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Health minister assures no Omicron cases in Kuwait

Sheikh Basel: New vaccines in new year • MoH launches Q8Seha app



KUWAIT: Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah inaugurates the Funaitees Medical Center yesterday. — KUNA

By B Izzak & KUNA

KUWAIT: Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah yesterday said although the Omicron variant of COVID-19 has spread in many countries, there are no reported cases of the strain in Kuwait. On the sidelines of celebrating the opening of the Al-Funaitees Medical Center, Sheikh Basel confirmed that the ministry's procedures in this regard were exceptional even before the existence of this mutation.

Health regulations and procedures imposed in Kuwait had prevented this virus from spreading among citizens and residents, the minister noted. "We urge all people to keep wearing their masks in closed areas, get vaccinated, get the third booster dose and do their PCR tests," he stressed. He added that even with the good vaccination rate in the country, the number of cases will rise if the new variant spreads in the country, and this is why "we have to increase our protection level among the people and society".

Sheikh Basel said that the ministry conducted genetic sequencing during previous periods to make sure there was no such mutation in the country. "Although people appear fearful of the new mutation, we can assure that this mutation is similar

to the regular seasonal flu viruses; therefore the effectiveness of vaccines varies from one period to another," he added.

He pointed out that the effectiveness of vaccinations now lies in reducing the possibility of severe symptoms and not only transmitting the infection, as happened with the (Delta) variant. "We are not only concerned with infection, but with patients in intensive care, severe symptoms and death cases. The vaccines are still effective in this respect, and next year will witness the introduction of new vaccines," he confirmed.

Regarding the vaccination of children aged five to 11 years old, Sheikh Dr Basel confirmed that the ministry of health has opened registration for this age group and the process to obtain the appropriate vaccine for children.

Sheikh Basel also announced the launch of a mobile application called Q8Seha, stating that it will provide reports of all types of tests and x-rays conducted in the public healthcare sector. He said 70 percent of tests will be available and the rest will follow in the coming months, adding this will be in collaboration with the Kuwait Mobile ID app in order to ensure the identity of users, as the information provided is very sensitive.

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News in brief

Panel rejects any OCA move

KUWAIT: The National Assembly's sports and youth committee announced its strong rejection of attempts to move the headquarters of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) out of Kuwait, where it has been located since its inception in 1981, head of the panel MP Abdullah Al-Turaiji said. The lawmaker said the panel was told by Hussein Al-Musallam, the Kuwait Director General of OCA, that there were "suspicious attempts" by unnamed quarters to move the headquarters out of Kuwait.

Saudi allows entry with Sputnik jab

MOSCOW: Saudi Arabia has granted approval for people vaccinated with Russia's Sputnik jab to enter the country in a move that will enable Muslims to take part in religious pilgrimages, the vaccine's developers said yesterday. Foreign tourists vaccinated with Sputnik will still be required to quarantine for 48 hours and take a PCR test. — AFP

Pre-departure tests must for UK

LONDON: The UK government has announced that those travelling into the country will need to show a negative coronavirus test pre-departure as it reintroduces COVID-19 restrictions due to the Omicron variant. From 0400 GMT tomorrow, anyone travelling to the UK will have to show evidence of a negative lateral flow or PCR test taken within the last 48 hours before boarding a flight, the health ministry said. — AFP (See Page 6)

10 COVID cases on cruise ship

MIAMI: Ten COVID-19 cases have been detected among crew members and passengers on a Norwegian Cruise Line ship returning to New Orleans yesterday with thousands on board, a US health authority said. "The Norwegian Breakaway departed from New Orleans on Nov 28 and stopped in Belize, Honduras and Mexico on its voyage," the Louisiana Department of Health tweeted Saturday. — AFP

Agencies defend extra charges for returned maids

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Domestic helper agencies in Kuwait are charging employers more to recruit housemaids who were returned by their original employers as opposed to hiring a new helper from abroad. There have been complaints in Kuwait alleging that offices

are demanding excessive charges compared to the fixed KD 890 fee set by the government to recruit a housemaid. However, a representative of employment agencies in Kuwait said the offices usually charge extra for returned maids for many reasons, mainly the need to refund and compensate employers.

"When the sponsor returns the housemaid to the agency, they demand back the money they spent to recruit the housemaid," said Mariam Macapudi, President of the Filipino Association of Secretaries of Employment Agencies in Kuwait (Fil-Aseak), a group comprising of 200 licensed recruitment agencies. She claimed that upon returning the maid, employers usually demand more money than what they had initially paid to recruit the helper, thus increasing the

cost of re-employment. In addition to asking the new employer to bear the cost of compensating the old employer and sheltering the maid until they find them a new home, agencies see this as an opportunity to turn a profit as well.

"The local agency here would also want to earn revenue from the fact that their services are used," Macapudi said. Once a new employer is found, the cost for recruiting a returned helper can reach up to KD 2,000. According to Macapudi, this is justified because agencies are essentially a business that seek to make a profit. "This is normal," she said. "Local agencies are charging more because that's their nature of business - they also want to earn something as well."

Continued on Page 2

CNN fires Chris Cuomo over help he gave to bro

WASHINGTON: CNN fired veteran anchor and correspondent Chris Cuomo, the cable news channel said Saturday, amid an investigation into his involvement with helping defend brother Andrew Cuomo, the former New York governor, against sexual misconduct allegations. Chris Cuomo had been suspended from CNN over the matter just days before his termination.

"We retained a respected law firm to conduct the review, and have terminated him, effective immediately," a statement posted to CNN's official communications Twitter account said. "While in the process of that review, additional information has come to light."

The termination comes after documents surfaced showing that Cuomo, who anchored the 9:00 pm news slot, offered advice to his politician brother that was deemed too close for comfort by his employer. "The documents, which we were not privy to before their public release, raise serious questions," a CNN spokesperson said Tuesday, adding they "point to a greater level of involvement in his brother's efforts than we previously knew."

CNN on Saturday found itself in the awkward

position of reporting on the firing of one of its own anchors. "This is not how I want my time at CNN to end but I have already told you why and how I helped my brother," Cuomo, 51, said in a text message statement read out on the air by CNN media reporter Brian Stelter. "So let me now say as disappointing as this is, I could not be more proud of the team at 'Cuomo Prime Time,'" Cuomo added.



Chris Cuomo

Continued on Page 2

Incomplete mosque bares Iraq divisions

BAGHDAD: It was meant to compete with the Taj Mahal in grandeur, but former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's monumental Al-Rahman Mosque project was never completed. Instead, the half-finished edifice of grey concrete stands in the heart of Baghdad as testimony to the sectarian and political strife that has shaped much of Iraq's modern history.

The aim was for the mosque, with a

capacity for 15,000 worshippers, to be one of the largest in the Middle East. Launched in the 1990s in the midst of a crippling Western embargo over Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, the construction of the mosque was designed to be a snub to Washington. But the dictator's dreams of grandeur - along with them his iron-fisted rule - would come crumbling down with the 2003 US-led invasion.

Today, a vast hole gapes at the sky from where an 84-metre-tall, gold-adorned ceramic dome was supposed to cover the central prayer hall. Around it, eight secondary domes 28 m high, each flanked by eight smaller domes, stand in a suspended state of

Continued on Page 2



BAGHDAD: This picture taken on Nov 16, 2021 shows a view of the Al-Rahman Grand Mosque in the Al-Mansour district of Iraq's capital. — AFP

Local

Kuwait's Amir invited to 42nd GCC Summit

Crown Prince receives Speaker Al-Ghanem, PM Sabah Al-Khaled



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al-Saud.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday received an invitation, addressed to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, from Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz to attend the 42nd session of the GCC Summit. The invitation, addressed to His Highness the Amir, was delivered to His Highness the Crown Prince by Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al-Saud.

The meeting between the visiting Saudi foreign minister and His Highness the Crown Prince was attended by Minister of the Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah,

Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, Amiri Diwan Undersecretary and Director of His Highness the Amir Bureau, Ambassador Ahmad Fahad Al-Fahad. Also present at the meeting were the Director of His Highness the Crown Prince Bureau Jamal Mohammad Al-Dhiab and Assistant Foreign Minister for GCC Affairs Ambassador Hamad Rashed Al-Meri.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh received Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah at Bayan Palace yesterday. — KUNA

Zain platinum sponsor of POP UP BY COMFEST

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced its platinum sponsorship of POP UP BY COMFEST 2021, Kuwait's biggest gaming and comics event. The event, which Zain supports for the second year running, welcomed huge crowds of gaming, comics, and pop culture fans.

The event's opening ceremony witnessed the presence of Zain Group Chief Investment and Digital Transformation Officer Malek Hammoud and Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Communications and Relations Officer Waleed Al-Khashti, who were eager to take part in the event after it made a comeback after a year-long halt due to the pandemic.

Zain's support to the event came in line with its keenness to support and encourage the various efforts and initiatives that offer a unique entertainment and social experience for the youth, given that they represent society's most vibrant segment. The company is also committed to supporting and empowering young Kuwaiti entrepreneurs who own small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). Zain took part in the event via its dedicated booth, through which the company showcased its recently launched Zain Esports brand. The company hosted many exciting competitions and mini championships for visitors who enjoyed competing against each other. Zain also presented valuable prizes to the winners.

Zain Esports is a regional gaming powerhouse launched in December 2020 by Zain, and to date, the brand has hosted numerous multi-national tournaments in the Middle East, such as the 'EA SPORTS FIFA 21 Tournament: Middle East Challenge'. Zain Esports has also organized the 'PUBGM Champions Squad Season 1 & 2', 'Zain Summer Series', and the CSGO 'Final Clash' and most recently partnered with the Kuwait Olympic committee to manage a first-of-its-kind four-week-end esports event.

