X - TERA car from the strategic partner, Al-Babtain Group. Ooredoo will offer an exclusive chance to all participants to enter the draw on a ticket to watch Paris Saint German (PSG) football match. Ooredoo will also award the top race winners with exclusive prizes.

NBK Run added a 5 Km race in addition to the existing 11 km to increase the completion among participants. The run for the 11 Km distance will start from the Green Island and for the 5 km will start from Souq Sharq on the Gulf Road. The finishing line of the race will be at Shuwaikh Beach Park, parallel to the Gulf Road, next to KPC building.

NBK will reward 12 winners. The top three win-



NEW YORK: Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the UN Headquarters in New York Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi addresses the Second Session of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction. —KUNA

Secretary-General noted that since 1967, five nuclear-weapon-free zones have been declared worldwide, including 60 percent of Member States and covering almost all of the southern hemisphere.

Expanding such zones to more regions will strengthen global nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation norms. It will also contribute to building a safer world, particularly in the Middle East where concerns over nuclear programs persist, and conflicts and civil wars are causing widespread civilian casualties and suffering, undermining stability and disrupting socioeconomic development. "I reiterate my call upon all parties to exercise restraint and avoid escalation," he said, emphasizing that the return to dialogue for the full implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Program of Action is an important step.

Further, the perpetrators of chemical attacks must be identified and held accountable. Achieving a nuclear-weapon-free zone will eliminate the possibility of nuclear conflicts in the region and strengthen international bans on chemical and biological weapons, he said. It will also deescalate regional arms races and free up much-needed resources to tackle COVID-19 and climate change, and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, he added, calling for strong political will and international community support to transform the vision of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East into a reality. —KUNA

Director of Support Operations at Kamco said: "We are pleased to commit to the WEPs, which are in line with our sustainable development plan, our continuing commitment to empowering women in the workplace and supporting our advocacy of gender equality. Women's empowerment and equality is one of the 17 UNDP's Sustainable Development Goals which is being currently integrated within our business model. Kamco Invest will continue to build on its sustainable development agenda and further develop a sustainable business ecosystem that paves the way for building the aspired modern state."

Stefan Schleuning, Head of Unit, Foreign Policy Instruments, European Commission, stated: "As we move closer towards the recovery phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU is putting women at the heart of the recovery. Stronger engagement on gender equality is key to a sustainable global recovery and building fairer, more inclusive, more prosperous societies. Indeed, estimates show that advancing gender equality could add about €11 to

€21 trillion to global GDP by 2025."

Hideko Hadzialic, Resident Representative of UNDP said: "The increase in female employment in Kuwait between 2014 and 2018 was 2.7 times that of males and was higher than males for both Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaiti women. Private sector plays a key role by incorporating a gender perspective into companies' overall management system and increasing women's role in decision making in leadership positions." The event, moderated by Bibi Khudari, prominent journalist, reporter and TV presenter, brought together government representatives, diplomatic missions, UN representatives, private sector companies, media and other guests.

ners (for each women and men) in the 11 km race will receive KD 1000, KD 700, KD 500 cash prizes. The top three winners in the 5 km race (for each women and men) will get KD 500, KD 400, KD 300 cash prizes. The bib-number for each participant will contain a step-counting chip to identify the winners' places. The results for NBK Run are supervised by the Event Management Company (SUFFIX).

NBK strongly supports sporting events and encourages various sporting activities as means to promote a healthier and more active lifestyle for members of the community. Throughout the years, NBK also organizes several social awareness programs including educational, environmental, health and many other active initiatives.



US warns Russia against Ukraine 'aggression'

Germany jails Iraqi jihadist for life for Yazidi genocide



BRIDGETOWN, Barbados: Prime Minister Mia Amor Mottley (L), President of Barbados Dame Sandra Mason (2nd L), National Hero Sir Garfield Sobers (C), Charles, Prince of Wales (3rd R) and Rihanna (R) look on during the Three Cheers to Barbados at the ceremony to declare Barbados a Republic and the Inauguration of the President of Barbados at Heroes Square in Bridgetown. — AFP

Barbados declared a republic

Caribbean island nation lowers UK queen's flag

BRIDGETOWN: The Caribbean island nation of Barbados has sever centuries-old ties to the British monarchy, ditching Queen Elizabeth II as head of state and declaring itself the world's newest republic. The Royal Standard flag that represents the queen will be lowered in the capital Bridgetown and - at midnight - the current governor-general, Dame Sandra Mason, will be inaugurated as the first president.

Prince Charles, heir to the British throne, will attend the "Pride of Nationhood" ceremony, which is set to include military parades, a mounted guard of honor, gun salutes, dances and fireworks. The new era for Barbados has fueled debate among the population of 285,000 over colonialism and Britain's centuries of influence, including more than 200 years of slavery until 1834.

And Prince Charles' visit was clouded at the last minute by another race row over alleged comments about his grandson, Charles' youngest son Prince Harry and his wife Meghan - who has a black mother and a white father - have said an unnamed royal asked how dark their unborn first child's skin would be. After a new book reportedly claimed that Charles was responsible, his spokesman said that "this is fiction and not worth further comment."

Colonialism and slavery

Barbados, famous for its idyllic beaches, love of

cricket and as the birthplace of singer Rihanna - who will attend the evening's fanfare - won independence from Britain in 1966. In October, it elected Mason to become its first president, one year after Prime Minister Mia Mottley declared the country would "fully" leave behind its colonial past. "I remember in the old days we would be really excited about the Queen and Prince Charles and Princess Diana and royal weddings," Anastasia Smith, a 61-year-old nurse, told AFP.

"But I don't know if we ever quite saw them as our royal family. Now, everybody is talking about a republic. I'm not sure that anything about my life is going to change. But I think we're doing the right thing and it's a proud moment for Barbados." British officials said Charles would use his speech in Barbados to stress continuing ties between the two countries, including through the Commonwealth group of nations.

But local criticism has focused on Mottley inviting Charles to be the guest of honor, and to award him the Order of Freedom of Barbados, the highest

national honor. For young activists such as Firhaana Bulbulia, founder of the Barbados Muslim Association, British colonialism and slavery lie behind the island's modern inequalities. "The wealth gap, the ability to own land, and even access to loans from banks all have a lot to do with

structures built out of being ruled by Britain," Bulbulia, 26, said.



World's newest republic emerges

Relying on tourism

Some Barbadians argue there are more pressing national issues than replacing the queen, including economic turmoil caused by the COVID-19 pandemic that has exposed

overreliance on tourism - which, ironically, is dependent on British visitors. "I know it is something that we were going towards for a very long time, but I think it came at a time which is not necessarily the best time considering our economic situation and the COVID situation," said 27-year-old office manager Nikita Stuart.

Eerie calm in usually bustling Bridgetown, paltry numbers at popular tourist spots and a dead

nightlife scene all point to a country struggling after years of relative prosperity. Unemployment is at nearly 16 percent, up from nine percent in recent years, and the country has just eased a longstanding COVID-19 curfew, pushing it back from 9:00 pm to midnight.

For the occasion, however, it has been suspended temporarily to allow Barbadians to enjoy the festivities, which are to include projections at various points across the country and large fireworks displays when the transition becomes official. Buoyed by Black Lives Matter movements across the world, local activists last year successfully advocated for the removal of a statue of the British Admiral Lord Horatio Nelson that stood in National Heroes Square for two centuries.

And the end of the queen's reign is seen by some as a necessary step towards financial reparations to address the historic consequences of the use of slaves brought from Africa to work on sugar plantations. For many Barbadians, replacing the British queen is just catching up with how the nation has felt for many years. "The symbolism of being able to aspire to become head of state is so powerful," Mottley said last week. "Our president-elect, who will be sworn in on Monday night... is the person who will bring immense pride to every Barbadian boy and girl." — AFP

Dutch find Omicron a week before South Africa flight cases

THE HAGUE: Dutch health authorities said yesterday that the new COVID-19 variant was already present in the Netherlands a week before a cluster of cases on two flights from South Africa. The Omicron cases were discovered on November 19 and 23 and authorities are checking whether they had links to southern Africa, and how far the new strain has spread.

The Netherlands joins other European countries including Belgium and Germany that have reported cases of the new strain before it was officially notified by South Africa to the World Health Organization on November 24. The Dutch RIVM National Institute for Public Health and the Environment said it "has found the corona variant Omicron in two test samples that had already been taken in the Netherlands... on November 19 and 23".

The first cases in the Netherlands were previously believed to be the 14 Omicron infections on two KLM flights from South Africa that arrived

in Amsterdam on Friday, November 26. "It is not yet clear whether the people concerned (in the earlier cases) have also been to southern Africa," the RIVM said. It said the people had been informed that they had the Omicron strain and municipal health services had now started contact investigations.

"In the coming period, various studies will be conducted into the distribution of the Omicron variant in the Netherlands," the institute said, adding that it would re-examine more samples from previous tests. With 16 confirmed cases the Netherlands has one of the highest numbers in Europe of the new strain. The airline passengers with Omicron, who were among 61 travelers on the two South Africa flights that tested positive for COVID, are currently in quarantine.

The Dutch case will increase concern about how far the variant had already spread in Europe before many countries brought in travel bans on southern African nations. Belgium, the first European country to report the presence of the new variant, has said that a case tested positive on November 22, and had developed symptoms 11 days after travelling to Egypt via Turkey. Germany has meanwhile said that a person who tested positive for the variant had arrived at Frankfurt international airport on November 21. — AFP

Ending sanctions is key to Vienna talks: Iran's Raisi

TEHRAN: Iran's president has assured his French counterpart that his government is serious about resumed talks on reviving a 2015 nuclear deal but stressed that lifting US sanctions is the absolute priority. President Ebrahim Raisi's comments in a phone call with Emmanuel Macron on Monday evening were his first after the reopening of the talks in Vienna earlier in the day.

Raisi said that Washington has a special responsibility to rebuild confidence in the agreement as it was then US president Donald Trump who had brought it to its knees in 2018 by pulling out and reimposing sweeping sanctions. "Those who have started to violate the nuclear deal must gain the confidence of the other party for the negotiations to proceed in a real and fruitful manner," he said. Raisi said Iran was serious about the talks on reviving the agreement known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and expected its negotiating partners to be so too.

"Sending a full team to the talks shows Iran's serious

will in these talks," he said. "If the Americans lift the sanctions and the Europeans honor their commitments... Iran will meet its obligations too." Raisi said Iran stood ready to resume "full cooperation" with the UN nuclear watchdog, which was tasked with monitoring Iran's implementation of the strict limits on its nuclear activities it agreed to in 2015 in return for the lifting of international sanctions.

A statement issued by the French presidency after the phone call said that France's goal in the talks was to "see Iran return to full respect for all of its commitments under the JCPOA and that the United States return to the agreement". Macron "underscored the need for Iran to engage constructively in this direction so that the exchanges allow a swift return to the agreement," it said. "Iran must return without delay to compliance with all its commitments and obligations... and quickly resume cooperation that allows the (UN atomic) agency to fully carry out its mission." — AFP



Iran's chief nuclear negotiator Ali Bagheri Kani.

International

Germany jails Iraqi jihadist for life for Yazidi genocide

A historic first verdict worldwide

FRANKFURT: A Frankfurt court yesterday handed a life sentence to an Iraqi man who joined IS for genocide against the Yazidi minority, in a historic first verdict worldwide to use the label. Taha Al-Jumailly, 29, was found guilty of genocide, crimes against humanity resulting in death, war crimes, aiding and abetting war crimes and bodily harm resulting in death after joining the so-called Islamic State group in 2013.

Proceedings were suspended as the defendant passed out in court when the verdict was read out. The Yazidis, a Kurdish-speaking group hailing from northern Iraq, have for years been persecuted by IS militants who have killed hundreds of men, raped women and forcibly recruited children as fighters.

In May, UN special investigators reported that they had collected “clear and convincing evidence” of genocide by IS against the Yazidis. “This is the outcome every single Yazidi and all genocide survivors were hoping to see,” Natia Navrouzov, a lawyer and member of the NGO Yazda, which gathers evidence of crimes committed by IS against the Yazidis, told AFP after the verdict.

“Today is a historical day for humanity and the Yazidi genocide enters finally the history of international criminal law. We will make sure that more trials such as this take place,” she said.

Torment

Prosecutors say Al-Jumailly and his now ex-wife, a German woman named Jennifer Wenisch, “purchased” a Yazidi woman and child as household “slaves” while living in then IS-occupied

Mosul in 2015. They later moved to Fallujah, where Al-Jumailly is accused of chaining the five-year-old girl to a window outdoors in heat rising to 50 degrees Celsius (122 Fahrenheit) as a punishment for wetting her mattress, leading her to die of thirst.

In a separate trial, Wenisch, 30, was sentenced to 10 years in jail in October for “crimes against humanity in the form of enslavement” and aiding and abetting the girl’s killing by failing to offer help. Identified only by her first name Nora, the child’s mother testified in both Munich and Frankfurt about the torment visited on her daughter. She also described being raped multiple times by IS jihadists after they invaded her village in the Sinjar mountains in northwestern Iraq in August 2014.

‘Clear message’

The mother was represented by a team including London-based human rights lawyer Amal Clooney, who has been at the forefront of a campaign for IS crimes against the Yazidis to be recognised as genocide,

along with former Yazidi slave and 2018 Nobel Peace Prize winner Nadia Murad. Although Clooney did not travel to Munich or Frankfurt, she called Wenisch’s conviction “a victory for everyone who believes in justice,” adding that she hoped to see “a more concerted global effort to bring ISIS (another acronym for IS) to justice”.

Murad has called on the UN Security Council to refer cases involving crimes against the Yazidis to the International Criminal Court or to create a specific tribunal for genocide committed against the community. Germany, home to a large Yazidi community, is one of the few coun-



FRANKFURT, Hessen: The defendant Iraqi Taha Al-Jumailly (L) holds up a file to cover his face as he speaks with his lawyers Serkan Alkan (C) and Martin Heising (R) before the sentencing in his trial for charges of genocide. —AFP

tries to have taken legal action over such abuses.

German courts have already handed down five convictions against women for crimes against humanity related to the Yazidis committed in territories held by IS. Prosecutors in Naumburg on Tuesday charged a German woman named as Leonora M. with aiding and abetting crimes against humanity after she and her IS husband enslaved a Yazidi woman in Syria in 2015.

Germany has charged several German and

foreign nationals with war crimes and crimes against humanity carried out abroad, using the legal principle of universal jurisdiction which allows offences to be prosecuted even if they were committed in a foreign country.

The trial of Al-Jumailly “sends a clear message”, Navrouzov told AFP. “It doesn’t matter where the crimes were committed and it doesn’t matter where the perpetrators are, thanks to the universal jurisdiction, they can’t hide and will still be put on trial.” —AFP

UK spy chief calls for intel services to come out of the shadows

LONDON: The head of Britain’s overseas spy service yesterday called for the country’s intelligence agencies to shed their culture of secrecy and partner with tech firms to fight hostile states, criminals and extremists. MI6 chief Richard Moore said in a rare public address that the country’s enemies were pouring “money and ambition into mastering artificial intelligence, quantum computing and synthetic biology”.

“We cannot hope to replicate the global tech industry, so we must tap into it,” Moore, known as “C” in government, said in a speech at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London. “I cannot stress enough what a sea-change this is in MI6’s culture, ethos and way of working, since we have traditionally relied primarily on our own capabilities.”

Cyber-threats from criminals, extremists and hostile states are growing “exponentially”, warned Moore, who took over as head of MI6 last year. “We may experience more technological progress in the next 10 years than in the last century, with a disruptive impact equal to the industrial revolution,” he added.

“It is a white-hot focus for MI6,” Moore identified China, Iran and Russia—with which Britain has had frayed diplomatic ties—were states of particular concern. “Adapting to a world affected by the rise of China is the single greatest priority for MI6,” he said.

“The Chinese intelligence services are highly capable, and continue to conduct large-scale espionage operations against the UK and our allies. “Beijing believes its own propaganda about Western frailties and underestimates Washington’s resolve. The risk of Chinese miscalculation through overconfidence is real,” he added.

Russian threat

China, criticised by London for its treatment of its Uyghur minorities and creeping authoritarianism in its former colony of Hong Kong, was using “debt traps and data traps” to wield global influence, he said. The “debt trap” refers to China extracting concessions such as the use of ports from countries that sign up to its soft-power infrastructure initiative when they default on loan repayments.

“The data trap is this: that, if you allow another country to gain access to really critical data about your society, over time that will erode your sovereignty, you no longer have control over that data,” Moore told BBC Radio 4 before giving his speech.

Britain caused outrage in China last year after blocking the involvement of telecoms major Huawei from involvement in its 5G broadband roll-out, after the United States raised spying concerns. MI6’s reputation was largely forged in the Cold War with the Soviet Union.

