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# New tank showcased in Kuwait land forces drill

See Pages 4-5





## Local

## Omicron and fear of the unknown in Kuwait



JUST KIDDIN', SERIOUSLY

By Sahar Moussa

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We are living in the age of uncertainty, where every day a new sickness, virus or threat appears - first COVID-19, then the Delta and now Omicron variants, and God knows what is next. We are living in the time of coronavirus, where we are lost and not sure what is going on or what will happen in the future. Many people died and lost loved ones. Many people took their vaccines, and many did not.

The World Health Organization (WHO) classified the new variant of SARS-CoV-2, which emerged in some southern African countries, as a 'variant of concern' - it also named it Omicron. People infected with Omicron so far seem to show milder symptoms than those in Delta patients. Many are asymptomatic; others suffer from coughs, fatigue, body aches and headaches.

There are many questions on people's minds nowadays. Are we going to live in constant fear? Are we going to wait for a new variant to mutate every few months? Is there going to be another lockdown worldwide? Will I lose my job or my life if I was not lucky enough? Is this how we are going to live from now on? Is this the new normal?

World leaders are getting paranoid, shutting their borders and airports against travelers coming from South Africa and nearby countries. Scientists are wondering, is there a need to change the existing vaccines or can it fight the new variant? So many questions and too many speculations. This virus became the new monster that is threatening the chain of life in every aspect - economically, mentally, physically and psychologically.

Although Kuwait has announced that it has no plans to shut down the airport or close land or sea borders, and that the health situation in Kuwait is "super excellent", people still did not get over the first coronavirus wave that hit the country and paralyzed almost everything. People are still trying to stand back on their shaky feet, struggling to catch up on what they have missed. They are still trying to overcome the mental and psychological strains that they went through since the start of the pandemic in February 2020.

Nowadays, as we are constantly in a state of high alert, this monster is affecting the new generation - the so called "coronavirus children" who were born and raised seeing people wearing masks, keeping social distancing, being remotely educated and locked up in their homes; sadly thinking that this is a normal life, which in my opinion goes against their nature.

I hope that we are not going back to square one because the world cannot bare another relapse, lockdown or a new virus. If that happens, we are more likely to be expecting more depression, suicides, as well as psychological and financial issues in society. However, within this extremely difficult situation, we must stay positive and adapt for the sake of our children so they will not stop dreaming of a better future.

### Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: This handout photo provided by the Central Bank of Kuwait on Wednesday shows the bank's headquarter building lit up with the United Arab Emirates' flag colors in celebration of the UAE's 50th national day.

## Winter seems to have skipped Kuwait this year



KAFFEKLATSCH

By Shakir Reshamwala

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By this time every year, there's a chill in the air, heaters have been brought out from storage, and everyone is in their winter best, with nary a white dishdasha in sight. Usually, rains in November are a harbinger of colder days ahead, but this year there has been no rainfall and no sign of wintry weather. Sure, the climate is pleasant these days - even a bit cold in the mornings - but air-conditioning is still needed inside homes, offices and cars, particularly in the afternoon, when the temperature rises above 30 degrees Celsius (in some parts of Europe, 30 C is heatwave conditions).

Leading Kuwaiti meteorologist Adel Al-Saadoun said last week the rainy Wasm season - which begins on Oct 16 and ends on Dec 6 - has been delayed this year, adding this may be an indication of an especially cold winter. A few days ago, Saadoun predicted the weather will start getting colder with the arrival of the frigid Marbaniya season - which starts on Dec 7 and lasts until Jan 14. But until now, the weather is temperate and skies clear.

Is this due to global warming? Is climate change to blame? Surely this is not a one-off, as everyone agrees that winters in Kuwait have been getting shorter and milder. I still remember my childhood years in the '80s, when the season was longer and colder. Getting ready for school in the morning was a fraught task. That kind of chilly weather is becoming rarer in Kuwait, as in recent

years, it's really cold for only a few days during winter - the weather then goes back to normal, and gradually starts getting warmer.

Kuwait has also been witnessing record summer temperatures in the past few years, with the mercury crossing the 50 C mark for weeks on end. This has led to desertification and rising sea levels, even as the population has been increasing steadily - notwithstanding a dip due to an exodus of expats during the coronavirus pandemic - placing increased pressure on infrastructure and services and resulting in more vehicles on the roads. It doesn't help that nearly the entire production of electricity and desalination of seawater in Kuwait is realized by burning oil, generating greenhouse emissions.

So, after all the heat and dust and a balmy winter, one is tempted to fly out to cooler climes and frolic in the snow. But repeated waves of coronavirus variants have put a dampener on these plans. The authorities have also cautioned people against travelling unnecessarily. Also, for many people, especially expats, it's a huge risk to travel now, with memories of prolonged airport closures and lockdowns of last year and this year fresh on everyone's minds.

Amid all this uncertainty, lovers of cold weather and desert campfires can only hope the temperature drops in the coming days. Until then, they will have to suffice with cynical 'Winter is Coming' memes.



## Local

## Kuwait congratulates UAE on 50th national day



KUWAIT: Top Kuwaiti officials join UAE Ambassador to Kuwait Dr Matar Hamed Al-Neyadi in cutting the cake during the ceremony. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



A folklore dance featured during the ceremony.



A general view of people in attendance.

KUWAIT: The State of Kuwait on Wednesday underscored the strength relationship with the United Arab Emirates under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and UAE President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan. The relations with the UAE and other members of the GCC keep growing thanks to the close contacts and cooperation in all areas, Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah said. He made the comments while attending a reception, hosted by the UAE Embassy in Kuwait on the eve of the 50<sup>th</sup> National Day of the UAE. The celebration also gathered Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah and Minister of Interior Sheikh Thamer Al-Ali Al-Sabah.

Sheikh Dr Ahmad expressed best wishes for the UAE leaders and people on this occasion. He noted that following the 41st Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Summit meeting in

Al-Ula city, Saudi Arabia, in January, joint committees and workshops resumed activities under auspices of the GCC Secretariat to strengthen cooperation among the GCC members in all fields. He voiced hope that the upcoming summit will be a critical juncture in the march of the bloc's joint action.

Meanwhile, Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad said the deep-rooted historical ties between Kuwait and UAE kept growing thanks to the great support from leaders of both countries. He wished the sisterly UAE more prosperity and progress, congratulating its leaders and people on the national day. Minister of Interior Sheikh Thamer expressed sincere congratulations for the UAE on its national day and hoped for more prosperity and progress under its wise leadership. The UAE celebrates its national day on December 2, each year in remembrance of the day in 1971 when the six emirates of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al Quwain and Fujairah combined to form the UAE federation; the seventh emirate of Ras al Khaimah jumped on the wagon on February 10, 1972. — KUNA

## Kuwait theater festival to advance cultural movement: Info Minister

KUWAIT: Minister of Information and Culture, and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi said the 21st edition of Kuwait Theater Festival is a civilizational platform that contributes to the development of the cultural and theatrical movement in Kuwait. The festival opened on Wednesday under the patronage of Mutairi who doubles as Chairman of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL). The minister said, in the inaugural speech read on his behalf by NCCAL Secretary-General Kamel Al-Abduljalil, that the event provides an opportunity for fostering the talents of a promising generation of young artists. "The theatrical movement in Kuwait saw a steady

advancement over the past three decades with the number of troupes increasing remarkably particularly in the private sector," he said, adding, "We hold the founders of this movement in high esteem."

"NCCAL has been keen on resuming its activities, including the holding of this festival, soon after relaxation of the coronavirus restrictions, which signals our care for the theater role in analyzing the social issues and enriching the literary intellectual production," the minister affirmed. NCCAL is setting out executive plans for issuing in the next year an encyclopedia for Kuwaiti theatrical works presented by local troupes in the 1960s and 1970s with a view to protecting their intellectual



KUWAIT: A group photo taken during the inauguration ceremony of the Kuwait Theater Festival. — KUNA photo

property and preserving the national cultural heritage, he revealed. The agenda of festival features eight performances and a symposium dealing with the experimentalism in Kuwaiti

theater and ethics in the festival, the minister added. The festival takes place at Al-Dasma Theater and the symposium will be hosted by Kaifan Theater on December 10. — KUNA



## Local



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah in a group photo during his visit to Al-Udaire' training range yesterday. — KUNA photos

# Prime Minister attends Kuwait land forces' drill of new K2A1M tank

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled expresses pride in Kuwait armed forces



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah is given a briefing during the visit.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah yesterday visited the land troops of the Kuwaiti Army at Al-Udaire' training range. His Highness the Prime Minister was accompanied by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and Minister of Interior Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. He was welcomed upon arrival by the Kuwait Army Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Sheikh Khaled

Saleh Al-Sabah, Deputy Chief of Staff Major General Fahad Abdulrahman Al-Nasser and a number of senior military officers.

His Highness the Prime Minister attended a drill carried out by the ground forces with the new tank, K2A1M, and was briefed about its specifications and capacities to operate in various surroundings and terrains. He also visited the sixth mechanized brigade and listened to briefings by senior officers about programs and training. The troops, meanwhile, displayed armored vehicles and infantry arms. Following the forces and arms' display, the deputy premier and





Local



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah is seen during a tour at Al-Udaire' training range.

minister of defense held a luncheon in honor of His Highness the Prime Minister attended by accompanying officials and army officers.

In a statement to reporters, His Highness the Prime Minister affirmed keenness of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah with respect of securing all needs for the armed forces and ensuring that the forces remain prepared for any emergency. He expressed pride of the magnificent performance of the armed forces, namely their show of the new tank that was put in service.

**Combat capacities**

Meanwhile, Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali expressed delight for His Highness the Prime Minister's presence at the military base, noting that it was in line with the top leaders' keenness on encouraging the armed forces and

depicted admiration of the troops' faithful efforts and sacrifices for defending and safeguarding the homeland. The minister expressed, in his personal capacity and on behalf of the Ministry of Defense personnel, sincere congratulations to His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled on the political leadership's renewal of confidence, re-appointing him as head of the government.

He pledged to pursue efforts for upgrading capacities of the troops' military preparedness and combat capacities. The new tank, K2A1M, with which the ground forces carried out live targeting drills, "is a basic and significant addition to the ability of the units of our brave army," he added. He affirmed that the troops would maintain their allegiance and loyalty to the dear homeland, the supreme commander and the faithful people, keeping their promise for further sacrifices to safeguard and defend the country. —KUNA

A scene from the drill.

On the occasion of the



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## Local



Kuwait's national men's hockey team. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Kuwait's national women's hockey team.

# Kuwait National Ice Hockey Team awaits 'time to shine'

## Officials detail journey from mere idea to international participation

By Ben Garcia

**KUWAIT:** The Kuwait National Ice Hockey Team Federation is currently busy preparing for its national team to participate in the upcoming 3rd GCC Games set to be held in Kuwait on January 9-19, 2022. "We want to win. That's our objective," started Khaled Mubarak Al-Mutairi, the Vice Chairman of the Board of Kuwait Winter Games Club, which manages the Kuwait National Ice Hockey (KNIH) men's and women's teams.

The teams are participating in a three-week camp in Turkey starting today for some "rigid training" in preparation for the tournament, Mutairi said. Kuwait looks at the GCC Games as an opportunity to showcase its skills not only in hockey, but other games to be featured in the regional tournament.

KNIH has been an associate member of the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF), an international organization for ice hockey and in-line hockey based in Zurich, Switzerland, and has 81 member countries. But Mutairi admits that winter games are



Fhaid Hamad Al-Ajmi, Board Chairman of the Kuwait Winter Games Club.



Khaled Mubarak Al-Mutairi, Vice Chairman of the Board of Kuwait Winter Games Club.



KUWAIT: The Kuwait Winter Games Club.



Girls participate in a figure skating tournament held at the Kuwait Winter Games Club's ice skating rink.





People skate at the Kuwait Winter Games Club's ice skating rink.

not very common among Kuwaitis. Yet, he says national players can compete on a high level through practice and perseverance, fueled by the love of the game.

"Even countries with ice or snow have to practice and train on the man-made-installed facilities. Trainings and the actual games are not normally done in the wild or snow mountains, so this means that we can learn how to play too," Mutairi argued. "Whether you live in a sandy desert in the Middle East or a European country with snow, training and the formal games are usually held in installed facilities, so it can easily be learned if your heart is into it," he added.

Mutairi further spoke about how the Kuwait National Ice Hockey team was conceived from scratch. "I remember visiting the Ice Skating Rink in 1987 and I saw a group of Canadian and US players taking part in a hockey game. Many of us were naive to this sport, but eventually our interest grew, and I encouraged many of my friends to join and play hockey," he said. "We started with nothing, and our club here started with nothing too; but we are determined to learn. Eventually we applied for government recognition - we developed a club and we

were able to go through the tedious process of accreditation," he added.

#### National team

After the liberation in 1991, Mutairi, along with Fhaid Hamad Al-Ajmi, the current Board Chairman of the Kuwait Winter Games Club, created a small hockey team and they started trainings and workshops to form a national team for Kuwait. "It was small group then, but the interest of Kuwaitis has sprung up from

then onwards until we finally got the nod of the government," Mutairi remembered. "When we were invited in Scotland for a hockey tournament in 1993, we joined without hesitation; we went there, 23 of us without any support from the government. Then several tournaments followed after that," he reminisced. As years went by, those who were part of the team became trainers and referees. "They are still with us, and we keep them because of their experience which they can share to our new members," he said.

Ajmi admitted meanwhile that getting recognition from the government was not an easy task. "I thought it was easy at first, but it took us years to comply with government requirements. At first, we were told to get real ice hockey training, then we were told to learn how to run and manage a team. After that, they told us to get stronger support from people and fans in order to move forward. It took us two years to comply with those requirements, but we managed it anyways," he explained. "In 1997, we were invited by China to join in the tournament. We lost as expected because we have no support from the government, but we were happy representing our flag in an international arena," Ajmi noted. "That game attended in China paved way for the government to do something for the ice hockey team in Kuwait. It was 1998 when the Kuwait Olympic Committee noticed us and so they started giving us some sort of budget. They had given us a chance to form a committee until we were finally and officially recognized by the Public Authority for Youth and Sports in 2013," he said.

Kuwait's ice hockey teams did most of their home trainings at the Ice Skating Rink at Al-Soor Street. But when the rink was demolished in 2018, they went 'homeless' temporarily. In the absence of the standard-size training grounds, the club had to send their players outside the country for practice. In 2019, the government allowed the construction of its new training ground for the ice hockey team. It was built at the Bayan district known now as the Kuwait Winter Games Club.

"With the government's recognition, we were able to get the proper funding for the construction of the new ice skating rink, as well as the funding needed for our players and members," Ajmi said. He also thanked "all the people who were instrumental for the success of the club and the creation of this federation." The ice skating rink at the Kuwait Winter Games Club is open to public every Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday (10am to 10pm), but closes for the rest of the week for the Kuwait National Team trainings.



Girls participate in a figure skating tournament held at the Kuwait Winter Games Club's ice skating rink.



## Local

# Kuwait restates backing Palestinian people's rights

## 'Settlers assault Palestinians while world busy with COVID'

**NEW YORK:** The State of Kuwait yesterday reiterated its unwavering support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, while applauding their steadfastness and struggle. The remark was made by Minister Plenipotentiary of Kuwait's Permanent Mission to the United Nations (UN) Talal Al-Fassam during a UN General Assembly (UNGA) session on the Palestinian issue. He echoed his country's principled and relentless stance based on inexorably backing the Palestinian people until they can get rid of their anguishes and woes and obtain their legitimate rights. He further highlighted the need for continued efforts to relaunch negotiations between Palestinians and the Zionist entity within a specific timetable for attaining just and comprehensive peace that eventually ensures a two-state solution.

However, the Kuwaiti diplomat regretted that the Zionist entity is still reluctant to comply with relevant international resolutions by permitting thousands of illegal settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Echoing international rejections and disapprovals, the State of Kuwait

condemns these Zionist activities and emphasize that all these illegitimate Zionist practices must be ceased, and all relevant UN resolutions be put in place. The Zionist entity capitalized on the international community's preoccupation with response to the novel coronavirus pandemic by intensively allowing Jewish settlers to assault disarmed Palestinian civilians, be they elderly, women or children, and even demolishing their property and houses, he lamented.

The Kuwaiti diplomat, further, astringently blasted a recent visit by president of the occupying Zionist entity to the Ibrahimi Mosque in the West Bank city of Hebron to celebrate the Jewish festival of Hanukkah, as having provoked the sentiments of Muslims worldwide and breached international legitimacy resolutions. In the meantime, he underscored the significant role of the UN refugee agency (UNRWA) in providing millions of Palestinian refugees with basic needs and aid, noting that Kuwait has offered a total of \$21.5 million to the agency in a bid to ease out their woes.—KUNA



### Kuwait regrets settlements' building



**NEW YORK:** Minister Plenipotentiary of Kuwait's Permanent Mission to the United Nations Talal Al-Fassam speaks during a UN General Assembly session on the Palestinian issue. —KUNA



**KUWAIT:** Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Sibi George met Hawally Governor Ali Salem Al-Asfar yesterday. They discussed issues of bilateral cooperation and diaspora matters, among other topics, the ministry said in a statement.

## Drug dealer arrested: Kuwait police

**KUWAIT:** Drugs control men arrested a man with possession of four kilograms of shabu, two kilograms of hashish and a sensitive scale, the Interior Ministry said yesterday. The suspect was referred to concerned authorities for further legal action, it added, noting that he faces charges of drug possession and trafficking.



## Commerce Ministry cracks down on fake trademarks

**KUWAIT:** Commerce Ministry's emergency team busted a store in Salmiya where workers reportedly fixed counterfeit trademark labels on shoes and sold them as authentic, the ministry said in a statement yesterday. The team confiscated a large quantity of counterfeit items carrying brands of major international trademarks, it added, noting that legal action will be taken against the suspects.





## Local

# Premier declares Kuwait Omicron-free as teams inspect adherence to precautions

## Committee received reports about 'lax in measures' at some facilities



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah speaks to reporters yesterday. — KUNA photos



Kuwait Municipality Director General Ahmad Al-Manfouhi (center) chairs a meeting for the main committee for overseeing implementation of the COVID-19 related conditions yesterday.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah assured the people of Kuwait yesterday that the health situation in the country is stable with no spillover of the new coronavirus strain Omicron. The health condition in the State of Kuwait is stable "however we have been following up with utter concern (on developments concerning) the new variant that preoccupied the world over the past days and spilled over to some Gulf states," His Highness the Prime Minister told reporters during a visit he paid to Al-Udaire' army base yesterday. There has been not a single case of Omicron in Kuwait, he affirmed, noting that the situation is being closely monitored by the Ministry of Health and the Supreme Emergency Committee of the Coronavirus. Precautions in place prevent any non-vaccinated person from entering the country, he said, noting that PCR tests have proven effective to stem spillover of the virus into the country.

### Field examination

Meanwhile, a senior official announced that field teams from different departments taking part in the combat against the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) will re-examine adherence to warranted procedures at various facilities in line with the approach to safeguard Kuwait's health status. Ahmad Al-Manfouhi, the deputy chairperson of the main committee for overseeing implementation of the COVID-19 related conditions and Kuwait Municipality Director General, said in a statement to the press yesterday that the higher commission is following up on reports and declarations from regional and foreign countries about developments related to the new coronavirus strain Omicron. The field teams will continue the supervisory task to



Government Spokesperson Tareq Al-Mezrem speaks to reporters on Monday.

maintain the local health situation, he said, following a session of the committee at Seif Palace.

The health situation in the country is stable and assuring, he said, citing latest statements by the health officials affirming that infections with the virus were low, that ICU wards were not occupied and that there were no more fatalities. However, "We ought to be cautious and abstain from being complacent with respect to applying the health terms," he warned. He disclosed that the committee decided during yesterday's meeting to tighten constraints after receiving reports about some lax in measures' adherence at some facilities, noting that the tasked personnel at several shopping malls, stores and hotels were not strict in ensuring that visitors put on masks and check whether they had been vaccinated.

The field teams of the Ministry of Social Affairs will inspect cooperative stores, inspectors from the Public Authority for Manpower will visit factories, while teams from Kuwait Municipality and the Public Authority for Food and Nutrition and the Public Authority for Man-



Officials attend a meeting of the ministerial coronavirus emergency committee on Monday.

power will check the commercial markets, the stores and the hotels to ensure that the warranted procedures are being observed.

### 'Remain vigilant'

The government had affirmed on Monday that the epidemic situation in the Kuwait was stable, but urged the public to remain vigilant after the emergence of the Omicron variant in several countries. In statements to the press following a meeting of the ministerial coronavirus emergency committee, Head of the Center for Government Communication and the Government Spokesperson Tareq Al-Mezrem urged citizens and residents to take the booster shot of the coronavirus vaccine and to abide by the relevant health requirements. He added that the coronavirus committee would continue its meetings to follow up and reassess the situation after reports about the detection of the Omicron variant in the region and the world.

At the advent of the meeting, Minister of

Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah updated the committee about the coronavirus situation in Kuwait, Mezrem said. Dr Basel assured the committee that the situation is stable thanks to the efforts exerted by the health ministry and all government ministries and bodies to implement the cabinet decisions and recommendations to counter the coronavirus spread.

Mezrem pointed out that the committee also reviewed the reports from other government bodies about their views on the situation and assessment of public's abidance to health measures. The government spokesperson called on all citizens and residents to abide by coronavirus preventive measures, especially wearing face-masks and taking the vaccine. He pointed out that fully vaccinated people can get the booster shot at the vaccination centers without prior appointments. This is an important step for increasing people protection from the virus and retaining the stability of the health situation in the country, he concluded. — KUNA



FRIDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2021

## International

**11** Saudi, UAE report first Omicron cases in Gulf**14** Border closure spells doom for Morocco tourism sector**15** How likely is Russian invasion of Ukraine?**18** Report: US is the world's biggest plastic polluter

# Germany cracks down on unjabbed

## Authorities tackle coronavirus surge

**BERLIN:** Germany will impose sweeping curbs on people not vaccinated against COVID-19 to combat the latest surge in cases, Chancellor Angela Merkel said yesterday after meeting regional leaders. “Culture and leisure nationwide will be open only to those who have been vaccinated or recovered,” Merkel said, adding that the same rule would also apply to non-essential shops.