These and other tournaments have attracted the participation of over 15,000 players from across the region and have been viewed by over 35 million on Zain Esports' YouTube, Twitch and other social media channels.

POP UP BY COMFEST 2021 is considered Kuwait's biggest gaming and comics event, having featured many of the entertainment and gaming industry's biggest brands. The event also hosted many popular international celebrities from the world of gaming and entertainment, where audiences had the chance to meet and greet them. The event witnessed the participation of many Kuwaiti entrepreneurs who own small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) who are comic and pop culture fans and featured their unique products at the event.

Zain is aware of the important role private sector



Malek Hammoud and Waleed Al-Khashti at Zain's booth

companies play in encouraging such initiatives that support the Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) segment, especially that it is one of the leading national companies in the private sector. Zain's participation at this event further reflected its keenness in developing the Kuwaiti entrepreneurial community, which bursts with young talents who have vibrant ideas that offer viable solutions for the

market needs.

Zain's support to this event came in line with its core objectives that aim at shouldering the advancement of the community as a whole on all levels, where the company reaffirms the principal of partnership through similar efforts with the aim of contributing to the further progress of national economy.

Campaign to plant trees in Ahmadi

KUWAIT: Ahmadi Governor Sheikh Fawaz Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah stressed yesterday the importance of launching official and civil initiatives that organize greening and afforestation campaigns in Kuwait. His remarks came in a press statement on sidelines of Ahmadi Governorate campaign 'We camp, we plant' which aims to enhance environmental awareness to preserve and develop the environment. He expressed his happiness with the campaign response which develops the people's awareness on preserving and caring for the environment, praising the efforts of all participants and volunteers and the support of the Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK). Sheikh Fawaz pointed out that the Ahmadi Governorate continued joint work during the campaign by distributing 3,000 agricultural seedlings to be planted in the camp areas. The Deputy Director



General of Corporate Communications Sector at the Commercial Bank, Amani Al-Werea, said in a similar statement that protecting the environment represents an important social dimension in social responsibility programs, as the bank always seeks to support public community activities that serve the community and the citizen. — KUNA

Agencies defend extra charges for...

Continued from Page 1

Agencies charge KD 890 in addition to a KD 150-KD 200 for air tickets to recruit a domestic helper from the Philippines. However, an employer in this case would have to wait for months before the helper arrives to the country (in addition to 14 days of institutional quarantine and an additional KD 500 cost for the hotel stay for unvaccinated maids). Hiring a domestic helper who has been returned by their original employer comes with the advantage of saving time, while the fact that they are already trained makes them even more sought after by employers.

In business terms, this creates a situation controlled by supply and demand, whereby agencies believe they are justified to charge higher for returned domestic helper who are already in Kuwait than workers who are still in their home countries.

However, Macapudi denied reports that there is a shortage of domestic helpers from the Philippines in Kuwait because Manila is allegedly prioritizing meeting demand of other countries such as Singapore, Japan, Canada and the US, where helpers are paid more than the \$400 they receive in Kuwait. "Yes, there is demand for housemaids in that part of the world, but we have enough supply," she said. "We have people who want to work in Kuwait."

The Philippines is a major source of housemaids for Kuwait, along with Sri Lanka and India.

Other labor exporting countries such as Nepal, Indonesia and Ethiopia have requested the signing of agreements to start sending workers to Kuwait. The Philippines and Kuwait earlier agreed and signed a tripartite agreement in which Kuwait agreed to provide Filipino housemaids with decent and appropriate housing equipped with all the necessities, suitable food and clothing, and medical treatment in case of sickness pursuant to the healthcare insurance system of Kuwait.

Their salary must be paid at the end of the month - not less than the designated amount signed by both parties, compensating the housemaid in case of injury during work, employers must issue a valid residency for the duration of contract, handle all the expenses to bring the housemaid, and in case of death, the employer must also bear the expenses of the deceased body.

The new tripartite contract also mentions that the employer is not allowed to assign the worker outside Kuwait without an agreement from the worker. The housemaid is also allowed to use the phone outside working hours, provided that she maintains the privacy of the household and in a manner consistent with public morals. Working hours must be 12 hours daily and employers must allow the housemaid to rest for eight continuous hours.

They must have a fully paid weekly day off, annual leave, end-of-service benefit of one full month's salary for every year of service, plus a bonus equivalent to one month's salary annually. The employer is not allowed to keep their passport in their possession. The employer needs to provide an economy ticket to the worker at the end of her contract, and in case of conflict, the case will be referred to the Public Authority for Manpower.

Health minister assures no...

Continued from Page 1

On the Funaitees center, Sheikh Basel said the 107th center in Kuwait will serve residents of the area. He added it includes several types of clinics, a laboratory, a workshop, nursing rooms and the administration. He added that several other projects will be launched, including another center in Funaitees. Director of Ahmadi medical area Dr Ahmad Al-Shatti said the Funaitees Medical Center

is the 30th in Ahmadi and eighth in Mubarak Al-Kabeer governorate.

Sheikh Basel said the center will only be open during the morning period, as this is only the preliminary launch and will include primary medical care, three clinics and dressing rooms for children, women and men. He also touched on pharmacy preparations, saying the upcoming phase will include expansion in specialized clinics including a diabetes clinic, chronic illness clinics, maternity and infant clinics, as well as labs.

Dr Shatti clarified that a dentistry unit will be available in the coming stages, adding the opening of medical centers reflects belief in importance of primary medical care, expressing pride in the number of medical centers in Kuwait. — KUNA

Incomplete mosque bares...

Continued from Page 1

near completion. Several cranes are frozen in time above the edifice, which towers over the upscale Mansur district of the capital.

"Unfortunately, we've neglected the country's heritage," architect and university professor Mohamed Qassem Abdel Ghaffour told AFP. "These projects belong to all Iraqis, we should make use of this heritage, and turn them into cultural and touristic sites," he added. "All of this is Iraq's money and the state must profit from it."

Although it was initially built as a Sunni mosque, it was taken over by Shiite clerics after the fall of Saddam. Today, it is a symbol of division between Shiites, now the dominant political force in Baghdad after decades of marginalization in the Shiite-majority Arab state. "After the fall of the old regime, the mosque fell under the control of the Islamic Virtue Party," a senior government official who asked to remain anonymous told AFP. "The party was never able to complete construction, because the costs are huge."

Saddam Hussein "wanted a mosque bigger than

the 'Taj Mahal', he recalled. The Islamic Virtue Party has blocked government plans to turn the mosque into a university or museum, the official said. Although the party's takeover of the mosque remains unofficial, its members hold the main weekly prayers each Friday at noon under one of the secondary domes. About 150 families have lived for years in makeshift homes that sprouted on vacant lots surrounding the mosque.

In January 2020, a court recognized the authority of the Shiite waqf - the institution that manages the community's religious properties - over the mosque. The verdict obliged the Islamic Virtue Party to pay \$200 million in compensation, according to a statement from the waqf. The waqf accuses the party of having occupied the site "for more than 16 years", "without any legal or religious legitimacy".

But the court ruling has not been enforced. Activist Subeih Al-Kachitani said that Iraqi security forces had tried several times to intervene. "But faced with the weapons of the state, there are the weapons of the parties," he said. Development of land adjacent to the mosque to build a shopping center or a housing complex could create up to 20,000 jobs, according to the waqf. But "construction cannot resume until the mosque is removed from partisan conflicts", Kachitani said, and the status quo remains.

For Caecilia Pieri, a researcher at the French Institute of the Near East, the mosque testifies to the "policy of architectural symbolism" of Saddam's Baathist regime. — AFP

CNN fires Chris Cuomo over help...

Continued from Page 1

"I owe them all and will miss that group of special people who did really important work."

Cuomo has spoken candidly of his strong bond with his older sibling. "He's my brother. And if I can help my brother, I do. If he wants me to hear something, I will. If he wants me to weigh in on something, I'll try," he told investigators in July when asked about the counsel he had offered. "He's my

brother, and I love him to death no matter what."

Democrat Andrew Cuomo was elected governor three times before resigning in August after New York's attorney general said an investigation concluded he had sexually harassed at least 11 women. In October, the former governor - whose father Mario Cuomo had also been governor of New York - was charged with a misdemeanor sex crime for forcible touching.

At the start of the pandemic, the Cuomo brothers soared to new heights of popularity: Andrew, 63, earned praise for his frank daily briefings as the coronavirus ravaged New York, and his live exchanges with Chris on CNN were peppered with banter. The investigation into Chris Cuomo's conduct remains ongoing, CNN said. — AFP

Local

Kuwait travel sector 'unfazed' by Omicron, recovery to continue

Civilian flights are mostly operating normally from Kuwait as of now

By Sajeev K Peter

KUWAIT: Kuwait's travel industry remains largely unfazed in the face of the new Omicron coronavirus variant and continues on its path to full recovery from the devastating effect of the pandemic that has paralyzed the world for almost two years, local industry experts said.

"There were some initial concerns and panic in the industry. We had some sudden cancellations of bookings as well. But concerns about the potential effect of the new variant lasted only for two days, and everything has become normal now," said Anasuddin Azeez, a travel professional working at a travel agency in downtown Kuwait.

The new variant ignited concerns around the world and triggered new travel bans after it was detected in South Africa. The United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and the European Union announced almost immediate travel bans from South Africa and other southern African nations. Kuwait's government also warned citizens against non-essential travel and suspended direct flights from nine African countries following the detection of the variant.

"It was much ado about nothing. The fear over the 'dubious' Omicron variant was unwarranted. The virus may be fast-spreading, but we haven't heard any report of mortalities from the virus yet. We need to be cautious, but no need for panic," a travel executive told Kuwait Times on condition of anonymity.