But Moore warned in his speech that President Vladimir Putin’s Russia remained an “acute threat”, given its actions on the border with Ukraine. “We have no desire to be adversarial towards Russia to undermine or encircle it. But we will do whatever it takes to keep our country safe and to deter and defend against the full spectrum of threats Moscow poses,” he added. —AFP

Seven weeks on, what’s up with Iraq election results?

BAGHDAD: Iraqi voters went to the polls more than seven weeks ago, but they are still waiting for the final results as tensions simmer in the war-scarred country.

A major rift has opened since the October 10 parliamentary vote within the camp representing Iraq’s Shiite Muslim majority over who should have a say in forming the next government.

While the movement of firebrand cleric and nationalist Moqtada Sadr made gains in the polls, some pro-Iranian Shiite factions lost support, and their backers have launched protests claiming election fraud.

Behind the scenes, powerful players are trying to hammer out what the next government might look like. But analysts warn that—in a country still recovering from decades of war and chaos, and where most parties have armed wings—political disputes

Barcelona fire kills 4, including two children

BARCELONA: A fire ripped through an abandoned bank occupied by squatters in central Barcelona yesterday, killing four people, including a baby and a three-year-old boy, Spanish firefighters said. “While we were battling the fire, we found four people. Emergency services tried to revive them, but unfortunately they failed, they could not do anything to save them,” the head of the firefighting operation, Angel Lopez, told reporters. A neighbour who lives in a flat above the bank said people trapped on the premises had been screaming, pleading for help after the blaze broke out. “It is a huge shame because there were two small children that we saw around here,” Miquel Guimera told reporters at the scene.

“There was a lot of smoke... the

squatters were screaming, asking for help, because you can see that they were locked up. It was quite traumatic.” People had lived in the abandoned office for two to three years, he said.

Lopez said it was not clear how the four dead people were related but Barcelona-based daily newspaper La Vanguardia said they were all members of the same family. The father was from Pakistan and the mother from Romania, the paper said.

‘The horror’

“There are no words to describe the horror of four people dying, among them two very young children, it is something that never should happen. It is horrible news,” Barcelona mayor Ada Colau, a former anti-evictions activist, told reporters.

Those in the building lived “in absolutely precarious conditions,” she added. Four other people were rescued after seeking refuge on the patio and taken to hospital with smoke inhalation, but their lives were not in danger, firefighters said.

Trumpism without Trump: The Republican playbook for 2022?

WASHINGTON: As US Republicans cheered impressive gains in state elections in the fall, their leader may not have been so delighted as he followed the results from his fiefdom in southern Florida. For the results of the gubernatorial races—victory in leftward-trending Virginia and an unexpectedly narrow defeat in deeply Democratic New Jersey—proved one thing beyond doubt: Republicans can win without Donald Trump.

Whisper it, but five years after submitting entirely to the will of its mercurial leader, and one year ahead of the crucial midterm elections, the Republican Party is tentatively picturing life after

always come with the risk of military escalation.

The incumbent Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhemi escaped unhurt when an explosive-packed drone hit his Baghdad residence on November 7 in an attack not claimed by any group.

Here is a look at the Iraqi election and the situation now.

Why the delay?

Iraqi election monitors launched the lengthy manual recounts after some parties alleged voter fraud. Last Saturday, the electoral commission said it had finally wound up the recount of hundreds of ballot boxes. A judicial committee has 10 days to certify the counts, after which the commission can name the winners within two days, with the result to be ratified in federal court.

According to the initial count, the big winner in the 329-seat unicameral assembly, with more than 70 seats, was the movement of Sadr. The big loser in the Shiite camp was the Fatah (Conquest) Alliance, the political arm of the Hashed al-Shaabi former paramilitary force, since integrated in the security apparatus, which includes many pro-Iranian groups.

It lost almost two-thirds of its parliamentary bloc

to gain some 15 seats, according to the preliminary results. Hashed leaders have rejected the preliminary results as a “scam” and their supporters have held street protests chanting “No to fraud”.

Political scientist Ihsan al-Shamari said that the electoral commission’s message was clear: “To give assurance that there have been no violations and the procedures were thorough.”

Who forms government?

The formation of governments has involved complex negotiations in multi-confessional and multi-ethnic Iraq ever since a US-led invasion toppled dictator Saddam Hussein in 2003.

Posts and ministries have been handed out according to compromises reached by the main blocs, rather than to reflect the numbers of seats parties have won.

While powerful blocs favour sticking with this tradition, Sadr has called for a “majority” government which, analysts say, he could try to build with Sunni and Kurdish parties.

Few analysts would dare to predict the next move of Sadr, a former leader of an anti-US militia who has often surprised observers with his political manoeuvres. —AFP



BARCELONA, Catalonia: A man closes the door of a van that transports the bodies of the fatal victims of a fire that broke out in the early hours of yesterday. —AFP

Firefighters rushed to the scene at around 6:00 am (0500 GMT) after being warned that a blaze had broken out in the building, Lopez said. The building located in a middle-class

neighbourhood was cordoned off and surrounded by emergency vehicles. The name of the bank was crossed out and the door doors were covered with graffiti. —AFP

Donald. “At this stage, he would be the frontrunner if he chose to enter the 2024 presidential race,” Matt Lacombe, an assistant professor of political science at New York liberal arts school Barnard College, told AFP. “But it’s also very possible that coordination among potential candidates and party officials... would be sufficient to prevent him from pursuing or succeeding in a second run.” After Trump secured the Republican presidential nomination in May 2016, the party abandoned its policy platform at its next two conventions, instead opting to simply declare fealty to its rambunctious chieftain.

The consensus remains that all paths to Congress go through Mar-a-Lago—that to succeed in Washington you had to kiss the ring in Palm Beach, flattering Trump and his ultra-loyal base of tens of millions of ardent devotees. Republican politicians who fail to toe the line know they risk a public dressing down and primary challenge at best and death threats to their families if his supporters were particularly inflamed.

“Despite losing his social media megaphone, his endorsements still energize grassroots supporters, drive donations, and in some cases clear away competitors and force retirements,” Tommy Goodwin, a Washington-based political consultant and lobbyist, told AFP. Some prominent Republicans are seizing on the recent governors’ races to call for a course correction, however, navigating around Trump and his “big lie” that the 2020 election was stolen from him by the Democrats.

In Virginia, Republican multimillionaire Glenn Youngkin won by far exceeding Trump’s 2020 showing in the suburbs, especially among independents and women. Trump immediately took credit but in reality, Youngkin soft-pedaled the former reality TV star’s support and did all he could in the final weeks to keep his high-profile endorser at arm’s length. In New Jersey too, Republican Jack Ciattarelli started out very pro-Trump, even speaking at a “Stop the Steal” rally in 2020, but distanced himself from the ex-president during the campaign proper. —AFP

International

US warns Russia against Ukraine
'aggression' as NATO meets

'We have seen Russia's playbook many times over'

RIGA: The United States yesterday warned Russia of "serious consequences" if it launches an invasion of Ukraine, as NATO ministers looked to counter a military build-up by Moscow on its neighbour's border. The long-scheduled meeting of NATO top diplomats in Latvia's capital Riga comes at a volatile moment along the bloc's eastern flank as allies also grapple with a migrant crisis the West says is fuelled by Kremlin-backed Belarus.

Western countries spearheaded by the United States worry that Moscow could be planning an incursion into Ukraine after accusing the Kremlin of massing tens of thousands of troops and heavy armour close to the frontier. "Any escalatory actions by Russia would be of great concern to the United States...and any renewed aggression would trigger serious consequences," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told journalists ahead of the meeting. "We have seen Russia's playbook many times over."

Moscow, which seized Crimea from Ukraine in 2014 and backs separatists fighting Kiev, has strongly denied it is plotting an attack and blames NATO for fuelling tensions. NATO diplomats say the bloc remains uncertain of Russian President Vladimir Putin's intentions-but ministers will discuss contingency plans should Russia invade.

The US-led alliance is looking to show the Kremlin

it faces severe costs if it threatens Ukraine, while stopping short of provoking Moscow into further aggression. Officials expect talks on additional support for Ukraine's military and potentially strengthening NATO forces arrayed along its eastern wing.

But they point out that NATO-aspirant Ukraine—which will have its foreign minister arriving for day two of the meeting today—is not covered by the alliance's collective defence pact. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg called on Russia to "show transparency, reduce tensions and de-escalate." "This military build-up is unprovoked and unexplained. It raises tensions and risks miscalculation," NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg said in Latvia Sunday.

Military build-up is unprovoked and unexplained



'Hybrid attack'
The growing fears around Ukraine come as NATO members Poland, Lithuania and Latvia have

faced another threat coming from the east that will be high on the agenda in Riga. They accuse Moscow's ally Belarus of funneling thousands of mainly Middle Eastern migrants to their borders in a "hybrid attack" as retribution for EU sanctions against Minsk.

President Alexander Lukashenko rejects the claim. NATO has expressed "solidarity" with its eastern members, but has largely been left on the sidelines as the threat level floats in a grey zone just

Most analysts had given Go little chance of success in the May election, though he was the most likely candidate to protect Duterte from criminal charges in the Philippines, and an International Criminal Court investigation into his deadly drug war. "From the very start he has launched a lukewarm campaign and it's very obvious that he was just thrust into that job by President Duterte," said Jean Franco, a political science professor at the University of the Philippines.

The son and namesake of former dictator Ferdinand Marcos has a commanding lead in the race, according to a recent survey by respected polling outfit Social Weather Stations. Marcos Jr was followed by incumbent vice president and Duterte critic Leni Robredo, celebrity mayor Francisco Domagoso and boxing great Manny Pacquiao.

Duterte has been an ally of the controversial Marcos family, which had gone into exile in the United States after the patriarch's humiliating downfall in 1986. But recently Duterte has been publicly critical of Marcos Jr, describing him as a "weak leader... saddled with baggage".

Sara Duterte, his daughter, had been widely expected to run for president. But she has filed her candidacy for vice president, a position which holds very little power, and formed an alliance with Marcos Jr. Go's exit from the "tight election race"

recently banned from speaking to the media. There was a heavy security presence on the streets leading to the special court in the capital Naypyidaw yesterday morning, an AFP correspondent said. The courtroom will remain off-limits to reporters for the verdict, junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun recently told AFP.

Catalogue of charges

Days after the coup Suu Kyi was hit with obscure charges for possessing unlicensed walkie-talkies, and for violating coronavirus restrictions during elections her National League for Democracy (NLD) won in 2020.

The junta has since added a slew of other indictments, including violating the official secrets act, corruption and electoral fraud. Suu Kyi's long spells of house arrest under a previous junta were spent at her family's colonial-era mansion in Yangon, where she would appear before thousands gathered on the other side of her garden fence.

Min Aung Hlaing's regime has confined her to an undisclosed location in the capital, with her link to the outside world limited to brief pre-trial meetings with her lawyers. In recent weeks, the trials of other ranking members of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy have wrapped

camps with our Congolese allies." Early yesterday, witness accounts reaching Beni, the chief town in the border province of North Kivu, reported heavy artillery fire in the Watalinga sector, causing panic at the nearby frontier post of Kamango.

The strikes came two days after a senior Congolese source reported that President Felix Tshisekedi had given Uganda permission to pursue the ADF on DR Congo soil. Linked by the United States to the Islamic State group, the ADF is deeply feared in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

The DRC's Catholic Church says the ADF has killed around 6,000 civilians since 2013 while a respected monitor, the Kivu Security Tracker (KST), blames it for more than 1,200 deaths in North Kivu's Beni area alone since 2017. The Ugandan authorities have recently accused the ADF or a local group affiliated with it of carrying out or planning attacks.

IS-linked

The ADF was historically a Ugandan rebel coalition whose biggest group comprised Muslims opposed to



RIGA: NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg (c) poses with the participants of the NATO foreign ministers' meeting in Riga, Latvia yesterday. NATO foreign ministers meet in the Latvian capital to discuss how to counter a Russian military build-up on Ukraine's border amid fears the Kremlin could be preparing to invade. —AFP

short of actual aggression.

Poland's President Andrzej Duda mooted increasing NATO force numbers deployed on its eastern flanks at a meeting with Stoltenberg last week. But a move to trigger emergency consultations under article 4 of the alliance's founding treaty appears to have been put on hold for now.

Speaking on a joint tour of the Baltics on Sunday, Stoltenberg and EU chief Ursula von der Leyen

pledged to step up cooperation against such challenges. Border tensions have eased slightly as some migrants have begun returning to Iraq, but Warsaw and Vilnius insist the crisis is far from over. "There can be no doubt that Lukashenko's regime and the forces that support it will continue to test the Western world's unity and their ability to react," Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda warned last week. —AFP

Duterte's chosen successor exits presidential race

MANILA: Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte's chosen successor yesterday announced his withdrawal from the 2022 presidential race, saying it was "not yet my time". Senator Christopher Go, a close aide to the president, entered the contest for the country's highest office two days before the November 15 deadline, after previously registering for the vice presidential race.

His sudden exit narrows the field of candidates vying to replace Duterte, who is constitutionally barred from seeking a second six-year term. He is running for the Senate. "My family doesn't want it either so I thought maybe this is not yet my time," Go told reporters.

Go said his decision to withdraw was also to avoid causing "more problems" for Duterte, who he professed to love "more than as a father". "I remain loyal to him and I promise to be with him forever," Go said. "In the past few days I realised that my heart and my mind are contradicting my own actions."

Myanmar delays verdict in Suu Kyi incitement trial

NAYPYIDAW: A Myanmar junta court yesterday postponed giving a verdict in the incitement trial of deposed civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, the first judgement from her many cases that could see her jailed for decades.

The Nobel laureate has been detained since the generals ousted her government in the early hours of February 1, ending the Southeast Asian country's brief democratic interlude. More than 1,200 people have been killed and over 10,000 arrested in a crackdown on dissent, according to a local monitoring group.

The court, which had been due to rule on her trial for incitement against the military—a charge that carries a three-year prison term—adjourned the verdict "until December 6," said a source with knowledge of the case.

Journalists have been barred from proceedings in the special court in the military-built capital Naypyidaw and Suu Kyi's lawyers were

Uganda strikes at rebels following suicide blasts

BENI, DR Congo: Uganda yesterday launched air strikes and artillery attacks against the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) rebel group in eastern DR Congo, both countries said, following deadly attacks in the Ugandan capital Kampala.

"As announced, targeted and concerted action with the Ugandan army started today with air strikes and artillery fire from Uganda against positions of the terrorist ADF in the DRC," Congolese government spokesman and Communications Minister Patrick Muyaya wrote on Twitter.

At almost the same time, a spokesman for the Ugandan armed forces tweeted: "This morning, we have launched joint air and artillery strikes against ADF



MANILA: File photo shows supporters of Philippine senator and presidential candidate Bong Go (pictured on placards) hold a rally in front of the commission on elections office in Manila, on the final day for candidates to file for the presidential and vice presidential races in 2022. —AFP

could strengthen the "political force" of Marcos Jr and Sara, said Franco.

But she doubted that Duterte would endorse Marcos Jr for his job. Go's decision also comes after a tumultuous week when many of the leading presidential and vice-presidential candidates took drug tests after Duterte accused an unnamed candidate of snorting cocaine. —AFP



Aung San Suu Kyi

up, with the junta doling out harsh sentences.

A former chief minister was sentenced to 75 years in jail earlier this month, while a close Suu Kyi aide was jailed for 20. The military, which has dominated life in Myanmar for decades, has defended its power grab, citing fraud allegations in last year's general election, which Suu Kyi's party won comfortably. International pressure on the junta to restore democracy swiftly has shown no sign of knocking the generals off course. —AFP

Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni. The group established itself in eastern DRC in 1995, becoming the deadliest of scores of outlawed forces in the troubled region. It has been blamed for thousands of killings in North Kivu province, especially in the Beni area. Since April 2019, some ADF attacks have been claimed by IS, which describes the group as its Islamic State Central Africa Province offshoot. In March, the United States placed the ADF on its list of "terrorist" organisations linked to the IS.

Ugandan attacks

On November 16, four people were killed and 33 were injured in twin suicide bombings in Kampala, which police attributed to a "domestic terror group" linked to the ADF. The blasts, claimed by IS, came on the heels of a bomb attack at a roadside eatery on October 23 that killed one woman, and a suicide blast on a bus near Kampala on October 25 that wounded several people.

In late October, the Ugandan police said they had arrested suspected ADF members, who they believed

Australian parliament staff sexually harassed

SYDNEY: Sexual harassment and bullying are widespread in Australia's parliament, affecting both lawmakers and staff, a high-profile inquiry into the institution's "sexist culture" has found.

After a seven-month investigation, a government-backed report yesterday said one in three people currently working at parliament "have experienced some form of sexual harassment while working there".

That included 63 percent of the country's female parliamentarians.

"Aspiring male politicians who thought nothing of, in one case, picking you up, kissing you on the lips, lifting you up, touching you, pats on the bottom, comments about appearance, you know, the usual... the culture allowed it," said one of the report's 1,700 interviewees.