The outgoing chancellor also spoke out in favor of compulsory vaccinations, which parliament is due to vote on soon. “Given the situation, I think it is appropriate to adopt compulsory vaccination,” she said. Merkel, her designated successor Olaf Scholz and the leaders of 16 states tightened COVID restrictions just two weeks ago, but met again yesterday to discuss tougher measures.

The plans include a blanket ban on entering venues including bars, restaurants and cinemas for anyone who has not been vaccinated or recovered from COVID, according to a document signed off by the leaders. The unimmunized will also be banned from Christmas markets, as well as being hit by contact restrictions limiting the number of people they can socialize with.

The agreement also includes new restrictions on large gatherings, which would affect events such as Bundesliga football matches, and the closure of nightclubs in areas with a weekly incidence rate above 350 infections per 100,000 people. Fireworks will be banned on New Year’s Eve to stop large crowds from gathering, according to North Rhine-Westphalia state premier Hendrik Wuest. Health Minister Jens Spahn, in a caretaker role ahead of the planned swearing in of a new government next week, told the ZDF broadcaster that Germany needed “a lock-

down, so to speak, for the unvaccinated”.

### ‘Never been as threatening’

“You can see from the decisions that we have understood the situation is very serious,” Merkel said, adding that the measures should be seen as “minimum standards” and different regions could also impose their own tougher curbs. Infections have smashed German records in recent weeks and hospitals are sounding the alarm, with many over capacity and forced to dispatch patients elsewhere in the country for treatment. Though Germany’s seven-day incidence rate has fallen slightly this week, it still stood at 439.2 yesterday, with 73,209 new cases recorded in the past 24 hours.

“From the point of view of intensive and emergency medicine, the pandemic situation has never been as threatening and serious as it is today,” the DIVI intensive care association warned on Wednesday, calling for a drastic tightening of restrictions. Several hard-hit German regions have already cancelled Christmas markets and barred the unvaccinated from public spaces like gyms and leisure facilities to slow the pandemic spread. But critics say the patchwork of rules is confusing, and yesterday’s emergency talks were aimed at coming up with nationwide rules.

### Compulsory vaccinations

Some experts have blamed Germany’s fourth wave on its relatively low vaccination rate of around 68 percent, compared with fellow EU countries such as Spain at 79 percent and Portugal at 86 percent. Merkel’s outgoing government had always



**BERLIN:** A woman cycles a bicycle down a sun-soaked street in Berlin’s Kreuzberg district yesterday, the day after a winter storm passed through. — AFP

ruled out mandatory vaccination, but the measure is now backed by politicians from across the spectrum. Germany already announced plans earlier this month to require health workers and soldiers to get inoculated against COVID-19.

Expanding that to the general public would see the country follow the example of neighboring Austria, which is planning

mandatory vaccinations from February. Greece has announced mandatory jabs for over 60s, with unvaccinated people facing fines if they don’t comply. EU chief Ursula von der Leyen said Wednesday it was time for the bloc to “think about mandatory vaccination” against COVID, though she also stressed it was up to individual states to make the decision. — AFP



## International

# India announces first two cases of Omicron variant

## Mumbai imposes 7-day quarantine for some passengers

**NEW DELHI:** India announced its first two cases of the highly infectious Omicron COVID variant yesterday, months after a devastating wave of the virus killed more than 200,000 people around the country.

Top health ministry official Luv Agarwal said two men in southern Karnataka state, aged 66 and 46, had tested positive for the variant. "As per the protocols all their primary and secondary contacts have been traced and are being tested," he told a press briefing.

India has yet to impose new blanket international travel bans but on Monday the health ministry ordered all inbound travelers from "countries at-risk" to undergo mandatory post-arrival COVID testing, along with the random testing of other interna-

tional arrivals. The nation's biggest city Mumbai on Wednesday imposed mandatory seven-day quarantine for all passengers arriving from at-risk countries. Omicron, first discovered in southern Africa, represents a fresh challenge to global efforts to battle the pandemic with several nations already re-imposing restrictions many had hoped were a thing of the past.

It is the latest coronavirus strain to emerge since the start of the pandemic, including the currently dominant Delta variant, which was first detected in India in October 2020. More than 200,000 people around the country died in a devastating COVID wave between April and June that overwhelmed hospitals and crematoriums. It struck after one of the world's biggest

religious gatherings, the Kumbh Mela, which attracted around 25 million Hindu pilgrims.

That gathering, along with large state election rallies, was blamed by experts for fuelling the Delta surge. India has the world's second-highest number of cases, with more than 34 million confirmed infections. Its nearly 470,000 COVID deaths are the third-highest, behind the tolls in the United States and Brazil. But under-reporting is widespread and some studies have estimated India's true toll could be up to ten times higher. The country has since administered more than 1.2 billion COVID-19 vaccine doses but only around a third of the population are fully vaccinated, according to government data. — AFP

## Omicron renews S Africa debate on vaccine mandates

**JOHANNESBURG:** The discovery of the Omicron variant of COVID-19 has pushed debate over mandatory vaccinations to the top of South Africa's agenda, as rising infections bring the once-unthinkable option into play. For months the country has tried carrots to lure people to get jabs, from discounts at stores to cash prizes and free Uber rides. And still only one in four South Africans are vaccinated. President Cyril Ramaphosa on Sunday hinted at bringing out the stick, raising the possibility of mandatory vaccinations - a step once seen as politically impossible, rejected by unions and opposition parties.

Omicron has changed those calculations, prompting two million-strong Cosatu - the country's largest labour group - to break ranks with other unions and back mandatory jabs. "Our position has evolved," the union said. Omicron is driving a new wave of infections, and stoking new fears as scientists determine exactly how dangerous the variant is. Although other countries quickly blocked travel from South Africa, Ramaphosa didn't announce another lockdown at home.

Instead, he said the government was looking at "measures that make vaccination a condition for access to workplaces, public events, public transport and public establishments." Less than a year earlier, he'd said no one would be forced to get a vaccine. Now lawyers and academics are tussling in public over how to balance public health with personal freedoms. South Africa's constitution, designed to mend the wounds of apartheid, takes an egalitarian approach, even though the country still grapples with a huge gap between rich and poor.

Some universities and employers have already imposed their own mandates. Major opposition parties oppose a national vaccine mandate, though they have softened their tone as data brings stark economic realities in-



**JOHANNESBURG:** A healthcare worker speaks with a woman queuing for a PCR COVID-19 test at the Lancet laboratory in Johannesburg. —AFP

creasingly into focus. Two days after Ramaphosa's speech, the country reported record unemployment at 34.9 percent, with job losses in every segment of the economy. While activity is slowly growing, it has yet to reach pre-pandemic levels - meaning that even without consensus on vaccine mandates, there is broad agreement that South Africa can't afford another lockdown.

### Vaccine apartheid

Lockdown measures - including bans on alcohol and tobacco and limits on religious gatherings - already faced legal challenges. Some unions have threatened to take any vaccine requirement to the nation's highest court. During last month's local elections, the touchy subject was hardly mentioned, though vaccine clinics were set up at some polling stations.

"Nobody has a right that extends into somebody else's right," said Cathleen Powell, a law professor at the University of Cape

Town. Refusing a vaccine could be considered a threat to infect others, she said. That would go against South Africa's concept of "ubuntu", meaning "I am because you are." The idea embodies the community spirit cherished by Nelson Mandela. Official numbers show COVID has hit South Africa harder than the rest of the continent, with nearly three million cases and 90,000 deaths.

But after leading global rallying cries of "vaccine apartheid" as rich nations hoarded doses, South Africa is now delaying its next deliveries, because it can't find enough takers for the shots already in stock. Some of the hesitancy is racial. Several studies show that white men are more reluctant to get jabbed. Others believe that traditional medicines from "sangomas" can combat coronavirus. "It's a reflection of the declining trust people have in our government," political analyst Ralph Mathekga told AFP. "It's also about credibility of policymakers." — AFP

## Saudi, UAE report first Omicron cases in Gulf

**RIYADH:** Saudi Arabia recorded the Gulf's first confirmed case of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus, followed hours later by a case in the UAE, health ministries in both countries said Wednesday. "One case of the Omicron variant has been detected in the kingdom-it was a citizen coming from a North African country," a Saudi health ministry official told the state SPA news agency. "He has been put in isolation, as have his contacts, and the necessary health measures have been taken." The neighboring United Arab Emirates announced later that it had also detected its first Omicron case, in an "African woman arriving from an African country via an Arab country", the health ministry said on Twitter.

The variant was first announced by South Africa but has since been discovered to have been present earlier in Europe. It has prompted governments around the globe to reimpose travel restrictions, despite warnings from the World Health Organization this could do more harm than good. Saudi Arabia last week halted flights from seven southern African countries, mirroring similar moves by other government, but travel links with North Africa have remained unaffected.

The kingdom had been lifting some of the remaining restrictions it imposed early in the pandemic, allowing worshippers at the Muslim holy places to resume praying shoulder-to-shoulder from October. More than 47 million doses of COVID vaccine have been administered in the kingdom, which has a population of nearly 35 million. Since the pandemic started, Saudi Arabia has recorded in excess of 549,000 cases of Covid-19, more than 8,800 of them fatal, while the UAE has registered about 742,100 cases and more than 2,100 deaths. — AFP



## International

# World creating 'toxic' recipe for new variants: WHO warns

## New variant of concern has rattled countries

**GENEVA:** The WHO has warned that the world was creating toxic conditions for new COVID-19 variants like Omicron to emerge and then spread around the globe. The World Health Organization said the combination of low vaccination coverage across the planet, mixed with very low testing to track the virus, was a fertile breeding ground.

The UN health agency stressed that measures to stop the globally-dominant Delta variant would also hinder Omicron. The new variant of concern has rattled countries around the world. "We need to use the tools we already have to prevent transmission and save lives from Delta. And if we do that, we will also prevent transmission and save lives from Omicron," WHO director general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told a press conference.

"But if countries and individuals don't do what they need to do to stop transmission of Delta, they won't stop Omicron either. Globally, we have a toxic mix of low vaccine coverage, and very low testing—a recipe for breeding and amplifying variants. That's why we continue to urge countries to... ensure equitable access to vaccines, tests and therapeutics all over the world."

### Omicron in 23 countries

Omicron was first reported to the WHO from South Africa on November 24, while the first known laboratory-confirmed case was identified from a specimen collected on November 9. The Netherlands said Tuesday it had found the variant in two samples taken on November 19 and 23, one having recently been to southern Africa and the other having no travel history. Maria Van Kerk-

hove, the WHO's COVID-19 technical lead, said timelines around first detections of Omicron may change as there was a backlog of sequencing of cases that occurred in November.

Tedros said the WHO was taking the emergence of Omicron "extremely seriously", but added that the mutation "should not surprise us. This is what viruses do. And it's what this virus will continue to do, as we long as we allow it to continue spreading." Tedros said Omicron was in at least 23 countries—with that number expected to grow. Van Kerkhove said the WHO was not yet aware of any deaths associated with Omicron.

### Transmissibility studies

The WHO said it could take several weeks to complete studies of Omicron to see if there are any changes in transmissibility, severity or implications for COVID vaccines, tests and treatments. "We expect to have more information on transmission within days: not necessarily weeks, but in days," said Van Kerkhove. "The more this virus circulates, the more infections there will be.

The more infections there will be, the more people will die, and this is something that can be prevented." Several countries have imposed travel bans on flights from South Africa, which Van Kerkhove said was making it difficult to send samples from the country, even though they were willing to share them.

Van Kerkhove said: "We will get out of this pandemic but every day decisions need to be made on whether or not we're getting closer to the end of this pandemic or we're actually taking steps to prolong it." Michael Ryan, the WHO's emergencies director,



**GAZA CITY:** A Palestinian medic prepares a dose of the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine during a campaign to encourage people to get vaccinated, in Gaza City yesterday. — AFP

said it was not the time for governments to be passing responsibility for management of the pandemic over to their citizens. "Certainly we are dealing with a crisis now: that crisis is in Europe, and it's being driven by the Delta variant," he said. —AFP

## Iranian forces, Taliban exchange fire at border

**TEHRAN:** An exchange of fire erupted Wednesday between Iranian forces and Afghanistan's Taliban at Iran's eastern border, local media reported. "A clash erupted in the afternoon between Iranian border guards and the Taliban following a misunderstanding at the border near the (Afghan) province of Nimroz," Iran's Tasnim news agency said.

Iran, which shares a 900 kilometer border with Afghanistan, does not recognize the Taliban government formed after the insurgents seized the capital Kabul in August. Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said a "border dispute between residents" of the area had triggered the incident, without referring to the Taliban. "The situation has been resolved. Shooting stopped after contact between border guards of the two countries," he said in a statement.

Tasnim reported that "Iranian farmers passed beyond the protective walls erected within Iran, and the Taliban reacted by deeming that their border had been breached". The Taliban opened fire and Iranian forces responded, it said. In late October, Tehran called on the Taliban to adopt a "friendly" approach towards their neighbors, in a meeting of six of countries that share borders with Afghanistan. Iran has appeared to edge towards a pragmatic rapprochement with the hard-line Sunni Islamist group in recent months. — AFP

## Libya on a bumpy road to uncertain elections

**TRIPOLI:** Libya is less than a month from elections seen as crucial to ending its long-running civil war, but deep political divisions could provoke a delay or even fresh violence. In theory, the North African country is preparing to move beyond a decade of conflict since the 2011 overthrow of longtime dictator Muammar Gaddafi in a NATO-backed uprising.

Western officials have talked up a UN-led peace process and insist on "inclusive" and "credible" elections starting on December 24, despite serious disputes over how they should be held. Libya's electoral commission has said it is ready to organize the process and has published an initial list of candidates and handed out voting cards. The United Nations has said that nine international organizations have sought accreditations to observe the conduct of the vote.

But despite a year of relative calm since an October 2020 ceasefire, Libya's deep political divisions remain. Analysts warn that violence could easily flare again, with camps around eastern military chief Khalifa Haftar and the eastern-based parliament still mired in bitter disputes with a rival camp in the western capital Tripoli.

"The electoral process imposed by the parliament is so fragile, incomplete and dysfunctional and institutions in Tripoli are so eaten away by political factionalism that the dynamics of violence and polarization are bound to come back before December 24," said Libya expert Jalel Harchaoui. "That's almost certain, even assuming that the vote somehow takes place."

### 'Vague electoral law'

On Monday, gunmen backing eastern military chief Khalifa Haftar blocked roads leading to a court in the southern city of

Sebha that had been set to examine an appeal by Seif Al-Islam Gaddafi after he was barred from running for president. Seif Al-Islam is the second son of the ousted dictator, who was slain in the 2011 revolt. The interim government in Tripoli said it was following the situation in Sebha with "great concern".

But as forces led by Haftar - himself a presidential candidate - dominate eastern Libya and much of the sparsely populated south, the Tripoli-based administration admitted it could do little to intervene. That was the latest in a string of ominous events that have overshadowed preparations for the polls and threaten to spark renewed violence.

With just weeks to go, the list of candidates has yet to be finalized. A Tripoli appeals court on Wednesday rejected two petitions against interim Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah, allowing him to take part, his lawyer Abdulraouf Qanbij said. On Tuesday, Interior Minister Khaled Mazen warned that the presidential election might have to be delayed if "violations" threatening the electoral process do not stop. "We must not continue on a path that would lead to the deterioration of the security situation until it is out of control," Mazen said.

Claudia Gazzini, a Libya expert at the International Crisis Group, said: "At the base of all these problems there is a vague electoral law and its contradictions." Parliamentary speaker Aguila Saleh sparked controversy in early September when he signed off on the bill without a vote in the assembly, putting into law a piece of legislation critics say was custom-made for his ally, Haftar. In late September, the parliament based in the eastern city of Tobruk, itself well past its mandate, passed a vote of no confidence in the interim government.

This month, notables in several cities called for a boycott and several voting offices were shut down by groups hostile to Gaddafi's candidacy, preventing voters collecting their voting cards. As Libya's main political players wrangle, the security situation on the ground, controlled by an array of militias and foreign forces, has voters asking whether they will be able to cast their ballots in safety. — AFP



## International

# Facebook hits anti-vaccine campaign harassing doctors

## Ongoing pressure from pandemic-tied misinformation

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Facebook's parent company Meta said Wednesday it had derailed an anti-vaccine campaign that harassed medical workers, journalists and elected officials, in a signal of the ongoing pressure from coronavirus pandemic-tied misinformation. The social media giant took down accounts in France and Italy that were linked to a conspiracy movement called "V\_V", which inundated pro-vaccine posts with potentially tens of thousands of comments. "V\_V" supporters also "mass-harassed" people on YouTube, Twitter, VKontakte and other online platforms, using swastikas or other images as well as calling doctors and media workers "Nazi supporters" for backing vaccines, Meta said.

The company's update regarding efforts to counter misinformation and harassment on its platform comes as the tech giant battles accusations that it puts profit over user safety. The firm changed its parent company name to "Meta" in October as it tries to move past the reputation of Facebook as a scandal-plagued social network to the company's virtual reality vision for the future. A report by social network analysis firm Graphika offered additional information on "V\_V," which it says touts itself as engaged in guerilla "psychological warfare" that targets vaccine supporters.

Graphika estimates that "V\_V" has about 20,000 followers and said the group has been linked to vandalism of hospitals and efforts to disrupt vaccination programs by repeatedly

booking and canceling medical appointments. The group's campaign used messaging service Telegram to train recruits and spread word of who to target, according to Meta head of emerging harms investigations Mike Dvilyanski.

### Using media to spread misinformation

"While we aren't banning all V\_V content, we're continuing to monitor the situation and will take action if we find additional violations," Meta said. Since the start of the pandemic, misinformation has taken many forms, from false and dangerous health advice to so-called miracle cures, conspiracy theories, racist rhetoric and online scams.

The United States in March denounced what it called a Russian disinformation campaign against US-made COVID-19 vaccines, saying Moscow was putting lives at risk. Meta also reported taking down a "sprawling and unsuccessful" network out of China that used fake accounts to promote a bogus claim that a Swiss biologist contended the United States was putting pressure on World Health Organization scientists to blame China for the pandemic.

Investigators on the Meta security team equated the campaign to a "hall of mirrors, endlessly reflecting a single fake persona" with even Chinese state media citing the fabricated claim. "Clusters of fake accounts attempted post-amplification, which only took root when media picked up the stories," Meta head of security



**WASHINGTON:** Former Facebook employee Frances Haugen (left) listens during a hearing before the Communications and Technology Subcommittee of House Energy and Commerce Committee on Dec 1, 2021 in Capitol Hill. —AFP

policy Nathaniel Gleicher said in the briefing. "But, that was quickly debunked and fizzled out quickly," he added. The tactic reflected a trend

of trying to get legitimate news outlets to spread misinformation promoted by networks of fake accounts, Gleicher noted. —AFP

## Global warming not responsible for Madagascar famine

**PARIS:** Global warming played only a minimal role in the famine that has hit Madagascar, according to a new study published yesterday which contradicts a UN description of the crisis as a "climate change famine". The southern Indian Ocean island off Africa has been hit by its worst drought in four decades. The UN's World Food Program said last month that more than 1.3 million people there were considered to be in a food security crisis or emergency as a result.

In June the WFP said Madagascar is the "first country in the world that is experiencing famine-like conditions as a result of the climate crisis". Last month Madagascar's President Andry Rajoelina said: "My countrymen are paying the price for a climate crisis that they did not create." But the findings of the new study, published yesterday by the World Weather Attribution (WWA) network of scientists, do not back up the theory that Madagascar's famine was induced by climate change.

According to the study by the WWA, which has pioneered ways to speedily link extreme weather events to climate change, the rainy seasons of both 2019/20 and 2020/21 saw just 60 percent of normal rainfall across southern Madagascar. "This lack of rain over the 24 months from July 2019 to June 2021 was estimated as a 1-in-135 year dry event, an event

only surpassed in severity by the devastating drought of 1990-92," the study said. "Based on observations and climate modeling, the occurrence of poor rains as observed from July 2019 to June 2021 in Southern Madagascar has not significantly increased due to human-caused climate change."

### 'Not surprising'

Those findings correspond with the results of a report released in August by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which indicated that global warming is not expected to affect levels of drought in Madagascar until it reaches two degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial era. At present the increase is around 1.1 C. "Our results are not surprising, they are very much in line with previous studies," Friederike Otto of Oxford University's Environmental Change Institute told AFP.

"I was more surprised by the UN branding this as clearly as climate change induced," she added, saying "extreme events are always a combination of things". "It's really important not to automatically assume that every bad thing that is happening is because of climate change, it's not true." Climatologist Robert Vautard, head of France's Pierre-Simon Laplace Institute and another of the study's authors, agrees. In the Madagascar case "if there is any influence by climate change it is minimal," even too small to be detectable, he told AFP. According to the WWA report, "poverty, poor infrastructure and dependence on rain-fed agriculture, combined with natural climate variability, are the main factors behind the Madagascar food crisis, with climate change playing no more than a small part." — AFP

## Nigeria boat disaster kills 29, mostly kids

**KANO:** An overloaded boat carrying dozens of passengers, mostly children, capsized in northwest Nigeria, killing at least 29 and leaving another dozen missing, a state rescue agency said on Wednesday. The tragedy on Tuesday in Kano state was the latest in a string of river transport accidents this year in Nigeria, where overcrowded boats, bad weather and lack of maintenance often contribute to waterway disasters. "We are still searching for the remaining 13 bodies. Our men and local divers are in the river, hoping to recover the remaining bodies," Saminu Abdullahi, spokesman for Kano state's fire service, told AFP Wednesday.