Civilian flights are operating normally from Kuwait

as of now, barring a few cancellations to some African destinations. Kuwait Airways announced that it will regularly review its flight schedules in light of the emerging COVID-19 situation. It said passengers are required to check the status of their planned flights for the latest information before making their way to the

“ Fear over ‘dubious’ variant unwarranted ”

airport.

The local travel sector has begun to bounce back after a two-year long hiatus due to the global pandemic. According to unofficial estimates, recovery in the travel and tourism sector reached nearly 80 percent of pre-COVID levels as of Oct-Nov 2021. "The industry is in recovery mode. Not only the airline sector, but related sectors such as hospitality and service sectors are also witnessing a recovery. The recovery is also helping a considerable amount of job creation in the local market. I don't think this variant will have any



serious repercussions on the travel industry. We have overcome the worst," said Faizal Ahmad, another travel professional in Salmiya.

Many travel agents who spoke to Kuwait Times said people have overcome initial apprehensions about the new virus and are going ahead with their travel plans. Local airlines are reporting a spike in sales volumes. Hotel chains, resorts, function halls and restaurants across the country are also witnessing a noticeable spike in bookings and as the holiday season approaches the trend is expected to pick up, they said. The country's tour operators are also reporting a jump in bookings for holiday packages, leisure trips

and cruise ship reservations.

"It is interesting to note that a large number of citizens are opting for holiday packages from the new year onwards to destinations such as UAE, Georgia, Turkey and Spain. Some people may be postponing their travel for the time being, but nobody is cancelling their plans. Some prefer to travel in the new year as they want to see how the impact of new virus is going to evolve," said Thomas Abraham, an executive working with a travel and tourism company in Kuwait. "I don't think this new variant is going to dampen the holiday mood of the people and derail the travel industry's recovery momentum."

Gulf Bank concludes sponsorship of NUKS US conference

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank has concluded its sponsorship of the conference of the National Union of Kuwaiti Students (NUKS) in the United States of America, which was launched last week as part of the bank's social sustainability program, which focuses on supporting Kuwaiti youth.

Gulf Bank participated in the conference, which was held in Chicago, from 25 to 28 November, in several activities for Kuwaiti expatriate students. The bank's participation included many entertainment sessions and activities for the stu-

dents present at the conference. The conference included raffle draws for cash prizes. One lucky winner, Ziad Alroumi, was awarded the grand prize of having his rent expenses covered by Gulf Bank for an entire year. Two lucky winners - Abbas Johar and Abdullah Althafiri - also received cash prizes worth \$5,000 and \$2,500. Commenting on Gulf Bank's sponsorship of this year's NUKS Conference, Mohammed Al-Qattan, General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank, said: "We are delighted to have sponsored this year's NUKS conference, and to have got-

ten a chance to meet with our Kuwaiti students there. We are looking forward to welcoming them back home."

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

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



levels through sustainability initiatives that are strategically selected to benefit both the country and the bank. The bank also

supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various relevant parties to achieve it.



High school students learn diplomacy at US embassy, UN office

KUWAIT: Five high school students spent the day at the US Embassy and the Office of the Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General and Resident Coordinator in Kuwait yesterday as winners of the US Embassy-sponsored Diplomat for a Day competition, held in collaboration with the UN.

The competition is part of a wider effort by the US Embassy and the UN to promote the next generation of global diplomats. Local high school students were challenged to upload one-minute videos on social media with the hashtag #Diplomat4aDayQ8 and present realistic solutions to some of the world's most pressing issues.

Yasmeen Al-Ghanim, Nora Al-Tuwajri, Lina Lee, Youssef Mokhtar, and Noor Salem were selected from over 50 shortlisted candidates with their videos on climate change, learning disabilities, and preventing illicit drug use, among others.

"The five talented winners were offered a window into the world of American diplomacy," US Ambassador to Kuwait Alina L Romanowski said. "They spent the day shadowing US diplomats from different sections and attending in-depth briefings on key embassy functions like consular, political, economic, foreign commercial services, and public affairs."

After a tour of the embassy compound and discussions with working-level American diplomats, the students joined Ambassador Romanowski for a lunch at her residence alongside UN Resident Coordinator Dr Tarek El-Sheikh, representatives from Kuwait's Foreign Affairs Ministry, and officials from other inter-



national organizations. "We wanted the winners to experience how the business of diplomacy takes place in different settings and with bilateral and multi-lateral partners," Romanowski explained.

"2021 has been a momentous year for our two countries," the Ambassador added. "In February, we marked the 30th anniversary of Kuwait's liberation by a US-led international coalition, and last September we celebrated 60 years of US - Kuwait diplomatic ties. Highlighting the history of these milestones to a new generation of youth is central to our two countries' shared legacy and diplomatic relations."

"The #Diplomat4aDayQ8 competition is a great example of how young people can advocate for solutions to global challenges and contribute to sustainable development and the Common Agenda. The five winners were announced in celebration of World Children's Day on November 20 to highlight that children and young people are raising their voices on the issues that matter to their generation and calling for adults to create a better future for people, the planet, partnerships, peace, and prosperity," said Dr Tarek El-Sheikh, Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General and Resident Coordinator to the State of Kuwait.

Following the lunch, Ambassador Romanowski and Dr Sheikh presented each winning student with a certificate. The students then ended the day with a tour of the UN House in Kuwait, where they were introduced to the UN Resident Coordinator's Office and its functions and met with UN agency representatives from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Labor Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), UNHABITAT, UNICEF, United Nations Volunteers (UNV), and the World Food Program (WFP).



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Kuwait funds bedoons' education

KUWAIT: Kuwait covered the education expenses for 33,700 bedoon (stateless) students in 2020/2021, the Central Agency for the Remedy of Situations of Illegal Residents said. A total of 20,373 students study in public schools while 13,327 others in private schools, and their expenses are paid through Kuwait's Charitable Fund, it added.

The information circulated in a seminar and circulated on social media about the education of bedoons in Kuwait is inaccurate and not true, said CARIRS in a press statement yesterday. It undervalues Kuwait's efforts to ensure education and denies the contributions that have been made in order to popularize education for the stateless people, added CARIRS, which would "damage Kuwait's reputation abroad and distort it for the great humanitarian role that distinguished Kuwait's government and its people."

Kuwait Charitable Fund was established by the State Cabinet resolution 655 on December 7, 2003, which states the establishment of two charitable funds, one for education while the other for health, explained CARIRS. CARIRS called on everyone to follow the truth in all news and statements that are published and broadcast, especially when it affects Kuwait's reputation. — KUNA

\$1 billion to people with special needs

KUWAIT: Kuwait Credit Bank granted a total of \$1 billion in financial assistance to people with special needs in the past 10 years, the bank said yesterday. Around 37,000 persons have benefited from the disability grant since it was enacted by law in 2010, it noted, adding that the bank is always keen to promote and support humanitarian work in Kuwait. The services provided to people with special needs are available through the bank's online portal and the bank's mobile application, as well as the branches, added KCB. — KUNA



Kuwait condemns terrorist attack

KUWAIT: The Foreign Ministry yesterday expressed Kuwait's condemnation and denunciation of the terrorist act in Iraq, Khidr Jija, which resulted in the death and injury of people. The statement stressed Kuwait's supportive stance rejecting all forms of terrorism and violence. It expressed sincere condolences to Iraq and the families of the victims and wished the injured speedy recovery. — KUNA



Hate speech laws discussed in Arab talks

CAIRO: A top Kuwaiti justice official highlighted yesterday efforts to strengthen hate speech laws aiming to establish more religious tolerance during talks involving justice ministers from across the Arab region, saying he had pitched suggestions over the matter.



Zakaria Al-Ansari

Kuwait has made palpable progress in measures the country has taken to clamp down on hate speech and encourage religious harmony, Justice Ministry Undersecretary for Legal Affairs and International Relations Zakaria Al-Ansari said after the talks.

Some of the legal and judicial measures Arab countries had taken during the COVID pandemic were also discussed, added the official, saying the suggestions he had made included anti-terrorism efforts and measures to eradicate corruption. He hailed the talks, held in person in the Egyptian capital Cairo, as a "new beginning" towards greater pan-Arab judicial cooperation, saying it was needed to bring some vital legislations to fruition. — KUNA

Shuttle service helps end Souq Mubarakiya parking troubles



KUWAIT: The buses provided by Kuwait Public Transport Company for the Souq Mubarakiya shuttle service. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: To make it easier for visitors of Souq Mubarakiya to access the market, Kuwait Public Transport Company (KPTC) has launched a new shuttle service. Visitors can park their vehicles at free parking lots in four different locations, then head to Mubarakiya by bus free of charge. The service was launched on Nov 14 and will be available till March 2022.

"If we notice a high demand for this service, we may extend it till April or even longer. The buses are available daily from 10:30 am to 10:30 pm. We may also extend the hours during weekends. The buses are for families only, so single males are not allowed to use this service," Ohood Al-Maseud, Assistant Director of Marketing, Public Relations and Customer Service at KPTC, told Kuwait Times.

Six buses ply three routes from four locations. "The first location is the parking lot of Souq Sharq, which is the most popular. The same bus

will pass through the second location - Al-Sanabel parking lot, then drop passengers on Ali Al-Salem Street in Mubarakiya," Maseud said.

"The second route begins from the Ministries Complex's parking lot and heads directly to Darwaza Abdulrazzaq on Ahmad Al-Jaber Street in Mubarakiya. The third route picks passengers from the parking lot of Al-Mailam Mosque on Sour Street and drops them on Ali Al-Salem Street," she added.

At all four locations, parking lots are free of charge. "Mubarakiya visitors are relieved from searching for parking spots at the market. They



Ohood Al-Maseud

can park their vehicles for free and use the bus service free of charge as well. The interval between each bus is between 5 to 10 minutes. But during weekends and high traffic, the interval may be between 15 to 20 minutes," she noted.