The report made 28 recommendations, including a formal statement of acknowledgement by political leaders, targets to increase gender diversity and "a proactive focus on safety and wellbeing".

It was launched amid widespread outrage at the alleged rape of parliamentary staffer Brittany Higgins inside a minister's office, after a night out with conservative Liberal Party colleagues.

Her allegations which are still before the court-fuelled nationwide demonstrations and demands for reform. Higgins yesterday welcomed the report and thanked "the many brave people who shared their stories which contributed to this review".

"I hope all sides of politics not only commit to but implement these recommendations in full," she said in a statement sent via the Australian National University, where she is now a visiting fellow.

Greens' Senator Sarah Hanson-Young described the report as a "damning expose of the sexist culture and harassment in politics". "The statistics and comments are shocking, but for many women here they are not surprising and ring true to our own experiences," she said. —AFP

were plotting a new attack on "major installations". Uganda has also blamed the ADF for a foiled bomb attack in August on the funeral of an army commander who led a major offensive against Al-Shabaab militants in Somalia.

Three men were charged with terrorism on November 5 in relation to that incident. A presidential advisor in Kinshasa told AFP on Sunday that the DRC would allow armed forces from Uganda to "enter Congolese territory to chase ADF terrorists".

The move is not universally supported in the DRC, where many critics recall the role of Uganda and Rwanda in the decades-long instability in the east of the country. On Monday, Muyaya told journalists that there were "no Ugandan troops" in the DRC, but "targeted and concerted actions... (were) envisaged with the Ugandan army to fight the ADF terrorists, our common enemy."

The eastern DRC provinces of North Kivu and Ituri have been under a "state of siege" since May in a bid to step up a military offensive against the rebels, with soldiers replacing civil servants in key positions. —AFP

Business

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2021

Omicron variant raises new fears for pandemic-hit world economy

WTO reschedules ministerial conference for March

WASHINGTON: Just as it was recovering from the body blow of the COVID-19 pandemic, the global economy has taken yet another hit from the Omicron variant of the virus, which has led to a raft of new travel restrictions. First reported to the World Health Organization in South Africa less than a week ago, the new strain has rapidly spread everywhere from Africa to the Pacific, and from Europe to Canada, causing dozens of countries to announce travel restrictions.

The severity of the economic impact will depend on how dangerous the variant proves to be, and how well existing vaccinations stand up to it. That has meant that even with the most favorable scenarios in mind, economists are already revising their 2022 forecasts downwards.

The International Monetary Fund, which expects growth of 4.9 percent for the next year, has been insisting for months that the coronavirus and its variants remain the main threat. The economic impact could be "modest," in the order of 0.25 percentage points on global growth in 2022, if Omicron causes "relatively mild symptoms" and the vaccines are "effective," said Gregory Daco, chief economist at Oxford Economics.

In the worst-case scenario, in which Omicron proves extremely dangerous and large swaths of the world are in lockdown again, 2022 growth could fall to around 2.3 percent, as compared to the 4.5 percent expected by Oxford Economics before the variant emerged. And in such a scenario it is not certain that governments, which have stumped up trillions of dollars in aid since the start of the pandemic, would be willing to put in place further fiscal stimulus packages, especially if vaccines are available, Daco said.

Those aspects "are going to be really key to how it affects the global economy and people's behavior," said Erik Lundh, an economist at The Conference Board.

Self-isolation

Beyond government measures to contain the new strain, fear of infection could lead people to limit

their own travel and economic activities, such as going to restaurants and reducing consumption, which will in turn impact growth. Lundh said. Another risk is the exacerbation of the global supply chain crunch. Lundh pointed out that "a lot of air cargo is stored basically in the belly of passenger planes...It's not just all sorts of FedEx planes."

"So if there are cancellations, if there's a lapse in demand for commercial flights for passengers, it does run the risk of limiting the route of trade," which could in turn worsen inflationary pressures as goods become more scarce. In addition, a wave of Omicron infections "could cause some workers to temporarily exit the workforce, and deter others from returning, making current labor shortages worse," said Neil Shearing, chief economist at Capital Economics in a note.

Omicron has sparked more anxiety than any other variant since the emergence of Delta, itself already much more contagious than previous strains.

US President Joe Biden, however, said Monday that there was "not a cause for panic," even if the United States has closed its borders to travelers from the southern African region where the variant was first detected. As for vaccine manufacturers AstraZeneca, Pfizer/BioNTech, Moderna and Novavax have expressed confidence in their ability to combat the variant.

Interest rate hike delayed?

However, the threat of a potentially more serious variant will complicate the task of central banks which could "postpone plans to raise interest rates until the picture becomes clearer," said Shearing. The Federal Reserve is due to meet on December 15, with several others, including the European Central Bank (ECB) and the Bank of England meeting the day after.

Pfizer CEO said Albert Bourla said it will be a few weeks before drug makers know most of what they need to know about the new strain. In the meantime, "uncertainty is damaging," said economist Daco.

"Every time you come back to a climate of uncertainty and fear, it slows down the recovery of the



MANILA: Workers pull carts loaded with goods for delivery in the Divisoria district of Manila yesterday. —AFP

world economy." On Monday, Fed Chairman Jerome Powell himself warned that Omicron is a risk for the US economy, which together with China and the European Union is one of the engines driving the global economy.

The WTO said yesterday it had rescheduled to March a ministerial conference that would have tackled thorny trade issues including fisheries and intellectual property because of the pandemic. The meeting, the first at this level since 2017, was to have run from Tuesday to Friday and bring together some 4,000 figures including heads of state and more than 100 government ministers.

The postponed gathering had already been from one planned last June in Kazakhstan but switched in the wake of the emergence of the COVID-19 virus. The WTO proposed a postponement to next year given "the deterioration of the epidemiological situation and ensuing travel restrictions" with the emer-

gence of the latest Omicron virus variant.

It is now proposed the meeting go ahead "during the first week of March 2022, if conditions allow". In a letter to national member missions, the WTO president and vice-presidents said the postponement should "not be a reason for us not to roll up our sleeves" as the WTO requires solidarity and full support "at this critical moment".

Pressing current issues on the WTO agenda are addressing intellectual property disputes as well as fisheries subsidies. Calling for a "sensible solution" to the former, the WTO urged flexibility on the latter "given that the fisheries subsidies negotiations have progressed substantially in the last few weeks".

The ministerial meeting will be the first since Nigerian economist Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala took the helm as WTO director general last March seeking to bolster the body's visibility amid growing trade rivalry between the United States and China. —AFP

EasyJet warns 'too soon' to know Omicron impact

LONDON: British airline EasyJet warned yesterday it was "too soon" to assess the impact of the Omicron COVID variant on the aviation sector, after logging narrowing annual losses as skies reopened. The emergence last week of Omicron, a new concerning COVID variant first detected in southern Africa, has prompted some nations including Britain to tighten travel curbs.

"It's too soon to say what impact Omicron may have on European travel and any further short-term restrictions that may result," EasyJet said in a results statement. "However, we have prepared ourselves for periods of uncertainty such as this."

Elsewhere in Europe, Scandinavian airline SAS expressed optimism despite the emergence of Omicron-but cautioned over "prevailing uncertainties" in the industry.

Demand pick-up

EasyJet meanwhile revealed "some softening of trading" in the current first quarter, or three months to December. However, the carrier forecast the fourth quarter would see "a return to near pre-pandemic"



LONDON: EasyJet has said it is already seeing a drop in bookings amid uncertainty over the new Omicron variant as it posted annual losses of more than £1 billion.

capacity levels as people take long-awaited summer holidays. EasyJet's net loss improved to £858 million (\$1.1 billion, 1.0 billion euros) in the reporting year to September, aided by the reopening of air travel.

That contrasted with a vast loss of £1.1 billion last time around, when COVID grounded flights and hampered demand. The airline, which is based in Luton north of London, added that pretax losses improved to £1.0 billion from £1.3 billion. Revenues more than halved to £1.5 billion as passenger numbers dived 60 percent, but the group drastically cut costs.

cines might be less effective at fending off the Omicron variant.

Carsten Fritsch of Commerzbank said "there is much to suggest that OPEC+ will not initially step up its oil production any further" in an effort to maintain current prices at around \$70 a barrel.

OPEC+ countries began slowly boosting output in May. The group has been adding 400,000 barrels per day to the markets every month, even though its capacity is 10 times higher than that. The alliance will discuss its output levels for early 2022 at the meeting.

No 'hasty' moves

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak, the Kremlin's oil pointman, warned Monday against any "hasty decisions", according to Russian news agencies. A technical meeting was set for Tuesday ahead of the meeting but was postponed to Thursday as experts seek more information on the "current situation", Novak said.

The conference also comes a week after the United States, China, India and Japan decided to dip into their strategic reserves to help bring down crude prices, after a surge that has undermined economic recovery. US President Joe Biden called it a "major initiative", with analysts estimating the injection at between 65 and 80 million barrels,

"EasyJet is moving through the pandemic with renewed strength," said Chief Executive Johan Lundgren. The business had been "transformed" by delivering "significant" cost savings and improving its network and flexibility.

"These initiatives alongside our strong, investment grade, balance sheet provide EasyJet with renewed strength to manage any further COVID related travel disruptions." In early afternoon deals, EasyJet shares dipped 0.5 percent to 499.90 pence on London's falling stock market.

'Eye of storm'

Interactive Investor analyst Richard Hunter said airlines are "caught in the eye of the storm" of the ongoing COVID crisis. "While the extent and impact of Omicron are not yet fully understood, the reaction from governments in restricting travel is becoming the norm," Hunter added.

"This begs the questions of how future variants and mutations are dealt with by the authorities, and whether the airlines can even hope to prosper given the stop-start nature of the present recovery."

The new, heavily mutated COVID-19 variant spread across the globe on Sunday, forcing nations to reimpose measures many had hoped were a thing of the past. Since the Omicron variant was identified and named last week, the UK government—which has responsibility for health policy in England only—has slapped a travel ban on 10 southern African countries, including South Africa. —AFP



including 50 million from the United States alone. Oil prices rose despite the move, but they fell after Omicron emerged.

Iran's possible re-entry into OPEC will be another key element in the OPEC calculus. Iran was sidelined from OPEC in 2018 when then US president Donald Trump pulled Washington out of the 2015 nuclear accord with the Islamic republic. After a five-month hiatus, negotiations resumed Monday in Vienna. While most analysts are pessimistic about the outcome, Bjarne Schieldrop of Swedish bank SEB said: "Getting Iranian oil production and exports back on track is probably the best option for President Joe Biden to ease the current oil market tightness." —AFP

India reports 8.4% quarterly growth on pandemic recovery

NEW DELHI: India maintained its pandemic bounceback with 8.4 percent growth in the July-September quarter, official data showed yesterday, boosted by a broad-based recovery after a deadly infection surge earlier this year. Asia's third-largest economy was hammered in 2020 by sudden COVID lockdowns that saw most industrial and manufacturing activity grind to a halt for months.

Infections skyrocketed again earlier this year in an outbreak that overwhelmed hospitals and crematoriums. But the latest on-year expansion shows the economy returning to its pre-virus size.

"Growth is on expected lines but it has been helped largely by the base effect. The growth over 2019 is only marginal," CARE Ratings chief economist Madan Sabnavis said. The economy grew by a record 20.1 percent in the April-June quarter, compared to a contraction of 24.4 percent during India's most stringent virus lockdown last year. The latest figures come as concern grows over the spread of the highly infectious Omicron COVID variant, which has weighed on global market sentiment.

"Growth seems to be on the road to 9.1 percent for the full year but a new COVID wave would put that estimate in danger," Sabnavis said. "If not for Omicron, we could have upgraded the growth forecast."

India has yet to detect any cases of the variant, health minister Mansukh Mandviya told parliament yesterday. Compared to the previous quarter, India's economy expanded by 10 percent at constant prices, according to an AFP estimate. The government does not release quarter-on-quarter economic data. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund slashed growth forecasts for India earlier this year after the huge COVID outbreak in April and May that killed more than 200,000 people.

But some analysts had raised their expectations in recent weeks in the wake of rising consumption and with new virus infections falling. The World Bank's most recent India forecast in October predicted 8.3 percent growth for the 2021-22 fiscal year, after a record contraction of 7.3 percent in the pandemic's first year. The Reserve Bank of India has maintained an accommodative stance on inflation to support the economy despite rising prices. —AFP

OPEC+ to meet as Omicron sparks price turmoil

LONDON: OPEC and the oil cartel's allies hold a key output meeting tomorrow facing new challenges as the Omicron coronavirus variant has roiled markets and other US-led nations decided to tap their strategic reserves.

The OPEC+ alliance has resisted US-led pressure to step up production to bring down surging energy prices, and the emergence of the new variant has complicated the equation. The meeting "is shaping up to be one of the most significant since the pandemic demand recovery began, and the key signal will be how much more oil will be added to supply to start the new year," said Peter McNally, an analyst at the Third Bridge think tank.

The detection of the new variant on Thursday caused crude prices to plunge more than 10 percent, a first since the massive drops of April 2020. After bouncing back on Monday, oil prices fell again on Tuesday as the head of US pharmaceutical company Moderna warned that current vac-

Business

Gulf Bank hosts intensive in-house CMA training for its employees

Employees participated in CMA training to stay up-to-date with its latest requirements

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank held an intensive in-house training on the latest Capital Market Authority requirements for all employees to ensure they are kept up-to-date. All employees, including members from various departments, took part in this training to promote a culture of compliance and continuous learning. Employees, along with staff members from the Investments, Board Affairs, Internal Audit, and Legal departments, all participated in the initiative and were eager to update their knowledge when it comes to the CMA certification.

By ensuring that staff members across the bank's departments are updated with the latest requirements, Gulf Bank will guarantee that their roles will be completed effectively and efficiently. The latest training aims to create a culture of compliance and motivate employees to broaden their knowledge when it comes to management accounting and financial management fields. Ambition, one of Gulf Bank's main core values, is the driving force behind employee success at the bank. Gulf Bank values continuous learning to ensure that its teams are staying up to date with the global benchmark of certifications. By doing so, Gulf Bank will continue to provide innovative services and guarantee sustainable growth.

Gulf Bank's General Manager of Human Resources, Salma Al-Hajjaj, emphasized the importance of continuous learning and improvement at the bank, saying: "At Gulf Bank, we value ambition and continuous learning to further enhance one's skills and knowledge. We aim to motivate our team to remain curious, keep learning and constantly aspire to grow intellectually. Creating an environment that promotes employee engagement and development is essential, and by offering intensive in-house CMA training for our team, we were able to cultivate that environment. Today, Gulf Bank employees are up to date with the latest CMA requirements and are excited to implement the knowledge they have acquired to satisfy our customers."

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti bank of the future. The bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and



Salma Al-Hajjaj with the team

seamless banking experience.

Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining a robust sustainability program at the community, economic, and environmental levels through sustainability ini-

tiatives that are strategically selected to benefit both the country and the Bank. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with the different relevant parties to achieve it.

Markaz appointed as Market Maker for Land and Gulf Cable

KUWAIT: Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz" announced that it has been appointed as a Market Maker for the shares of Land United Real Estate Company "Land" and Gulf Cable and Electrical Industries Company "Cable". Markaz will provide its specialized market making services to boost the trading of the two companies' shares on Boursa Kuwait.

In its role as a Market Maker, Markaz will support Land and Gulf Cable and Electrical Industries in increasing the volume of trading on their shares and boosting liquidity, thereby contributing to their growth and stability in the market. It will facilitate the buying and selling of the two companies' shares by investors and traders through increasing their access to trading opportunities by continuously quoting the competitive prices and



Azzam Al-Otaibi

providing liquidity. Markaz also seeks to create the much-needed balance, in the case where there is a high supply of shares and low demand, and vice versa.

Commenting on the announcement, Azzam Al-Otaibi, Assistant Manager, MENA Equities at Markaz, stated: "We are pleased that Markaz has been designated to provide market making services for LAND and Gulf Cable and Electrical Industries. This appointment reflects the trust of the market in Markaz's capabilities as a Market Maker with a proven track record in creating significant value for companies and traders alike. It also confirms that our market making services are in line with best international standards and are managed by a qualified team consisting of trading experts and specialists."

"The appointment also comes as a testament to our ongoing commitment and constant efforts to drive the development of the Kuwaiti market. Working closely with Boursa Kuwait, we are striving to boost transactions and investments to improve liquidity. We will continue to explore new opportunities to further our contributions to the financial markets sector and the wider national economy," added Mr. Al-Otaibi.

Al-Otaibi said that the Market Maker services aim to create a balance between supply and demand and reduce the spread between bid and ask prices. This can result in greater revenues for companies benefitting from these services. It also might positively impact the companies' borrowing costs, the value of company shares and the ability to trade at fairer values.

In addition, market maker services support the overall development of the Kuwait economy by encouraging other companies to list their shares on the national exchange. Earlier this year, the Capital Markets Authority of Kuwait granted a license to Markaz to operate as a Market Maker, following which it started providing market making services to Boursa Kuwait and Aleid Foods Company.