"We recovered 20 last night and nine this morning. We hope to make progress." Seven others had been rescued, he said. Abdullahi said the boat was "meant to ferry 12 adults but the skipper had packed such a number of children onboard." The children, most between the ages of eight and 15 from Badau village in Kano state, were on their way to Bagwai, a town on the other side of the river, for a religious ceremony. Kano State Governor Abdullah Umar Gandje said the boat was carrying about 50 people and cargo when it capsized because of overloading. His office put the death toll at 20 people, with another seven in hospital and eight rescued. It was not immediately clear why those figures differed from rescue officials' tally. —AFP



## International

# Border closure spells doom for Morocco tourism sector

## The latest blow to an industry battered by pandemic

**RABAT:** Moroccan tourism operators are facing potential ruin after the country abruptly shut its borders over the Omicron variant of COVID, the latest blow to an industry battered by the nearly two-year pandemic. The results were immediate: an avalanche of cancellations, hotels shuttered and warnings that operators face bankruptcy. The latest crisis “has delivered a fatal blow to the sector,” said Mohamed Semlali, chairman of the National Federation of Travel Agencies of Morocco (FNAVM). On November 25, Moroccan authorities suspended “until further notice” direct flights to and from France, where COVID cases were surging.

Three days later, it announced a halt to all incoming passenger flights for two weeks amid concern over the spread of the new, highly infectious variant. For tourism operators, who had already endured a second disastrous summer in a row, the news snuffed out any hope of a winter holiday uptick. “All reservations have been cancelled and most hotels will have to close,” said Lahcen Zelmat, head of the National Federation for Hoteliers (FNH). “Half of them have been closed since the beginning of the pandemic,” he added. Semlali said the decision to close the borders “will make our situation worse”.

### ‘One foot in bankruptcy’

One industry official quoted by the Medias24 news website said the industry faced losses of at least 88 million euros between Christmas and

the new year. The tourism ministry did not respond to AFP’s request for comment. In 2019, the sector clocked up revenues of around 7.5 billion euros, a figure that plummeted by two-thirds in 2020 to just 2.6 billion euros, according to official figures.

In June, the kingdom finally started reopening its long-closed borders, allowing for a modest rebound in the sector. The country welcomed some two million tourists over summer 2021 – compared to just 165,000 the previous summer, according to the economy ministry. And with COVID-19 cases relatively low, hoteliers dared to dream that the end of the tunnel was in sight. But those hopes were dashed by another spike in cases in Europe, followed by news of a new variant the WHO believes could be more transmissible and resistant to vaccines.

And as their country joins other states around the world battenning down the hatches against yet another wave of infections, Moroccan hoteliers have lost the little hope they had. “We were very optimistic with the arrival of the new year, but these decisions took us by surprise,” said Khalid Moubarak, secretary general of the FNAVM. “We were on the edge of bankruptcy. Now, we’ve put one foot in bankruptcy.” Authorities say the severe measures were aimed at “preserving Morocco’s achievements in the campaign against the pandemic”.

But for Didier Arino, head of the Paris-based consultancy Protourisme, the move is “very bad

(TPLF), of attacking federal army camps. One of the biggest standing armed forces in Africa with an estimated 140,000 personnel, the Ethiopian military captured Tigray’s capital Mekele in a few weeks, and Abiy declared victory. But the rebels mounted a shock comeback, retaking most of Tigray including Mekele by late June and opening up new fronts in the war by pushing into the neighboring regions of Afar and Amhara.

### What went wrong?

Despite access to advanced weaponry, the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF) have struggled to rout the rebels. While the TPLF boasted decades of experience in fighting large armies like the one they are now confronting, the Ethiopian military was not adapted to counter an insurgency, said an analyst who spoke to AFP on condition of anonymity.

“The Ethiopian military was designed to fight the Eritrean army, not an insurgency, so they did terribly,” he said. The TPLF fighters were battle-hardened after overthrowing Ethiopia’s autocratic Derg regime and then fighting a war against Eritrea in the late 1990s. They also commanded a large paramilitary force and well-trained local militia possibly numbering 250,000 men in total, according to the International Crisis Group (ICG). —AFP



RABAT: A boatman transports passengers across the Bou Regreg river near the Oudaya Kasbah between the city of Sale and Morocco's capital Rabat. — AFP

news for the country’s economy because there had been a pickup in reservations for Morocco”, as many other countries remained off limits. “Morocco is an affordable ‘nearby sunshine’ destination and the French make up a third of visitors,” he said. The timing is particularly un-

fortunate. “For the new year holidays, we expected around 100,000 French tourists to visit Morocco. But now they’re cancelling,” he said. That is another disaster for a sector that has seen up to 30 percent of jobs disappear since the start of the pandemic, Zelmat said. — AFP

## The shifting fortunes of Ethiopia’s massive army

**NAIROBI:** Ethiopia’s federal army is facing a tough fight against Tigrayan rebels seeking to advance on the capital Addis Ababa, despite its advantages in numbers following a huge recruitment drive and access to greater firepower. Last week Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed deployed to the conflict zone himself in a bid to boost morale, and the government has since claimed control of several towns the rebels once held, including the UNESCO World Heritage site Lalibela. Here are a few details about Ethiopia’s national military and its shifting fortunes in the year-long war that has left hundreds of thousands on the brink of famine, according to UN estimates:

### How did the war begin?

In November 2020, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed deployed troops in Tigray, accusing its regional rulers, the Tigray People’s Liberation Front

## UN fears sectarian violence that could ‘fracture’ Ethiopia

**GENEVA:** Ethiopia risks descending into sectarian violence and experiencing a chaotic Kabul-style exodus if the year-long conflict spreads to the capital Addis Ababa, the UN aid chief warned. In an interview with AFP, Martin Griffiths expressed deep concern for the stability of a nation of 115 million people composed of more than 80 ethnic groups. Griffiths, the UN undersecretary for humanitarian affairs, said the conflict in Ethiopia has sparked perhaps the world’s most worrying humanitarian crisis.

He warned that a battle in the capital Addis Ababa and increasing communal violence could worsen the situation “exponentially”. Humanitarian organizations have been scrambling to respond to soaring needs in Ethiopia, and laying contingency plans in case the crisis deepens. “The worst I think from a humanitarian perspective (would be) if there is a battle for Addis or turmoil around there, leading to

increased communal violence across the country,” Griffiths said.

“If that were to happen, we’re facing something I don’t think we have faced before for many, many years: We’re facing a fracture ... of the fabric of Ethiopia.” The chaos flowing from such a situation would be far worse than what has happened in the last 13 months. Thousands of people have been killed, two million displaced and hundreds of thousands driven into famine-like conditions since the conflict erupted in November 2020, according to UN estimates.

### ‘Unimaginable’

The conflict began when Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed sent troops into the northernmost Tigray region to topple the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) – a move he said came in response to rebel attacks on army camps. The rebels mounted a comeback, recapturing most of Tigray by June before expanding into the neighboring regions of Amhara and Afar. The conflict took a sharp turn around a month ago, when the TPLF claimed to have captured strategic towns on a key highway to the capital. But last week Abiy himself deployed to the conflict zone, and the government has since claimed it is back in control of several towns including the UNESCO World Heritage site Lalibela. —AFP



## International

# The unfinished church dividing Kosovo: Arrested development

## A potent symbol of the unresolved dispute

**PRISTINA:** At first glance, the half-built Orthodox Church in the heart of Kosovo's capital seems little more than a napping spot for stray dogs splayed out in a patch of unkempt weeds near the padlocked entrance. But for nearly three decades the hulking structure has cast a long shadow over Pristina, serving as a potent symbol of the unresolved dispute between Kosovo and Serbia.

"This church must be destroyed," Jahir Islami, a 77-year-old retiree, tells AFP, citing painful memories of Kosovo's bloody past when the land was divided along ethnic lines during years of violent unrest. Disputes over religious sites remain simmering flashpoints between the bitter rivals since Kosovo declared independence in 2008 - with Serbia still refusing to acknowledge the breakaway province's sovereignty.

Kosovo is home to some of the Serbian Orthodox Church's most revered monasteries, with many of the centuries-old churches now residing in largely ethnic Albanian towns where Islam predominates. The fate of those churches and Kosovo's shrinking Serb minority has continued to thwart efforts to reach a deal between the two sides that have achieved little progress in recent years. Unlike the storied Orthodox monasteries in the countryside, the unfinished church in Pristina belongs to a more recent and brutal history. Former Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic facilitated its construction in the mainly Albanian city during a bloody crackdown on the community in Kosovo, which led to a brief but vicious war in the late 1990s that only ended after NATO intervention.

### Church and state

"They did not only commit crimes against our bodies but also wanted to erase our history, to attack our identity, to implement their project of ethnic cleansing of Kosovo," Hajrulla Ceku, Kosovo's minister

of culture, tells AFP. Kosovo officials have long accused Belgrade of using the Orthodox Church as a proxy, with the clergy acting as emissaries on the ground carrying out Serbia's will.

Tensions have been steadily rising over the future status of Kosovo's Orthodox churches since the election of Prime Minister Albin Kurti in 2021. The left-wing leader has since called for four Serbian Orthodox churches to be taken off the UNESCO World Heritage in Danger list. The churches were listed as endangered following rioting in 2004 that saw mobs target Orthodox sites after unfounded rumors about Serbs murdering Albanian children sparked days of fighting that killed at least 19 people. For years, NATO troops were positioned outside most of Kosovo's Orthodox establishments to prevent further violence. But since then, religiously motivated attacks have declined, with NATO troops only guarding the picturesque Visoki Decani Monastery in western Kosovo. "This is a very important indication that the situation is much better than in the past," said former NATO commander in Kosovo Franco Federici. Other churches are guarded by special units made up of Kosovo police, but some establishments have no security at all.

### Tensions

The progress, argues the Kosovo government, also supports their calls to be recognized by the UN as the sovereign party responsible for the four listed churches, instead of Serbia. Serbian Orthodox officials refused to comment on the matter when contacted by AFP. But Belgrade has roundly dismissed any such moves to change the status quo. "They want to present Kosovo as an oasis of peace and Pristina as needing to look after and protect Serbian cultural treasures," said Petar Petkovic, the head of Serbia's office for Kosovo. "It's a hypocritical act by Pristina and an attempt to deceive the international community," he

### What Russia hope to achieve

Putin has accused the West of ignoring Russia's "red lines" by holding drills in the Black Sea and sending Kiev modern weaponry, demanding "legal guarantees" from NATO that it would not expand eastwards. In an article in July he labeled Ukraine a historic heartland of the Slavic people and warned the West not to try to turn it against Russia. "We will never allow our historical territories and people close to us living there to be used against Russia," Putin wrote. "And to those who will undertake such an attempt, I would like to say that this way they will destroy their own country."

### How has West responded?

The US, NATO and Europe have repeatedly warned Russia against taking military action, and Blinken will meet Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Stockholm to discuss the conflict. Blinken has expressed concern that Russia might seek to claim it was provoked into military action. Lavrov on Wednesday warned against a Ukrainian "military adventure" after his ministry said Kiev had deployed some 125,000 troops to the east.

### The chances of invasion

Russia has dismissed claims of a planned invasion as "hysteria" and Putin this week compared the West to a boy crying wolf, saying that Moscow did not invade this spring after similar concerns. Alexander Baunov of the Carnegie Moscow Centre told AFP he could "hardly imagine an invasion without a reason" and questioned what Russia would have to gain. Some of Russia's other military operations, however, developed quickly. In 2008, Russia bombed targets across Georgia after its then-president Mikheil Saakashvili sent troops to fight separatists. Last month, Russia's SVR foreign intelligence service drew a direct line between Georgia and Ukraine. It said in a statement that the 2008 conflict came as Georgia made overtures to join NATO and warned Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky about repeating Saakashvili's move. "It cost him a high price," the SVR said. —AFP



**GRACANICA:** A Serbian monk enters the Gracanica Monastery in the town of Gracanica. At first glance, the half-built Orthodox Church in the heart of Kosovo's capital looks to be little more than a napping spot for stray dogs splayed out in a patch of unkempt weeds near the padlocked entrance. —AFP

added, saying more than 135 churches and monasteries have been destroyed since 1999. Similar claims have been made on the Albanian side, who say more than 200 mosques were damaged or destroyed by Serb forces amid bouts of ethnic cleansing. But even as Kosovo officials point to a drop in recent violence, hostilities are again rising in Pristina. In June, members of the Serbian Orthodox Church held a rare liturgy service inside the unfinished church, triggering protests and vandalism including the scrawling of graffiti saying: "Jesus hates Serbs". —AFP

## How likely is Russian invasion of Ukraine?

**KIEV:** The West is growing increasingly worried that Russia is planning a winter invasion of Ukraine. Top US diplomats, who have joined NATO and Europe in warning against military action, met their Russian counterparts yesterday in Sweden.

### What sparked the concern?

In late October, videos began circulating on social media showing Russia moving troops, tanks and missiles towards the Ukrainian border. Ukrainian officials said at the time that Russia had moved about 115,000 soldiers to the area. Kiev and its Western allies have long accused Moscow of sending troops and weapons across the border to support pro-Russian separatists that seized two eastern regions in 2014 shortly after Russia annexed Crimea. The Kremlin denies those claims. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said last month Washington was concerned about "unusual" Russian activity and warned Moscow against making another "serious mistake" as in 2014.

### Why would Russia act now?

Russia previously built up forces on the Ukrainian border this spring, with some analysts speculating the idea was to extract diplomatic benefits. Russia pulled back shortly after US President Joe Biden and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin announced a summit. Some experts have said Putin could be trying the same trick again, as talks over another summit continue. Others have suggested Ukraine angered Russia by using drones made by NATO member Turkey. Russia's build-up came just as the Ukrainian army released footage of what it said was its first use of a Turkish drone against the separatists.

## US, Russia ministers to meet as Ukraine tensions soar

**STOCKHOLM:** America's top diplomat Antony Blinken is expected to warn his Russian counterpart yesterday against invading Ukraine, as Moscow warns Kiev against any attempt to retake the Crimea peninsula. Western powers have been sounding the alarm in recent weeks about Russia massing troops along the border with Ukraine, further stoking tensions in an area where a long-running conflict has already left 13,000 dead.

Moscow, which is accused of backing the separatists fighting Kiev, has denied preparing an attack and accuses NATO of raising the temperature. "We have deep concerns about the aggressive posture that Russia has taken once again towards Ukraine," Blinken told reporters yesterday after meeting Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba in Stockholm. Kuleba said his country would "demonstrate restraint" but called on its partners to "prepare a deterrence package" that would make Russia think twice before resorting to military force. The Kremlin said Ukraine's stated goal of retaking Crimea, which Moscow annexed in 2014, amounted to a "direct threat" to Russia. US, Russia and Ukraine were all in Stockholm yesterday for a meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), one of the few international dialogue forums to which both the US and Russia belong. —AFP



## International

# Romanian women face uphill abortion battle

## Coronavirus pandemic overwhelms hospitals

**BUCHAREST:** Kai, a university student from Bucharest, knew her grandmother had two secret abortions during communist rule in Romania. She thought times had changed. Then she was raped. As the Supreme Court leans towards rolling back abortion rights in the United States, an increasingly powerful conservative lobby means that women in Romania are battling to find a doctor willing to perform the procedure. "My expectation was you call the clinic and you're done. It was very scary because I was running out of time," says 21-year-old Kai, who only wants to use her nickname.

"The first I called advised me to keep the pregnancy, the next two withdrew when they learned that it was a rape and the fourth told me about the risks to my health," she told AFP. Kai was three months pregnant when she finally got an appointment at a public hospital. It was nearly too late. She was approaching 14 weeks, after which it is no longer legal to abort. Neither did the torment end there. By the time the doctor started the procedure, she said the effect of the local anaesthetic had nearly worn off. "It was the worst pain I felt during my entire life, I was screaming, crying."

Romania legalized abortion in 1989 as soon as communist rule collapsed. In 1990, nearly a million abortions were carried out, according to official statistics, three times more than the number of births. But the number has since fallen dramatically. In 2019, fewer than 47,500 were carried out. Last year the number was just 31,900. As in other parts of the world, the coronavirus pandemic has overwhelmed Romanian hospitals, some of which are providing emergency medical care only.

### 'Very afraid'

While increasingly conservative Poland passed a near-total

ban on abortion earlier this year, EU member Romania has not touched its legislation. It doesn't need to. Around 40 percent of some 170 public hospitals said they did not perform abortions, according to a survey carried out earlier this year by non-profit organization Filia whose work focuses on gender equality. Almost a third of those questioned cited religious grounds for their refusals. "Access to abortion is already limited... under the influence of current conservative trends," says Andrada Cilibiu of Filia. Many state-run family planning practises have also been closed due to lack of funding and staff, she adds.

Gynaecologist Ioan Placinta, an Orthodox Christian, works at the largest public hospital in south-eastern county of Vrancea. "Until 15 years ago I sometimes did around 10 abortions a day. But now I've stopped because I've sinned enough," the 56-year-old told AFP. A spokeswoman says the hospital no longer carries out abortions. Another doctor, Corina Bratu, who works at a private clinic in Focsani, Vrancea's largest city, told AFP that she bowed to her husband's wishes and stopped performing abortions for religious reasons.

### 'Girls believe in us'

Romania's communist regime in 1966 outlawed abortion and contraceptives, as part of dictator Nicolae Ceausescu's plan to strengthen the economy through population growth. At least 10,000 women died in the country trying to abort without professional medical care from 1966 to 1989, according to historians, while many others were left mutilated.

Radu Vladareanu, head of Romania's Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology, an independent body representing doctors, says



**BUCHAREST:** Girls wearing traditional outfits from the northern Romanian region attend a protest against the anti-COVID vaccine passport in Bucharest. —AFP

medics are not doing their jobs in refusing to carry out requested abortions because of religious beliefs, even if allowed under the code of conduct. "Those of us who lived in a dictatorship know how important it is to fight for women's rights," he says. In a country with the second highest number of teenage pregnancies in the European Union, dozens of women wait in a dark passageway at the Polizu public hospital, one of the few places in Bucharest where women can still get abortions. —AFP

## US shutdown looms as lawmakers squabble

**WASHINGTON:** The threat of a US federal government shutdown loomed larger Wednesday as lawmakers failed to reach a budget agreement with just two days to go before the funding runs out. Congress has until today night to come up with a new budget in order to avoid a sudden stoppage of most so-called non-essential federal government operations, putting hundreds of thousands of workers on furlough without pay.

Various administrative offices, national parks, museums and dozens of other services would see their congressional authorization to spend money stop at the end today. During the winter 2018-2019 shutdown, which was the longest in US history at about five weeks, security lines at airports were even affected.

Despite deep partisan divisions, the majority of both Republican and Democratic lawmakers hope to avoid a repeat of that scenario, which could wreak havoc ahead of the holidays. But a handful of Republicans, many of whom are supporters of former president Donald Trump, are refusing to agree to the budget because they say it would contribute to the imposition of vaccine mandates ordered by President Joe Biden.

In a statement Wednesday, the House Freedom Caucus asked their Senate colleagues to "use all procedural tools at your disposal to deny timely passage" of any budget agreement that funds vaccine mandates or their enforcement. Several Democrats expressed their frustration at the partisan stalemate, especially as the first case of the Omicron coronavirus variant was confirmed in the United States. —AFP

## High stakes for Honduras' Hernandez

**TEGUCIGALPA:** Juan Orlando Hernandez faces an uncertain future when his scandal-marred reign as Honduras president ends in January, along with the immunity from prosecution that the position gave him. His National Party (PN) presidential candidate Nasry Asfura has conceded defeat to leftist Xiomara Castro, who will be sworn in as her country's first ever woman president in less than two months. Hernandez, 53, told AFP earlier this year that he intends to "step away from public life" to write his memoirs. But US prosecutors have accused Hernandez of protecting drug traffickers in exchange for bribes.

"He's been under investigation since 2004... he runs the risk that (the US) requests his extradition," Ernesto Paz Aguilar, a former foreign minister said. His brother Tony, a former PN legislator, is already serving a life sentence in the US for drug trafficking. "The general rule is that the United States doesn't take any measures against presidents," said Paz Aguilar. "There's no formal accusation" in the US but "he was mentioned as a co-conspirator in his brother's case," said Reina Rivera, an analyst and human rights defender.

### 'No laws'

Until recently, the US was a keen and close ally. While the opposition and international observers questioned Hernandez's 2017 re-election, the US was the first country to congratulate him. Washington also saluted his efforts to combat drug trafficking and he helped extradite several drug barons to face trial in the US. But several of them then accused Hernandez of in-

volvement in the illicit trade. He denies that and insists the accusations are motivated by "revenge." Should US prosecutors launch a case, Castro, who branded Hernandez a "narco-dictator", would be unlikely to protect him.

"One way out (from extradition) would be if they open a trial here... when a person has a pending trial in Honduras, they cannot be extradited," said Rivera. In a case that has since been buried, Honduran prosecutors claimed Hernandez's 2013 election campaign benefited from embezzled funds. But the opposition has also accused him of corruption linked to the acquisition of infrastructure and supplies to fight the coronavirus pandemic.

Hondurans don't expect Hernandez to face trial, either at home or abroad. "If he committed crimes he has to pay for it," said Kenia Maldonado, 32, a street vendor. "The problem is that here there are no laws, no-one can do anything to him here. There are laws for the poor but not for the rich." Oscar Edmundo Arzu, 59, does not think Hernandez will be extradited. "How could he not realize what his brother was involved in? But if the gringos (US) had sufficient evidence against him, they would already have asked for his extradition," he told AFP in central Tegucigalpa.