"At each of the locations, there is a stand that includes the bus schedule with timings and the map of each route. Also, it includes photos of the bus, as it's special and different from other transport buses," Maseud explained. The initiative was proposed by Capital Governor Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, who met CEO of KPTC Mansour Al-Saad to realize the idea of this project.

"I would like to thank all those who supported this project for their cooperation, including Kuwait Municipality, Traffic Department of the Ministry of Interior, and Souq Sharq," she said. Maseud also noted that KPTC will soon have a new fleet of buses that will surprise the passengers with their new design, size, services provided onboard, and new routes. "The new buses will provide VIP services for all passengers," she concluded.





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OXFORD, Michigan: Signs in the window of a store show support for the community after the Oxford High School shooting, in downtown in Oxford, Michigan. — AFP

US school shooter parents plead not guilty

Michigan judge set a combined million-dollar bond for their release

WASHINGTON: The parents of a 15-year-old who shot dead four students at a US high school with a gun bought by his father pleaded not guilty to involuntary manslaughter Saturday, as a Michigan judge set a combined million-dollar bond for their release.

James and Jennifer Crumbley, the parents of shooting suspect Ethan Crumbley, were arrested overnight after police tracked them down in an industrial building in Detroit — 40 miles (65 kilometers) from the shooting in Oxford. The pair were considered fugitives—having reportedly withdrawn \$4,000 in cash and switched off their phones—although the Crumbleys' lawyers told the court their clients "were absolutely going to turn themselves in."

But Sheriff Michael Bouchard of Oakland County—where the shooting took place—told reporters during a news conference Saturday that it appeared the couple had help in "hiding" from police. "They weren't looking toward surrendering at that point," he said. "We believe they were assisted in that location, to get there, to get in," Bouchard said.

"Clearly somebody helped them into that location and made it available to them," even after there was a warrant out for their arrests, he said.

At their arraignment Judge Julie Nicholson set bond at \$500,000 for each parent, calling the

charges "very, very serious" and saying "the court does have some concern about the flight risk." Four students, aged 14 to 17, were killed in the Tuesday shooting at Oxford High School north of Detroit and six more were wounded, along with a teacher.

The couple's son Ethan has been charged as an adult with state murder and terror charges, while his parents each face four counts of involuntary manslaughter—each carrying a sentence of up to 15 years in jail. In announcing charges against the boy's parents on Friday, Oakland County prosecutor Karen McDonald said the rare move was intended to "send the message" that gun owners have a responsibility.

The Crumbleys are accused not only of supplying their son with a weapon, but of ignoring escalating warnings that he appeared to be on the brink of violence—including on the day of the shooting.

Four days before the tragedy, James Crumbley bought the 9mm Sig Sauer semi-automatic handgun for his son, McDonald told the judge at Saturday's hearing. His wife took their son to a shooting range the following day, posting on social

media that she had bought a gun for her "baby" for Christmas, the prosecutor said. "Instead of disclosing to the school that he had full access to this weapon, they chose not to," she said.

Gun purchase

While school shootings carried out by teens have become a sadly familiar part of American life, it is highly unusual for parents to face charges. Ethan was with his father at the time of the purchase at a local firearms store and the teen posted a picture of the gun on his Instagram account, writing "just got my new beauty today" along with a heart emoji.

But the Crumbleys' lawyer Shannon Smith told the judge it was "absolutely not true" that Ethan Crumbley had free access to a gun. "Our clients are going to fight these charges," Smith said. "Our clients are just as devastated as everyone else."

According to police, Ethan Crumbley recorded a video on his cell phone the night before the attack saying he was planning a shooting at the school the next day, but it was not posted online. That same day, a teacher observed Ethan

Crumbley searching for ammunition on his cell phone during class.

McDonald said Jennifer Crumbley exchanged a text message with her son that day, writing: "lol I'm not mad at you. You have to learn not to get caught." There is evidence the shooting was "premeditated, and he was actually looking forward to it," Bouchard said.

'Don't do it'

The Crumbleys were summoned to the school on the day of the shooting after a teacher was "alarmed" by a note she found on Ethan's desk, McDonald said. The parents were shown the drawing and advised they needed to get the boy into counseling. McDonald said they resisted taking their son home and he returned to class.

He later entered a bathroom, emerged with the gun, which he had concealed in his backpack, and opened fire. McDonald said Jennifer Crumbley, when she heard about the shooting, had texted her son, saying: "Ethan don't do it."

And James Crumbley called the emergency line 911 to report that a gun was missing from his house and that he believed his son may be the shooter, McDonald said. According to Bouchard, all three family members are in custody at the Oakland County jail, unable to communicate with each other. — AFP

“They weren't looking toward surrendering”

Indonesia volcano eruption death toll rises to 14

JAVA: Rescuers in Indonesia raced to find survivors in villages blanketed by molten ash yesterday after the eruption of Mount Semeru killed at least 14 people and left dozens injured. The eruption of the biggest mountain on the island of Java caught locals by surprise on Saturday, sending thousands fleeing and forcing hundreds of families into makeshift shelters.

At least 11 villages of Lumajang district in East Java were coated in volcanic ash, submerging houses and vehicles, smothering livestock and leaving at least 1,300 evacuees seeking shelter in mosques, schools and village halls.

"We did not know it was hot mud," said Bunadi, a resident of Kampung Renteng, a village of about 3,000 people. "All of a sudden, the sky turned dark as rains and hot smoke came." Dramatic footage showed Semeru pumping a mushroom of ash into the sky that loomed over screaming residents of a nearby village as they fled.

"The number of victims who died until now is 14 people," national disaster mitigation agency spokesman Abdul Muhari told a press conference

yesterday. Two of the victims have been identified, he said in an earlier statement.

At least 56 people including two pregnant women were injured in the eruption, health officials said, and most suffered serious burns. President Joko Widodo on Sunday ordered a rapid emergency response to find victims after the scale of the disaster became clear, said state secretary Pratikno, who like many Indonesians goes by only one name.

As many as 10 trapped people were rescued from areas surrounding Lumajang, Muhari said, as villagers and rescuers worked through the night to find anyone alive or retrieve bodies. But the rescue efforts were hindered by hot ash and debris, with evacuations temporarily suspended yesterday due to ash clouds, Indonesia's Metro TV reported, highlighting the difficulty of the operation.

The country's geological agency said rain is expected in the next three days that could further hinder rescue work. There is also a risk of the rain causing ash sediment to form a new river of hot lava, the country's top volcanologist Surono told the TV station.

Many people who sustained burns had mistaken the hot mud flow for floods so stayed in their villages, said Lumajang Public Order Agency spokesman Adi Hendro. "They did not have time to run away," he told AFP. Authorities said they are still trying to confirm the whereabouts of at least nine people. — AFP

Moscow says US spy plane nearly caused mid-air 'catastrophe'

MOSCOW: Moscow has said that a US plane threatened civilian aircraft but "catastrophe" was avoided when a Russian passenger plane dived to avoid the NATO reconnaissance aircraft that crossed its path above the Black Sea.

On Friday morning a NATO CL600 reconnaissance aircraft descended rapidly across the planned route for a Tel Aviv to Moscow Aeroflot service with 142 people on board, Russia's Federal Air Transport Agency said in a statement.

The Aeroflot flight reportedly had to drop 500 metres (1,600 feet) to keep its distance from the reconnaissance aircraft, which the pilots saw from the cockpit with the naked eye. A second plane, a smaller CL650 aircraft, flying from the Black Sea resort Sochi to Skopje, the capital of Northern Macedonia, also had to divert to avoid the spy plane, the Russian air transport authority said Saturday.

"The direction and altitude of the commercial

flights were immediately altered" to avoid a collision, the agency said, adding that the unknown plane did not respond to radio hails from air traffic control. While the Federal Air Transport Agency did not say which nation had operated the spy plane, Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova indicated on Sunday that the reconnaissance aircraft belonged to the United States. "The actions of the US Air Force have created a threat to civil aviation," Zakharova said on messaging app Telegram. "If now a catastrophe in the airspace over the open waters of the Black Sea has been averted, this does not mean that the United States and NATO can continue to risk people's lives with impunity."

The Federal Air Transport Agency said it would lodge a diplomatic protest. "Increased activity by NATO aircraft near Russia's borders, including above the Black Sea, creates a risk of dangerous accidents involving civilian aircraft," the agency said. The incident came as tensions rise between Russia and Western nations, which accuse Moscow of massing troops on its border with Ukraine in preparation for a possible invasion.

Russia has denied it has any such plans, in turn accusing NATO countries of "provocations" including military exercises near its borders. — AFP

International

Pope calls neglect of migrants 'shipwreck' on Lesbos visit

Mediterranean 'is becoming a grim cemetery without tombstones'

LESBOS ISLAND: Pope Francis yesterday returned to the island of Lesbos, the migration flashpoint he first visited in 2016, calling the neglect of migrants the "shipwreck of civilisation". The pope has long championed the cause of migrants and his visit comes a day after he delivered a stinging rebuke to Europe which he said was "torn by nationalist egoism".

"In Europe there are those who persist in treating the problem as a matter that does not concern them," the pope said as he spent some two hours at Lesbos' Mavrovouni camp where nearly 2,200 asylum seekers live. On the second day of his visit to Greece, he met dozens of child asylum seekers and relatives standing behind metal barriers and stopped to embrace a boy called Mustafa.

"I am trying to help you," Francis told one group through his interpreter. People later gathered in a tent to sing songs and psalms to the pontiff. Pope Francis warned that the Mediterranean "is becoming a grim cemetery without tombstones" and that "after all this time, we see that little in the world has changed with regard to the issue of migration".

He said the root causes "should be confronted-not the poor people who pay the consequences and are even used for political propaganda". The European Union has been locked in a dispute with Belarus over an influx of migrants travelling through the former Soviet state seeking to enter Poland, Lithuania and Latvia in recent months.