WASHINGTON, DC: Federal Reserve Board Chair Jerome Powell (left) speaks as Lael Brainard (right) listens during an announcement at the South Court Auditorium of Eisenhower Executive Office Building in this November 22, 2021 file photo. —AFP

Fed's Powell warns Omicron poses risks to US economy

WASHINGTON: The Omicron variant of COVID-19 could slow the recovery of the US economy and labor market and also heighten uncertainty regarding inflation, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said in testimony released Monday. Powell has consistently said the recent spike in inflation would be transitory, but acknowledged that the factors pushing US prices higher will "linger well into next year."

The comments to be delivered to the Senate Banking Committee later indicate the central bank chief is growing more concerned about this year's price increases, which has put pressure on the central bank to raise interest rates more quickly. The Fed slashed interest rates to zero in the early days of the pandemic and flooded the financial system with liquidity, which together with massive government aid helped to prevent a more damaging economic downturn. While the US economy has "continued to strengthen," the resurgence of the pandemic has dragged on the recovery, starting with the arrival of the Delta variant over the summer, he said.

The latest strain, which first emerged in South Africa, has jolted global policy and health officials as they scramble to determine if Omicron is more infectious or more serious, and whether current vaccines will be as effective. Financial markets tanked on Friday amid fears the global economy would suffer a severe setback, but rebounded on Monday.

"The recent rise in COVID-19 cases and the emergence of the Omicron variant pose downside risks to employment and economic activity, and increased uncertainty for inflation," Powell said. "Greater concerns about the virus could reduce people's willingness to work in person, which would slow progress in the labor market and intensify supply-chain disruptions." Those global snags have caused shortages of a variety of products, while pent up demand for goods also have contributed to a burst of price hikes.

Unpredictable inflation

Powell noted that inflation is running "well above" the Fed's two-percent goal, with the central bank's preferred price gauge seeing a surge of five percent for the 12 months ending in October. "Supply chain problems have made it difficult for producers to meet strong demand, particularly for goods. Increases in energy prices and rents are also pushing inflation upward," he said.

While the Fed still expects that "inflation will move down significantly over the next year as supply and demand imbalances abate," Powell acknowledged the trend is "difficult to predict." Noting that rising prices hurt "those least able to shoulder the burden," including Black and Hispanic families, he pledged to act to support the recovery and "prevent higher inflation from becoming entrenched." —AFP

Climate change 2021: There's no turning back now

PARIS: Across a quarter century of UN climate conferences tasked with saving humanity from itself, one was deemed a chaotic failure (Copenhagen/2009), another a stunning success (Paris/2015), and the rest landed somewhere in between. This year's COP26 inspired all these reactions at once. Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, leading a 100,000-strong march through the streets of Glasgow, dismissed the two-week meet as a "greenwashing festival".

But dedicated experts in the negotiating arena hailed solid-even historic-advances in beating back the existential threat of global warming. More often than not, observers vacillated between approval and criticism, hope and despair. "The Glasgow Climate Pact is more than we expected, but less than we hoped for," Dann Mitchell, head of climate hazards at Britain's Met Office, said with Haiku-like economy.

Gauging the efficacy of measures announced at the COP26 summit largely depends on the yardstick used to measure them. Compared to what came before, the first-ever call by 196 countries to draw down coal-fired power, or a promise to double financial aid each year-to roughly \$40 billion-so poor nations can brace for climate impacts, are giant steps forward.

Likewise a provision obliging countries to consider setting more ambitious targets for reducing carbon pollution every year rather than once every five years. But all these hard-won gains at COP26 shrivel in significance when stacked up against hard science.

Glasgow exit lane

An unbroken cascade in 2021 of deadly floods, heatwaves and wildfires across four continents, combined with ever more detailed projections, left no doubt that going beyond the 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.6 degrees Fahrenheit) heating limit envisioned in the Paris Agreement would push Earth into the red zone. "As a lifelong optimist, I see the Glasgow outcome as half-full rather than half-empty," said Alden Meyer, a senior analyst at climate and energy think tank E3G.

"But the atmosphere responds to emissions-not COP decisions-and much work remains ahead to translate the strong rhetoric here into reality." 2021 also saw Part I of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) first comprehensive synthesis of climate science in seven years. It found that global heating is virtually certain to pass 1.5C, probably within a decade. Meanwhile, ocean levels are rising faster than anticipated, and will do so for centuries. And forests, soil and oceans-which absorb more than half of humanity's carbon-pollution-show signs of saturation.

Then there is the threat of "tipping points" that could see permafrost release massive amounts of CO2 and methane, the Amazon basin transformed into



ISTANBUL: This aerial photograph taken on June 6, 2021 in Turkey's Marmara Sea at a harbor on the shoreline of Istanbul, shows a jelly-like layer of slime that develops on the surface of the water due to the excessive proliferation of phytoplankton, gravely threatening the marine biome. — AFP

savannah, and ice sheets shedding enough mass to submerge cities and deltas home to hundreds of millions. "Make no mistake, we are still on the road to hell," said Dave Reay, head of the University of Edinburgh's Climate Change Institute. "But Glasgow has at least created an exit lane."

Permanent breaking story

Part 2 of the IPCC report on climate impacts, seen exclusively by AFP ahead of its February 2022 publication, reveals another yawning gap between the baby steps of COP26 and what is needed in the long term. Helping vulnerable nations cope, to the multiplier effect of global heating on extreme weather could soon require trillions of dollars per year, not the tens of billions put on the table at COP26, a draft version of the report makes clear.

"Adaptation costs are significantly higher than previously estimated, resulting in a growing 'adaptation finance gap'," said an executive summary of the 4,000-page report. The failure of rich nations to deliver \$100 billion a year by 2020 to help developing countries makes it hard to imagine where these trillions will come from.

Glasgow marked the transition from fleshing out the rules for the 2015 Paris treaty to implementing its provisions. But unlike the aftermath of other major COPs, the climate crisis will remain front-and-centre, and this permanent breaking story is not going to recede into the background anytime soon.

How that saga unfolds will depend a lot on the world's four major emitters, collectively responsible for 60 percent of global carbon pollution. The United States and the European Union have pledged carbon neutrality by 2050 and recently set more ambitious emissions reduction targets for 2030, but refused to set up a fund demanded by

more than 130 developing countries to help pay for climate damage already incurred.

All sectors, all countries

China and India-accounting for 38 percent of global emissions in 2021, and rising-have resisted pressure to foreswear fossil fuels. Beijing has steadfastly refused to do what scientists say is doable and necessary to stay under 2C: peak their emissions far earlier than 2030.

If climate politics remain stymied, however, global capital is already flowing into what some have called the most massive economic transformation in human history. In Glasgow, former Bank of England governor Mark Carney boasted that nearly 500 banks, insurers and asset managers worth \$130 trillion were ready to finance climate action. "If we only had to transform one sector, or move one country off fossil fuels, we would have done so long ago," commented Christiana Figueres, who headed the UN climate convention when the Paris deal was struck.

"But all sectors of the global economy have to be decarbonized, and all countries must switch to clean technologies." Where some of that money might flow-and who might get left out-has also come into focus, with major investment deals announced for South Africa, and others in the pipeline for emerging economies such as Indonesia and Vietnam. But there is little incentive for private capital to help the poorest and most climate vulnerable countries to cope with climate ravages and shore up their defenses. "We cannot just wait for open market incentives to have their way, we need to set prices on carbon globally, we need to set science-based targets that become climate laws," said Johan Rockstrom, director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research. —AFP

KAMCO Banking Sector Report

Boost in economic activity drives lending in GCC banking sector

Lending by Kuwaiti banks grows by \$3.8bn to a total gross loan of \$201bn q-o-q

KUWAIT: Economic indicators remained strong in the GCC and sentiments remained elevated, especially with the recovery in oil prices as well as the almost complete removal of COVID-19 related restrictions on business activity. Vaccinations rates also remained one of the highest in the region, giving further confidence to the governments to resume some of the vulnerable sectors, including airlines and tourism. This was reflected in the PMI figures for UAE and Saudi Arabia that remained consistently and comfortably above the growth mark of 50 at 57.7 and 55.7 during October-2021, respectively.

Total gross loans disbursed by listed GCC banks increased by \$28.3 billion q-o-q mainly led by higher lending in Saudi Arabia which increased lending by \$13.9 billion. Lending by Qatari banks was also strong with a growth of \$7.4 billion to a total gross loans of \$363 billion followed by Kuwaiti banks with a growth of \$3.8 billion to a total gross loan of \$201 billion.

Data from GCC central banks' monthly publications also showed growth in credit disbursements across the region. Mortgage loans, which accounted for the bulk of the personal credit facilities, showed strong q-o-q growth during Q3-2021 across the GCC. In Saudi Arabia, mortgage loans increased by 6.1 percent, the strongest in the GCC followed by Kuwait and Bahrain at 4.1 percent and 3.4 percent, respectively. A recent report citing CBK data said that housing loans granted to Kuwaiti citizens reached KD 930 million (\$3.1 billion) during the first eight months of this year. In Saudi Arabia, SAMIA data showed that the number of mortgage financing deals increased by 3.4 percent m-o-m to 23,899 contracts during October-2021. Credit facilities extended to the construction sector also showed growth in all the GCC countries, barring Kuwait where it declined by 2.9 percent, with Qatar showing the strongest growth of 6.0 percent.

LLP declined to an 8-quarter low

Loan loss provisions (LLP) witnessed a steep double-digit drop in all the GCC markets during Q3-2021, barring UAE, as compared to Q2-2021. Total LLP reached \$3.2 billion, a 0.9 billion decline as compared to \$4.1 billion in Q2-2021. Saudi Arabian banks reported the biggest decline in provisions at \$0.5 billion to reach total LLP of \$0.7 billion followed by Kuwaiti and Qatari banks with declines of \$0.2 billion and \$0.1 billion, respectively.

UAE banks continue to boast the highest provisions of \$1.3 billion followed by Qatari and Saudi Arabian banks at \$0.7 billion and \$0.68 billion, respectively. The y-o-y drop for slightly higher for the aggregate GCC banking sector at \$1.2 billion or 26.1 percent. In UAE, Emirates NBD, Abu Dhabi Islamic Bank and Emirates Islamic Bank reported higher q-o-q provisions. However, the aggregate increase was partially offset by a steep q-o-q decline reported by Mashreq Bank with provisions of \$146.6 million during Q3-2021 vs \$213.9 million during Q2-2021.

Net profits increased q-o-q

GCC banking sector net profits showed a q-o-q increase almost equivalent to the decline in LLP dur-

ing Q3-2021. Total banking sector net profits reached \$9.4 billion in Q3-2021 as compared to \$8.3 billion during Q2-2021. Profits continued to remain below pre-COVID levels of \$10.2 billion reported in Q3-2019. Nevertheless, q-o-q growth was seen across the GCC, barring in Oman, with Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahraini banks seeing double digit growth.

Profits reported by Saudi Arabian banks reached one of the highest quarterly levels of \$3.5 billion as compared to \$2.9 billion in Q2-2021 and \$3.2 billion in Q3-2020. UAE and Qatari banks showed high single digit bottom-line growth of 7.7 percent and 7.3 percent, respectively. Out of the 60 banks that reported earnings during the quarter 19 banks reported a q-o-q drop in net profits during Q3-2021 while in terms of y-o-y growth, nine banks reported a decline. Banks that reported noticeable decline in net profits included Bank of Sharjah that continued to reported losses for the fourth consecutive quarter at \$226.9 million, a bigger loss as compared to a loss of \$93.9 million reported during Q2-2021. Saudi British Bank also reported a decline in profits during the quarter mainly led by higher operating expenses.

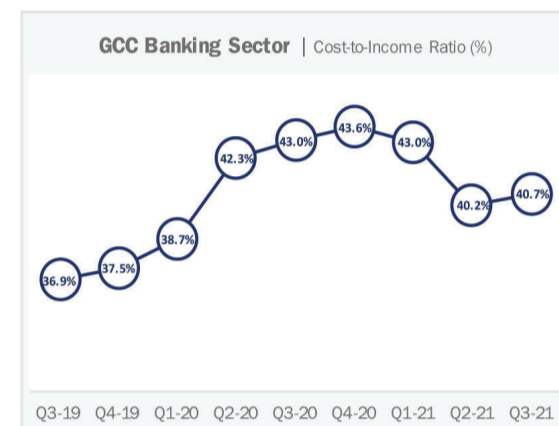
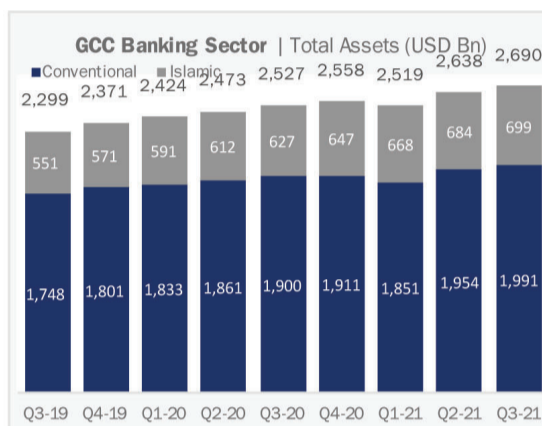
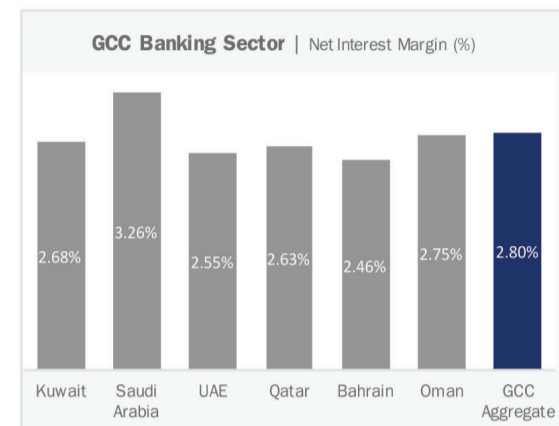
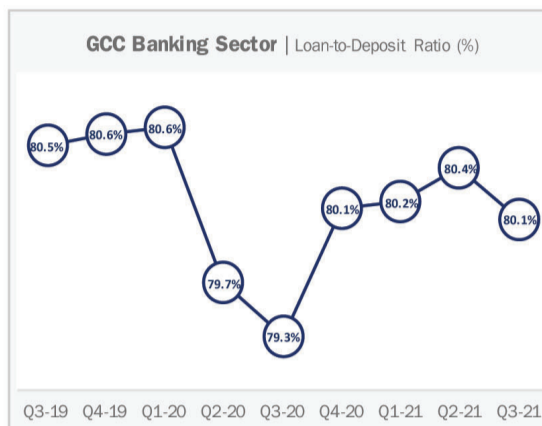
ROE reaches 5-quarter high

Aggregate return on equity (ROE) for the GCC banking sector continued to show improvement during Q3-2021 reaching a 5-quarter high level of 9.4 percent as compared to 9.1 percent at the end of Q2-2021. However, the ratio remained relatively low as compared to pre-pandemic levels of over 10 percent. The ratio also improved in terms of y-o-y comparison by 40 bps supported by an increase in aggregate 12-month profitability. Total shareholder equity reached \$349.5 billion, after increasing by 2.9 percent from the previous quarter. At the country level, Qatari banks continued to boast the highest average ROE of 12.3 percent at the end of Q3-2021 as compared to 12.0 percent at the end of Q2-2021. Saudi Arabian banks were next also with a double digit average ROE of 10.8 percent, a 20 bps decline from 11.0 percent reported in Q2-2021.

The rest of the market reported ROE in single digits with UAE banking sector at 8.0 percent followed by Kuwait and Omani banks at 6.8 percent and 6.6 percent, respectively.

Total bank revenue for GCC banks increased by 3.3 percent q-o-q to reach \$22.6 billion during Q3-2021 after seeing a slightly higher growth of 3.5 percent during the previous quarter with revenues at \$21.8 billion. The positive q-o-q growth in Q3-2021 was led by an increase in both net interest income as well as non-interest income at the aggregate GCC level. Aggregate net interest income increased by 3.1 percent q-o-q during Q3-2021 to reach \$15.8 billion. The q-o-q growth was led by a broad-based increase in net interest income across the six exchanges in the GCC. Banks in UAE, Bahrain and Oman reported the biggest percentage increase in net interest income during the quarter at 6.8 percent, 4.9 percent and 3.1 percent, respectively. The increase in the case of Saudi Arabia and Qatar were much smaller at 1.5 percent followed by 1.1 percent growth in the case of Kuwaiti banks.