Another option for Hernandez would be to flee into exile, away from the reach of either Honduran or US justice "but his options are limited," said Michael Shifter, president of the Inter-American Dialogue. "He is toxic and surely would be unwelcome in most countries." There is one place that he would likely find a safe haven. "The strong relationship that Hernandez has with (Nicaragua President) Daniel Ortega could mean an escape from his complicated legal situation," said Gustavo Irias, executive director of the Center for Democracy Studies. Ortega is a pariah in Washington's eyes and the two countries have no diplomatic relations. —AFP



## International

# Aid needs will surge in 2022 amid pandemic, conflict: UN

## One in 29 people will need help in 2022

**GENEVA:** The UN warned yesterday that the need for humanitarian aid was skyrocketing worldwide, as the pandemic continues to rage, and climate change and conflicts push more people to the brink of famine. The United Nations' humanitarian agency OCHA estimated that 274 million people worldwide would need some form of emergency assistance next year, up 17 percent on an already record-breaking 2021.

That means one in 29 people will need help in 2022, marking a 250-percent-increase since 2015 when one in 95 needed assistance, OCHA found in its Global Humanitarian Overview report. The number of people in need "has never been as high as this", UN aid chief Martin Griffiths told reporters. Providing aid to so many "is not sustainable, but it has to be sustained," he said.

The annual appeal by UN agencies and other humanitarian organizations said that providing aid to the 183 million most vulnerable people across 63 countries next year would require \$41 billion - up from the \$35 billion requested for 2021 and double what was requested just four years ago. The report presented a depressing picture of soaring needs brought on by conflicts and worsening instability in places like Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Myanmar.

### Famine 'terrifying possibility'

Natural disasters and climate change also drove up displacement and

humanitarian needs, as did the continuing Covid-19 pandemic, it found. It pointed out that the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic - which has officially killed more than five million people globally and likely many times that - along with measures aimed at reining in the virus, had pushed some 20 million more people into extreme poverty.

It has also devastated health systems worldwide, with testing for HIV, tuberculosis and malaria for instance plunging 43 percent, and 23 million children worldwide missing basic childhood vaccines in 2021. At the same time, climate-related disasters are becoming more frequent, the report said, warning that by 2050 as many as 216 million people could be forced to move within their own countries due to the effects of global warming.

Climate change is contributing to rising hunger and food insecurity, with famine-like conditions remaining a "real and terrifying possibility for 45 million people in 43 countries around the world", it warned. "Without sustained and immediate action, 2022 could be catastrophic," it cautioned, pointing out that as many as 811 million people worldwide are already undernourished. Conflicts are also taking a devastating toll across a range of countries.

Need had especially surged in Afghanistan, in the grip of multiple crises that have been exacerbated since the Taliban swept back into power in August and international aid dried up. Yesterday's appeal warned that more than 24 million people - 65 percent of the Afghan population -

Bertrand has focused his attacks against Macron, saying he "stands for everything and its opposite" and "does not understand the French well". "His (Macron's) only chance of being elected is to have extremes against him. Against me, he is going to be beaten," he said.

### Eric Ciotti

An MP from the southern city of Nice, Ciotti, 56, has never held a cabinet post but he is the candidate who has made the most impact in the run-up to the congress. Billing himself as a candidate against "wokeism" but "for a French Renaissance", he has taken right-wing positions that sometimes echo those of Zemmour-the candidate he will vote for in case of a second-round run-off against Macron. He says his economic policy follows in the footsteps of Francois Fillon, the ex-premier who was the LR candidate in 2017 but was felled in a graft scandal for which he was later convicted. Ciotti bills himself as the candidate of "order," "authority" and "identity," vowing to defend a "Jewish-Christian" France against radical Islam and even proposing a "French Guantanamo" Bay for extremists.

### Philippe Juvin

The dark horse and least politically experienced of the five, Juvin, 57, is mayor of a residential suburb of Paris and also head of the accident and emergency service at a top Paris hospital. He won media prominence for his comments at the height of the COVID pandemic and is on a sure footing when outlining the problems facing the French health system. He has performed solidly in debates though without appearing to gain a brighter spotlight. "I embody a humanist right-ring, which takes care of the other, a liberal, European right, and the right of public services," he said.

### Valerie Pécresse

Pécresse, 54 and the only woman in the race, is the head of the Ile-de-France region that includes Paris and presents herself as a moderate yet effective politician who could pose a genuine threat to Macron. She has played on her experience leading the region and vowed to "restore French pride" since the election of Macron, under whom she says France has "lost five years". Pécresse has generally performed well in the debates but it remains to be seen if she has managed to generate enough buzz to lift her profile. Macron has "words on the right but not at any moment, actions", she said. —AFP

needed aid, including around nine million people expected to be on the brink of famine. It requested \$4.5 billion to help the 22 million most vulnerable people in Afghanistan in 2022 - tripling its ask from a year ago.

### Ethiopia 'most alarming'

Billions of dollars were also requested to help the many millions of people impacted by the drawn-out conflicts in Syria and Yemen. And the appeal highlighted swelling needs in Ethiopia, where thousands have died and millions have been displaced since Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed sent troops into the northern Tigray region more than a year ago.

It estimated that 26 million people there need humanitarian aid, including 400,000 people on the brink of famine. Griffiths said the situation in Ethiopia was perhaps the world's "most alarming". But he stressed there were many other dire situations, with violence and unrest continuing to force millions to flee their home.

According to UN numbers, more than one percent of the global population is currently displaced. Despite the devastating picture painted in the report, Griffiths stressed that humanitarian aid often manages to contain the worst consequences of crises. Last year, the humanitarian organization provided aid to around 107 million people - 70 percent of those they had wanted to reach - including helping bring half a million people in South Sudan back from the brink of famine. —AFP

## The five right-wing hopefuls seeking to challenge Macron

**PARIS:** France's traditional right-wing party The Republicans (LR) will on Thursday choose the two final contenders among five hopefuls to find its candidate to take on President Emmanuel Macron in elections next year. The identity of the winner, announced Saturday after a run-off, will be crucial to the overall dynamic of the election and to whether the party of ex-president Nicolas Sarkozy can threaten the centrist president, who is widely expected to seek re-election. The candidacy of far-right pundit Eric Zemmour, who declared Tuesday, also provides a new factor. With the outcome still wide open in the final hours of first round voting, AFP looks at the five hopefuls:

### Michel Barnier

Barnier, 70, is by far the best-known candidate outside France owing to his role as the EU's chief negotiator on Brexit, a mission admirers believe he carried out with tact and aplomb. He was seen in the early stages of the race as a favorite for the Republican nomination, but a somewhat leaden performance in TV debates has led some pundits to mark down the chances of the oldest candidate in the race. In the campaign, Barnier has surprised some of his admirers in the EU by staking out ground to the right, calling for an "electric shock" on security, a moratorium on immigration and the reintroduction of military service. "I am ready to be a president who reassures and acts," said the man sometimes called the "French Joe Biden" given a long political career that dates back to 1973.

### Xavier Bertrand

Bertrand, 56, is a former minister under Sarkozy who now serves as head of the industrial Hauts-de-France region in the north of the country. Polls have shown him as the LR figure who would poll the highest in the first round, though still far behind Macron. A more moderate right-wing figure than some of his rivals for the nomination,

## Nigeria recruits mosques, churches to speed up COVID-19 vaccinations

**LAGOS:** Prayers and hymns filled the Ikoyi Baptist Church at a recent Sunday sermon before the pastor delivered a message from the pulpit: Do the right thing and get the jab. Downstairs in the carpark in the wealthy Ikoyi area of Nigeria's economic capital Lagos, worshippers in their Sunday finest lined up to register for a first shot of a COVID-19 vaccine. Fearing a surge in cases over the holiday season and wary of new variants, Nigeria is recruiting religious leaders, churches, mosques and government offices to mobilize its vaccination campaign. Those worries will likely deepen after Nigeria on Wednesday reported its first cases of the Omicron variant that has prompted new travel bans. Africa's most populous nation has so far mostly escaped the brunt of the global pandemic that ravaged Europe and elsewhere after coronavirus emerged in December 2019.

Recorded cases are low-around 214,000 registered infections and just under 3,000 deaths since the pandemic began-although that is likely partly due to low testing rates. But the country of some 210 million people has fully vaccinated only 3.5 million people and given 6.5 million one shot-far off a target of inoculating around 112 million, or 70 percent of the adult population, by the end of next year. For a religious society like Nigeria, churches and mosques have in the past proven effective in mobilizing sceptical communities to get vaccinated as they were with a polio campaign a decade ago.

"The mosques and churches get the largest crowds. It is also a way to reduce the risk and access more people," said Dr. Atinuke Onayiga, a senior Lagos health official visiting the Ikoyi church. "A lot of people don't want to queue up, so we bring it to their doorstep." Across the other side of Lagos, in the mainland district of Alausa, Friday prayers at the Lagos State Secretariat mosque followed a similar pattern. —AFP



## International

# Hong Kong launches China-style tracking app for mainland travel

## The new 'Hong Kong Health Code'

**HONG KONG:** Hong Kongers travelling to China will need to download a tracking app similar to those used on the mainland, local officials said yesterday as they try to meet Beijing's strict coronavirus demands. The app will allow mainland authorities to access a person's travel records under some circumstances. It comes at a time of heightened privacy concerns among many Hong Kongers as Beijing cracks down on dissent.

The new "Hong Kong Health Code" will require users to register their name and address and consent to their information being shared with Chinese authorities. Similar to movement-tracking apps in China, the Hong Kong program uses a color-coded warning system based on a person's risk of exposure to the coronavirus. Government Chief Information Officer Victor Lam said the app will only allow Chinese authorities to access travel records when that person is infected or at risk.

"Visit records will not be transferred automatically to mainland or Macau authorities," Lam said, adding that users must give their consent before any records are shared. The app is part of an effort by Hong Kong's government to fall in line with China's strict zero-COVID strategy and win Beijing's approval to reopen their border.

The government has yet to give a firm date for reopening the boundary. Hong Kong Secretary for Innovation and Technology Alfred Sit said the government does not have any plans to use the Health Code locally.

The app tracks a person's movements by importing data from Hong Kong's existing local contact tracing app - which itself generated privacy concerns at launch a year ago. "Leave Home Safe" relies on users scanning QR codes when entering Hong Kong premises such as government buildings, restaurants and bars. That digital footprint is stored on a device's memory and is anonymous, tied to a phone number, not a name. Many Hong Kongers have nonetheless spurned the app, often choosing to fill in paper forms instead of scanning QR codes at restaurants.

However, starting next week it will be compulsory for all eateries, gyms and cinemas. Francis Fong, honorary president of the Hong Kong Information Technology Federation, said the new Health Code app should be walled off from local contact-tracing measures. "Real-name registration will get people worried," Fong said. "Keeping the new app separate is the best way to minimize impact on businesses, for example on restaurants." —AFP



**HONG KONG:** A photo illustration of a mobile phone displaying the Disney+ streaming service in Hong Kong shows a list of episodes of popular US cartoon series 'The Simpsons' - which depicts a scene of the Simpsons at Beijing's Tiananmen Square, the site of a deadly 1989 crackdown against democracy protesters - missing from the list, adding to concerns about mainland China-style censorship in the city. —AFP

## Report: US is the world's biggest plastic polluter

**WASHINGTON:** The United States is by far the biggest contributor to global plastic waste in the world, according to a new report submitted to the federal government Wednesday that called for a national strategy to tackle the growing crisis. Overall, the US contributed around 42 million metric tons (MMT) in plastic waste in 2016 - more than twice as much as China and more than the countries of the European Union combined, according to the analysis. On average, every American generates 130 kilograms of plastic waste per year, with Britain next on the list at 99 kilos per person per year, followed by South Korea at 88 kilos per year.

Entitled "Reckoning with the US Role in Global Ocean Plastic Waste," the report was mandated by Congress as part of the Save Our Seas 2.0 Act, which became law in December 2020. "The success of the 20th century miracle invention of plastics has also produced a global scale deluge of plastic waste seemingly everywhere we look," wrote Margaret Spring, chief science officer of Monterey Bay Aquarium, who chaired the committee of experts that compiled the report.

She added global plastic waste was an "environmental and social crisis" that impacted inland and coastal communities, polluted rivers, lakes and beaches, placed economic burdens on communities, endangered wildlife and contaminated waters that humans depend on for food. Global plastic production rose from 20 million metric tons in 1966 to 381 MMT in 2015, a 20-fold increase over half a century, the report said.

Initially, attention to ocean waste focused solely on ship and marine-based sources, but it is now known that almost any plastic on land has the potential to reach the oceans via rivers and streams, the report added. Research has shown nearly a thousand species of marine life are susceptible to plastic entanglement or to ingesting microplastics, which then make their way through the food web back to humans. —AFP

## Denied treatment, Russians with rare disorder fight on

**MOSCOW:** Diagnosed with a rare neuromuscular disorder, 25-year-old Marina Lisovaya needs a costly treatment to stop her condition from getting worse and save her from dying young. But like many others in Russia with spinal muscular atrophy (SMA), she is fighting for state healthcare providers to pay for the drugs that she needs.

"To put it plainly, you've been turned around and pointed towards the cemetery," says Lisovaya, 25, who uses a wheelchair. With their health deteriorating, Lisovaya and others with SMA have had enough and are demanding the government pay for their treatment. In late September, she organized a demonstration outside the Moscow mayor's office, rolling out three empty wheelchairs bearing photos of adults with SMA who died in the last five years. "I wanted to show them what will happen if we wait," she explains.

SMA impedes muscular development, causing muscles to weaken and eventually waste away. In later stages, sufferers can lose the ability to breathe or swallow on their own. The genetic condition has no cure, though there are drugs that can slow its development and improve motor function. But the two medications so far registered in Russia - Spinraza (Nusinersen) which is injected into the spine several times a year and Risdiplam (Evrysdi) which is taken orally every day - are among some of the most expensive drugs in the world.

### 'A lot of people have died'

One injection of Spinraza costs \$125,000 (110,000 euros) and full treatment means several injections a year for life. Evrysdi costs around \$340,000 (300,000 euros) for an annual supply. Although Russian regions are supposed to pay for the expensive medicine, local health departments have balked at the prices. In Moscow - Russia's capital and wealthiest city - none of the 38 known adults with SMA have been able to secure treatment, according to the "Semyi SMA" (SMA Families) group. And with the median monthly salary in Russia hovering just above \$400 (350 euros), paying for the drugs privately is not an option. After dozens of medical tests, Lisovaya has twice been told by a committee of doctors

that treatment would be "impractical" for her.

Earlier this year, she took Moscow's health department to court for denying her treatment, but lost. "My best friend died before he got treatment. A lot of people have died," she says. In the time she has been seeking treatment, Lisovaya says her left arm has become weaker and her lung capacity has decreased. For now, she can use a laptop to work remotely, but she lives in fear of losing what independence she has left. "SMA is scary because you are aware of everything. Your brain continues working until the moment you die," says Daniil Maximov, a 19-year-old Muscovite with the condition.

### 'Where is my treatment?'

Maximov received Risdiplam under a pre-approval access plan offered by the drug's developer Roche. When the program ended after nine months, it was up to the Russian government to secure his doses.

In that brief period, the 19-year-old said his lung capacity improved and he gained better control of his neck. But the progress halted after he stopped taking the treatment.

"It says in the constitution that the state needs to treat its citizens. I am a Russian citizen - where is my treatment?" says Maximov, sitting in a wheelchair in his Moscow apartment. Maximov has also protested outside government buildings with posters, one of them reading "We also want to live", and has been invited to speak with officials and doctors. He says he feels like a "beggar asking for food." Moscow's health department this year opened a specialized medical centre for SMA patients, where those with the condition must obtain a doctors' note to be eligible for free treatment.

### Need for 'political will'

But Maximov says the centre has rejected all those who have applied, like Lisovaya who says it turned down her request in the autumn. The Moscow health department did not reply to AFP's requests for comment. Maximov doesn't plan to back down and wants to relay his requests to President Vladimir Putin. "I am not breaking the law, I am not challenging the government... I am fighting for our country to observe its own laws," he says.

Outside Moscow, some patients have been able to get the treatment. According to Olga Germanenko of Semyi SMA, about a quarter of Russia's 300 or so adults with SMA are getting medication. She says it's absurd that patients are able to be treated in smaller and poorer regions but not in the wealthier capital. "There is a solution, this is probably a question of political will," Germanenko, 37, says. —AFP

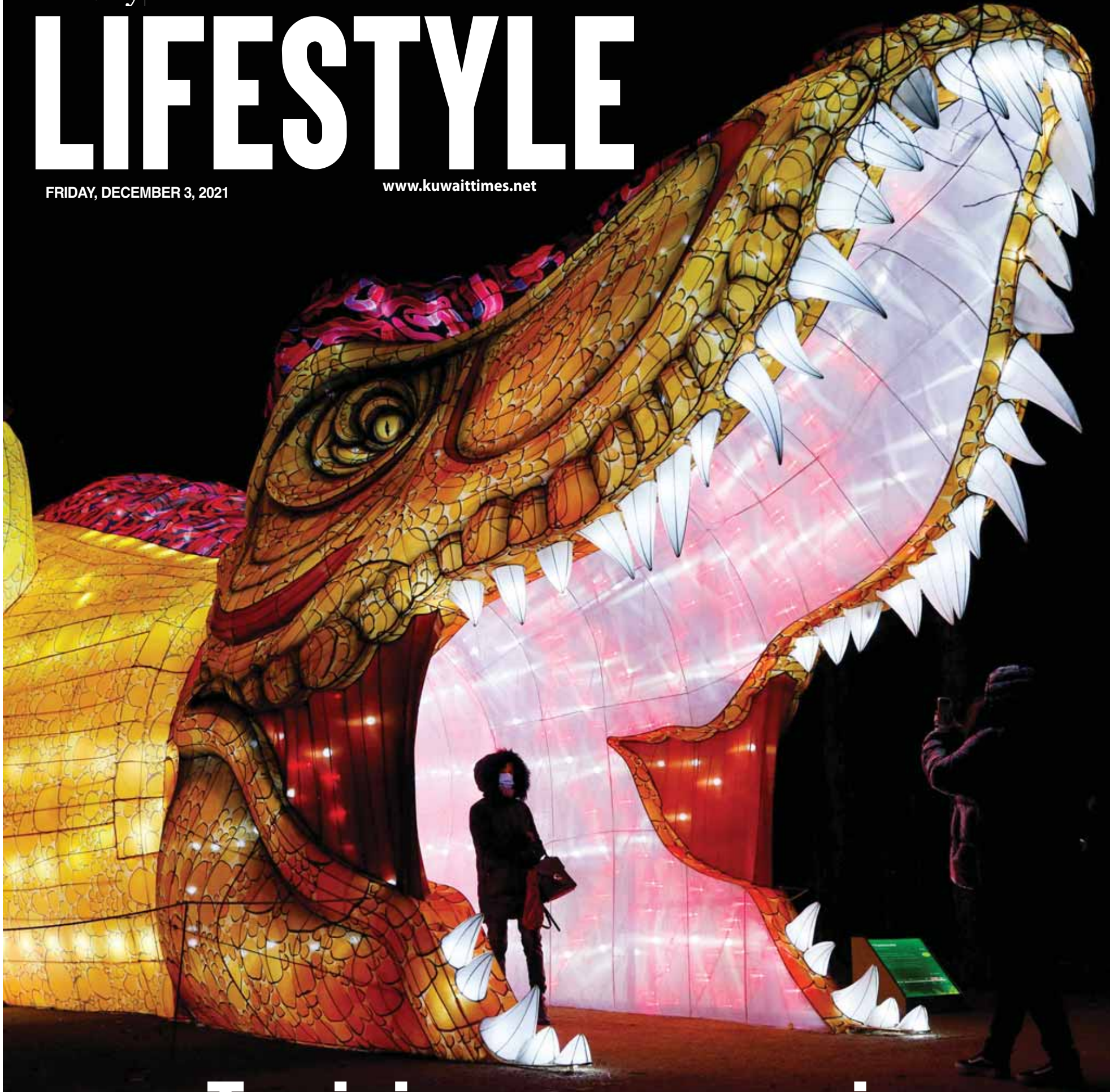


Friday|Times

# LIFESTYLE

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## Tunisia women mix beats and break taboos

See Page 21





'Casa de Papel' cast members pose for a family picture during a photocall for the presentation of the last part of the fifth season of the Spanish TV show 'Money Heist' (La Casa de Papel) at the Palacio Vistalegre arena in Madrid. —AFP photos



Spanish actor Pep Munne poses during a photocall for the presentation of the last part of the fifth season of the Spanish TV show "Money Heist" (La Casa de Papel).

# BARRIER-BREAKING SMASH HIT 'MONEY HEIST' REACHES END

Netflix will on Friday release the final five episodes of its Spanish smash series "Money Heist" which blew open the door for other non-English language series on streaming services. Created by Spain's private Antena 3 network, the thriller about a gang of thieves and their elaborate heists became Netflix's most-watched series not in English after it picked up the show in December 2017. The fate of the robber characters, all of whom have code names from cities around the world, even hooked audiences in the United States, which was not then used to dubbed shows. The New York Times praised the series and its twists and turns as a "joy ride in every sense" while Israel's Haaretz newspaper called it "seriously riveting".

The red overalls and Salvador Dali masks sported by the renegade gang members in the se-

ries soon became popular around the world at costume parties and street protests. "This is the first non-English language series to become a global phenomenon," said Elena Neira, a professor of communication sciences at the Open University of Catalonia. Thanks in part to the success of the show, Netflix and its competitors "realized that they did not need to produce everything in the United States" to get a global audience, she added. Netflix soon scored big with other series not in English, such as French thriller "Lupin" and South Korean dystopian drama series "Squid Game" which this year became the platform's most-watched series ever.

### 'Highly addictive'

While the "Money Heist" screenplay is "not revolutionary", it tells "a very universal story, of

the struggle between good and bad...with messages about the power of women, camaraderie and the need to rebel," said Neira. "Lupin" shares many of the show's features, such as its focus on a thief with "a certain moral" aspect who is "very intelligent," she added. "Money Heist" was also lucky to have been picked up by Netflix shortly after the steaming service in January 2016 went live in more than 130 countries, bringing its coverage to almost the entire globe except China. Netflix's recommendation algorithm also favours series like "Money Heist" which end with a cliffhanger and are "highly addictive," said Alberto Nahum Garcia, a professor of audiovisual communication at the University of Navarre.