Britain and France have also traded barbs over the increasing number of migrants making the deadly Channel crossing to reach the UK in the wake of the November 24 mass drowning which claimed 27 lives. "His visit is a blessing," said Rosette Leo, a

Congolese asylum seeker at the site.

However, Menal Albilal, a Syrian mother with a two-month-old baby whose asylum claim was rejected after two years on the island, said refugees "want more than words, we need help." "The conditions here are not good for a baby," she told AFP. "The Greek government should think about us, we've been here for two years without work or education," said Francois Woumfo, from Cameroon.

'Terrible modern Odyssey'

The temporary Mavrovouni tent camp was hurriedly erected after the sprawling camp of Moria, Europe's largest such site at the time, burned down last year. Greek authorities blamed a group of young Afghans for the incident and security was substantially enhanced for the pontiff's Sunday visit.

The pope's trip to Lesbos was shorter than his last as he will hold a mass for some 2,500 people at the Megaron Athens Concert Hall later in the day. In Cyprus, where the pope visited before Greece this week, authorities said that 50 migrants will be relocated to Italy thanks to Francis. He took 12 Syrian refugees with him during his last visit to Lesbos in 2016.

EU 'torn by egoism'

At the start of his Athens visit on Saturday, Francis said that "today, and not only in Europe, we are witnessing a retreat from democracy," warning against populism's "easy answers". In 2016, Francis visited Moria with Bartholomew I, the spiritual leader of the world's Orthodox Christians, and Archbishop Ieronymos II, head of the Church of Greece.

The Mavrovouni camp currently holds 2,193

Refugees 'want more than words, we need help'



MYTILENE, Lesbos: This handout photograph taken yesterday and released by Vatican Media shows Pope Francis (R) meeting refugees at the Reception and Identification Centre in Mytilene on the island of Lesbos. —AFP

people and has a capacity of 8,000, a facility official said this week. Authorities insist asylum procedures and processing times are now faster. With EU funds, Greece is building a series of "closed" facilities on Greek islands with barbed wire fencing, surveillance cameras, X-ray scanners and magnetic gates that are closed at night.

Three such camps have opened on the islands of Samos, Leros and Kos, with Lesbos and Chios to follow next year. Once asylum seekers are recognised as refugees, they are no longer eligible to remain in the camps, a fate shared with migrants

whose requests for protection are rejected and who face deportation.

Many of these refugees are unable to find accommodation or work, raising another point of criticism of the Greek state from charities and aid agencies. The groups have also raised concerns about the new camps, arguing that people's movements should not be restricted as well as claiming Greek border officers have pushed back migrants.

Greece vehemently denies the claims, insisting its coastguard saves lives at sea. The pope will return to Rome today. —AFP

Maronites dream of return to occupied Cyprus villages

AGIA MARINA: Only a few times a year Ninos Josephides, a Greek Cypriot, is allowed to visit his home village in the Turkish-occupied part of divided Cyprus. But he can't visit his house. It was destroyed long ago. In the aftermath of a visit by Pope Francis last week, the Vatican-affiliated Maronite was allowed an extra visit to the town he had to flee 47 years ago.

"My house used to be here, opposite the church. It's demolished. There were a lot of houses here," Josephides told AFP on Saturday. Maronites first migrated to Cyprus centuries ago from Syria and Lebanon. Like other communities on the eastern Mediterranean island, they suffered from its turbulent history, the scars of which remain to this day.

Cyprus has been divided since 1974 when Turkish troops invaded and occupied the northern third of the island in response to a coup sponsored by the military junta then ruling Greece. The Republic of Cyprus, an EU member, controls the mostly Greek Orthodox south while the self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is only recognised by Ankara.

TRNC authorities allow Maronites to visit Agia Marina an average of just five times a year, during religious holidays. An exception was made on Saturday as a gesture to Maronite Patriarch Bechara al-Rahi, who had come to Cyprus from Lebanon for the pope's two-day visit. Around 50 people registered for the trip organised by the Maronite church. As they reached Agia Marina their cars were stopped by Turkish security forces in civilian clothes who searched their vehicles and checked identification.

After the invasion, a military camp was set up in Agia Marina and some of the homes abandoned by the Maronites who fled south were occupied by Turkish troops. The small Agia Marina church is one of the few buildings unused by the Turkish soldiers. On Saturday men in uniforms bearing the Turkish word for police mingled with the faithful inside. A single bulb provided electricity as Rahi said he would keep lobbying in favour of the Cypriot Maronites. Before leaving Cyprus for Greece early Saturday Pope Francis called the island's division a "terrible laceration".

'Happy and sad'

Several rounds of UN-led talks to reunite Cyprus have resulted in failure, including the last failed attempt in 2017. Saturday's tour also took in the village of Asomatos, just north of Agia Marina, where visitation rules are more relaxed. Each Sunday, Maronite Cypriots are allowed back to attend mass but right after the service they must head back south again.

"I lived here from my birth till 1974. I got married here," said Maria Partella Stefani, 71. The invasion forced her to move south. "My house (in Asomatos) was built three months before the invasion... now it is occupied by the commander of the army," she said. Because of the coronavirus pandemic Stefani said she had not been able to visit her home village for a year.

"I'm very happy and sad today," she said, adding that her dream is to live permanently in Asomatos. Her sister Annetta, also in her 70s, harbours the same dream of returning. —AFP

French police on alert as Zemmour holds first rally

PARIS: French far-right presidential candidate Eric Zemmour is to hold his first official campaign rally at a stadium outside Paris yesterday, with police on high alert over the risk of clashes with protesters. Zemmour, a 63-year-old author and television pundit, announced Tuesday that he would run in next April's election, joining the field of challengers seeking to unseat centrist President Emmanuel Macron.

His first rally comes just a day after the right-wing Republicans party picked Valerie Pécresse, a former budget minister, as its nominee. "It's incredible the level of enthusiasm, while other candidates have been in half-empty rooms," Antoine Diers, a spokesman for the Friends of Eric Zemmour group, told AFP on Friday. "We're expecting a lot of people."

Around 19,000 people have signed up for the event, according to Zemmour's campaign, leading him to swap a concert hall for a larger capacity

'Eternal' chancellor: Germany's Merkel to hand over power

BERLIN: She was called "the leader of the free world" against authoritarian populists on the march in Europe and the United States, but Angela Merkel is wrapping up a historic 16 years in power with a mixed legacy at home and abroad.

In office so long she was dubbed Germany's "eternal chancellor", Merkel, 67, leaves with her popularity so resilient she would likely have won a record fifth term had she sought it. Instead, Merkel will pass the baton as the first German chancellor to step down entirely by choice, with a whole generation of voters never knowing another person at the top.

Her supporters say she provided steady leadership through countless global crises as a moderate and unifying figure. Yet critics argue a muddle-through style pegged to the broadest possible consensus lacked the bold vision to prepare Europe and its top economy for the coming decades.

What is certain is that she leaves behind a fractured political landscape, with her own CDU party divided as it struggles to emerge from her long shadow. Social Democrat Olaf Scholz, who served as her vice chancellor and finance minister, successfully sold himself as the Merkel continuity candidate in the run-up to September's general election and will now succeed her.

Travellers to UK to show pre-departure virus tests

LONDON: The UK government has announced that those travelling into the country will need to show a negative coronavirus test pre-departure as it reintroduces COVID-19 restrictions due to the Omicron vari-

ant. From 0400 GMT on Tuesday, anyone travelling to the UK will have to show evidence of a negative lateral flow or PCR test taken within the last 48 hours before boarding a flight, the health ministry said late Saturday.

This will apply to travellers aged over 12 from any country. Currently travellers have to take a PCR test within two days of arrival. The reintroduction of compulsory pre-departure testing prompted an angry response from the travel industry.

The Business Travel Association said that the measure would be a "hammer blow", while the Airport Operators Association said that "pre-departure tests

Momentum fades

The event will be closely scrutinised given how Zemmour has been falling in opinion polls following a dramatic entrance into French politics in September. Until now, he had been travelling the country doing promotional events for his latest book-"France has not said its final word"-which served as a thinly disguised pre-campaign tour.

As well as a series of recent missteps, including

With Scholz due to be officially elected by parliament as chancellor on Wednesday, Merkel will fall just days short of beating Helmut Kohl's record as Germany's longest-serving post-war leader.

Do the right thing

The unflappable Merkel has served for many in recent years as a multilateralist counterweight to the big, brash men of global politics, from Donald Trump to Vladimir Putin. A Pew Research Center poll in September showed large majorities in most democracies around the globe having "confidence in Merkel to do the right thing in world affairs".

A trained quantum chemist raised behind the Iron Curtain, Merkel was long in sync with her change-averse electorate as a guarantor of stability. Her major policy shifts reflected the wishes of large German majorities—among them phasing out nuclear power after the 2011 Fukushima disaster—and attracted a broad new coalition of women and urban voters to the once arch-conservative CDU. However, the last days of her tenure have been marred by a vicious fourth wave of coronavirus, the worst since the start of the pandemic.

'Austerity queen'

Before the pandemic, her boldest move—keeping open German borders to more than one million asylum seekers in 2015 — seemed set to determine her legacy. But while many Germans rallied to Merkel's "We can do it" cry, the move also emboldened an anti-migrant party, Alternative for Germany (AfD), ushering a far-right bloc into parliament for the first time since World War II.