Non-interest income also increased and at a slightly faster pace of 4.0 percent q-o-q during Q3-



Source : Reuters, Company Financials, Kamco Invest Research

2021 to reach \$6.8 billion vs \$6.5 billion during Q2-2021. The increase was mainly led by higher non-interest income in UAE, Qatar and Saudi Arabia that was partially offset by double-digit declines reported by banks in Bahrain, Oman and Kuwait. Non-interest income reported by UAE banks was the highest in eight quarters at \$2.9 billion and in the case of Saudi Arabian banks, it was at one of the highest levels ever recorded at \$1.9 billion.

NIMs remain stable

The increase in net interest income during Q3-2021 and an equivalent increase in earning assets during the quarter resulted in flat net interest margin for the aggregate GCC banking sector. NIM at 2.8 percent remained at one of the lowest levels over the last few quarters owing to benchmark rate cuts implemented last year by governments globally in order to boost economic activity and investments. These rate cuts were almost fully replicated by central banks in the GCC, barring a few cases where the rate cuts were different. NIM remained relatively stable across the board in the GCC during Q3-2021 as compared to the previous quarter. NIM continued to remain the highest in the case of Saudi Arabian banks at 3.26 percent during Q3-2021 and it was the only market in the GCC to report NIM of over 3.0 percent in the GCC.

Loan-to-deposit ratio marginally declines

Aggregate net loan growth during Q3-2021 stood at 1.6 percent q-o-q for the GCC banking sector to

reach \$1.62 trillion led by a broad-based growth seen across the six countries in the GCC, barring a marginal decline reported by Omani banking sector.

The y-o-y growth vs Q3-2020 was strong at 7.1 percent, slightly higher than the growth in gross loans that reached \$1.71 trillion at the end of Q3-2021 that recorded a y-o-y growth of 6.8 percent. In terms of gross loan growth, Saudi Arabian banks once again reported the biggest q-o-q increase in during Q3-2021 with a growth of 2.8 percent or \$13.9 billion followed by Qatari and Kuwaiti banks that clocked growth rates of 2.1 percent and 1.9 percent, respectively. The growth recorded by banks in the UAE was much more muted at 0.3 percent to reach \$486 billion. Nevertheless, UAE banks continued to lead in the region in terms of total assets that reached \$854 billion at the end of Q3-2021 followed by Saudi Arabia and Qatar at \$785 billion and \$503 billion respectively.

Customer deposits growth was also broadly positive with banks listed in all seven exchanges recording a q-o-q growth. Aggregate customer deposits for the sector grew by 2.0 percent q-o-q and 6.1 percent y-o-y to reach \$2.03 trillion at the end of Q3-2021. Banks in Qatar once again reported the biggest y-o-y increase at 10.1 percent to reach \$388 billion. The q-o-q growth was also the highest for Qatari banks at 2.5 percent. Saudi Arabian banks were next with a y-o-y growth of 8.8 percent followed by Bahraini and Omani banks at 7.8 percent and 5.9 percent, respectively. UAE banks reported the smallest y-o-y customer deposit growth of 1.2 percent.

ABCK-AmCham Kuwait hosts its annual Thanksgiving dinner

KUWAIT: ABCK-AmCham Kuwait held its annual Thanksgiving dinner on November 23rd at the Hilton Kuwait Resort's Al-Dorra Ballroom. This annual Thanksgiving event was sponsored by Kuwait and Gulf Link Transport Company (KGL), The Bridge Company, Gulf Insurance Group (GIG), and EQUATE Petrochemicals Company (EQUATE), as well as the event's exclusive airline partner, KLM and Air France.

The dinner began with opening remarks from AmCham Kuwait's Vice-Chair Dr. Arezou Harraf, who expressed gratitude to AmCham Kuwait members for their consistent support over the years and spoke about the meaning of Thanksgiving and its significance during these times. Dr. Harraf also welcomed

the guest of honor, James Holtsnider, US Deputy Chief of Mission to Kuwait, and thanked the US Embassy for its participation in this event. Consequently, Dr. Harraf thanked the US Military men and women who were able to attend the event for their service and sacrifice, as she asked for a round of applause to honor them.

Following Dr. Harraf's opening remarks, US Embassy's Deputy Chief of Mission Holtsnider thanked ABCK-AmCham Kuwait for hosting the event and emphasized the friendly relationship between the United States and Kuwait. Holtsnider also took a moment to thank the US military service men and women in attendance, as he spoke about what the holiday meant to him and shared the

spirit of gratitude with guests.

Next, Yousef Dashti (board member), the platinum sponsor's (KGL) representative, thanked everyone for attending the event and highlighted KGL's work with the US military as well as his appreciation for the service men and women for their efforts, and he thanked them for spending Thanksgiving with AmCham Kuwait.

Paola de la Roche (AmCham Kuwait's Acting Executive Director) honored the event's sponsors as the evening proceeded, and awards were given by AmCham Kuwait's Vice-Chair, Dr. Harraf. The first award was given to the event's Exclusive Airline Partner, KLM and Air France, represented by Rajat Kumar (country manager) and his colleagues. The sole silver sponsor award was presented to EQUATE Petrochemicals Company. The first gold sponsor award was presented to Gulf Insurance Group (GIG), represented by Khaled Khourshed (marine and aviation officer), and the second gold sponsor award was presented to The Bridge Company, represented by Fouad Rouh (CEO), and Dana Majthob (COO). Finally, the sole Platinum Award was presented to AmCham Kuwait's one of three Champions and Chairman's Club Member - KGL, represented by Yousef Dashti (board member) and Sam Khatib (chief business development officer).

Once the awards ceremony was finalized, AmCham Kuwait's Vice-Chair and the US Embassy's Deputy Chief of Mission followed a long-time tradition and cut the Thanksgiving Turkey together, as dinner and entertainment followed.

To finalize the evening, the AmCham Kuwait team held a raffle. The raffle gifts included dinner invitations from the Hilton Kuwait Resort at their famous Teatro restaurant, fruit baskets from Del Monte Arabia, gift bags from Unilever, and the highlight of the evening- 1 airplane ticket to the US and 1 airplane ticket to Europe from KLM.



ABCK-AmCham Kuwait's Annual Thanksgiving Welcome Remarks



ABCK-AmCham Kuwait's Annual Thanksgiving's Sponsors



ABCK-AmCham Kuwait's Annual Thanksgiving Highlights



Business

Purity or power: India's coal quandary

Open-cast mines epitomize India's economic and environmental dilemma

SINGRAULI, India: Thick grey dust hangs in the air and vast chasms are gouged into the land in the Indian coal hub of Singrauli, where giant machines scoop up dirty fuel to power the country's growth while worsening its pollution blight.

The open-cast mines of Singrauli epitomize the economic and environmental dilemma faced by the world's second-most populous nation, which led the opposition to phasing out coal at this month's COP26 climate summit in Glasgow. India's resistance on the issue is driven by its desire to distribute the benefits of development more widely among its 1.3 billion people, some of whom still have no access to electricity.

But it comes at a heavy price. In Singrauli, home to more than a dozen mines and coal-fired power stations, dark soot covers trees, houses, cars and even cows. In scenes reminiscent of a dystopian movie, sticky sludge lines the roads, while trucks, trains and ropeway cars carry huge mounds of coal and spill black dust on passers-by.

Residents have little choice but to breathe in the acrid air that stings the eyes and throats. "Our air, water and in fact the entire environment is heavily polluted. Even the cows look like buffaloes here," said Sanjay Namdev, a labor union activist, as cranes and dumpers whirred behind him at a sprawling coal yard.

"But forget phasing out, you cannot even phase down coal in a country like India," he said. "Millions of people depend on coal for cheap electricity and I don't see that stopping ever."

A/C and fridges

As Asia's third-biggest economy grows, its hunger for coal is mounting, with aspirational middle classes needing electricity to run their air conditioners and refrigerators. Coal consumption in India has already doubled in the last decade—only China burns more—and the fuel powers 70 percent of the country's electricity grid. With international pressure mounting, Prime Minister Narendra Modi last month announced India would aim to be carbon-neutral only by 2070 — a decade after China and 20 years after the world's other big emitters. The government argues that although the country is the world's third-largest emitter in total, its per capita



In this file photo taken on November 18, 2021, a general view of an open cast coal mining area is pictured at Singrauli in India's Madhya Pradesh state. —AFP photos



A child plays next to the burning coal kept for domestic use at Singrauli in India's Madhya Pradesh state.

emissions are far lower than the American average.

Around 30,000 people are employed in the Singrauli mines, with thousands more working as casual laborers, and fear they have no future without coal, even as climate change brings them hotter summers and heavy unseasonal rains. "You can see how bad the pollution situation is here. I know it is bad for my health but what will I do if the coal mines shut down? How will I feed my children?" said mineworker Vinod Kumar, whose haggard looks belied his 31 years.

Northern Coalfields, a state-run mining firm, owns over 80 percent of the coal assets in Singrauli, producing 130 million tons of the fuel annually, and says it is trying to make its operations less polluting. "We want to make coal dispatch completely eco-friendly," said company spokesman Ram Vijay Singh. "We also hold free camps every year to

screen health problems among the locals."

But activists say such piecemeal measures serve no real purpose. "There are some machines and techniques that can cut down the pollution but the companies are not serious about these," said Namdev. "There are so many anti-pollution guidelines but these are flouted with impunity. All they are concerned about is making quick profits."

Begging for jobs

Across India, more than 13 million people are employed in coal mining and related sectors, according to Harjeet Singh of the Fossil Fuel Non-proliferation Treaty Initiative, a campaign group. "An abrupt coal phase-out in India may lead to economic disruption," he said. "In a country where a large population depends on coal for their income and energy, we must ensure social justice in the shift

towards a fossil fuel-free future."

And for some Singrauli residents, their biggest complaint is that they are not profiting from the environmental carnage around them. Casual laborer and part-time liquor distiller Uma Devi, 50, lives in a thatched mud house on the edge of a coal mine owned by Reliance, an Indian conglomerate headed by Asia's richest man Mukesh Ambani. "We have been begging them to give us jobs for two years but they don't listen to us," she said. "They have brought people from outside to work for them."

"Each time blasting happens, it shatters our eardrums. The government is making money off them but we are getting nothing in return except the pollution." She cannot afford the 900-rupee (\$12) cost of a gas cylinder, so every day she cooks her family's food on a fire made with scavenged coal. —AFP

Eurozone inflation soars to highest rate on record

FRANKFURT: Soaring energy prices took eurozone inflation to its highest rate on record in November, official data showed yesterday, challenging the European Central Bank's resistance to tightening monetary policy earlier than planned. Consumer prices rose by 4.9 percent this month, up from 4.1 percent the previous month, the highest reading since the official statistics agency Eurostat began compiling the data more than 20 years ago.

The figure is more than double the ECB's target of two percent. Inflation has soared worldwide as demand and economies have bounced back from coronavirus lockdowns, and the emergence of the Omicron variant has created new uncertainties.

Higher cost-of-living is being experienced across the eurozone, putting pressure on the ECB to scale back stimulus and consider raising interest rates earlier than planned. But the Frankfurt-based institution has so far insisted that the acceleration in inflation in the 19-nation zone is transitory, and is wary of acting too soon and potentially stifling the pandemic recovery.

Its next policy meeting is on December 16. High demand after the easing of coronavirus restrictions has pushed up energy prices and led to shortages of key materials and labor around the world.

"If we tightened monetary policy now, that would not add a single container ship or truck driver," ECB chief Christine Lagarde said in an interview with Germany's Sueddeutsche newspaper published Monday. The current supply chain woes and shortages will ease over time, she said, with the ECB estimating that inflation will start to fall back next year.

A member of the ECB's executive board, Isabel Schnabel, had predicted earlier in November that inflation would hit its highest level this month since the euro was introduced in 1999. The pace of price rises would then slow over the course of the coming year, Schnabel said.

Omicron's potential impact

Inflation has gone up every month in the euro area since June. Natural gas and oil prices have pushed up inflation around the world, with energy logging an annual rate of 27.4 percent in November in the eurozone



Soaring energy prices took eurozone inflation to its highest rate on record in November, official data showed yesterday.

compared to 23.7 percent in October. Services, industrial goods, and food, alcohol and tobacco also ticked up, all above two percent. Core inflation, which strips out energy and other items, stood at 2.6 percent in November, up from two percent the previous month.

"November's inflation data were yet another surprise on the upside,"

Jack Allen-Reynolds, senior Europe economist at Capital Economics, said in a note. "The Omicron variant has increased the level of uncertainty even further, but for now we suspect that it will have a fairly small impact on inflation," he added. "Still, headline inflation looks set to remain above target until at least the end of next year." —AFP

Al-Khalifah wins ABK's weekly draw prize of KD 10,000

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) announced Abdulrahman Fahad Al-Khalifah as the winner of KD10,000 in the Alfouz weekly draw. The draw was held under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and announced live on Q8 Pulse Station FM88.8 on Monday (29th November 2021).

The Alfouz draw account offers ABK customers the chance to win life-changing rewards. With Alfouz, ABK customers will get a chance to win KD 10,000 in Kuwait's highest single weekly draw and the ultimate grand prize of KD 5,000 monthly additional income for 10 years. Both new and existing ABK customers can benefit from this opportunity, with a minimum account balance of KD 100 only.

The next draw winner announcement will be on 6th December 2021.

S Africa sets new unemployment record of 34.9%

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa's unemployment rate rose again in the third quarter of 2021 to set a new record of 34.9 percent, the government statistics office StatSA announced yesterday.

"The number of employed persons decreased by 660,000 in the third quarter of 2021 to 14.3 million" out of a total population of 59 million, StatSA said in a statement. The official unemployment rate had stood at 34.4 percent for the previous quarter.

The report noted that 37.3 percent of women are unemployed compared with 32.9 percent for men. Black women are 41.5 percent unemployed compared with 9.9 percent of white women. All sectors of the economy saw job losses between the second and third quarters of 2021, except the finance sector, StatSA's report said. South Africa, the continent's most industrialized economy and hit the hardest by COVID, was already in recession when the pandemic hit in March 2020. —AFP

UK firms fined for late delivery of cable project

LONDON: British energy regulator Ofgem yesterday fined two British electricity firms £158 million (\$210 million, 185 million euros) over a delay in delivering a major cable project. National Grid Electricity Transmission and Scottish Power Transmission accepted the fine handed down for a two-year delay on the Western Link scheme to transport electricity across Scotland, Wales and England via an undersea cable. —AFP



KUWAIT: The Royal Thai Embassy and Kuwait Airways celebrated the resumption of flights to Bangkok on Monday (29 Nov) with full passengers on board. The flights to Bangkok were suspended for a year during the pandemic. It is good time now to visit Thailand for tourism and medical tourism.



Promotion at all Grand Hyper branches in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Grand Hyper, the largest hypermarket chain in Kuwait, has announced '11th anniversary promotion' from 24th November to 7th December 2021 for the benefit of its customers. This much hyped and awaited promotion from Grand Hyper is announced every year and is well received by its customers. Grand Hypermarket is the best destination for shopping to all kinds of shoppers as

products from around the world at much affordable prices are showcased for sale. The anniversary sale according to sources from Grand Hyper encompasses discounted sale promotion across all category of products ranging from fresh fruits and vegetables to fashion and footwear.

Grand Hypermarket is the retail division of Regency Group. It has been on an aggressive expansion drive since its inception. It is mainly because of the overwhelming customer acceptance and love the retail chain received over the years. "This factor along with the support of the customers and prayers have given us the courage to expand more. The group is targeting to reach 50 outlets milestone by the end of 2022," said Regional Director Ayyoob Kacheri, during the



inaugural press conference of the newly-opened store of Grand Hyper at Shuwaikh.

Lifestyle | Features

AFRICAN DESIGNERS SAY FASHION ICON ABLOH HELPED 'OPEN DOOR'

African fashion designers on Monday paid tribute to American star designer Virgil Abloh for helping "open the door" and allowing them to be seen and heard in the global industry. Artistic director for Louis Vuitton men's collections, Abloh, whose family was from Ghana, died on Sunday of cancer aged 41, after becoming the first major black designer to be recognized in an industry often criticized for its lack of diversity.

"Thank you Virgil for your bravery and talent, which disrupted and allowed so many people to be seen and heard. You held open the door, we'll never forget you," South African designer Thebe Magugu, the first African winner of the LVMH prize in 2019, wrote on Instagram. Abloh's partnership with Kanye West took him from Chicago's skate and DJ culture to the heights of the fashion world, first with his own red-hot label Off-White, and then into the luxury industry in Paris.

His cancer diagnosis came just a year after he was appointed as head of menswear for Louis Vuitton, becoming the first black person to take an artistic director role at a top French fashion house. Though born in the United States, Abloh has never forgotten his Ghanaian roots: in January 2021, the designer brought Kente, a traditional fabric worn in Ghana during major ceremonies, to the catwalks of Louis Vuitton. "It is a huge loss for world fashion, all the more shocking because it was unexpected," said Cameroonian designer Imane Ayissi, who in 2020 joined the closed circle of fashion houses during haute couture week in Paris. "He remains a model for part of the population by proving that it is possible to creatively and successfully manage one of the very top luxury houses, whatever one's origin and one's skin color."