"There was a kind of alignment of the planets at a time when distribution became even more global," he added. Neira said the show benefited as well

from the US streaming giant's willingness to invest heavily to dub and add subtitles to shows in dozens of languages.

### Launch pad for Spain

The global success of "Money Heist" has also given Spain's audiovisual sector a huge boost. "It placed Spain's industry in a place where we never dreamed it could be," the show's creator Alex Pina said Tuesday at a Madrid news conference to promote the second part of the fifth and final season of the series. Netflix in 2018 signed a deal with Pina to produce new series and projects exclusively for the streaming giant. And the following year it opened its first European production centre in Madrid, part of a multi-million euro investment in Spanish language content.

"Money Heist" showed that "stories can be created anywhere in the world and be appreciated everywhere in the world," Netflix's vice president of content for Spain and Portugal, Diego Avalos, told AFP. Several "Money Heist" stars have become regulars on other Netflix shows. Jaime Lorente, who plays hot-tempered robber Denver, and Miguel Herran who plays young hacker Rio, appear in teen drama Elite, another Spanish global hit. Netflix head Reed Hastings said it was "amazing" to see Spanish shows like "Money Heist" and "Elite" "win the hearts of fans not just in Spain, but globally". "Our aim is to be part of the Spanish creative ecosystem. We are investing for the long term," he added at the opening of the company's production center in Madrid. —AFP



Spanish actor, writer and director Jose Manuel Seda poses during a photocall for the presentation of the last part of the fifth season of the Spanish TV show 'Money Heist'.



Spanish actor Roberto Garcia Ruiz poses during a photocall.



Spanish actress Najwa Nimri poses during a photocall.



# Tunisia women mix beats and break taboos



Yasmina Gaida (center left) — known professionally as Fouchika Junior—teaches her student Nada Benmadi (center right) during a DJ mixing class as part of the “DJ Academy for Girls” at the French Institute of Tunisia. —AFP photos



Yasmina Gaida — known professionally as Fouchika Junior — looks on during a DJ mixing class as part of the “DJ Academy for Girls”.



Yasmina Gaida (center right) gives a demonstration before students during a DJ mixing class .



Yasmina Gaida (left) teaches her student Roua Bida (right) during a DJ mixing class.

Fouchika Junior adjusts her headphones, flicks a slider and seamlessly drops the next tune: one of Tunisia’s rare female DJs, she is helping other women break into a male-dominated world. “DJing isn’t very common among women,” she said. “I’m trying to give them an opportunity so they understand that a woman can be a DJ in Tunisia—or anywhere.” The 29-year-old, whose real name is Yasmina Gaida, works in cinema by day. But since taking a three-day DJing course five years ago, she has mastered the decks and now plays various styles of house music in clubs across Tunis.

At the French Institute in central Tunis recently, she was giving Nada Benmadi, 25, her first lesson in mixology. “I want to bring music lovers together to dance and spread positive energy,” said Benmadi, an aspiring sound engineer who wants to one day open her own production studio. But “being a female DJ in Tunisia, that makes most families afraid,” she said. “You get home late at night, and it’s mostly a male thing.”

#### ‘Toxic’ environment

Fouchika, whose DJ name means “hyper” in Tunisian Arabic, said club owners were sometimes wary of hiring a female DJ for a night. “When it’s a man, they say ‘OK, send me your profile on SoundCloud’, and they can go and mix,” she said, referring to the streaming platform where DJs and musicians can share their work. “But when it’s a girl, they ask, ‘have you ever mixed before?’” “They see it as a technical thing and so not really made for girls,” said the DJ, wearing a loose blue shirt and her hair in an Afro. Fouchika said her parents—a make-up artist and a hotel entertainer—didn’t stand in the way of her passion, but some

of her students face more resistance.

“Sometimes I have to go and meet their families to tell them, ‘everything’s OK, we’re not doing anything bad, just music’,” she said. While Benmadi said family members had encouraged her to do what she loves, many women in Tunisia face obstacles to pursuing their interests. “DJing isn’t seen as ‘safe’ for Tunisian women,” said Olfa Arfaoui, who set up the DJ Academy for Girls in 2018. “It’s seen as a difficult trade dominated by men, and which happens in an environment that can be toxic or even violent for women.”

#### ‘Social change’

But now, she added, “women have started entering the clubbing space, which is getting used to their presence”. In three years her academy, which she said was the first in the Arab world, has trained about 100 young women. And in a country with 40 percent youth unemployment, and where only 28 percent of women work, the hobby allows some “to use their passion for music to earn money”, Arfaoui added. The academy also offers courses on sound engineering and design as well as music production.

Arfaoui said it all helped boost students’ self-confidence. “Music helps them speak more freely and puts them at ease,” she said, adding that it can also be “a tool for social change, and to create more diversity and equality.” Former student Roua Bida, 33, said she wanted to fight against men who “think we’re going to take away their space”. Along with Fouchika and others, they are setting up a collective of female DJs. “If we each battle on our own, we’ll always have the same problems, but if we’re united... people will give us a chance,” she said. —AFP



# Tweed weaves a way from Scottish islands to catwalk



Traditional thatched roof cottages are pictured at Garrannan Blackhouse Village on the Isle Of Lewis. —AFP photos



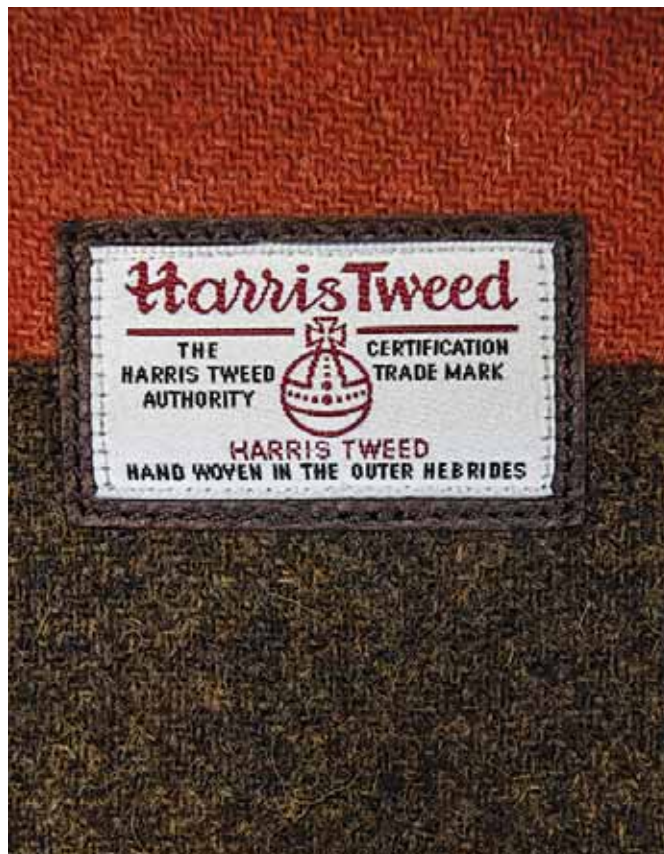
Harris tweed weaver Ian Mackay tends to sheep in Shawbost on the Isle Of Lewis.



Harris tweed weaver Ian Mackay works in his weaving shed in Shawbost on the Isle Of Lewis.



Harris tweed weaver Ian Mackay works on his pedal powered loom in his weaving shed.



A certification trade mark for Harris Tweed is pictured at The Carloway Mill.

In the cluttered workshop of his home off the coast of northwest Scotland, Ian Mackay patiently weaves a bright green wool, surrounded by bags of fabric, spools and tools. He makes a steady clatter as he pedals his machine in the shed of his croft on the village of South Shawbost on the Isle of Lewis, watching closely for any defects. “It’s handwoven... or rather foot-woven,” the 51-year-old weaver jokes in his sing-song accent typical of the Outer Hebrides. Mackay spins wool for 10 hours a day, resting only on Sundays, when most shops and services are shut on the religiously conservative islands.

Once complete, his handiwork-authentic Harris Tweed—could be shipped to the other side of the world, as the rough woollen fabric becomes more popular than ever. Long associated with the windswept Scottish islands, the textile’s ecological and sustainable properties have inspired designers to be more environmentally friendly. “It doesn’t really matter how bad the weather is outside if you are weaving,” Mackay told AFP as an icy November wind whipped across the ochre-coloured moor where sheep were grazing. “There’s no point in being really fast, doing mistakes. You are better doing slow, quality work.”

Such is its status, Harris Tweed, traditionally made from 100 percent pure virgin-unrecycled-sheep’s wool, is the only fabric protected by an act of parliament. The Harris Tweed Act 1993 stipulates that it “has been handwoven by the islanders at their homes in the Outer Hebrides, finished in the Outer Hebrides, and made from





Harris tweed weaver Ian Mackay shows a blanket.



Harris tweed weaver Ian Mackay works on his pedal powered loom.



Work goes on in the Carloway Mill near Garenin on the Isle Of Lewis.



Spools of wool yarn are pictured.

pure virgin wool dyed and spun in the Outer Hebrides". A distinctive Orb stamp globe with a cross on top certifies the fabric's origin and authenticity.

#### High fashion export

Harris Tweed, mostly woven with a plain weave, twill or herringbone structure, was originally associated with Britain's aristocracy and gentlemen farmers. Jackets and plus-fours made from the durable fabric that can withstand harsh climates were a must for traditionally outdoor upper-class pursuits such as hunting and fishing. But British designer Vivienne Westwood turned that image on its head by integrating it into her punk wardrobe in a subversion of culture and tradition. Now other major brands, including Chanel, Dior, Yves Saint Laurent and Hermes, are making it a key element of their collections.

"Recently we have been working extensively with Polo Ralph Lauren in the USA," said Margaret Ann Macleod, sales director for Harris Tweed Hebrides. Seventy people work at the company's lakeside factory, where the wool is dyed and spun, then sent to some 120 home weavers,



Samples of finished cloth are pictured at The Carloway Mill.

where skills have been passed down for generations. Once woven, it is returned to the factory 18 miles (29 kilometers) from Lewis' main town of Stornoway to be washed, dried and finished in Shawbost Mill. A third of the Shawbost factory's output goes to the UK, while two-thirds is exported to all corners of the world. "We export extensively to France, Germany, Italy and a lot of other countries in Europe," Macleod said. "We also have a big export business in South Korea, Japan and the USA, and increasingly China has become a new export market for us as well."

#### Color and culture

In total, some 160 home weavers live in the Outer Hebrides, working hand in hand with three factories that produce a total of 1.5 million meters of the fabric every year. Tweed, immortalized by Mr Toad, one of the main characters in Kenneth Grahame's 1908 classic novel "The Wind in the Willows", is used to make jackets, trousers, coats, but also shoes, handbags, armchairs and even teddy bears. Fifteen years ago, the sportswear brand Nike chose Harris Tweed for a collection of trainers—a huge publicity coup for





Cones of wool yarn are pictured.



Cones of wool yarn are pictured at The Carloway Mill.



Rolls of wool are seen in the loom at The Carloway Mill.



Cones of wool yarn are pictured.



The loom is pictured at The Carloway Mill.



Traditional thatched roof cottages are pictured at Gerrarannan Blackhouse Village.



Cones of wool yarn are pictured.

the Hebridean craftsmen. But more recently the public has rediscovered the fabric in its dozens of different patterns and shades through popular television series. From the aristocrats of “Downton Abbey” to the gangsters of “Peaky Blinders” and the royal family in “The Crown”, virtually everyone wears tweed.

“We start with about 60 colors and we blend each of these colors to create over 180 different yarn shades and they would reflect the landscape and the seascape of the Outer Hebrides—the rich browns are the tones of the moorland, the blue of the Atlantic Ocean,” Macleod said. “Young designers are coming and are looking for the colors. They are looking for authenticity, the fact that we are hand-weaving (and) creating our own yarns is really important to them. “They want to capture a little bit of the island, of the Outer Hebrides in their creations as well.”—AFP



Work goes on in the Carloway Mill near Garenin on the Isle Of Lewis.



Work goes on in the Carloway Mill.



# ELLE SAYS WILL DROP FUR FROM MAGAZINES WORLDWIDE

Elle magazine announced yesterday it will stop using fur in all its editorial and advertising content worldwide, becoming the first major publication to do so. The monthly lifestyle magazine, which originated in France and is owned by French media group Lagardere, comes out in 45 different editions around the world. It has some 33 million readers from Mexico to Japan, with 100 million monthly online visitors.

But Elle's international director Valeria Bessolo Llopiz told a conference organized by The Business of Fashion publication that fur was no longer acceptable. "The presence of animal fur in our pages and on our digital media is no longer in line with our values, nor our readers," she said. "It is time for Elle to make a statement ... rejecting animal cruelty," she told delegates in Chipping Norton, in Oxfordshire, southern England. Instead, she said the magazine wanted to "increase awareness for animal welfare" and "foster a more humane fashion industry". The magazine has signed an undertaking to drop fur that is already in force in 13 of its editions. Twenty more will impose the measure from January 1, 2022 and the rest will start a year later.

Welcoming Elle's decision, PJ Smith, director of fashion policy for the Humane Society of the United States, said he looked forward to other fashion magazines following suit. "This announcement will ignite positive change throughout the entire fashion industry and has the potential to save countless animals from a life of suffering and a cruel death," he told the conference. "Fur promotions belong only in the back copies of fashion magazines from days gone by," the UK director of animal rights organization PETA, Elisa Allen, told AFP. She welcomed decisions by publications including British Vogue, InStyle USA, Cosmopolitan UK, and the newly launched Vogue Scandinavia for rejecting fur on their editorial pages and expects the move to soon extend to advertising.

## Consumer pressure

The decision comes as the fashion industry has faced pressure from animal rights activists to stop the use of real fur on humane grounds and mounting public opposition. Smaller fashion weeks held in cities such as Amsterdam, Oslo, Melbourne and Helsinki have all banned fur but larger ones in Paris, Milan and New York leave it up to designers. Many big names have already chosen not to do so. They include Gucci, Versace and Prada, Burberry, Vivienne Westwood and Alexander McQueen, Donna Karan, DKNY and Michael Kors, as well as Jean-Paul Gaultier and Balenciaga.

A 2020 YouGov survey found that 93 percent of British people refuse to wear natural fur while another by Research Co suggested that in the United States, 71 percent opposed killing animals for their fur. In Europe, an FOP poll indicated that 90 percent of French opposed the fur trade, while 86 percent of Italians expressed opposition in a 2019 survey by Eurispes. In a German poll by Kantar in 2020, 84 percent said cruelty towards animals and killing them for their fur was unacceptable.

The fur industry itself argues that its natural product is being replaced with synthetic fur made with plastics that damage the environment. In November, French furriers wrote an open letter to Vogue magazine claiming it was "absurd" to present "plastic" garments as environmentally friendly, when they contain acrylic and modacrylic fibres. The group has complained of a "climate of fear" created by protesters, which has encouraged designers to drop fur from shows and discouraged fashionistas from wearing it. While fake fur coats are often made from polyester, which takes hundreds of years to biodegrade, some designers such as Britain's Stella McCartney opt for plant-based materials. Others use natural fibres such as wool and feathers to mimic the appearance of fur. —AFP



## Armani gives up angora wool as part of fur-free policy

Italian fashion house Armani announced Wednesday it would no longer use angora wool, a product made from rabbit hair, as part of its fur-free policy. The company said it would no longer use the material across all of its lines from next year's fall-winter collection. At Armani "the percentage of clothing items containing angora wool is very low and we plan to replace it with materials that meet higher criteria in terms of animal well-being," a group spokeswoman told AFP. Soft and silky angora wool is a fibre made from the

coats of angora rabbits.

The animal rights group Peta called in 2013 for a halt to the use of angora wool, releasing a video of an angora rabbit wailing as its fur was pulled out to be collected. Armani renounced using fur in its products in 2016, saying there are now practical alternatives "that render the use of cruel practices unnecessary". A growing number of fashion companies are adopting policies against using materials that require cruelty towards animals. —AFP





# 'Largest-ever' Vermeer show coming to Dutch Rijksmuseum

Amsterdam's famed Rijksmuseum unveiled plans yesterday to stage the largest-ever exhibition of Johannes Vermeer's paintings, including his iconic "Girl with the Pearl Earring". The groundbreaking show in early 2023 will bring works from museums across the globe together under one roof, to shed light on the life and career of the elusive 17th century Dutch master. It is expected to better the exhibition by the Rijksmuseum's sister Mauritshuis museum in The Hague in 1996, which at the time with some 22 works was the most ambitious display of Vermeers to date.

"With loans from all over the world, this promises to be the largest Vermeer exhibition ever," the Rijksmuseum said. "It promises to have more works" than the 1996 exhibition, Rijksmuseum director Taco Dibbits told AFP, but he added "we will not have them all." Today some 35 works have been attributed to Vermeer, renowned for his mastery in the use of light, which can be seen in his works like the "Milkmaid", one of four Vermeers belonging to the Rijksmuseum. "I was always amazed that over nearly a century of organizing exhibitions at the Rijksmuseum, who has four fantastic Vermeers, we have never had a monographic exhibition about him," Dibbits said.

"The Girl with a Pearl Earring", the much-loved masterpiece which inspired a best-selling novel and a 2003 Hollywood film starring Scarlett Johansson, will be on loan from the Mauritshuis, which will collaborate with the Rijksmuseum on the show. Very little is known about Vermeer (1632-1675), who lived a life of modest means in the historic city of Delft during the Dutch "Golden Age" of painting. "For centuries little importance was attached to his work's name," the Rijksmuseum said, until his rediscovery in the 1870s.

Both museums "will research Vermeer's artistry, his artistic choices and motivations for his compositions, as well as into the creative process of his paintings," the Rijksmuseum said. Other works on loan will include "Lady Writing a Letter with her Maid" from The National Gallery of Ireland in Dublin and "Woman Holding a Balance" from The National Gallery of Art in Washington. "Vermeer is somebody who is clouded in mystery, there are so few written sources about him," Dibbits said. "If you want to get to know him better, you need his work and there is something incomparable between sourcing Vermeer and putting all his works together," Dibbits said. The Vermeer exhibition will run from February 10, 2023 to June 4 that year. —AFP



## Meghan Markle urges tabloid shake-up after second privacy win

Meghan Markle yesterday called for a reform of tabloid newspaper culture after winning a second court victory against a British newspaper group for breaching her privacy. But Associated Newspapers indicated her high-profile win may not be the end of the matter, as it said it may now take the case to the country's highest court. Three judges at the Court of Appeal in London threw out the news group's challenge to a February ruling in the High Court over the publication in 2019 in the Mail on Sunday of a letter she wrote to her estranged father.

The Duchess of Sussex, who is married to Queen Elizabeth II's grandson, Prince Harry, said she hoped the ruling would embolden others to hold tabloids to account. "This is a victory not just for me, but for anyone who has ever felt scared to stand up for what's right," she said in a statement. "While this win is precedent setting, what matters most is that we are now collectively brave enough to reshape a tabloid industry that conditions people to be cruel and profits from the lies and pain that they create."

Associated, which also publishes the Daily Mail and MailOnline, appealed the lower court ruling, arguing the judge should have only made his judgment after a full trial hearing. The publisher had been ordered to pay hundreds of thousands of pounds in interim legal costs and to print a front-page statement acknowledging her legal victory. But that was put on hold while the appeal was heard.

### 'Personal and private'

Associated said it was "very disappointed by the decision" and was considering an appeal to the Supreme Court. "It is our strong view that judgment should be given only on the basis of evidence tested at trial, and not on a summary basis in a heavily contested case, before even disclosure of documents. "No evidence has been tested in cross-examination, as it should be," it added. The three appeal judges agreed with the lower court judge that the contents of the letter were



In this file photo Duchess of Sussex Meghan Markle smiles during the 2021 Global Citizen Live festival at the Great Lawn, Central Park in New York City. —AFP

"personal, private, and not matters of legitimate public interest".

Judge Geoffrey Vos, the most senior civil judge in England and Wales, told court the Mail on Sunday articles "interfered with the duchess' reasonable expectation of privacy" and it was "hard to see" if a trial could have changed that. He said the key point was that the articles "focused on revealing the contents of the letter" rather than providing Thomas Markle with a chance to respond to claims made about him in an article in US magazine People.

The articles "were splashed as a new public revelation of extracts from the duchess's letter to her father, rather than her father's answers to what People magazine had written", said Vos. The original judge "had been right to decide that just one paragraph of the letter could have been justifiably deployed to rebut the allegation in People magazine", he added. Lawyers for Associated had argued that Markle wrote the correspondence to her father knowing it was likely to be leaked, despite claiming the opposite. The letter to her father was written in 2018 after her wedding and asked him to stop talking to tabloids and making false claims about her in interviews. —AFP

## Wife of 'godfather of Black music' fatally shot in Beverly Hills home

The wife of the man known as the "godfather of Black music" was shot and killed Wednesday in a break-in at the couple's Beverly Hills home, police said. Jacqueline Avant, 81, was found in her home with fatal gunshot wounds, Beverly Hills Police Chief Mark Stainbrook told a press conference. Avant was the wife of Clarence Avant, a music executive with stints at Motown and other labels who helped mentor an array of African American artists and was inducted earlier this year into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. The couple's daughter, Nicole Avant, is married to Netflix CEO Ted Sarandos.

Stainbrook said no one else had been hurt in the incident and that he did not believe it was a random attack, though the motive was not immediately clear. There had "apparently" been a security guard at the property during the attack, Stainbrook said, declining to offer further details. Police in Beverly Hills, an upmarket area of Los Angeles that is home to the rich and famous in the US entertainment industry, said officers were called to the house after 2:00 am. "Police units arrived and discovered a victim with a gunshot wound," an earlier press release said. —AFP



In this file photo Jacqueline and Clarence Avant attend the NMAAM 2016 Black Music Honors in Nashville, Tennessee. —AFP



# Baldwin denies pulling trigger in 'Rust' shooting

Alec Baldwin has said he did not pull the trigger of the gun he was holding that killed a cinematographer on the movie set of "Rust." In his first major interview since the tragedy in October, the US actor also said he has "no idea" how a live round had gotten onto the set of the low-budget Western in New Mexico. "The trigger wasn't pulled—I didn't pull the trigger," he said in an excerpt of an interview with ABC News released on Wednesday. "No, no, no. I would never point a gun at anyone and pull the trigger at them. Never."