VILLEPINTE, Seine-Saint-Denis: Supporters of French far-right media pundit and 2022 presidential candidate Eric Zemmour wave French national flags and placards during a campaign rally in Villepinte, near Paris, yesterday. —AFP

the middle-finger incident, Zemmour has seen several influential figures on the far-right distance themselves from him, including his main financial backer. Polls show that voters currently believe Marine Le Pen, the veteran leader of the far-right National Rally party, would make a more competent president than Zemmour, who is viewed as highly divisive and arrogant by a large majority.—AFP



BAYREUTH, Bavaria: File photo shows German Chancellor Angela Merkel and her husband Joachim Sauer arriving for the opening ceremony of the annual Bayreuth Festival featuring the music of German composer Richard Wagner at the festival theatre (Richard-Wagner-Festspielhaus) in Bayreuth. —AFP

The woman once known as the "climate chancellor" for pushing renewables also faces a mass movement of young activists arguing she has failed to deal with the climate emergency, with Germany not meeting its own emission-reduction commitments.

The incoming coalition has pledged to improve on that legacy and to take a more assertive stance with Russia and China after the commerce-based pragmatism of the Merkel years. Merkel became Europe's go-to leader during the eurozone crisis when Berlin championed swingeing spending cuts in return for international bailout loans for debt-mired countries.—AFP

are a devastating blow, as they deter people from travelling". Justice Secretary Dominic Raab told Sky News that he knew the new measure was a "burden for the travel industry" but stressed the UK needed to act.

"We've got to take the measures targeted forensically to stop the new variant seeding in this country to create a bigger problem." The government has vowed it "will take further decisive action if necessary to contain the virus and new variant". The UK earlier banned flights from South Africa and put 10 African countries on its red list, meaning only UK and Irish citizens or UK residents can travel from there to the UK. —AFP

International

Myanmar junta chief meets ousted Suu Kyi party stalwart

Suu Kyi faces a raft of charges that could see her jailed for decades

YANGON: Myanmar's junta chief sat down with a prominent senior figure of Aung San Suu Kyi's ousted party yesterday, the first significant meeting since the February coup. The military deposed Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy party from power, pushing many of her closest political allies into hiding while others have been arrested.

The junta has alleged electoral fraud in last year's poll as a justification for the putsch, but much of the country is in open revolt calling for a return to democracy. Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing yesterday met with longtime politician and NLD stalwart Tin Oo, who has in recent years receded from the political landscape due to old age and poor health.

"Min Aung Hlaing told U Tin Oo that health treatment could be provided if necessary, and his army hospital will help," the junta's information team announced. Tin Oo, a 94-year-old former army general and co-founder of NLD, was pictured wearing his party pin—a trademark red flag with a golden peacock—during the meeting with Min Aung Hlaing, who was all smiles in civilian attire.

The junta chief also met with Khin Nyunt, for-

mer spy chief-turned-prime minister before he was arrested under the former junta. "Min Aung Hlaing also went to meet U Khin Nyunt... and asked about his health condition." The 82-year-old spent years in prison before he was released in 2012.

While some in the West saw him as a potential reformer, Khin Nyunt's reign as spy chief saw activists harassed, arrested and tortured en masse. Khin Nyunt's intelligence apparatus—which once infiltrated every neighbourhood across Myanmar—was purged after his ouster, while Tin Oo no longer plays an active role in NLD party affairs, said Richard Horsey, International Crisis Group's Myanmar senior advisor.

"It seems unlikely this meeting was sanctioned by the NLD," Horsey told AFP. "Given that Min Aung Hlaing seems determined to sideline Aung San Suu Kyi and won't meet with her, perhaps he's looking for other meetings that will be politically cost-free." A former NLD MP—who is now part of a group of ousted lawmakers working underground to undermine the junta—criticised the meeting yesterday.

"The intention of this meeting is dishonest. Min Aung Hlaing wants to take political advantage out



YANGON, Yangon division: This handout photograph taken and released by Myanmar's military information team yesterday shows National League for Democracy (NLD) patron Tin Oo (R) meeting Myanmar's armed forces chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing at Tin Oo's home in Yangon. — AFP

of this meeting," said Htun Myint, who is currently on the run. After the February coup, Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest. She currently faces a raft of charges that could see her jailed for decades. Yesterday's meeting came on the eve of a

junta court verdict on Suu Kyi's charges of incitement and breaching coronavirus restrictions.

The verdict was due to be announced last week, but the court adjourned it until December 6, without providing a reason. — AFP

US, West blast Taliban over 'summary killings' of ex-security forces

WASHINGTON: The United States on Saturday led a group of Western nations and allies in condemnation of the Taliban over the "summary killings" of former members of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), other military personnel, police and intelligence agents "who had surrendered to or were apprehended by Taliban forces" from mid-August through October.

"We are deeply concerned by reports of summary killings and enforced disappearances of former members of the Afghan security forces as documented by Human Rights Watch and others," read a statement by the United States, the European Union, Australia, Britain, Japan and others, which was released by the State Department.

"We underline that the alleged actions constitute serious human rights abuses and contradict the Taliban's announced amnesty," the group of nations said, as it called on Afghanistan's new rulers to ensure the amnesty is enforced and "upheld across the country and throughout

their ranks." Early this week Human Rights Watch released a report that it says documents the summary execution or enforced disappearance of 47 former members of the ANSF, other military personnel, police and intelligence agents "who had surrendered to or were apprehended by Taliban forces" from mid-August through October.

"Reported cases must be investigated promptly and in a transparent manner, those responsible must be held accountable, and these steps must be clearly publicized as an immediate deterrent to further killings and disappearances," the countries—which include Canada, New Zealand, Romania, Ukraine and several European nations—said in their statement.

The Taliban took power in Afghanistan in August as the US-backed government in Kabul and the country's military collapsed.



KANDAHAR, Afghanistan: This picture taken on November 7, 2021 shows Taliban members walking near the birthplace of Taliban Supreme Leader Hibatullah Akhundzada at the Sperwan village in Kandahar's Panjwai district. — AFP

Washington held talks with Taliban officials earlier this week when it urged the hardline Islamist group to provide access to education for

women and girls across the country. It also "expressed deep concern regarding allegations of human rights abuses," a US spokesman said. — AFP

13 civilians killed by security forces in India's northeast

NEW DELHI: Indian security forces killed 13 civilians in the northeastern state of Nagaland after firing on a truck and later shooting at a crowd that gathered to protest the attack, police said yesterday. Troops shot dead six labourers returning to their homes on Saturday afternoon in Mon district, near the Myanmar border, after setting up an ambush for insurgents they believed were operating in the area.

Family members and villagers later went looking for the missing men and confronted the troops after finding the bodies. "This is where a confrontation happened between the two sides, and the security personnel fired, killing seven more people," Nagaland police officer Sandeep M. Tamgadge told AFP.

Tamgadge said the situation in the district was "very tense right now", with nine other civilians wounded in the second incident now being treated in local hospitals. The Indian army said in a statement one of its soldiers had died during the confrontation, with an unspecified number of troops wounded. It added soldiers were acting on "credible intelligence" that insurgents were operating in the area and had laid an ambush to intercept them. "The cause of the unfortunate loss of lives is being investigated at the highest level and appropriate



KOHIMA, India: A man walks behind a placard posted at the venue of the Hornbill festival which was shut after Indian security forces killed 13 civilians in the northeastern state of Nagaland firing on a truck and later shooting at a crowd that gathered to protest the attack, at Kisama village in Kohima yesterday. — AFP

action will be taken as per the course of law," the statement said.

'Appeal for peace'

Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio appealed for calm and announced an investigation into the event. "The unfortunate incident leading to killing of civilians at Oting, Mon is highly condemnable," he said on Twitter. "Appeal for peace from all sections." Mon district is about 220 miles (350 kilometres) from Nagaland's capital Kohima, and is more than a day's drive only along poorly maintained roads.

year. AFP asked Burhan in an interview on Saturday whether the military components and the paramilitary members of the transitional Council will be able to participate in elections planned for 2023.

Burhan responded by saying the August 2019 deal had "included a clear clause that all participants of the transitional period will not be allowed to take part of the period that directly follows it." But a landmark 2020 peace deal with rebel groups "granted some participants to the transitional period the right to become part of the government" that followed the transition, he said.

The statement issued yesterday said Burhan meant that only ex-rebel groups which signed a peace deal in 2020 could be candidates in the planned elections. Burhan-Sudan's de facto leader since the ouster of longtime autocrat Omar al-Bashir in April 2019 — removed the civilian government and declared a state of emergency on October

25, upending the planned three-year transition to full civilian rule.

Burhan's interview with AFP was one of a series he gave to international media a day after UN chief Antonio Guterres, in a report submitted to the Security Council, called Sudan hostile to journalists. On November 21, Burhan signed a deal to reinstate Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok who was ousted in the coup and kept for weeks under house arrest.

The Burhan-Hamdok agreement was welcomed by the United Nations, the African Union, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. It was also cautiously greeted by Britain and the United States. But critics have lambasted it as "whitewashing" and accused Hamdok of "betrayal". Pro-democracy activists vowed to maintain pressure on the military-civilian authority.

The top general has long insisted the military's move on October 25 "was not a coup" but a step "to rectify the transition". — AFP

News in brief

Two explosions hit UN camps in Mali

GAO: Two explosions hit UN camps in the northern Mali city of Gao yesterday, causing damage but no casualties, AFP journalists at the scene said. The blasts which occurred at 0545 GMT shook the barracks of the United Nations mission in Mali, called MINUSMA, forcing the occupants to take refuge in shelters for two hours. The French army said there was only material damage, but did not provide details about any possible origin of the blasts. The latest violence in the West African country comes after 31 people were killed in an attack on Friday by suspected jihadists near the central town of Bandiagara. Mali has been struggling to contain an Islamist insurgency that first erupted in the north in 2012 and has since claimed thousands of military and civilian lives. Despite the presence of thousands of French and UN troops, the conflict has engulfed central Mali and spread to neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger. France, the former colonial power in Mali, has said it will reduce its number of troops in the Sahel.