Cameroonian designer Imane Ayissi
African streetwear

Nigerian designer Bubu Ogisi told AFP that as many Africans in the diaspora are taken away from their culture while growing up, fashion was one of the ways Abloh used to pay tribute. Abloh also had a strong influence on streetwear brands in Africa, said Ogisi, director of the lamisigo brand, whose creations showcase fabrics and techniques from the continent. "A lot of friends who have street brands in Nigeria and in Ghana have taken references from Off-White," he said, referring to Abloh's luxury streetwear brand.

"Gone too soon, thanks for supporting African skaters," trendy Nigerian skate clothing brand Wafflescream posted on Instagram on Monday. A fan of hip-hop and urban culture, Abloh helped finance a skatepark in Ghana's capital Accra. He had also worked with UNICEF to promote education and entrepreneurship in the West African country.

Throughout his career, the designer strove for



South African designer Thebe Magugu

more inclusiveness in the fashion industry. In 2017, he confided during a conference at Harvard University that he found it difficult to see himself as a designer as designers did not look like him. His career gave hope to many black creators, in the West and on the African continent. "A few black people in the world have risen



Nigerian designer Bubu Ogisi

above and really pioneered a shapeshifting idea that anyone can be anything and Virgil has been that guy from day one," said Aledayo Laketu, a young Nigerian designer who founded the couture brand Pith Africa. "I want to do a billion more and go harder cause he has shown and told me it's possible." —AFP



Burj Khalifa

FASTEST, HIGHEST, LONGEST:
FIVE RECORDS SET BY UAE

From the world's tallest building to the deepest diving pool, the United Arab Emirates, which turns 50 on Thursday, has a love of setting records. Here are five of the wealthy Gulf state's record-breaking feats:

Tallest building

Dubai is the glitziest of the UAE's seven emirates and its shining achievement is the needle-shaped Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building. The 828-metre (2,717-foot) skyscraper, in glistening glass and steel, opened in the downtown area in 2010. Known as Burj Dubai before its inauguration, it was renamed Burj Khalifa in honor of UAE's President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al-Nahyan.

Biggest Ferris wheel

The world's largest Ferris wheel, Ain Dubai, opened in October 2021. At 250 meters (820 feet) from the ground to the top of its rim, Ain Dubai ("Dubai Eye") towers above the Bluewaters artificial island. Each of its 48 carriages can hold 40 people, and it takes 38 minutes to complete a full rotation.

Longest zipline

Dubai is not the only emirate with record-breaking structures, with Ras Al-Khaimah boasting the world's longest zipline. Jebel Jais Flight, which opened in January 2018, spans 2,831.88 meters (9,290 feet). Riders can reach speeds up to 150 kilometers (93 miles) per hour as they zip through the Hajar mountain range.

Deepest diving pool

Dubai added to its list of records in June when it opened the world's deepest swimming pool for diving. Deep Dive Dubai, an indoor facility for scuba diving, plunges 60 meters (196 feet). Divers can explore a mock sunken city, play chess and navigate through caves.



The world's largest Ferris wheel, Ain Dubai



Jebel Jais Flight



Deep Dive Dubai



Formula Rossa

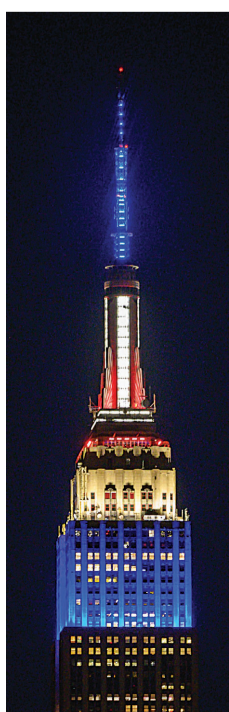
Abu Dhabi, the UAE capital, also has its share of records including the world's fastest roller coaster. Formula Rossa, which simulates driving a

Formula One car at a speed of up to 240 kilometers (150 miles) an hour, is located at the Ferrari World theme park and opened in November 2010. —AFP

Empire State Building lights
up to honor Josephine Baker

New York's Empire State Building lit up in the French national colors on Monday evening to honor Josephine Baker, on the eve of the US-born singer, dancer and rights activist's entrance to the Pantheon in Paris. Baker will become the first Black woman to be honored in the mausoleum, the final resting place of leading figures in the history of France. "Tonight... we glow blue, white, and red in celebration of entertainer and civil rights icon Josephine Baker," the 102-storey art deco skyscraper's Twitter account posted. As night fell, the building's tricolor top and spire gleamed among Manhattan's city lights, whilst on the 86th floor viewing deck, an event to celebrate Baker took place.

French basketball player Evan Fournier, who plays for the New York Knicks, paid tribute to the "courage" of a woman who was a heroine of the French World War II Resistance and a seasoned anti-racist activist. "When you look at what happened last year or two years ago, she was ahead of the curve in her time," he said, referencing massive protests that rocked the United States after the murder of 46-year-old Black man George Floyd. Also at the event were "Emily in



Paris" actor William Abadie and France's New York consul Jeremie Robert. One of Baker's 12 adopted children, Jari Bouillon-Baker, 68, was also present to pay tribute to his mother.

Born Freda Josephine McDonald into extreme poverty in Missouri in 1906, Baker left school at 13. After trying her luck in New York, she managed to land herself a place in one of the first all-Black musicals on Broadway in 1921. However, like many Black American artists at the time, she moved to France to escape racial segregation. On visits back to the United States, Baker suffered the segregation rife against Black people at the time, with many New York hotels turning her away in 1948. In 1951 she forced the posh Miami nightclub Copa City to open its doors to African Americans after refusing to perform if Black people were barred.

In New York, the restaurant Chez Josephine was founded by the man considered to be her 13th adopted child, Jean-Claude Baker. Baker took French nationality in 1937. Nearly half a century after her death, on Tuesday a coffin containing earth from four places Baker lived will be placed in a tomb assigned to her in the Pantheon's crypt. —AFP

AUSTRALIA'S DALAITHNGU, INDIGENOUS
ACTOR FROM 'CROCODILE DUNDEE', DIES

David Dalaithngu, the Indigenous Australian actor who mesmerized audiences in his breakout movie "Walkabout" and was hailed as one of the country's greatest artists, has died at the age of 68, four years after being diagnosed with lung cancer. Dalaithngu, who was from the Mandhalpungu clan of the Yolngu people and was raised in Arnhem Land in Australia's Northern Territory, won international accolades for his piercing performances. After his first film "Walkabout" (1971), his career spanned five decades and took in works from "Storm Boy" (1976) to "Rabbit-Proof Fence" (2002), "The Tracker" (2002), and "Charlie's Country" (2013), for which he won Cannes' "Un Certain Regard" award for best actor.

He was probably most widely known for his role in "Crocodile Dundee" (1986), shortly after which he received the Order of Australia and was named in the Queen's Birthday Honours List. The actor and Aboriginal dancer spent his final years in Murray Bridge, South Australia because of ill health. "It is with deep sadness that I share with the people of South Australia the passing of an iconic, once-in-a-generation artist who shaped the history of Australian film and Aboriginal representation on screen," South Australia Premier Steven Marshall said in a statement Tuesday.

'Mirror to the soul'

"He was a brother, son, friend, father, grandfather and husband. An actor, dancer, singer and painter, he was also one of the greatest artists Australia has ever seen," he said. "My

including national broadcaster ABC respected the wish. Prime Minister Scott Morrison said Dalaithngu was a "mirror to the soul of Australia".

"On stage, television and the big screen, David shone and reflected

chievous glint in his eye and effortless ease in front of the camera... His humanity is irreplaceable." The Indigenous actor's life was also blighted by alcohol and periods of poverty.

'Throw a spear'

In September 2011, he was given a one-year sentence and ordered to spend a minimum of five months in jail for hitting his wife with a broomstick while drunk. Dalaithngu's lawyer at the time said he was embarrassed and wanted to stop drinking and get back to making movies, which he did. Two years ago, when accepting a lifetime achievement award, Dalaithngu recalled how he was recruited for Walkabout as an adolescent in Arnhem Land. "I was a young boy growing up going to school. They came up looking for an Aboriginal boy who can play this part, throw a spear, dance and sing and they said: 'Yeah, he's alright'," he said in a video shown to the awards ceremony of the National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee. The artist said his own favorite film was "Storm Boy" but he considered his best to be "The Tracker".

But he spoke also of his cancer.

"Never forget me while I am here. I will never forget you. I will still remember you even though I am gone forever. I will still remember," he said.



A file photo shows Aboriginal actor David Dalaithngu (right), posing for photos with actors Nicole Kidman (center), Hugh Jackman (left) and Brandon Walters (below) for a photo following a press conference prior to the world premier for the movie 'Australia' in Sydney. —AFP

thoughts are with his family, and his dear friend and carer Mary Hood." The actor's family asked for him to be referred to only as David Dalaithngu, rather than his full name, in line with Indigenous custom for those who have recently died. Most Australian media

something massive... of the 60,000-year history of indigenous people of this country back to ourselves," he told parliament. Hugh Jackman, who co-starred with Dalaithngu in "Australia" (2008), said on Instagram: "From his cheeky laugh, to that mis-

Lifestyle | Features

UK FASHION AWARDS HONOR VIRGIL ABLOH AND OTHER BIG-HITTERS



Indian actress Priyanka Chopra and US singer Nick Jonas pose on the red carpet upon arrival at The Fashion Awards 2021 in London.



Mexican actress Eiza Gonzalez poses on the red carpet.



US media personality Addison Rae poses on the red carpet.

The British Fashion Council's usually glitzy annual awards honored a host of prominent industry names in sombre style on Monday following the death of Louis Vuitton designer Virgil Abloh. The 2021 ceremony, at London's Royal Albert Hall, saw Kim Jones win "designer of the year", for Dior Men and Fendi, and Tommy Hilfiger lauded with the "outstanding achievement award". Meanwhile, British designer Stella McCartney and editor-in-chief of British Vogue Edward Enninful were among 15 recognized as "leaders of change". But the event was overshadowed by the passing of Abloh, who died Sunday aged 41 after battling cancer for several years.

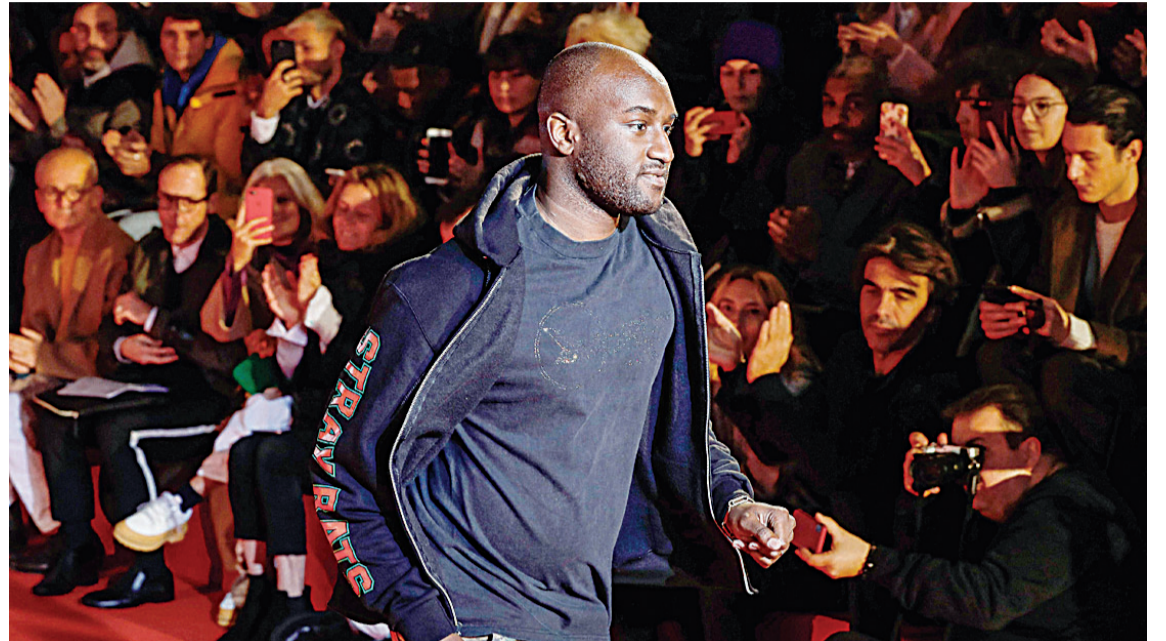
Louis Vuitton's trailblazing head of menswear, and the first black artistic director at a major French luxury label, was also named a leader of change and eulogized throughout the evening. A minute's silence was observed at the beginning of the show in memory of the late founder of brand Off-White and DJ, before British actor Idris Elba recited the Maya Angelou poem "When Great Trees Fall". "Virgil Abloh was the true embodiment of creativity," the BFC said in its statement following the ceremony.

"With Off-White, Abloh reimagined what fashion design means, and at Louis Vuitton Men, he did not just made luxury relatable to culture, he made it culture." The annual fundraiser for the BFC Foundation was held virtually in 2020 due to the pandemic but the red carpet returned to London this year. US actress Demi Moore, Indian actress Priyanka Chopra Jonas and British rapper Kano were among the presenters. Nominees and winners were voted for by an international panel of industry experts of over 1000 people, with two general awards and four "special recognition awards" handed out alongside the 15 "leaders of change" gongs.

In a first this year, the BFC unveiled an award for "metaverse design" which "recognizes a digital designer who pushes the boundaries and showcases excellence in digital fashion design" within the virtual reality space. The inaugural winner, cSapphire—which designs online clothing—beat out competition from four other fashion creators on the Roblox digital platform. —AFP



Designer Tommy Hilfiger poses on the red carpet.



This file photo shows US fashion designer Virgil Abloh acknowledging applause following the presentation of the men's Fall/Winter 2018/2019 collection he designed for Off White, in Paris. —AFP photos



English actress Kate Beckinsale poses on the red carpet.



English designer Kim Jones (second left) and US actor Demi Moore (second right) pose on the red carpet upon arrival at The Fashion Awards 2021 in London.



Corey Gamble (left) and Kris Jenner (second left) pose with designer Tommy Hilfiger and US designer Dee Ocleppo on the red carpet upon arrival at The Fashion Awards 2021.

ORGANON LAUNCHES IN KUWAIT WITH FOCUS ON INNOVATIVE WOMEN'S HEALTHCARE PROGRAMS



Organon Kuwait team



Group picture

Organon, the global healthcare company with a vision of a better and healthier every day for every woman, marked its launch in Kuwait with a groundbreaking scientific symposium attended by leading figures from the region's health and pharmaceutical sectors. The company's foray into the Kuwait market underscores a desire to expand its mission of delivering impactful medicines and solutions to as many people as possible in as many locations as possible.

The symposium titled HERE for HER HEALTH was organized in partnership with Ministry of Health, Kuwait Diabetes Society, and Arab Federation of Specialized Women Kuwait Branch and was addressed by Dr Ghada Ibrahim, Director of Public Relations & Media Ministry of Health - Kuwait and Consultant Family Medicine - Ministry of Health Kuwait; Dr Waleed Al Dhahi, Head of Kuwait Diabetes Society; Dr Kalthoum Hussein, President of the Arab Federation of Specialized Women Kuwait Branch and Ahmed Lasheen, Kuwait,

Qatar and Bahrain Organon Country Lead; Organon representatives and other leading industry players.

Commenting on the symposium and launch into Kuwait, Ahmed Lasheen said: "As a healthcare organization dedicated to improving the health of women, it was an honor to gather and host the key figures in the health sector to highlight various medical conditions that women may face. The symposium was unquestionably beneficial, providing expert medical insight and recommendations. We'll keep listening to women's needs to better understand the gaps and provide the appropriate solution so they can live better and healthier lives every day."

"We are entering Kuwait at a time of rapid, strong national growth, necessitating a focus on women's health issues and treatments that affect women daily. We aspire to influence change in the region by using our experience, treatments, and solutions in women's health to enable women to take control of their health and live better lives."

Dr. Ghada Ibrahim, Director of Public Relations

& Media Ministry of Health - Kuwait, spoke about the necessity of putting women's health first: "It is critical to prioritize women's health. Many women are successful in their careers and may not set aside enough time to care for their health and well-being. They are the cornerstone of a family's overall health and ensuring that they have access to high-quality care can improve the health of children and their families."

Dr Kalthoum Hussein, President of the Arab Federation of Specialized Women Kuwait Branch, stressed on making collaborations to support women. He said: "Long-term partnerships based on mutual benefit are critical to empowering women and advancing gender equality in the workplace, economy, and community. Bringing together government, business, civil society, and grassroots leaders through a range of partnerships and multi-stakeholder engagements can aid in closing the gender gap."