In the interview, aired in full on ABC yesterday, Baldwin did not elaborate on how the weapon had gone off. Baldwin, also a producer on "Rust," was rehearsing a scene in which his character brandishes a Colt .45 when cinematographer Halyna Hutchins was shot and killed. The weapon was meant to contain dummy-or fake-rounds, and Baldwin was asked in the interview how a real bullet had ended up within the firearm. "I have no idea. Someone put a live bullet in a gun—a bullet that wasn't even supposed to be

on the property," said Baldwin. Prosecutors have refused to rule out criminal charges against anyone involved with "Rust," including Baldwin and armorer Hannah Gutierrez-Reed.

Gutierrez-Reed has also said she has "no idea" why live rounds were present. On Tuesday, investigators said Seth Kenney—an Arizona weapon rental supplier—may have supplied "reloaded ammunition" that matched the cartridge suspected to have contained the live round that killed Hutchins. "Reloaded ammunition" refers to rounds that are assembled from component parts, not manufactured as complete live rounds. "The Sheriff's office has taken a huge step forward today to unearth the full truth of who put the live rounds on the 'Rust' set," Gutierrez-Reed's lawyers said in a statement Tuesday. The full, one-hour ABC interview with Baldwin aired yesterday at 8:00 pm Eastern. "Even now, I find it hard to believe," says a tearful Baldwin in the preview clip. "It just doesn't seem real to me." "I think back, and I think of 'what could I have done?'" he says. —AFP



## Hala Al-Zuraiqi exhibition



Yemenis visit an exhibition of Yemeni plastic artist Hala Al-Zuraiqi in the capital Sanaa. — AFP photos



Kids Page

Word Search

Word Search: Colors

B	X	H	P	B	L	A	C	K
B	G	O	I	E	F	W	F	I
N	Y	Q	N	P	D	H	A	Q
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O	R	A	N	G	E	G	U	X
U	B	L	Y	E	L	L	O	W
K	X	M	G	Z	P	D	R	R
B	R	O	W	N	T	R	E	D

- BLACK
- BLUE
- BROWN
- GREEN
- ORANGE
- PINK
- RED
- WHITE
- YELLOW



Kids Mazes



alegra.ru

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### Find the objects



Find 15 objects in the picture



### Word Scramble

#### Baseball Word Scramble

Unscramble the words, then use the highlighted letters to form the phrase below. Watch out: the phrase is scrambled too!

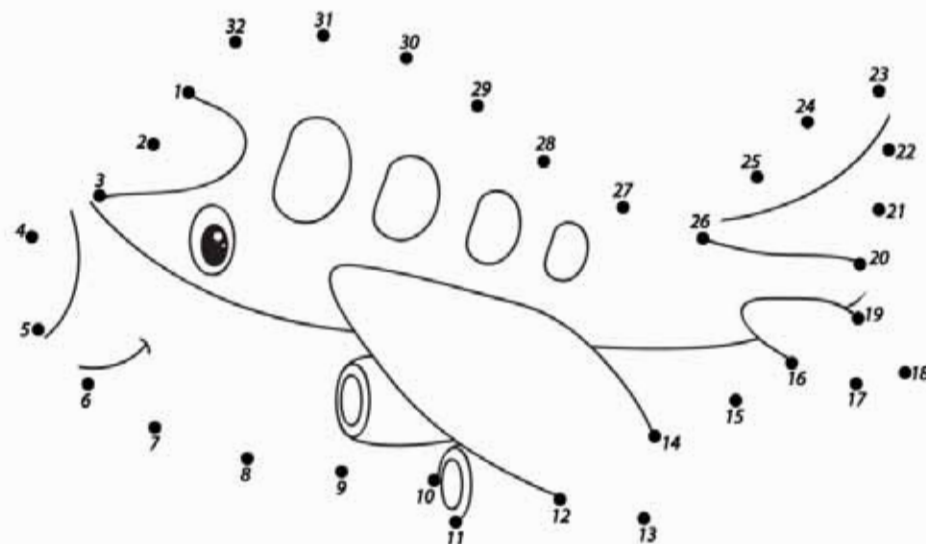
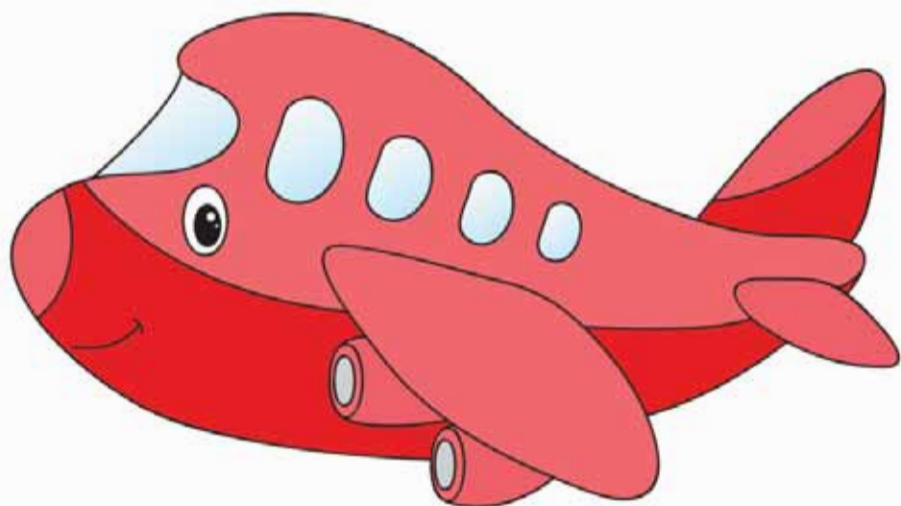
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(Sung during the seventh inning.)

### Join the dots





# Business

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2021

**32** Payments firm Square gets new corporate name: Block

**33** Tech trends for 2022: Meatless meat, Web 3.0, Big Tech battles

**33** US government shutdown looms

**34** Hong Kong quarantine pushes Cathay pilots to 'breaking point'



## OPEC+ to boost output in January

### Omicron variant raises fresh questions over oil demand

**LONDON:** Major oil producers decided yesterday to raise output levels in January, despite the Omicron coronavirus variant raising fresh questions over demand. The OPEC+ alliance led by Saudi Arabia and Russia has so far resisted US-led pressure to significantly boost output to rein in surging energy prices.

But the emergence of the variant further complicated the equation, as countries have imposed new travel curbs and mull other measures that could dampen demand and hurt oil prices. The 13 members of the Vienna-based Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and their 10 allies met for a little over an hour yesterday afternoon via video conference.

The group decided to stick with its modest increase in output by 400,000 barrels per day every month, as they have been doing since May. The OPEC+ meeting comes a week after the United States and to a lesser extent China, India and Japan decided to dip into their strategic reserves to help bring down crude prices, after a price surge that has undermined economic recovery.

But the detection of the new variant last week caused crude prices to plunge around 15 percent, a first since the massive drops of April 2020 when the pandemic started to hit hard. In the hours before the decision was announced prices for the two benchmark contracts, WTI and Brent, had been largely stable on \$66 and \$69 per barrel respectively.

But they fell sharply as the meeting got underway and stood down roughly 2 percent as the announcement of the production increase was announced.

#### Remain cautious

At a technical meeting on Wednesday, OPEC Secretary General Mohammed Barkindo had "highlighted... that steady progress has been made on the global economic recovery" but also "underscored the need to remain attentive to the prevailing uncertainties and shifting conditions, including those related to the new COVID-19 variant Omicron," OPEC said in a statement.

Washington had called on the cartel to further open the taps. International Energy Agency executive director Fatih Birol said Tuesday he hoped OPEC+ would continue its current policy of increasing production. The group's spare capacity is some 10 times higher than the 400,000 barrels per day that it has been adding to the markets every month. OPEC+ drastically slashed output last year as the pandemic began to unfold, and virus-related restrictions caused demand to crash.

Another variable the bloc will have to contend with is the possible return to the market of Iran if talks in Vienna lead to the revival of the 2015 nuclear deal between Tehran and world powers. Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said yesterday a deal was "within reach if the West shows good will". —AFP



**LONDON:** Major oil producers decided yesterday to raise output levels in January, despite the Omicron coronavirus variant raising fresh questions over demand.

### Many countries face 'economic collapse': IMF

**WASHINGTON:** The IMF yesterday urged advanced economies in the G20 to extend and improve its debt relief initiative, warning that many countries face a dire crisis without the help. "We may see economic collapse in some countries unless G20 creditors agree to accelerate debt restructurings and suspend debt service while the restructurings are being negotiated," IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva said in a blog, adding that it is critical private creditors also offer relief.

The G20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) expires at the end of the year, and without a renewal, countries could face financial pressure and spending cuts just as new COVID-19 variants are spreading and interest rates are expected to rise, she said.

"Debt challenges are pressing and the need for action is urgent. The recent Omicron variant is a stark reminder that the pandemic will be with us for a while," Georgieva said in the blog co-authored by Ceyla Pazarbasioglu, director of the fund's Strategy, Policy, and Review Department.

Given the problems with the debt relief program and the common framework for dealing with private creditors, only three countries so far have applied for relief—Chad, Ethiopia and Zambia—and they have faced "significant delays." —AFP



# PREMIER MARKET WEEKLY TECHNICAL BULLETIN

WEEK ENDED ON 02 DECEMBER 2021

No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance										Valuation Multiples *				
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	993	999	1007	984	23	44,433,805	-18	-1.77%	18.93%	990	1011	21.6	2.09	1.9%	1.26
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	242	245	251	242	9	34,272,195	-9	-3.54%	11.87%	245	250	19.7	1.14	1.9%	1.13
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	210	207	214	202	12	45,460,272	-13	-5.91%	-0.48%	203	212	72.8	0.90	0.0%	1.01
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	222	220	224	215	9	13,243,671	-6	-2.65%	3.29%	217	222	16.7	1.00	1.9%	1.05
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	793	810	825	792	33	85,103,222	-24	-2.88%	19.65%	794	815	31.8	3.54	1.1%	1.40
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	780	779	799	755	44	7,931,790	-16	-2.01%	37.15%	773	781	57.5	4.49	0.0%	1.05
204	National Investments	Financial Services	220	222	226	201	25	56,878,397	-9	-3.90%	64.44%	218	224	7.1	0.94	4.5%	1.25
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	145	147	148	140	8	5,966,706	-4	-2.65%	-7.55%	145	147	25.4	1.38	3.3%	0.59
252	Al Imtiaz Investment	Financial Services	117	118	119	112	7	22,207,976	-5	-4.07%	5.36%	112	123	NM	0.72	0.0%	1.00
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	171	177	178	163	15	27,280,228	-3	-1.67%	62.39%	174	178	27.3	1.28	0.0%	0.98
413	Mabaneer	Real Estate	760	807	807	760	47	10,512,878	7	0.88%	22.83%	790	809	17.9	1.84	0.7%	1.10
501	National Industries	Financial Services	269	269	272	255	14	29,749,817	-10	-3.58%	52.84%	262	272	5.3	0.97	0.0%	1.45
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	945	913	950	901	49	1,233,758	-42	-4.40%	20.93%	913	950	32.2	0.93	5.5%	0.94
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	865	837	890	825	65	4,721,725	-63	-7.00%	30.78%	820	850	23.8	1.97	6.4%	0.73
526	Al Qurain	Basic Materials	352	335	360	333	27	2,692,874	-25	-6.94%	-0.89%	333	357	NM	0.91	4.5%	0.75
603	Agility	Industrials	948	935	974	901	73	27,477,240	-62	-6.22%	38.31%	928	955	2.1	1.01	0.9%	1.48
605	Zain	Telecommunications	589	585	589	569	20	33,154,833	-5	-0.85%	-3.47%	581	589	13.4	2.13	3.4%	1.35
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,201	3,230	3,350	3,170	180	1,310,223	-20	-0.62%	-14.98%	3200	3286	7.0	3.53	12.3%	0.49
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	234	222	234	216	18	14,497,046	-22	-9.02%	2.78%	220	226	NM	0.71	0.0%	0.88
818	Ahli United Bank	Banking	274	284	290	264	26	133,067,840	-1	-0.35%	25.11%	282	287	19.5	2.19	1.3%	1.15
821	Warba Bank	Banking	275	267	280	260	20	13,804,590	-20	-6.97%	13.14%	262	273	20.3	2.64	0.0%	1.00
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	601	596	601	590	11	2,480,724	-6	-1.00%	-1.97%	593	601	18.6	1.68	2.9%	0.44
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	370	375	382	368	14	6,370,166	-10	-2.60%	2.46%	375	380	NM	1.57	0.0%	0.47
826	Shamal Az-Zour	Utilities	237	235	238	231	7	6,380,060	-4	-1.67%	-15.16%	233	238	20.0	4.17	5.1%	0.64
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	1,890	1,948	1,948	1,800	148	2,073,059	55	2.91%	77.09%	1925	1983	24.9	6.93	2.1%	0.65

\* As of end of week closing

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## Business

# Markaz: GCC stocks fall on profit-taking due to fears over new COVID variant

## S&P GCC composite index fell by 5.0% in November

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Financial Centre “Markaz” recently released its monthly market review report for the month of November 2021. Markaz report noted that Kuwait’s equity market witnessed an end to its eight-month winning streak, as oil prices tumbled during the month. Kuwait All Share index declined 4.5 percent in November, reducing its yearly gains to 22.4 percent.

Among sectors, Basic Materials sector was the top loser, falling 10.4 percent followed by the Industrials sector, which fell 7 percent. Likewise, Boursa Kuwait’s banking sector index was down 3.8 percent in November. Insurance sector index outperformed, gaining 7.6 percent for the month. Among Premier Market stocks, Warba Bank was the top gainer, rising 0.1 percent for the month.

GCC markets were also down, as evidenced by the S&P GCC composite index, which fell 5.0 percent for November. Weakness in Oil prices derailed the rally of GCC markets barring the UAE, with the Abu Dhabi (8.7 percent) and Dubai (7.3 percent) indices remaining resilient due to reforms announced by the government. Saudi Arabia and Qatar equity indices fell 8.1 percent and 3.2 percent respectively, as Saudi markets were affected by the sharp cuts in oil prices. Among the GCC blue chip companies, the best performer was Emirates Telecommunications (Etisalat),

which gained 24.8 percent during the month, followed by Abu Dhabi National Energy Company, which gained 14.6 percent. The rally in Etisalat was triggered by the positive Q3 2021 results in terms of revenue and subscriber base, which led to the company revising its guidance upwards for the full-year 2021.

Rating agency Moody’s stated that the sovereign creditworthiness of GCC countries is expected to be stable in the upcoming 12 to 18 months due to supportive oil prices and higher production. Dubai markets remained resilient despite the turbulence in oil markets as investors were enthused by the recent reforms undertaken by the government. Dubai unveiled plans to list utility company DEWA, which would be one among 10 government entities to be listed in the local stock exchange in the coming months. The move was followed by the decision to overhaul the board of the stock exchange.

Global equity markets, which were already startled by inflation and interest rate hike concerns, had to contend with another negative trigger in the form of a new COVID-19 variant named Omicron, which was labeled by the World Health Organization as a variant of concern at the end of November. The variant was identified in South Africa, and is anticipated to have higher transmissibility. The spread of a

new variant has been met with caution by several countries, as it could result in public health measures that could potentially have a negative effect on economic growth. As a result, the MSCI World and S&P 500 (US) indices lost 2.3 percent and 0.8 percent, respectively for the month. Earlier during the month, US President Joe Biden nominated Jerome Powell for a second term as Chair of the US Federal Reserve. Emerging market equities (MSCI EM index) fell by 4.1 percent while China remained flat for the month. Escalating tensions between the US and China over the status of Taiwan and trade disputes remain a cause for concern.

Oil prices witnessed its worst monthly decline in over a year to close at \$70.6 per barrel due to simultaneous pressure from both the supply and demand side. Brent crude registered its highest monthly decline in over a year, falling 16.4 percent in November. Negative triggers in the demand side included the spread of a new COVID-19 variant, which could affect economic growth. On the supply side, US President Joe Biden announced that the US would release oil from their Strategic Petroleum Reserve to try to reduce gasoline prices, which have been a key driver of inflation in the country. The market now expects OPEC+ members to reduce production further to compensate for the excess supply in the market.

## EU fines major banks \$390m over forex cartel

**BRUSSELS:** Brussels slapped fines totalling 344 million euros (\$390 million) yesterday on Barclays, RBS, HSBC and Credit Suisse after finding the banks had engaged in a forex trading cartel. Traders at UBS were also found to have taken part, but the European Commission agreed to reduce the Swiss bank’s fine to zero after it came forward voluntarily to cooperate with regulators. “The collusive behavior of the five banks undermined the integrity of the financial sector at the expense of the European economy and consumers,” commission vice-president Margrethe Vestager said.

These fines brought to an end the third part of an investigation that has been ongoing since 2013 and which had already resulted in more than one billion euros in fines in 2019. The probe revealed that traders in charge of spot foreign exchange transactions on major currencies, acting on behalf of the British and Swiss banks, coordinated their trading strategies. The commission said the traders at the banks sometimes coordinated through an online chatroom called “Sterling Lads” — named after the British currency.

Sometimes, on this group, traders who were supposed to be rivals would agree to stand down to avoid interfering in each other’s trades, distorting the market. “Our cartel decisions ... send a clear message that the Commission remains committed to ensure a sound and competitive financial sector that is essential for investment and growth,” Vestager said. —AFP

## Payments firm Square gets new corporate name: Block

**WASHINGTON:** Digital payments firm Square, which was co-founded and is still led by former Twitter chief Jack Dorsey, on Wednesday changed its corporate name to Block as it expands into cryptocurrency and other financial technology tools. The Square payments platform—which was the company’s sole offering when it was founded in San Francisco by Jim McKelvey and Dorsey in 2009 — will keep its name, and the now-public company will continue to trade under the symbol “SQ.”

Square started out providing small businesses with devices that plug into smartphones or computer tablets to process credit or debit card payments. The company has since expanded to include Cash App and Jay-Z’s music streaming service Tidal.

“We built the Square brand for our Seller business, which is where it belongs,” Dorsey said in a release.

“Block is a new name, but our purpose of economic empowerment remains the same.” The corporate name change is meant as a nod to the company’s growth, and will not involve organizational restructuring, according to Block. Facebook recently changed its corporate name to Meta in a similar move, while Google years ago took on the corporate name Alphabet.

“Not to get all meta on you... but we’re going to!” Square said in a comment forum beneath a Dorsey tweet about the name change. “Block references the neighborhood blocks where we find our sellers, a blockchain,



block parties full of music, obstacles to overcome, a section of code, building blocks, and of course, tungsten cubes.” The name also represents an overarching ecosystem of businesses.

Square has made it known that it is working on a wallet for holding digital money, and Dorsey recently expressed interest in the company getting involved in mining cryptocurrency. An initiative at the company that had been called Square Crypto will change its name to Spiral. Earlier this week, Dorsey announced that he was leaving Twitter, after steering the social network during the tumult of Donald Trump’s presidency and surviving an activist investor’s ouster bid in 2020.

Dorsey came under pressure in 2020 from Elliott Management amid concerns he had spread himself too thin by running both Twitter and Square. Twitter’s chief technology officer Parag Agrawal has assumed the top post, with Dorsey saying he would remain a member of the board through until around May to help with the transition. —AFP



## Business

# Tech trends for 2022: Meatless meat, Web 3.0, Big Tech battles

## How technology may change lives in the coming year

**WASHINGTON:** After a year that made the terms WFH (work from home) and metaverse instantly recognizable for many people, there are a new set of technological trends headed this way for 2022. Here's a selection of how technology may change lives in the coming year:

### Meatless meat

Meat alternatives have become common in an increasing number of US households, thanks in part to Beyond Meat and Impossible Food plant-based products that come far closer to the texture and flavor of beef. As the products have improved and the prices edged downward, demand has been boosted by concern about the environment: raising animals for food is responsible for a whopping 14.5 percent of human-linked greenhouse gas emissions, according to UN data.

The global market for plant-based meats is expected to be worth \$35 billion in 2027 — up from \$13.5 billion in 2020, thanks in part to expansion beyond the United States, according to a report from Research and Markets. "2022 will be the crowning year of food made from plant-based proteins," said David Bchiri, president of US consulting firm Fabernovel. "The products are mature and good. They're going to become mainstream."

### 'Web 3.0' and crypto

The internet's first phase was the creation of websites and blogs, which allowed the emergence of companies like Yahoo, eBay or Amazon. The next iteration was Web 2.0, defined by social media and user generated content on sites like Facebook and YouTube. These platforms "get the money and control it, they let you on their platform," summarized Benedict Evans, an independent analyst specializing in Silicon Valley.

### So, is Web 3.0 coming?

In this iteration, "users, creators and developers would have stakes and votes" in a platform in much the way a cooperative works, Evans

said on his "Another Podcast." Such a revolutionary step could be made possible by blockchain technology, where computer programs run on networks of thousands or millions of computers.

So far, blockchain has enabled the rise of cryptocurrencies like bitcoin, and more recently, the unique digital objects such as drawings or animations called NFTs. "We talk a lot about decentralized finance, but I think that in 2022 we will see more localized use cases, which will enter everyday life," said Bchiri of consulting firm Fabernovel.

As highly-volatile digital monies like bitcoin have hit record high values in 2021, a huge range of players have gotten into the game including versions launched by the cities of Miami and New York.