Myanmar soldiers ram car into protest

YANGON: Myanmar soldiers wounded at least three people after ramming a car into a peaceful anti-coup rally in Yangon, eyewitnesses said yesterday. The country has been in turmoil since February when the military seized power, triggering nationwide demonstrations which the junta sought to quell with violent crackdowns and mass arrests. More than 10 months of military rule has seen some 1,300 killed rallying against the army but small, highly mobile protests still crop up. The rally in Yangon was violently dispersed Sunday morning when a large car ploughed into it, according to a journalist there. "They increased the speed when they got closer to the protesters—it was like they drove into them," he said, declining to provide his name for security reasons. He said a handful of people, some carrying banners in support of ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, were hit and splayed on the ground as others fled the scene.

Trial to begin over alleged coup plot

ANTANANARIVO: A trial will begin today in Madagascar for 21 people accused of planning a coup d'etat, including two French men and their wives. Arrested on July 20, Paul Rafanoharana, Philippe Francois and their wives are accused of endangering the security of the state, criminal conspiracy and a plot to assassinate President Andry Rajoelina. The chief prosecutor accused them of "putting together a plan to eliminate or neutralise various Malagasy public figures including the head of state". They deny all involvement. Together with 17 other accused, the four are set to appear at the Anosy courthouse in Madagascar's capital Antananarivo. It was not immediately clear whether journalists will be allowed to attend the public hearing, which defence lawyers said should last three or four days. Defendant Rafanoharana, who is French-Malagasy, is a former adviser to the president.

Sudan top general denies military could run in elections

KHARTOUM: Sudan's top general Abdel Fattah al-Burhan yesterday denied that military and paramilitary members of the transitional administration could run for the country's July 2023 elections. "The president of the Sovereign Council denied what the Agence France-Presse reported about the participation of the military in the upcoming elections," his office said in a statement.

Sudan has been run by a joint military-civilian ruling council since August 2019, but civilian members were changed following a coup in October this

Business

MONDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2021

‘Metaverse’ hype propels digital property market

Republic Realm spends \$4.3m on digital land through The Sandbox

PARIS: The idea of spending millions on non-existent land may sound ludicrous—but feverish predictions of a virtual reality future are pushing investors to bet big on digital real estate. This week, New York-based company Republic Realm announced it had spent a record-breaking \$4.3 million on digital land through The Sandbox, one of several “virtual world” websites where people can socialize, play games and even attend concerts.

That came hot on the heels of a \$2.4-million land purchase in late November on a rival platform, Decentraland, by Canadian crypto company Tokens.com. And days before that, Barbados announced plans to open a “metaverse embassy” in Decentraland. Such websites bill themselves as a prototype of the metaverse, a future internet where online experiences like chatting to a friend would eventually feel face-to-face thanks to virtual reality (VR) headsets.

“Metaverse” has been a Silicon Valley buzzword for months, but interest soared in October after Facebook’s parent company renamed itself “Meta” as it shifts its focus towards VR. The Facebook rebrand “introduced the term ‘metaverse’ to millions of people a lot faster than I would have ever imagined,” said Cathy Hackl, a tech consultant who advises companies on entering the metaverse.

According to crypto data site Dapp, land worth more than \$100 million has sold in the past week across the four largest metaverse sites, The Sandbox, Decentraland, CryptoVoxels, and Somnium Space.

For Hackl, it’s unsurprising that the market is booming, spawning an entire ecosystem around virtual real estate, from rents to land developers. “We’re trying to translate the way we understand physical goods into the virtual world,” she said.

And while it may be some time before these sites operate as true metaverses, transporting us elsewhere with VR goggles, digital land is already func-

tioning as an asset just like real land, said Hackl. “They can build on it, they can rent it out, they can sell it,” she said.

‘Fifth Avenue of the metaverse’

Tokens.com has bought a prime patch in Decentraland’s Fashion Street district, which the platform hopes to make as a home for luxury brands’ virtual stores. “If I hadn’t done the research and understood that this is valuable property, it would seem absolutely crazy,” admitted Tokens.com CEO Andrew Kiguel.

Kiguel spent 20 years as an investment banker focused on real estate. He insists the Decentraland plot makes exactly the same kind of business sense as it would in the real world: it’s in a trendy area with high footfall. “That is advertising and event space where people are going to congregate,” he explained, pointing to a recent virtual musical festival in Decentraland which attracted 50,000 visitors.

Luxury brands are already venturing into the metaverse—a Gucci handbag sold on the Roblox platform in May for more than the real version—and Kiguel hopes Fashion Street will become a shopping destination akin to New York’s Fifth Avenue. As for how the land could be used to make money, “it can be as simple as having a billboard, or it can be as complex as having a storefront with an actual employee,” he said.

“You could walk in with your avatar and have 3D digital representations of a shoe that you can hold, and ask questions.”

Second Life, rebooted

As far back as 2006, a real estate developer made headlines after making \$1 million from land sold on the virtual world site Second Life. While Second Life remains active, proponents of its next-generation rivals point out a key difference. In Decentraland, everything from land to virtual artwork comes in the



Metaverse has been a Silicon Valley buzzword for months, but interest soared in October after Facebook’s parent company renamed itself “Meta”.

form of a non-fungible token, or NFT.

Some people have spent tens of thousands of dollars on these digital items, and the concept has generated skepticism as well as excitement. But Kiguel predicts this form of digital ownership will become widespread in the coming years, because the blockchain technology behind it creates trust and transparency when making transactions. “I can see the ownership history, what’s been paid for it and how it’s been transferred around,” he said. But the investment is not without its risks—particularly

given the volatility of the cryptocurrencies used to buy NFTs. And while virtual concerts on sites like Roblox and Fortnite have drawn tens of millions of viewers, the sparse data available suggests traffic on metaverses like Decentraland lags far behind that of established social media sites like Facebook and Instagram.

Ultimately the value of the land investments depends on whether people start flocking to these sites. “I know it all sounds quite ludicrous,” said Kiguel. “But there’s a vision behind it.” —AFP

Sealand: The ‘micronation’ defying the UK and COVID

SEALAND, Undefined: Chief Engineer and Head of Homeland Security, Michael Barrington (R) and Security Guard, Joe Hamill winch supplies onto the Principality of Sealand, some seven miles (11 kilometers) off the coast of southeast England, on September 16, 2021.

It’s a hulking metal-and-concrete platform in the North Sea that has been run as an independent micronation in defiance of the UK government for the last 54 years. But even on Sealand, some seven miles (11 kilometers) off the coast of southeast England, visitors have to show a negative COVID-19 test before being winched up onto the deck. “We have zero COVID cases,” Liam Bates, one of the self-declared “princes” of Sealand, declares proudly. “At the moment I think we’re one of the only countries in the world that can actually say that,” he said.

Sealand, a former anti-aircraft platform built atop two hollow concrete towers, had been due to be demolished after World War II since it was outside UK waters. But when that did not happen, Bates’ grandfather, Roy, a businessman with ventures in fishing and pirate radio, took over and declared independence. The Principality of Sealand-motto “E Mare Libertas” (From the Sea, Freedom) — was born in 1967, with its own constitution, a national flag and even a national anthem.

Since then the windswept former fortification has survived an attempted “coup”, a collapsed data storage venture and a catastrophic fire.

Titles

With its black-red-and-white flag flying, Sealand still has a piratical air. Engineer Joe Hamill, 58, winches up visitors in a wooden swing, as they tightly grip the ropes. On board, the first formality is a Sealand passport stamp. Close up, Sealand looks reassuringly shipshape with new decking and neatly stored tools, paints and tins of hot dogs. The kitchen has pot plants and china plates while the rooms are decorated with wallpaper, rugs and classic books, including Thomas Hardy’s “Far From the Madding Crowd.” Liam, now 33, has been visiting since he was three and springs onto the swing seat with practiced ease.

He focuses on the day-to-day operations, while his elder brother, James, runs the family’s cockle fishing and canning business. Their father, Prince Michael, is recovering from surgery and “slowing down a bit,” he says. Since he has an American fiancée and an elder brother, Liam jokes that he is Sealand’s “Prince Harry”.

Sealand keeps afloat by selling titles through its website: you can become a Lord of Sealand for £29.99 (\$44.99) or a Duke for £499.99. They sell “a good few”, said Liam. “Enough to sustain Sealand now, which is just massive.”



SEALAND, Undefined: Chief Engineer and Head of Homeland Security, Michael Barrington (R) and Security Guard, Joe Hamill winch supplies onto the Principality of Sealand, some seven miles (11 kilometers) off the coast of southeast England. —AFP

Isolation

Sealand does not pay UK tax and the “whole point... is freedom of whatever you want, really: like religion, expression, any kind of orientations,” he added. While the Bates only visit, the platform is maintained by two men on two-week shifts: Hamill and 66-year-old Michael Barrington, head of homeland security.

During lockdown, Hamill said he volunteered to spend two 11-week periods here on his own, winching up supplies from a boat. By the end, “I think my mental state was actually going a bit”, says the Londoner, who used to work in insurance. “It was pure isolation.”

At least Sealand is far more comfortable than in its early days, the men say. Wind turbines and solar panels have replaced the old diesel generators, one of which caught fire in 2012, causing extensive damage. Rooms inside the concrete towers include a multi-faith chapel, a recreation room with a pool table and gym equipment and a meeting room with a whiteboard. Some are below the waterline and there is a constant sound of sloshing water. Barrington, who first came to Sealand 33 years ago after working on pirate radio stations, calls it “a big man cave”.

There’s little trace of Sealand’s WWII origins, beyond a painted sign about pumps. Liam Bates said that most got ripped out in the early 2000s, when US entrepreneurs tried to set up a data haven in the towers. It became “a victim of the dot.com bubble,” he says, while servers remain in one room “as part of our national history”. He still sees the future of Sealand as digital, with plans to launch a cryptocurrency, though he gives few details.