Dr Waleed Al Dhahi, Head of Kuwait Diabetes

Society, said: "It was a privilege to participate in the HERE for HER HEALTH symposium. It's critical to bring together all stakeholders from various sectors of society to address women's health, which is frequently overlooked by society, and educating them is critical. Adequate policies and strategies aimed at supporting women's health and well-being throughout their lives, are critical to helping women and girls reach their full potential. Organon globally covers 140 markets with 60 drugs and solutions, with the goal of shifting the focus towards wider healthcare needs specifically in women health."

Organon's mission is to advance and innovate in the field of women's healthcare, in accordance with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal of gender equality and female empowerment. The company's debut in Kuwait will generate a better and healthier every day for every woman, as well as new employment possibilities and growing diversity in the healthcare profession, as the only global firm of its scale dedicated on women's health.

Sports

Saudi motorsports chief says F1 debut 'signal to the world'

Verstappen could clinch title with a win in Jeddah

JEDDAH: Saudi Arabia's debut Formula One race will showcase the country to the world, its motorsports chief said. The newly built venue in Jeddah is all but completed ahead of Sunday's night race, Prince Khalid bin Sultan al-Faisal said in an interview, just over a year after Saudi Arabia was announced as the wealthy Gulf region's latest F1 host.

"When we prove in the coming days that this race will take place on time, this will signal to the world who the Saudis are and what the capabilities of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are," said Prince Khalid, president of the Saudi Automobile and Motorcycle Federation.

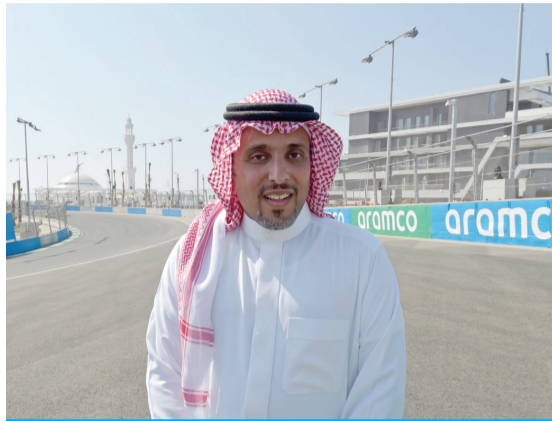
"We can say that the circuit is 95 percent complete. The five percent left are simple things, from branding to tree planting and decorations. The circuit is done, the infrastructure is done... everything related to the race is done," he added. "So, we are comfortable and in a very good situation."

Red Bull's championship leader Max Verstappen could clinch the drivers' world title this week in Saudi Arabia, one of four countries in the resource-rich Gulf on the F1 calendar this year. It is among several big events lured in recent times to Saudi Arabia, which has also hosted heavyweight boxing and European Tour golf. Hatice Cengiz, fiancée of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, led calls for Justin Bieber not to perform at the Jeddah race.

'We have opened our doors'

But Prince Khalid said the Saudi authorities and people were better placed to speak for Saudi Arabia than Canadian singer Bieber, 27. "The one that (polishes) the image of the kingdom is not a singer, but its leadership and people... you cannot polish the image of anything or relay a picture different than reality," he said.

He added: "There are many people, among them singers and actors, maybe they did not come (to Saudi Arabia) before. But when they saw the reality



Prince Khalid bin Sultan al-Faisal, president of the Saudi Automobile and Motorcycle Federation, speaks during an interview with AFP on Sunday.

and the truth with their own eyes, they said: 'No, we're going to come because we now have an idea of everything that happens in the kingdom'."

Saudi Arabia has embarked on a series of

“ There's been a fight against the kingdom ”

reforms under its de facto leader, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, lifting a ban on women driving and reopening cinemas in 2018. Formula



JEDDAH: A picture taken on Sunday, shows a view of the Jeddah Corniche Circuit that is expected to host the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix in the Saudi Red Sea resort of Jeddah. —AFP photos

One is part of a campaign to show a friendlier face as the world's top oil exporter tries to attract foreign businesses and diversify its economy.

"There's been a fight against the kingdom for years, and it is fought for political reasons... some people don't want its success," Prince Khalid said. "There are those that say the kingdom is behind and is against human rights... of course, no one is perfect and the biggest nations that hold on to freedom and human rights have more than their share of criticisms in those fields," he added.

"We are confident in ourselves, and this war will

continue, and we will continue on our path, and the door is open for all to visit us and know who we really are," said the prince. Prince Khalid also said he expected a COVID-reduced capacity crowd of 40,000, including 8,000 from abroad.

He said "there are no restrictions on dress" despite the conservative country's strict social codes. "We expect from the people that they respect the place to which they are coming, the same as any place outside the kingdom," he said. "So, for example, no one is going to come to the circuit wearing a bathing suit." —AFP



MIAMI: Nikola Jokic #15 of the Denver Nuggets handles the ball during the game against the Miami Heat on Monday at FTX Arena in Miami, Florida. — AFP

Booed Jokic leads Nuggets past short-handed Heat

LOS ANGELES: Nikola Jokic returned from an injury to score a team-high 24 points and 15 rebounds as the Denver Nuggets ended a six-game losing skid with a 120-111 victory over the Miami Heat on Monday.

The reigning NBA MVP, who had missed four games with an injured wrist, shot nine-of-14 from the floor, made five-of-six free throws and dished out seven assists. "That's behind us," Jokic said of the losing streak. "We need to move on to the future. We won the game and that's the most important thing."

This was the first game between the teams since Jokic tangled with Heat player Markieff Morris in a 113-96 Nuggets win on November 8. Jokic had a triple-double in that game before getting ejected for his retaliation blow against Morris, who was upset at a non-call and was ejected for his hit on Jokic. Morris has yet to play since the altercation.

The Heat fans in the 19,600 crowd at FTX Arena booed Jokic throughout Monday's contest. Aaron Gordon added 20 points for the Nuggets, who shot 58.1 percent from the floor, including 51.4 percent from beyond the arc. Bones Hyland came off the bench and scored 19 points in the win. "I shot the lights out of the ball," Hyland said.

The Heat were missing leading scorer Jimmy Butler (tailbone contusion) and Tyler Herro (body soreness). Bam Adebayo led Miami with 24 points, 13 rebounds and six assists. Kyle Lowry added 17 points and a game-high 14 assists.

"Our defense is better than that," Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said. "I think they played extremely well and in those pivotal moments in the course of the game, it seemed like they made every shot, every play."

Elsewhere, Nikola Vucevic delivered a double-double of 30 points and 14 rebounds and DeMar DeRozan had 28 points to power the Chicago Bulls to a 133-119 victory against the Charlotte Hornets. In Minneapolis, Karl-Anthony Towns scored 32 points as the Minnesota Timberwolves recorded their seventh win in the past eight games by defeating the Indiana Pacers 100-98. —AFP

Kuwait women's athletics season off to a heated start

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The Kuwait women's athletics season kicked off Monday with the participation of five clubs in the first refresher championship, which saw heated competition at the Kazma sports club's track. Salwa club topped the table in the first day after collecting 87 points, followed by Al-Fatat club with 81 points while Kuwait club was third with 47 points, Sahel fourth with 12 points, and Fatayat Al-Oyouin fifth with four points.

Salwa club collected three gold, four silver and two bronze medals, while Al-Fatat collected three gold, three silver and one bronze. Kuwait ended up with two gold and one bronze medals, while Sahel received two bronze medals only.

Salwa club's Dana Al-Zanki won first place in 800 meters running, while Haya Al-Tawajer from Fatat club was second and Sahel's Bedoor Al-Bahar took third place. Latifa Hussein from Kuwait club won first place in the 400 meters running while Salwa club took second and third place by Dima Ibrahim and Fajer Bader respectively.

Salwa club's runner Mudhawi Al-Shimmari won the gold medal in the 100 meters running followed by Sheikha Al-Qattan, also from Salwa club, while Ameena Al-Marhoum from Fatat club won third place. In the 3000 meters running event, Amal Al-Roumi from Fatat club won first place, her teammate Lowlwa Al-Askar won silver while third place went for Noura Adel from Al-Sahel.

In the discus event, Salwa club's



KUWAIT: Salwa club's runner Mudhawi Al-Shimmari (center) poses with her gold medal in the 100 meters on the first day of the Kuwait women's athletics season.

Dana Al-Azmi and Ayesha Al-Khader took the first and second places respectively, while Sara Al-Muzayen from Fatat club took bronze. The long

jump event was won by Fatat's Shahad Al-Saad followed by Dalal Marzouq from Salwa club and Juan Yaquob from Kuwait club respectively.

Booed Jokic leads Nuggets past short-handed Heat

Ahli United Bank wins ABK T20 cricket trophy

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank (AUB) announced winning the finals of bank league ABK T20 cricket tournament. AUB Chief Executive Officer Jihad Al-Humaidhi honored the bank's cricket team and praised their efforts and enthusiasm.

Humaidhi confirmed that AUB is one of the oldest Kuwaiti banks that devoted particular attention to sports, especially cricket. AUB made great sports achievements over the years, by participating in tournaments with various banks or winning these tournaments.

Humaidhi pointed out that cricket is very popular among AUB employees who have great enthusiasm for this crowd-pleasing game. This is evidently reflected in the highly competitive spirit shown by the bank's cricket team in this tournament. Humaidhi delivered heartfelt congratulations to the winners. She also extended sincere thanks to all participants and organizers who successfully managed to run and present this tournament in this good image.

Meanwhile, AGM Human Resources at Ahli United Bank, Maryam Al-Mudhaf, said that AUB

Washington boost playoff hopes with win vs Seahawks

LOS ANGELES: The Washington Football Team continued their resurgence Monday with a gritty 17-15 win over Seattle, their improved play over the past few weeks turning them from also-rans into playoff contenders.

JD McKissic scored two touchdowns and Kendall Fuller intercepted a potential game-tying two-point conversion pass as Washington rejuvenated their postseason hopes with three straight



pays great attention to encourage sports, including football, cricket, bowling and other sports activities. The bank is keen to support athletes to develop their skills so that they can raise the name of Kuwait high in international forums.

Mudhaf added that the bank provides this support based on its belief in the importance of sports and its role in refining the physical, psychological and mental skills of young people. She

mentioned that AUB includes distinguished sports teams of enthusiastic youth who are eager to win championships.

Raja Sudheer, on behalf of AUB cricket team, thanked the bank's management for the support and encouragement it provides to the bank's cricket team to inspire them achieve success. He also praised the Kuwait Cricket Club for its support in organizing all cricket tournaments.

wins over Carolina, defending champion Tampa Bay and now Seattle.

Taylor Heinicke completed 27 of 35 passes for 223 yards with a touchdown and an interception for Washington. Running back Antonio Gibson rushed 29 times for 111 yards. "The guys played a great game," said Heinicke. "It is always great getting a win. The guys grinded it out. We had adversity and it wasn't most ideal situation, but we fought through it."

At one stage in the season, the NFC East looked out of reach for Washington. But they are now within two games of division-leading Dallas with two games left against the Cowboys. They also play Philadelphia and the New York Giants.

"We are not out of it completely," head coach Ron Rivera said of Washington's playoff hopes. "This is about learning and growing. We are going

to continue to work and play the way we play, and give ourselves a chance."

Seattle quarterback Russell Wilson was 20 of 31 for 247 yards with two touchdowns. Washington took the lead for good when McKissic rushed 10 yards for a tie-breaking touchdown with 8:30 left in the third quarter.

Wilson's Seahawks drove 96 yards and pulled within two points when the quarterback hit Freddie Swain with a 32-yard scoring pass with 15 seconds left. Wilson tried to connect with Swain on the two-point conversion, but Fuller had other plans, intercepting the throw in the end zone.

The Seahawks appeared to recover the ensuing onside kick but were instead penalized for lining up illegally before the kick. Washington's Adam Humphries recovered the second onside kick to clinch the win. —AFP

Sports

Lionel Messi's enduring brilliance rewarded with another Ballon d'Or

Copa America, Copa del Rey, top La Liga scorer cap achievements

PARIS: Some might question whether Lionel Messi really deserved to win his latest Ballon d'Or prize ahead of other worthy candidates, but the Argentinian has been rewarded for continuing to be so good for so long.

The most turbulent year of Messi's glittering career, in which he was forced to tearfully bid farewell to Barcelona, ends with him — at the age of 34 — claiming a record-extending seventh Ballon d'Or for the best player in the world.

In Germany they thought it had to be Robert Lewandowski's year after he missed out 12 months ago when the 2020 edition was scrapped due to the pandemic. Karim Benzema might have had plenty of support in Spain for his remarkable performances with Real Madrid, and Jorginho could stake a claim following a year in which he won the Champions League with Chelsea as well as Euro 2020 with Italy.

Yet it is the enduring brilliance of Messi — who won the last award in 2019 — which stays in the minds of the jurors when it comes to voting. Having joined Paris Saint-Germain in August, he is the first male player to win the award while with a French club since Jean-Pierre Papin of Marseille in 1991, although it was his achievements with Barcelona and with Argentina that counted towards him effectively retaining his crown. Messi tried unsuccessfully to force his departure from Barcelona in August 2020 but he showed no signs of rancor as he stayed put at the Camp Nou and ended last season with 38 goals in 48 games for his boyhood club.



World Cup still eludes star

International success at last
These are the kind of remarkable figures that he has made so mundane over the course of his career — indeed he had actually scored more goals than that in 10 of his previous 11 seasons. Messi was the top scorer in La Liga for the fifth consecutive year with 30 goals and won the Copa del Rey, scoring twice in the final as Barcelona beat Athletic Bilbao 4-0.

This will always be remembered as the year his long association with the Catalan giants came to an end, after 672 goals in 778 appearances, a record goal tally for one club. However, 2021 was also the year he finally won a major international title, captaining Argentina to victory in the Copa America with a 1-0 win against Brazil in the final at the Maracana.

He scored four goals in the tournament as Argentina won the South American championship for the first time since 1993. "I think I won this trophy thanks to what we did at the Copa America so I dedicate this to my teammates," he said after being handed his latest Ballon d'Or at the Chatelet Theatre in central Paris.

Unfinished business

However the shame was that hardly any fans were in the stadium to witness Argentina's Copa America success due to coronavirus restrictions, only adding to the sense that, despite all he has achieved, Messi still has unfinished business. Not least at PSG, where he has so far played just 11



PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain's Argentine forward Lionel Messi, his wife Antonella Rocuzzo, and their children (from left) Ciro, Mateo and Thiago pose upon arrival to attend the 2021 Ballon d'Or France Football award ceremony at the Theatre du Chatelet in Paris on Monday. —AFP

games since arriving in August, and scored just four goals.

Messi did provide three assists for the Parisians in a Ligue 1 match on Sunday but it remains to be seen how motivated the Argentinian is by the French league. He has other priorities. "My dream is to win another Champions League," he said at his unveiling in

August, with the last of his four European Cups coming in 2015.

Then there is the really big one: the World Cup in Qatar will be underway this time next year and Messi will be 35 by then. That will surely be his last chance to win the greatest trophy of all, and you imagine he would swap his seven Ballons d'Or to get his hands on it. —AFP

Ballon d'Or sees Barca childhood fan Putellas go down in folklore

MADRID: Alexia Putellas grew up dreaming of playing for Barcelona and after clinching the treble of league, cup and Champions League last season, her status as a women's footballing icon was underlined as she claimed the Ballon d'Or on Monday. Unlike the men's side, Barca's women swept the board last term with the 27-year-old, who wears "Alexia" on the back of her shirt, at the forefront, months before Lionel Messi's emotional departure.

Attacker Putellas, who turns 28 in February, spent her childhood less than an hour's car journey from the Camp Nou and she made her first trip to the ground from her hometown of Mollet del Valles, for the Barcelona derby on January 6, 2000. Exactly 21 years later she became the first woman in the modern era to score in the stadium, against Espanyol. Her name was engraved in the club's history from that day forward, but her story started much earlier. She started playing the sport in school, against boys.

"My mum had enough of me coming home with bruises on my legs, so she signed me up at a club so that I stopped playing during break-time," Putellas said last year. So, with her parent's insistence, she joined Sabadell before being signed by Barca's academy.

"That's where things got serious... But you couldn't envisage, with all one's power, to make a living from football," she said. After less than a year with "her" outfit, she moved across town to Espanyol and made her first-team debut in 2010 before losing to Barca in the final of the Copa de la Reina.

She then headed south for a season at Valencia-based club Levante before returning "home" in July 2012, signing for Barcelona just two months after her father's death. In her first term there she helped Barca win the league and cup double, winning the award for player of the match in the final of the latter competition.

It was in the following year that



PARIS: FC Barcelona's Spanish midfielder Alexia Putellas poses after being awarded the women's Ballon d'Or award during the 2021 Ballon d'Or France Football award ceremony at the Theatre du Chatelet in Paris on Monday. —AFP

she made the step up to the national team and she has gone on to feature in four major tournaments with Spain, winning 92 caps. Last season was her crowning glory as her childhood side won the Primera Division and the Copa de la Reina as well as the Champions League in a matter of weeks, a historic achievement for a

Spanish women's outfit.