### Ransomware, everywhere

The spike toward record ransomware attacks and data leaks in 2021 looks likely to spill over into the coming year. Cyber-extortion heists break into a victim's network to encrypt data, then demand a ransom, typically paid via cryptocurrency in exchange to unlock it. A confluence of factors has fueled the trend, including the booming value of cryptocurrencies, victims' willingness to pay and the difficulty authorities have in catching attackers. Cybersecurity company SonicWall wrote in late October: "With 495 million ransomware attacks logged by the company this year to date, 2021 will be the most costly and dangerous year on record."

"When I think about 2022, the thing that's top of mind for me and for my colleagues continues to be ransomware. It's simply too lucrative," wrote Sandra Joyce, executive vice president and head of global intelligence at cybersecurity firm Mandiant.

### Big Tech regulation?

It's difficult to say if 2022 is the year Big Tech will finally be hit with significant new rules, but a series of regulatory and legal threats launched in 2021 will provoke major battles. In the United States, the Federal Trade Commission's anti-trust lawsuit against Facebook rep-



resents a genuine threat to the social media giant, though a court has already dismissed the case once. More lawsuits and a federal investigation — and maybe even finally new laws — are possible in the wake of the damning whistleblower leaks showing Facebook executives knew its sites could cause harm. Some critics say the firm's major push into realizing the metaverse — a virtual reality version of the internet — is an effort to change the subject after years of criticism.

Apple dodged a bullet in 2021 when a US federal court said Fortnite maker Epic Games failed to show the iPhone giant held an illegal monopoly, but the firm was still ordered to loosen control over its App Store. Both sides have appealed. New regulations may come sooner in the EU as it pushes through new laws, such as the Digital Services Act which would create much stricter oversight of harmful and illegal content on platforms like Facebook. —AFP

## US government shutdown looms

**WASHINGTON:** The threat of a US federal government shutdown loomed larger Wednesday as lawmakers failed to reach a budget agreement with just two days to go before the funding runs out. Congress has until tonight to come up with a new budget in order to avoid a sudden stoppage of most so-called non-essential federal government operations, putting hundreds of thousands of workers on furlough without pay.

Various administrative offices, national parks, museums and dozens of other services would see their congressional authorization to spend money stop at the end of Friday. During the winter 2018-2019 shutdown, which was the longest in US history at about five weeks, security lines at airports were even affected. Despite deep partisan divisions, the majority of both Republican and Democratic lawmakers hope to avoid a repeat of that scenario, which could wreak havoc ahead of the holidays.

But a handful of Republicans, many of whom

are supporters of former president Donald Trump, are refusing to agree to the budget because they say it would contribute to the imposition of vaccine mandates ordered by President Joe Biden.

In a statement Wednesday, the House Freedom Caucus asked their Senate colleagues to "use all procedural tools at your disposal to deny timely passage" of any budget agreement that funds vaccine mandates or their enforcement. Several Democrats expressed their frustration at the partisan stalemate, especially as the first case of the Omicron coronavirus variant was confirmed in the United States. "As we head into winter and brace for the effects of the new Omicron variant, it would be negligent to shut down our government—all in the name of fighting a vaccine requirement designed to boost vaccination rates and save lives," said Senator Mark Warner of Virginia.

Congressional budget agreements have often been made at the last minute in recent years, but as concerns grow that lawmakers may miss the deadline, economists have warned of the potential consequences of a looming shutdown.

A week of shutdown would cost the US economy some \$6 billion, according to a report by the Oxford Economics group. —AFP

## Supply snags hurting US growth, but may be easing: Fed

**WASHINGTON:** The US economy continues to struggle with supply issues that have pushed prices higher in recent weeks, but there are signs the strains may be easing, the Federal Reserve said Wednesday. Businesses in several areas of the country noted that "despite strong demand, growth was constrained by supply chain disruptions and labor shortages," according to the Fed's "beige book" survey of economic conditions.

However, the report said the "outlook for overall activity remained positive in most districts," although some noted "uncertainty about when supply chain and labor supply challenges would ease." Rising inflation is a top issue for the US central bank, and Fed Chair Jerome Powell made a dramatic shift on Tuesday, saying he

now sees a risk the price increases could continue for some time.

Powell said he supports a faster pullback of the Fed's stimulus policies, a move that would open the door to raising lending rates sooner than expected. Strong pent-up demand from American consumers as the US economy reopened from the pandemic shutdowns has posed a challenge to companies that have been struggling to get products and materials from foreign suppliers, which in many cases continue to face restrictions.

The auto industry was hard hit by a global shortage of important computer chips, but shipping bottlenecks have been felt throughout the economy. The Fed survey noted "moderate to robust" price increases. "With price hikes widespread across sectors of the economy."

However, the survey noted that "wider availability of some inputs, notably semiconductors and certain steel products, led to easing of some price pressures." Strong demand means firms have been able to raise prices with "little push-back," the Fed said. —AFP



## Business

# Hong Kong quarantine pushes Cathay pilots to 'breaking point'

## 'Things are horrible, resignations are through the roof'

**HONG KONG:** Cathay Pacific has been hit by a wave of pilot resignations in recent weeks as resentment over Hong Kong's strict quarantine regime boils over and crew scramble for emerging opportunities overseas. The departures come as Hong Kong ties itself to Beijing's closed-border zero-COVID strategy—a move that has kept the city coronavirus-free but internationally isolated.

Hong Kong's leaders say normalizing travel with China must come before the rest of the world, a strategy that has caused growing alarm within multinationals in a finance hub that dubs itself "Asia's World City". AFP interviewed four Cathay pilots who requested anonymity. Each said they knew more than a dozen colleagues who had resigned in the last few weeks.

More were applying for jobs at rivals in places that have shifted to a strategy of learning to live with the virus, they added. "Things are horrible, resignations are through the roof," one pilot, who has more than 20 years' flying experience and has applied to two rival airlines, told AFP. "There are a lot of guys at their breaking point. It's actually amazing that we haven't had an accident yet." For much of the pandemic Hong Kong has restricted inbound travel with as much as three weeks mandatory quarantine.

Pilots have some exemptions but spend days, sometimes weeks, shuttling within plane-to-hotel bubbles to avoid triggering quarantine when they return. The most extreme form of this is "closed loop" flights where crew choose to spend some five weeks in a bubble followed by two weeks at home.

### 'Absolutely exhausted'

The pilots AFP interviewed said the quarantine rules have taken a profound mental toll both on crew and families. Resentment built throughout the pandemic but exploded last month when more than 270 people—made up of some 120 crew plus their families—were ordered into a government quarantine camp after three pilots tested positive on return from Germany.

The trio were later fired when Cathay said they had left their hotel rooms during their layover. One cargo pilot said he planned to resign "within the next six months" and look for employment overseas now that carriers in the Middle East and North America are hiring. "I've had periods of staying in hotels in complete isolation for as many as 12 days," he said. "We're absolutely exhausted by this."

As the pandemic spread, hammering global airlines, Cathay secured a bailout from Hong Kong's government. Many pilots kept their jobs but had to sign new contracts cutting their pay by as much as half. Pilots fear Hong Kong's future as one of Asia's busiest transport hubs is now at risk. Last month FedEx began relocating Hong Kong pilots to California because of the quarantine rules. British Airways also temporarily suspended flights after some crew were placed in government isolation.

"Once airlines move infrastructure like technicians, ground crew and pilots out of Hong Kong to places like Seoul and Bangkok, trust me, they're not coming back," one pilot said.

Hong Kong's Transport and Housing Bureau did not respond to a request for comment on whether the city's business reputation was at risk. "We will review the quarantine arrangements for air crew as and when appropriate," a spokesperson said.

### 'No roadmap'

In a recording obtained by AFP, Cathay's director of flight operations Chris Kempis told employees this week that there was "a higher resignation rate among pilots right now". "There will be an increased draw, given the current environment in Hong Kong versus what is perceived overseas to be an opportunity for some," he said.

But he stressed the company still planned to make "an awful lot of recruitment" next year. In a statement, Cathay Pacific said it had to abide by Hong Kong's regulations. "We fully acknowledge that these rules and the length of time they have been in force are placing a burden on our aircrew, all of whom have been exemplary in their conduct



**HONG KONG:** Cathay Pacific passenger airplanes are seen parked on the tarmac as a Cathay Pacific Cargo plane (bottom) takes off at Hong Kong's Chek Lap Kok International Airport in Hong Kong. —AFP

and professionalism throughout this difficult period," the company said. Any pilot who feels unfit to fly can decline to work "without jeopardy and is legally protected," the carrier added. One pilot who flies commercial said he had been unable to see his family overseas for more than 20 months because of the quarantine restrictions and his need to stay flying to top up his depleted salary. He said he felt Hong Kong's leaders have abandoned the idea of the city being an international hub at the request of "our overlords to the north"—a reference to Beijing. "I love Hong Kong but if we're not going to plan our way out of this with a roadmap the question becomes what am I doing here?" he said. "I can't take another year of this." —AFP

## US private firms hired 534,000 workers in Nov

**WASHINGTON:** Private US companies added 534,000 workers in November, payroll services firm ADP reported Wednesday. The figure follows an increase of 570,000 in October, reflecting continued gains across the economy but especially by services firms. It previews an expected hiring surge in official government data due out Friday. "The labor market recovery continued to power through its challenges last month," ADP chief economist Nela Richardson said noting that the gains over the past three months averaged 543,000.

The services sector, which dominates the US economy, added 434,000 jobs, with 136,000 in the leisure and hospitality sector that took the biggest hit from the pandemic shutdowns, according to the report.

Goods-producing companies added 110,000 workers, with 50,000 in manufacturing—a sector President Joe Biden has made a priority. Richardson said the economy has regained 15 million jobs since the recovery began, but is still five million jobs short of pre-pandemic levels. However, with a new strain of COVID-19 spreading, "It's too early to tell if the Omicron variant could potentially slow the jobs recovery in coming months." —AFP

## Sri Lanka clamps down on remittances as it battles forex crisis

**COLOMBO:** Colombo threatened yesterday to freeze the bank accounts of Sri Lankans working overseas who send money back to the country using informal money changers, as depleted foreign exchange reserves drive a thriving black market for dollars. The pandemic has wreaked havoc on the island's economy, and the government has banned imports of food, vehicles and other items in an effort to shore up its stockpile of foreign currency.

These restrictions have led to severe shortages of food, cooking gas and cement, and Sri Lanka was forced to shut its only oil refinery last month as the country ran out of dollars to import crude. The official exchange rate of 202 rupees to the dollar, offered by commercial banks that have run out of foreign currency, is well below the 240-245 rupees offered by informal money changers now in the central bank's crosshairs.

The bank's governor Ajith Nivard Cabraal said that migrant workers and others would face consequences

if they sent their earnings home outside of official channels.

"Bank accounts of those who distribute and receive #money through #unlawful money transmission methods will be frozen with immediate effect," Cabraal said on Twitter. He added that the central bank "urges all #migrant Sri Lankans to use only #legal channels to #repatriate their earnings".

The bank has also offered to pay a 10 rupee incentive to overseas workers who send money back through official channels, up from two rupees before. Sri Lanka is struggling to service its foreign debt and forex reserves had fallen to \$2.26 billion at the end of October, around a third of the levels when the government took office two years ago.

Ratings agency Moody's downgraded Sri Lanka's foreign debt rating in October and the government unveiled a drastic austerity budget last month in an attempt to rein in its runaway deficit.

Central bank officials have said the country is facing its worst foreign exchange crisis since the advent of a free economy and have demanded all exporters turn over their foreign exchange earnings to the government within six months. Sri Lanka recorded its worst-ever economic performance last year with a 3.6 percent contraction, fuelled largely by the fallout from the pandemic on tourism. —AFP



# Kuwait Times Classifieds

Friday, December 3, 2021

## NEEDED OFFICE BOY/ CLEANER

### Sudan Embassy in Kuwait

is looking for a office boy / Cleaner

- Clean the office
- Prepare coffee/tea
- Bilingual is an advantage (English, Arabic)
- The candidate should be presentable and good physique.
- Transferable Visa

For interested applicants you may directly contact by  
e- mail: [skuwait@live.com](mailto:skuwait@live.com)

الطيران المدني  
Civil Aviation  
State of Kuwait - دولة الكويت



Tel: (+965) 161 Ext: 66819 - 66817  
Fax: (+965) 24331579  
[www.met.gov.kw](http://www.met.gov.kw)

## Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

**BY DAY:** Mild and Partly cloudy with light to moderate freshening at times south easterly wind changing to north westerly wind with speed of 15 - 45 km/h with a chance for rising dust over open areas with a chance for

**BY NIGHT:** Rather cold with light to moderate freshening at times over costal areas north westerly wind to northerly wind with speed of 15 - 50 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

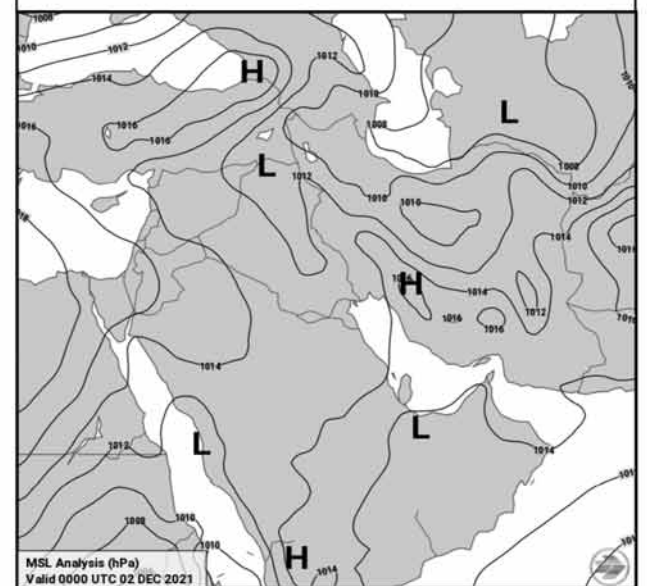
### WEATHER WARNING

No Current Warnings

STATION	MAX EXP	MIN REC
KUWAIT CITY	27 °C	21 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	29 °C	16 °C
ABDALY	28 °C	18 °C
JAHRA	29 °C	15 °C
SALMIYAH	24 °C	22 °C
AHMADI	24 °C	18 °C
NUWAISIB	29 °C	14 °C
WAFRA	28 °C	13 °C
SALMY	28 °C	15 °C
JAL ALIYAH	27 °C	17 °C

### SFC. CHART

02/12/2021 0000 UTC



### 4 DAYS FORECAST

DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Friday	12/03	A significant decrease in temperature and some scattered clouds will appear	22 °C	11 °C	NW-N	15 - 42 km/h
Saturday	12/04	Mild and Partly cloudy	21 °C	08 °C	NW-VRB	10 - 32 km/h
Sunday	12/05	Mild and Partly cloudy	24 °C	07 °C	VRB-SE	06 - 30 km/h
Monday	12/06	Mild and Partly cloudy with a chance for rising dust	28 °C	14 °C	SE-NW	15 - 45 km/h

### PRAYER TIMES

Fajr	05:02
Sunrise	06:26
Zuhr	11:37
Asr	14:30
Sunset	16:49
Isha	18:11

### RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT

MAX. Temp.	29 °C
MIN. Temp.	11 °C
MAX. RH	84 %
MIN. RH	19 %
MAX. Wind	S 32 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

All times are local time unless otherwise stated.

UP:0



NOTICE  
November 29, 2021



Mr. Rajkumar Rapolu, son of Mr. Sathaiah Rapolu, resident of 21-21, Jangala Colony, Devarakonda, Nalgonda-508248, Telangana and Ms. Sowjanya Jella, daughter of Mr. Satyanarayana Jella, resident of 11-10-770/19, Raparthi Nagar, Burhanpuram, Khammam-507001, Telangana both Indian nationals presently residing in Kuwait, have given notice of intended marriage between them under the Foreign Marriage Act, 1969. If anyone has any objection to the proposed marriage, he/she may file the same with the undersigned according to the procedure laid down under the Act/Rule within thirty days from the date of publication of this notice. Communications in this regard can be made by Email ([cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in](mailto:cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in)) / letters / telephonic calls (00965 - 22550171, 00965 - 22533125).

*K.S. Rathore*

(K.S Rathore) First Secretary (CA)  
and Marriage Officer.  
Embassy of India, Kuwait

## ACCOMMODATION

MAXIM DSOUZA for all purpose, Vide affidavit dated 06.11.2021 sworn before notary Abbas N, Mangaluru. (C0984)

I, Javed Ahmed Abdul Hamid, holder of Indian Passport No: M4640773, Civil ID No: 270020704398, changed my name from Javed Ahmed Abdul Hamid to Shaik Javed Ahmed S/o Shaik Abdul Hamid. Permanent Address: House No. 76-106-A11-A5, Guru-Raghavandra Nagar Ballary Chowrasta Kallur Kurnool 518003. (C 0986)

JOHNY LONIS S/o LONAPPAN MAZUVANCHERY ATHAPPAN do hereby solemnly affirm and declares that

1. I am known in two names such as JOHNY LONIS and ANTONY.M.L.
  2. As per my Passport my name is JOHNY LONIS
  3. As per my educational certificates my name is ANTONY.M.L.
- The aforesaid two different names are the names of one and the same person.  
(C 0983)

**For Filipino Bachelor ONLY** Farwaniya block 1, near Oncost and India gate. Available from November 26, 2021. Contact 94418396 or 97345734. 30-11-2021

## CHANGE OF NAME

I, ABDUL RAHMAN ANSARI, FATHER OF SANA, HOLDER OF INDIAN PASSPORT NO. R5458965, CIVIL ID NO. 313020800715, CHANGED MY NAME SANA ANSARI S/O ABDUL RAHMAN ANSARI, INDIAN ADDRESS - SAHIB GANJ CHIKTOLI NEAR MASJID CHAPRA SARAN, TOWEN TAHA CHAPRA BIHAR. PIN COD-841301. (C 0985)

I, RIXON MAXIM DSOUZA, S/o. Vindo Lawrence Dsouza, R/at Door No. 7-63/44, Saripalla Cross Road, Near 4B Bus Stop, Padil, Mangalore-575007, D.K. District, Karnataka State have changed by name as RICKSON



## Sports

# Warholm, Thompson-Herah named World Athletes of the Year

**PARIS:** Norwegian 400m hurdler Karsten Warholm and Jamaican sprinter Elaine Thompson-Herah were named the World Athletes of the Year on Wednesday for sensational performances at the Tokyo Olympics.

Warholm received the men's award for smashing the 29-year-old world record to win the Olympic final in a time of 45.94sec. His performance is widely considered one of the greatest Olympic track performances of all time.

Thompson-Herah took the women's award for achieving the sprint double at a second consecutive Olympics. Although her compatriot Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce was the favourite for the 100m coming into the Games, Thompson-Herah beat her to retain the short sprint title she won five years earlier at the Rio Olympics. In the 200m she held off 18-year-old Namibian revelation Christine Mboma to complete an Olympic 'double-double'.

In addition to her Olympic triumphs, Thompson-Herah also clocked 10.54sec and 21.53sec over 100m and 200m respectively to move to second on the world all-time lists behind the late Florence Griffith Joyner. "I went very close to the world record so, you know, anything is possible. No spikes hanging up any time soon!" the 29-year-old said at the World Athletics ceremony in Monaco.

## 'I hope I get some crowd'

She said the world championships in Oregon next year were "my next big target" and expressed hope that, unlike the empty stands at the Olympics where spectators were banned because of the COVID-19



Karsten Warholm



Elaine Thompson-Herah

pandemic, she would be performing in front of a full house. "It is close to home, I hope friends and family can come out and watch. I hope I get some crowd as well," she said. Warholm's time obliterated the previous men's one-lap hurdles record of 46.78sec set by Kevin Young of the United States at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics.

All three medallists — American Rai Benjamin and Alison dos Santos of Brazil — finished inside the old record. "First when I saw the time, I was like, 'This must be a mistake!' Because I didn't see that one coming. And I didn't see the victory coming before crossing the finish line," Warholm said on Wednesday.

"It was a very intense race, I knew the American and the Brazilian and all the other guys were really chasing

me. "I always go out hard and I never know what is going on behind me. I was just fighting all the way to the finish line. When I realised 45.94 was the reality, I was thinking: 'This is not too bad. I'll take it!'"

Athing Mu, the 19-year-old American who was an impressive winner of the women's 800m Olympic title, was named the Female Rising Star. Erriyon Knighton, the American sprinter who at just 17 years old finished fourth in the men's 200m final in Tokyo, won the equivalent men's award. There was a special award for Mutaz Essa Barshim of Qatar and Italian Gianmarco Tamberi, who shared the Olympic men's high jump gold medal in a moment that touched a nerve with the public. The awards were decided by the World Athletics Council and more than 300,000 online voters. —AFP

## Arab Masters Championship

**KUWAIT:** President of Kuwait and Arab Tennis Federations Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah will hold a press conference tomorrow evening to speak about Kuwait's hosting of the Arab Masters



Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

Championship to be held at Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah International Tennis Complex from Dec 6 until Dec 12. Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber will speak about the challenges the organizing committee faced under the current health situation besides other issues.

## KSSC to hold closing ceremony of annual shooting championship

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Shooting Sport Club (KSSC) will organize the closing ceremony of the Late Sheikh Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah annual shooting championship tomorrow in the presence of championship sponsor Sheikh Sabah Bader Al-Salem Al-Sabah, Sheikh Abdallah Thamer Ali Al-Sabah and President of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex. President of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations Duajj Al-Otaibi spoke about the importance of this annual championship and the large number of shooters who are participating in it from both genders and wished them all success. Otaibi thanked the administrative and technical departments for their efforts as the current activities are being held with observance to health protocols of Coronavirus pandemic.



Duajj Al-Otaibi

## Skating showpiece axed over Japan border ban

**TOKYO:** Figure skating's Grand Prix Final will no longer take place in Japan next week over a ban on new foreign arrivals to the country prompted by the Omicron variant, organisers said yesterday.