Individual recognition shortly followed, as she was named UEFA women's player of the year and Monday's announcement in Paris made her just the second Spanish player, after Luis Suarez in 1960, to win the much-coveted Ballon d'Or. —AFP

Benzema not upset after Ballon d'Or snub: Ancelotti

MADRID: Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said yesterday Karim Benzema is "not crying" about missing out on winning his first Ballon d'Or. Lionel Messi, who left Barcelona for Paris Saint-Germain last summer, won the Ballon d'Or for a record seventh time on Monday.

The 34-year-old Messi led Argentina to the Copa America title in July and has scored 40 goals in 2021, including 28 for Barca. Benzema, 33, finished fourth behind Messi, Bayern Munich striker Robert Lewandowski, and Chelsea midfielder Jorginho. In his Madrid press conference yesterday, Ancelotti was asked if the Ballon d'Or "still has credibility" following Messi's latest victory.

"We have to respect the decision. Messi won and he's still a great player," Ancelotti said. "For the players, individual awards are important and

they give motivation - but if they don't win them, it doesn't matter. Benzema has had a great season and finished fourth and now he will have extra motivation to finish first next year." Ancelotti added: "It's an important award but it's still individual. Karim Benzema isn't crying about not winning it, nor Thibaut Courtois. They have accepted it without any problems."

Ancelotti said he would have voted Benzema, Vinicius Junior and Luka Modric as his top three. Vinicius scored a scintillating late winner against Sevilla on Sunday as Madrid moved four points clear at the top of La Liga. They could extend that advantage to seven points by beating Athletic Bilbao at the Santiago Bernabeu tomorrow.

"I don't know if we are favorites for La Liga but we're playing well and we're consistent," Ancelotti said. Ancelotti also said Madrid will not sign any players in January but admitted unhappy players could be allowed to leave. Some players like Isco and Eden Hazard have found themselves out of favor under Ancelotti this season.

Ancelotti said Hazard will be available against Athletic Bilbao but insisted the Belgium attacker

"Ralf Rangnick was announced as interim manager on Monday but, while the club follows the regulatory process around a work visa, Carrick will continue at the helm," a United statement said. "Michael has communicated this to players and staff at Carrington in a busy week for the club."

The 63-year-old German will eventually take charge at United until the end of this season before moving into a two-year consultancy role at the troubled Premier League outfit. Carrick has been working as United's caretaker boss since Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's sacking.

The former United midfielder, who had served as Solskjaer's assistant, has overseen a 2-0 Champions League win at Villarreal and Sunday's 1-1 draw at Premier League leaders Chelsea. United host Crystal Palace on Sunday, by which time Rangnick could be in the dugout.



MADRID: Real Madrid's French forward Karim Benzema gives a thumbs up during the Spanish league football match between Real Madrid and Sevilla at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid on Sunday. —AFP

"must improve his fitness because he's had problems of different kinds." "I don't like January signings much. If we have players who aren't happy, it's something we can think about but we are not going to sign anyone. We have enough to compete until the end of the season." —AFP



Michael Carrick

They are then scheduled to play their final Champions League group fixture at home to Swiss club Young Boys on December 8. That game could be switched to a neutral venue given the new travel restrictions in response to the emergence of the Omicron variant of COVID-19. —AFP

News in brief

Bayern extend agreement

MUNICH: Bayern Munich announced yesterday they had extended their partnership with the Japanese Football Association until 2024 to encourage young Japanese players to join the club's academy. "Japan is one of the strongest countries in Asian football. I was able to experience the Japanese enthusiasm for football at the 2002 World Cup," Bayern chief executive and former Germany goalkeeper Oliver Kahn said in a club statement. "The continuation of the partnership with the Japanese Football Association brings us together in a common goal of developing world-class players. We are proud we already have a world-class player in our women's ranks in Saki Kumagai, a familiar face in Japanese football," he added. JFA president Kozho Tashima said he wants more Japanese women players to spend time at the Bavarian giants. "In the near future, we hope to send female youth players to Bayern via our player exchange program for our mutual development," Tashima said in Bayern's statement.

QPR downs Rooney's Derby

LONDON: Wayne Rooney's crisis-hit Derby blew a one-goal lead to lose 2-1 at home to QPR on Monday as Andre Gray scored a brilliant 90th-minute winner for the visitors at Pride Park. Derby have been deducted 21 points in total this season for entering administration and breaking financial rules and sit well adrift at the foot of the table. A three-match unbeaten run had moved the Rams up to one point, but they remain 19 from safety after this agonizing defeat. "There are details we need to get right for the next game," Derby manager Rooney told Sky Sports. "But listen, these lads have been fantastic. It's not a lack of effort, just a lack of care in keeping the ball." QPR took advantage of the top two, Fulham and Bournemouth, slipping up at the weekend to jump into third place, seven points off the automatic promotion places.

New shooting tournament

KUWAIT: Kuwait Shooting Sport Club will organize the late Sheikh Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah tournament on December 2-4 in the Olympic skeet and trap disciplines for men, women and juniors. Secretary General of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations Obaid Al-Osaimi thanked the family of the late Sheikh Ali Sabah Al-Salem along with Chairman and board members for supporting the activities of this championship and their continued keenness on encouraging Kuwait Shooters and urging them to continue making achievements. He said the Kuwait Shooting Sport Club is always keen to organize this tournament annually in the late Sheikh's memory. Osaimi said the organizing committee held several meetings to complete preparations for the championship that will be officiated by Kuwaiti referees "who are highly qualified and experienced at the international level."

Seager joins Rangers

LOS ANGELES: Former Los Angeles Dodgers shortstop Corey Seager is joining the Texas Rangers in a 10-year, \$325 million deal, US media reported on Monday. Seager is one of the most coveted free agents in baseball, and the Dodgers had been expected to mount a strong bid to retain his services in the face of a clutch of interested teams including the New York Yankees. However the 27-year-old — named MVP of the Dodgers' 2020 World Series victory — has opted to take his talents to Texas after being offered a lucrative long-term deal. The Rangers finished bottom of the American League West division last season with 60 wins and 102 losses, and have endured losing records for each of the last five seasons. The Rangers last reached the playoffs in 2016, when they were beaten in the divisional round.

Carrick in charge of Man Utd for Arsenal clash

LONDON: Michael Carrick will stay in charge of Manchester United for their clash against Arsenal this week as interim manager Ralf Rangnick awaits his work visa, the Old Trafford club said yesterday. Rangnick on Monday agreed to join United from Lokomotiv Moscow, where he was the head of sports and development. But he will not be on the bench when Arsenal visit on Thursday due to legal red tape.



PARIS: This combination of file photographs created shows Barcelona's Argentinian forward Lionel Messi reacting as he receives his seven Ballon d'Or football awards (from left) for the years 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2015, 2019 and 2021. — AFP

Messi wins Ballon d'Or for seventh time

Lewandowski best goal-scorer; Putellas crowned women's winner

PARIS: Lionel Messi admitted winning the Copa America with Argentina might have been the determining factor in him claiming the men's Ballon d'Or prize for the seventh time after a turbulent year, as Spain's Alexia Putellas took the women's award.

Now 34, Messi pipped much-fancied rivals like Robert Lewandowski and Karim Benzema to take the award in a glittering ceremony on Monday in Paris, the city he now calls home after leaving boyhood club Barcelona for Paris Saint-Germain in August.

Despite his tearful goodbye from Barcelona and his relatively underwhelming start to life in France, the jury of journalists from around the world rewarded him in particular for captaining Argentina to their first major international title since 1993.

"Two years ago I thought I was coming into my final years but here I am again back here," said Messi, who won the last edition of the Ballon d'Or in 2019 before last year's awards were cancelled due to the pandemic. Messi also won in 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 and in 2015.

"People were starting to ask me when I was going to retire but now I am here in Paris and I am very happy," he said at the Chatelet Theatre in cen-

tral Paris, where he was joined by his wife Antonella Rocuzzo and their three children.

"I don't know how many more years I have left but I hope there will be many because I am really enjoying myself this year. What I achieved with Argentina was a dream come true. I think I won this trophy thanks to what we did at the Copa America, so I dedicate it to my teammates."

Argentina beat Brazil 1-0 in the final in Rio de Janeiro as Messi won a major title with his country for the first time. He also scored 38 goals in 48 games in his final season with Barcelona and won the Copa del Rey.

Lewandowski second

However, Messi has played just 11 times and scored four goals for PSG since joining the French club and there was a feeling that this year might see a different winner. Poland striker Lewandowski

would have been a shoo-in in 2020, when he scored 45 goals in 37 games for Bayern, only for the awards to be cancelled.

He ended last season with a remarkable 41 Bundesliga goals but had to settle for second place in the voting for the Ballon d'Or, which is organized by France Football magazine and voted for by a panel of journalists from around the world.

Lewandowski instead was given a consolation prize for the year's best goal-scorer and received glowing praise from Messi. "I wanted to say to Robert that it was an honor to go up against him. He deserved to win it last year," Messi said.

Midfielder Jorginho, who won the Champions League with Chelsea and Euro 2020 with Italy, came third, followed by Real Madrid's Karim Benzema and another Chelsea player, N'Golo Kante. Five-time winner Cristiano Ronaldo came

sixth. He was absent from the ceremony. Between them, Messi and Ronaldo have won 12 of the last 13 editions of the Ballon d'Or with the exception coming in 2018 when Luka Modric claimed the prize.

Putellas succeeds Rapinoe

This is just the third year that a women's Ballon d'Or has been awarded, with Putellas following in the footsteps of Norway's Ada Hegerberg, winner in 2018, and the United States' 2019 World Cup superstar Megan Rapinoe.

Spain international Putellas, 27, captained Barcelona to victory in this year's Champions League, scoring a penalty in the final as her side hammered Chelsea 4-0. She also won a Spanish league and cup double with Barca, the club she joined as a teenager in 2012 and who are fast becoming the dominant force in the women's game.

Her Barcelona and Spain teammate Jennifer Hermoso was second, with Sam Kerr of Chelsea and Australia coming in third. "I am sure I won't be the last Barcelona player to win the prize. This is just the beginning," said Putellas, who in August was named player of the year by European football's governing body UEFA. — AFP



Messi dedicates win to Argentina teammates

Pedri, Donnarumma claim prizes at Ballon d'Or ceremony

PARIS: Spain starlet Pedri won the Kopa Trophy for the best player aged under 21 at the Ballon d'Or awards ceremony in Paris on Monday, while Italy's Gianluigi Donnarumma was named the best goalkeeper.

Barcelona midfielder Pedri, who only turned 19 last Thursday, was a key player for Spain as they reached the semi-finals of the European Championship and featured in their side that lost in the men's Olympic football final against Brazil in Tokyo. In addition he played 52 games for Barcelona, helping them win the Copa del Rey.

Pedri, who joined Barca from Las Palmas last year, recently extended his contract at the Camp Nou to 2026. The Kopa Trophy is named after Raymond Kopa, the Real Madrid and France star of the post-war era who won the Ballon d'Or in 1958.

France forward Kylian Mbappe was the inaugu-



PARIS: FC Barcelona's Spanish midfielder Pedri delivers a speech after receiving the Kopa Trophy for best under-21 player during the 2021 Ballon d'Or France Football award ceremony at the Theatre du Chatelet in Paris on Monday. — AFP photos



Paris Saint-Germain's Italian goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma is awarded the Yashin Trophy for best goalkeeper by Ivorian former football player and evening host Didier Drogba during the 2021 Ballon d'Or award ceremony.

ral winner of the prize in 2018, and Matthijs de Ligt of Juventus and the Netherlands won it in 2019. There was no Ballon d'Or awards ceremony last year because of the pandemic.

Donnarumma won the Yashin Trophy for the best goalkeeper after his outstanding performances in Italy's glorious Euro 2020 campaign. The 22-year-old left AC Milan for Paris Saint-Germain fol-

lowing the European Championship. Liverpool and Brazil star Alisson was the first winner in 2019 of the Yashin Trophy, named after former USSR icon Lev Yashin. — AFP

Messi looking to prove a point in Ligue 1

PARIS: Lionel Messi was awarded a record-extending seventh Ballon d'Or on Monday, but for the first time in his illustrious career, there was a mixed reaction to his success. The Argentinian great has made a slow start to life in France after a turbulent year which saw him bid a tearful farewell to Barcelona and join Paris Saint-Germain. But there have been sparks of life in recent weeks, with his first Ligue 1 goal followed by three assists in PSG's 3-1 win at Saint-Etienne on Sunday.

Messi admitted his latest Ballon d'Or win was largely down to leading his country to a major international title for the first time in the Copa America, although he did also finish as La Liga top-scorer last season in a weak Barcelona team which has since stumbled from crisis to crisis.

After scoring just four goals in 11 appearances this term for PSG, the 34-year-old will need an upturn in fortunes to be named the world's best player again next year. Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp was among the leading football figures to express surprise that Messi beat Bayern Munich striker Robert

Lewandowski to the prize.

But PSG coach Mauricio Pochettino was in no doubt that his player deserved to become the first from the French side to win the Ballon d'Or, despite failing to fully fire for the capital club. "He totally deserves the Ballon d'Or. There is no debate on this subject," Pochettino insisted ahead of PSG's game against high-flying Nice today.

"I can understand that in other countries some do not agree, but I think he deserved it. We also hope that it is the first day of the makings of what can become an eighth Ballon d'Or. We are all delighted to have Messi here."

Messi, along with midfielder Leandro Paredes, did not train yesterday due to illness, but he will want to be fit to face third-placed Nice, especially with Neymar sidelined for up to eight weeks by an ankle injury.

PSG are already 12 points clear of second-placed Rennes in the French topflight, despite a series of underwhelming performances this season after a raft of high-profile signings. Messi, Neymar and Kylian Mbappe have scored only 11 times in 31 league appearances between them.

They will need to improve to make a mark in the Champions League, where they had to settle for second in their group behind Manchester City. Nice, bankrolled by British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe's Ineos, will be no pushovers this week though, despite a shock home loss to lowly Metz last weekend. — AFP

Ronaldo hits back at claim he wants to beat Messi's haul

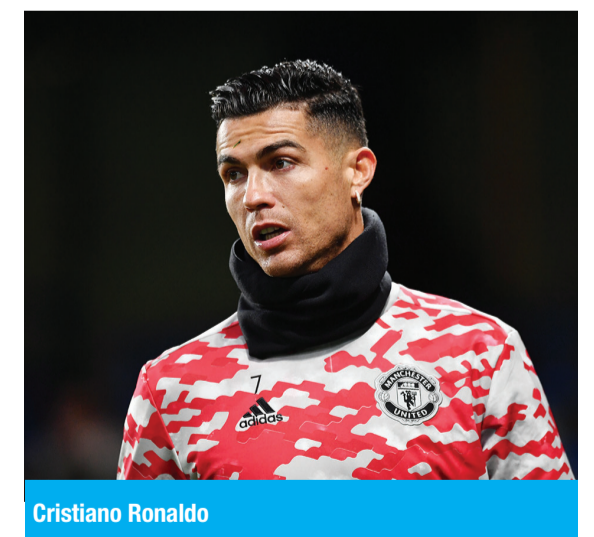
LONDON: Manchester United star Cristiano Ronaldo has hit back at a "disrespectful" claim that his only remaining ambition is to win the Ballon d'Or more times than Lionel Messi. Paris Saint-Germain forward Messi won the prestigious award for a seventh time on Monday.

Ronaldo, who finished sixth in this year's voting, has earned the Ballon d'Or five times. The Ballon d'Or, given to the best male and female footballers of the year, is voted on by 180 journalists and presented by France Football.

Pascal Ferre, the editor in chief of France Football, was quoted in the New York Times recently saying Ronaldo told him his primary motivation was to retire having won the accolade more often than his old rival Messi.

Ronaldo, 36, took to Instagram to deny that suggestion. "Today's outcome explains Pascal Ferre's statements last week, when he said that I confided in him that my only ambition was to finish my career with more Ballon d'Ors than Lionel Messi," Ronaldo wrote.

"Pascal Ferre lied, he used my name to promote himself and to promote the publication he works for." "It is unacceptable that the person responsible for awarding such a prestigious prize could lie in this way, in absolute disrespect for someone who has always respected France Football and the Ballon d'Or."



Cristiano Ronaldo

"The biggest ambition of my career is to win national and international titles for the clubs I represent and for the national team in my country. The biggest ambition of my career is to be a good example for all those who are or want to be professional footballers. The biggest ambition of my career is to leave my name written in golden letters in the history of world football."

Ronaldo, who did not attend Monday's prize-giving event in Paris, last won the Ballon d'Or in 2017. This year marked the first time the former Juventus and Real Madrid striker finished outside the top five voting since 2010. Messi's seventh success extended his lead in the male category after he set the record with his sixth in 2019. Barcelona and Spain midfielder Alexia Putellas won the 2021 women's Ballon d'Or. — AFP