Separately, Kazakh boxer Gennady Golovkin's world title fight against Ryota Murata in Japan is now in doubt, with promoters telling AFP they do not know if it will go ahead on December 29 as scheduled.

The Japanese government announced Monday that it would ban all new foreign arrivals because of the heavily mutated Omicron coronavirus variant. That has forced Grand Prix Final organisers to pull the plug on the showpiece event in Osaka, just two months before the February 4-20 Beijing Winter Olympics. "We deeply apologise to everyone involved for causing so much trouble, but we ask for your understanding," a Japan Skating Federation statement said. Governing body the International Skating Union said: "The ISU will evaluate a possible postponement to hold the event at the end of the season and will take a decision as soon as possible." The December 9-12 Grand Prix Final was set to feature the cream of this season's skating talent, including three-time men's world champion Nathan Chen of the US and Russian sensation Kamila Valieva.

Japanese skater Yuma Kagiyama, who qualified for the men's singles final after winning Grand Prix events in Italy and France, had earlier reacted to news of a likely cancellation on Twitter with an emoji shedding a tear. Japan's Olympic champion Yuzuru Hanyu did not qualify for the final after missing events through injury. —AFP



## Sports

# Shakib, Taskin return to give Bangladesh badly needed boost

**DHAKA:** Key Bangladesh bowlers Shakib Al Hasan and Taskin Ahmed return from injury as the hosts fight to prevent a clean-sweep at the hands of Pakistan in the second Test in Dhaka. Bangladesh trail the two-match Test series 1-0 after being beaten by eight wickets in Chittagong, where they badly missed a strike bowler.

The hosts were also whitewashed by Pakistan 3-0 in their Twenty20 series. But Bangladesh have won five of their last seven Tests at Dhaka's Mirpur Stadium, including beating England and Australia, which will give them confidence that they can repeat the feat there when the Test starts tomorrow.

Skipper Mominul Haque is hoping for pitch conditions at Mirpur to match those at Chittagong, where Bangladesh were competitive in the first four days. "I prefer wickets like this. I think we had a perfectly flat wicket, which was helpful for the batsmen, but the pacers faced hurdles," Mominul said after losing the first Test.

Bangladesh's left-arm spinner Taijul Islam staged a lone battle to claim 7-116 in the first innings. But Pakistan cruised to an ultimately easy win, despite his efforts, thanks to a 151-run opening stand from Abid Ali and Abdullah Shafique.

Taijul's regular spin partner Shakib missed the contest after a hamstring injury suffered during last month's Twenty20 World Cup. Shakib

was included in the first Test squad with hopes he would recover in time, but he was subsequently ruled out.

Bangladesh also missed the services of pace bowler Taskin after he injured his finger during the final Twenty20 international against Pakistan on November 22. Taskin had been in fine Test form since making his comeback to the side after a four-year absence, picking up 11 wickets in three matches.

A number of changes are expected for the hosts for the second Test, with illness sidelining opening batsman Saif Hassan. Bangladesh selectors named a 19-member squad, mindful of the upcoming series in New Zealand, where they will travel two days after the Dhaka Test.

Pakistan batsman Abid Ali, who scored 133 and 91 runs in the first Test, says that their previous wins count for nothing. "It will be a new day and we need to bat with a positive mind," he said. Pakistan sit second in the World Test Championship table.

**Bangladesh squad:** Mominul Haque (captain), Shadman Islam, Najmul Hossain Shanto, Mushfiqur Rahim, Shakib Al Hasan, Liton Das, Yasir Ali, Nurul Hasan, Mehidy Hasan, Taijul Islam, Taskin Ahmed, Ebadot Hossain, Abu Jayed, Nayeem Hasan, Mahmudul Hasan, Rejaur Rahman, Khaled Ahmed, Shohidul Islam, Mohammad Naim.



**DHAKA:** Bangladesh's Shakib Al Hasan checks his bat during a training session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium ahead of the second Test cricket match in Dhaka yesterday. —AFP

**Pakistan squad:** Babar Azam (captain), Mohammad Abbas, Mohammad Nawaz, Naseem Shah, Nauman Ali, Sajid Khan, Sarfaraz Ahmed, Saud Shakeel, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Zahid Mahmood. — AFP

## Mumbai's surprise rain no excuse for N Zealand: Southee

**MUMBAI:** Tim Southee warned yesterday that the New Zealand bowlers will have to adapt quickly to Mumbai's pitch after two days of rain hampered preparations for the second Test against India. The Black Caps, led by Kane Williamson, come into the second clash of the two-match series starting today after a hard-fought draw in Kanpur.

But the tourists were forced to call off their training for the second day running while India did some indoor practice after Mumbai's unseasonal rains.

"It's a different lead-in to what we are all expecting," the 32-year-old quick Southee said.

"I don't think we were expecting too much rain in the lead-in, but it's just something that we will have to adapt to." Southee took a five-wicket haul in the first innings of the Kanpur Test and ended with eight scalps in a match dominated by the Indian spinners.

He said it was too soon to say what conditions Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium would throw up. "We won't know if it's going to swing until we are out there, so it's something that we will have to adapt to as bowlers here," said Southee.

"The wicket's been under covers and may offer a little bit more, but who knows?"

Southee believes the lack of training might be a blessing in disguise for the bowlers, who will return fresh for the final match.



**MUMBAI:** New Zealand's captain Kane Williamson (L) speaks with his teammates Tom Latham (C) and Ross Taylor on the eve of the second Test cricket match against India at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai yesterday. —AFP

"We are fortunate to have the last week, even the guys that weren't playing were able to train throughout the Test match," he said.

"So for us bowlers it's nice to give the body a bit of a rest and freshen up ahead of another Test match... Yes, you haven't had the ideal preparation, but there is no excuse."

Top-ranked New Zealand, who beat India to win the inaugural World Test Championship in June, have never won a Test series in India. They last won a five-day game in India in 1988, also in Mumbai.

"Always nice to hear of the history of the game and New Zealand doing well here," said Southee.

"It's a long time ago, a lot's changed in that time, but our focus is on us going out there and giving our best over the next five days." — AFP

## India seek clarity on SA tour with Omicron spread

**MUMBAI:** India skipper Virat Kohli said yesterday his side were seeking clarity about the upcoming tour of South Africa, which is in doubt over the spread of the Omicron COVID variant. Kohli returns for the second Test against New Zealand in Mumbai starting Friday after he stepped down as Twenty20 captain at the end of India's World Cup campaign and took a short break. New Zealand hung on to a draw in the opening Test of the two-match series.

India are expected to fly to South Africa for a full series including three Tests from December 17 but the highly infectious new Covid variant has put plans on hold. "There are players who are not part of this group right now who will be entering quarantine to join the team," Kohli told reporters a day out from the Mumbai Test. "Those kinds of things you want to seek clarity as soon as possible." A tour by India is easily the biggest money-spinner for South African cricket and is believed to be worth hundreds of millions of rands.

On Tuesday the South African government had pledged to take all precautions necessary to keep players safe and praised the "solidarity" of India's cricketers in choosing to continue with the tour. But the Board of Control for Cricket in India has also said it will await a government nod on the Proteas tour before making a final decision. Kohli insisted their focus is on the final Test while staying connected with the board over the Proteas trip. "At the end of the day we understand, our focus from the Test match will not shift regardless," he said. "We have been talking to the board and we are pretty sure within a day or two we will have absolute clarity as to what is going on."

"We need to be realistic about things as well, we cannot just ignore the things that potentially could put you in a confusing place and no one wants to be there." Top-ranked New Zealand, who beat India to win the inaugural World Test Championship in June, have never won a Test series in India and last won a five-day game there in 1988, also in Mumbai. — AFP



## Sports

# MLB locks out players in sport's first work stoppage since 1994

**NEW YORK:** Major League Baseball locked out its players shortly after midnight yesterday as failure to agree on a new collective contract sparked the sport's first work stoppage since 1994.

Disagreement on how to divide \$10 billion in revenues from the elite level of America's national pastime saw negotiations come to a halt on Wednesday afternoon, and after the collective bargaining agreement expired at 11:59 pm MLB announced it would lock out players.

In a "Letter to Fans" posted on Twitter, MLB commissioner Rob Manfred said he was disappointed that the league was "forced to commence a lockout of Major League Players, effective at 12:01 am on December 2."

Manfred said MLB executives believe an off-season lockout "is the best mechanism to protect the 2022 season. "We hope that the lockout will jumpstart the negotiations and get us to an agreement that will allow the season to start on time.

"This defensive lockout was necessary because the Players Association's vision for Major League Baseball would threaten the ability of most teams to be competitive. It's simply not a viable option." The shutdown is the first since the bitter player strike that wiped out the 1994 World Series and led to a shortened 1995 campaign once the dispute was resolved.

Even after games returned, fans were disenchanted and both attendance and television viewership plunged. This stoppage comes in baseball's offseason, giving negotiators more than two months before the start of Spring Training camps and exhibition games that would lead up to the scheduled start of the regular season on March 31.

But Manfred was already ratcheting up the rhetoric, blaming the MLB Players Association for intransigence in negotiations

so far. "From the beginning, the MLBPA has been unwilling to move from their starting position, compromise, or collaborate on solutions," Manfred said in his statement, adding that the union "already had a contract that they wouldn't trade for any other in sports."

MLB and the MLBPA representatives had met again on Wednesday afternoon in suburban Dallas. The union is seeking reduced revenue sharing among clubs and a drop from six years to five years for players to become eligible for free agency, measures that owners fear would make small market clubs uncompetitive.

The union has also pitched an expanded playoff proposal. Owners offered several ideas last week, including an increase in minimum player salaries, creating a designated hitter rule for the National League that would end the practice of pitchers coming to the plate and the creation of an NBA-style lottery for top MLB Draft picks.

## 'Owners' choice'

Manfred pointed to the fact that there is no salary cap in baseball and no maximum length or dollar amount on contracts as evidence that players are getting their share of baseball revenue.

He also rejected the idea that free agency is "broken," pointing to a rash of recent big-money free agent signings that included the Texas Rangers signing Corey Seager to a 10-year deal for a \$325 million contract and 37-year-old star pitcher Max Scherzer signing a three-year deal for \$130 million with the New York Mets.

"In the month of November \$1.7 billion was committed to free agents, smashing the prior record by nearly 4x," Manfred wrote. Free agency signings and trades will be suspended during the lockout as team officials and players are barred from communicating.

The MLBPA also issued a statement early Thursday morning,



Rob Manfred

calling the lockout "a dramatic measure, regardless of the timing."

"It was the owners' choice, plain and simple, specifically calculated to pressure Players into relinquishing rights and benefits, and abandoning good faith bargaining proposals that will benefit not Just Players, but the game and industry as a whole," the union said. "We remain determined to return to the field under the terms of a negotiated collective bargaining agreement that is fair to all parties, and provides fans with the best version of the game we all love." — AFP

## 'Incredible' Djokovic doubles up as Serbia reach Davis s-finals

**MADRID:** World number one Novak Djokovic performed double duty to lead Serbia into the Davis Cup semi-finals for the fifth time on Wednesday with a come-from-behind win over Kazakhstan.

Serbia, the 2010 champions, will face neighbours Croatia on Friday for a place in the final. Djokovic comfortably preserved his 10-year undefeated Davis Cup singles record when he eased past 36th-ranked Alexander Bublik 6-3, 6-4 in 77 minutes to level the quarter-final at 1-1.

The 34-year-old then teamed with Nikola Pecić to see off Andrey Golubev and Aleksandr Nedovyesov 6-2, 2-6, 6-3 in the decisive doubles. "I couldn't be prouder of our fighting spirit. We dropped in level in the second set, but we managed to bounce back, stay calm and turn the tide," said Djokovic.

Djokovic had not won a Davis Cup doubles match since 2015 and went into Wednesday's decider on a run of three defeats — including a loss against Golubev and Nedovyesov in 2016. Earlier Wednesday, Mikhail Kukushkin saved four match points to defeat Miomir Kecmanovic to give the Kazakhs the opening point of the quarter-final. Kukushkin, the world 182, triumphed over 69th-ranked Kecmanovic 7-6 (7/5), 4-6, 7-6 (13/11) after more than three hours on court. — AFP

## Antetokounmpo fuels NBA champion Bucks, Doncic dazzles

**LOS ANGELES:** Giannis Antetokounmpo drove for the game-winning layup with two seconds left on Wednesday, lifting the NBA champion Milwaukee Bucks to a 127-125 victory over the Charlotte Hornets. Antetokounmpo, a two-time NBA Most Valuable Player and MVP of the 2021 Finals, scored 40 points with 12 rebounds and nine assists as the Bucks rallied for an eighth straight win.

The Hornets were on fire early at Fiserv Forum in Milwaukee, making 10 of 17 three-pointers in the first quarter. They led by as many as 18 points in the first half, but couldn't maintain the torrid pace, Milwaukee closing the deficit to 68-60 at halftime.

The Bucks took the lead for the first time with 2:26 remaining in the third quarter, when George Hill's three-point play put them up 91-90. They led by two going into a fourth quarter that developed into a back-and-forth battle that featured 10 lead changes.

Khris Middleton, who scored 21 points for the Bucks, drained a three-pointers with 52 seconds remaining for a 123-122 lead. LaMelo Ball, who led the Hornets with 36 points, drained a three with 5.9 seconds left—enough time for Antetokounmpo to get the ball out of a timeout and drive for the winner.

There was little suspense in New Orleans, where the Dallas Mavericks led virtually all the way in a 139-107 rout of the Pelicans. Luka Doncic scored 28 points and handed out 14 assists and Kristaps Porzingis added 20 points and 10 rebounds for the Mavs, who were coming off a 114-96 loss to Cleveland.

The Mavs—who had lost five of their past six—shook off their

recent shooting woes in a big way, connecting on 57 of 83 shots from the floor, including 18 three-pointers. Their 68.7 shooting percentage was a franchise record for a game, breaking the previous high of 68.6 set in 1983. "It all started with Luka," Porzingis said. "Our energy was there ... the chain-reaction starting from him."

Doncic, who had a triple-double in the loss to Cleveland, had 22 points and 10 assists in the first half to join Damian Lillard and Trae Young as the only players with multiple 20-point, 10-assist halves since the 2018-19 season. "We came out with a lot of energy," Doncic said. "Those shots were open, so we knocked them down." — AFP



MILWAUKEE: Jrue Holiday #21 of the Milwaukee Bucks strips the ball from LaMelo Ball #2 of the Charlotte Hornets during the second half of a game at Fiserv Forum in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. — AFP



## Sports

# Liverpool thrash Everton as Chelsea, City grind out wins

**LONDON:** Liverpool thrashed local rivals Everton 4-1 to pile the pressure on former Reds boss Rafael Benitez on Wednesday, while victories for Chelsea and Manchester City ensured the Premier League top three remain separated by just two points. Leaders Chelsea were made to work hard for a 2-1 win at Watford in one of two games held up by lengthy delays to allow treatment for an ill supporter in the crowd. Former Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard could not do his old club a favour as his 100 percent start as Aston Villa manager was ended by a 2-1 defeat to City. Liverpool had won only once in their last nine visits to Goodison Park, but the gulf in class between the sides currently was obvious as Mohamed Salah produced two more stunning finishes to take his tally for the season to 19 goals in 19 games.

Jordan Henderson opened the scoring before Salah curled the first of his double into the top corner. Demarai Gray's strike briefly gave Everton hope heading into half-time, but further strikes from Salah and Diogo Jota gave the scoreline the reflection it deserved from a one-sided contest. "It was for sure the best performance at Goodison since I have been at Liverpool," said Reds' boss Jurgen Klopp. "We had some good games here but never as good or convincing as tonight."

## Emergency support

Chelsea needed Hakim Ziyech to come off the bench and score the winner 18 minutes from time at Vicarage Road to hold off City and Liverpool at the top of the table. After a half an hour hold up early in the match as a fan was attended to by emergency services, Mason Mount gave the European champions the lead. Emmanuel Dennis hit back for Watford on the stroke of half-time and for a while it looked like Chelsea could drop points for the third time in four league games. But Ziyech's powerful finish

from Mount's cross maintained their slender one-point advantage over City.

"The two situations we had, we scored," said Chelsea boss Thomas Tuchel. "We were very lucky to escape with the win." Gerrard had got off to a flying start as Villa boss with back-to-back wins over Brighton and Crystal Palace to ease fears of being dragged into a relegation battle, but admitted before the game that the champions posed a very different test and so it proved.

An injury-hit City dominated the first half and went in 2-0 up at the break thanks to brilliant finishes from Portuguese international duo Ruben Dias and Bernardo Silva. Ollie Watkins pulled a goal back two minutes into the second half but City held out for a vital three points as Jack Grealish celebrated a victorious return to Villa Park.

"The game we played was fantastic," said City manager Pep Guardiola. "Difficult game. We knew it. I understand why. Especially after conceding early in the second half, the way we reacted, we played really well." West Ham's hopes of a top-four finish suffered another blow as Brighton struck late to snatch a 1-1 draw at the London Stadium.

Tomas Soucek opened the scoring for the Hammers after just five minutes, but after a second for David Moyes's men was controversially ruled out by a VAR review, Neal Maupay earned a point for Brighton a minute from time. In the other match affected by a lengthy delay to attend to an ill fan in the crowd, Leicester twice came from behind to salvage a 2-2 draw at Southampton. Jan Bednarek and Che Adams put the home side in front in the first half, but Jonny Evans and James Maddison levelled to keep Leicester just five points off the top four. Burnley edged a point closer to survival but have still only won once this season after a 0-0 draw at Wolves. —AFP



**LIVERPOOL:** Liverpool's Egyptian midfielder Mohamed Salah (R) runs past Everton's Irish defender Seamus Coleman to score his team's third goal during the English Premier League football match between Everton and Liverpool at Goodison Park in Liverpool. —AFP

## 2023 Women's WCup

**SYDNEY:** Sydney will stage 11 games, including the final, and Auckland nine at the 2023 Women's World Cup, officials said yesterday, as the number of host cities was scaled down.

Australia and New Zealand were picked as co-hosts ahead of Colombia in June last year for what will be the first 32-team women's tournament. Back then, organisers envisaged games at

13 venues across 12 cities, but this has been slimmed down to 10 stadiums (two in Sydney) and nine cities, world governing FIFA said in announcing the match schedule.

Sydney had already been earmarked as hosting the final on August 20, with Stadium Australia now confirmed as the venue. The World Cup kicks off at Auckland's Eden Park on July 20. Australia was given 35 of the 64 fixtures with Perth, Brisbane, Melbourne and Adelaide also playing host. —AFP

## Real Madrid go seven points clear

**MADRID:** Karim Benzema applauded Real Madrid's fans after they chanted "Karim, Ballon d'Or" as his goal against Athletic Bilbao on Wednesday sent Madrid seven points clear at the top of La Liga.

Benzema's 20th goal in 24 games this season proved the difference in a 1-0 victory at the Santiago Bernabeu that puts Madrid firmly in charge of the Spanish title race, even after only 15 games played. "We're on a good run and I like the atmosphere right now in the team," said Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti.

A run of seven consecutive wins in all competitions has helped pull Ancelotti's team away from the chasing pack and Benzema, along with the explosive Vinicius Junior, has been instrumental.

Ancelotti insisted on Tuesday Benzema had not been "crying" about losing out to Lionel Messi in the Ballon d'Or on Monday, with the Frenchman finishing fourth in the final vote.

But there was more than a hint of rebellion in the air when the Madrid fans toasted his goal by chanting "Karim, Ballon d'Or" and the 33-year-old responded by applauding them back. —AFP

## Messi shows off Ballon d'Or as PSG held by Nice

**PARIS:** Lionel Messi showed off his latest Ballon d'Or to Paris Saint-Germain supporters on Wednesday but the Argentinian had a quiet night as the Ligue 1 leaders were held to a 0-0 draw by Nice at the Parc des Princes. The 34-year-old had been a pre-match doubt having reportedly picked up a stomach bug after going out to celebrate being named the best player in the world for the seventh time at a ceremony in Paris on Monday.

However, he started against Nice in a PSG side missing Neymar, who is expected to be sidelined for up to eight weeks with an ankle injury, the latest setback in the Brazilian's time in the French capital. Angel Di Maria and Kylian Mbappe came closest to finding the net after the break for PSG, who had a huge let-off as Kasper Dolberg hit the post for Nice in the second half when it seemed easier to score.

"We created chances and I thought we deserved the three points," insisted PSG coach Mauricio Pochettino. "We are improving little by little. We are top of Ligue 1 and through in the Champions League." Messi has still managed just one Ligue 1 goal since moving to Paris in August from Barcelona, although he has also

netted three times in the Champions League.

Gianluigi Donnarumma also showed off an award pre-match, the Italian displaying the Yashin Trophy he won at the Ballon d'Or gala for being the best goalkeeper of a year in which he starred in his country's Euro 2020 victory. He did not have too much to do against a Nice team that defended superbly, although he did make one crucial stop from an Andy Delort header just after the half-hour mark.

"We were very, very well disciplined and I thought the draw was the right result," said Nice coach Christophe Galtier, who led Lille to the Ligue 1 title last season at PSG's expense. France's Moto GP world champion Fabio Quartararo, who was born in Nice, appeared on the pitch before the match, taking the ceremonial kick-off before shaking hands with Messi and then embracing Mbappe.

### Marseille second

Despite the draw, Pochettino's PSG side are 12 points clear at the top of the French table from Marseille, who climbed up to second with a 1-0 win at 10-man Nantes as Brazilian midfielder Gerson got their goal with a brilliant finish on the turn on the half-hour mark.

Marseille, who still have a game in hand following the abandonment of their recent match at Lyon, move above Rennes after the Brittany side went down 2-1 at home to defending champions Lille, Renato Sanches scoring what proved to be the winner. Nice slip to fourth in the table, while fifth-placed Lens drew 2-2 at Clermont. —AFP





# Warholm, Thompson-Herah named World Athletes of the Year

See Page 36