A small prison cell with an iron bedstead once housed the state’s only prisoner in 1978 during “the great coup of Sealand”. After a dispute with Roy Bates, a German businessman sent mercenaries to storm the platform while he was away. Roy Bates and his son Michael recaptured Sealand in a dawn raid in a helicopter and released the mercenaries but held the businessman’s lawyer, accusing him of treason. He was eventually freed after a German diplomat came out to investigate. —AFP

Protesters hit S Africa beaches to oppose oil exploration

CAPE TOWN: Hundreds of environmentalist demonstrators gathered on South African beaches yesterday to protest against oil and gas exploration by energy giant Shell. In Cape Town protesters held up the peace symbol and brandished a giant model snoek fish to highlight their concerns about the potential impact of the project on sea life. Under a dull, rainy sky, protesters in Gqeberha waved signs showing a Shell logo altered to resemble a hand showing its middle finger and calling for a boycott of the group’s petrol stations.

Activists say Shell’s plans to search for oil and gas deposits off the beloved “Wild Coast” of eastern South Africa—a key tourist attraction—pose a danger to marine animals. Shell plans to use seismic waves emitted from boats equipped with air cannons to analyze the geological structure of the ocean floor, hunting for spots likely to contain hydrocarbons. Ecologists say the exploration technique could upset animals’ behavior, feeding, reproduction and migration patterns, with many sea creatures such as whales relying heavily on their sense of hearing. But a court on Friday rejected their request for an emergency injunction against Shell’s plans. “In a time when all accepted science points towards us not using fossil fuels anymore,



CAPE TOWN: A giant puppet of a Snoek, a type of common local Mackerel, is displayed as hundreds of people take part in a protest against the plan by Dutch oil company, Shell, to conduct underwater seismic surveys along South Africa’s East coast, at Muizenberg Beach, in Cape Town, yesterday. —AFP

and our northern hemisphere neighbors are dead set against seismic surveys, I find it puzzling that these new ‘colonizers’ feel justified in moving their unwanted activities to Africa,” said Alan Straton, a sailor and member of the Ocean Stewards development project.

The Wild Coast includes several nature reserves and protected marine areas stretching along some 300 kilometers (190 miles) of unspoiled Indian Ocean shoreline.

Shell plans to spend four to five months exploring in the region over an area of 6,000 square kilometers. “We take great care to prevent or minimize impacts on fish, marine mammals and other wildlife,” a company spokesman told AFP last month. —AFP

Trump media venture says it has \$1bn investment pledge

NEW YORK: Donald Trump’s fledgling social media venture and an investment vehicle it is partnering with said Saturday that institutional investors have pledged \$1 billion in funds for the former president’s startup. This sum would be in addition to \$293 million that Digital World Acquisition Corp raised in an initial public offering in September, the companies said in a statement.

Digital World is a special purpose acquisition company (SPAC), sometimes called a “blank check” company because it is set up with the sole purpose of merging with another entity. It is set to merge with Trump’s startup, Trump Media and Technology Group. Linking up with a SPAC is a short-cut way to sell shares publicly.

The two companies say they plan to launch the social media platform “TRUTH Social” nationally early next year. Trump says it will be an alternative to Silicon Valley internet companies that he says are biased against him and other conservative voices.



The 75-year-old was thrown off Twitter—his preferred communications conduit while president—as well as Facebook and YouTube after the January 6 insurrection in which a mob of Trump supporters, riled up by his repeated false claims the November 2020 election was stolen from him, assaulted the US Capitol.

Saturday’s statement did not say who is investing \$1 billion into Trump’s venture. Months ago, shares of Digital World Acquisition Corp shot up after it said it was teaming up with Trump, going from \$10 to as much as \$175 in two days. It has since come back down to earth after that initial euphoria, closing Friday at \$45, which gave it a market value of \$1.67 billion. —AFP

Drowning in garbage: Ukraine struggles with trash crisis

Mountains of overflowing and noxious garbage plaguing residents

PIDGIRTSI, Ukraine: For stray dogs and scavenging birds, Landfill No.5 outside the Ukrainian capital Kiev is a treasure trove of trash, but the mountains of overflowing and noxious garbage are plaguing residents. Nina Popova, a 73-year-old retired accountant who lives in the nearby village of Pidgirtsy, says life there is a misery.

"It reeks. We're all sick. We have heart problems and difficulty breathing," Popova told AFP outside her modest brick cottage. Breathing heavily, she added that her children "suffocate" when they come to visit. Covering 63 hectares (156 acres), the sprawling dump outside Kiev is one of the largest in Ukraine and part of network of more than 6,100 landfills. Already at capacity, it was slated for closure in 2018, with garbage diverted to a new site. But the new facility was never constructed and trash is piling higher and higher.

The story of the site points to a larger problem in the country. Thirty years after Ukraine gained independence from the Soviet Union, it lacks a functioning waste management system and requisite resources to tackle a garbage crisis that is perpetuating public health and ecological concerns.

The president's office concedes that most landfills are overflowing and fall short of safety standards. It estimates some 33,000 illegal dumps have proliferated throughout the country. "It's not a secret to anyone that Ukraine is drowning in garbage. And every day, every minute the situation is getting worse," then-deputy head of the presidency, Yulia Svyrydenko, warned in September.

'Lever' to halt climate change

She made the comments at a meeting of local and regional officials after President Volodymyr Zelensky voiced concerns. But the problem has much wider ramifications.

Globally, landfills like the one menacing Popova's neighborhood contribute to climate change as a major emitter of methane, a gas 30 times more harmful than CO2 according to the United Nations.

UN Environment Programme executive director Inger Andersen in May said reducing methane was "the strongest lever we have to slow climate change over the next 25 years".

To address the problem, Kiev introduced a law in 2018 requiring households to sort waste to aid



KIEV, Ukraine: Employees, surrounded by seagulls, work in a landfill in the village of Pidgirtsy near Kiev on October 13, 2021. — AFP

recycling efforts. The order has largely been ignored and just four percent of the approximately 10 million tonnes of household trash produced annually is sorted, according to the presidency.

Added to that, there is only one waste incinerator—dating from the Soviet period—to serve the entire country of 40 million. It lacks capacity to handle waste even from Kiev.

The crux of the problem is that Ukrainian authorities are either unwilling or unable to pay more to better process garbage, analysts said. Kiev shells out less than 10 euros (\$11) to process a ton of waste compared to 100-170 euros in Western European countries, explained Svyatoslav Pavlyuk, executive director of the Ukrainian Association of Energy-Efficient Cities.

'It's scary'

"This sum isn't enough to actually treat waste. It only covers its transportation to a field and its placement in the ground," Pavlyuk said. Yevgeniya Aratovska, a 42-year-old economist, took matters into her own hands six years ago, launching a small sorting site in Kiev called No Waste Ukraine.

"I realised that a lot of people didn't even know that it's necessary to sort," Aratovska said.

Khrystyna Richmanenko did not realize how much waste she was producing until she started sorting it. "It's scary," the 29-year-old teacher remarked. She added that there were no recycling centers near her home or official instructions on where to find one. "You have to look for yourself how to do it properly," she added.

More than 45 percent of Ukrainians say a lack of recycling bins is the main obstacle to more sorting, according to a November poll. Analysts added that authorities should do more to raise awareness among Ukrainians about the impact their waste has on the environment.

Ultimately, said environmental activist Kostiantyn Yaloyvi, what was needed is a drastic increase in funding to better handle waste. Even though that investment would be likely to fall on Ukrainians and trigger protests, the stakes of doing nothing were much higher. "If today we don't start sorting and generally change Ukrainians' attitude towards garbage, the entire country could turn into a landfill," Yaloyvi said. — AFP

Western Canada sees record-high winter temperature

MONTREAL: A region in western Canada has notched up a record-high winter temperature, just months after the country sweltered under a historic global heat dome in the summer, boosting global concern about climate change. Penticton, a city in central British Columbia, recorded a high temperature of 72.5 degrees Fahrenheit (22.5 degrees Celsius) on Wednesday.

"It is a record, or it equals a record, to be very precise," Environment Canada meteorologist Arnel Castellan told AFP. Winter temperatures in Canada had previously hit 72.5 degrees on December 3, 1982 in the southeastern town of Hamilton, Ontario, Castellan said.

Penticton is a few hundred kilometers southeast of Lytton, Lytton, which itself is located 250 kilometers (155 miles) northeast of Vancouver, gained international attention over the summer for setting a new Canadian heat record of 49.6 degrees Celsius (121.3 Fahrenheit) before being ravaged days later by a fire that killed at least two residents.

The province of British Columbia also suffered over the summer from the historic heat dome linked to climate change that saw hot air trapped by high pressure fronts over western Canada and the western United States. The heat wave exacerbated wildfires and claimed hundreds of lives.

"Since September, we've had a lot of heat coming in from the subtropics," Castellan explained. For the past week or so, an "atmospheric river" has been raging across southwestern British Columbia, the third so far, he said. Heavy rainfall has caused catastrophic flooding in the province since mid-November, which authorities have also linked to the effects of climate change. —AFP



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار
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KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 02 DECEMBER 2021

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Market	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
Premier Market	30,690	7,532.61	-2.4%	2.5%	24.5%	632,305,095	284,871,281	38,111	28.1	2.2	75.2%
Main Market	10,096	5,774.47	-3.5%	1.0%	26.8%	1,218,651,629	119,060,124	43,303	18.0	1.5	24.8%
All Share	40,786	6,936.14	-2.7%	2.2%	25.1%	1,850,956,724	403,931,405	81,414	26.2	2.0	100%

Sector	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
BANKS	23,699	1,595.06	-2.2%	2.4%	26.3%	388,570,111	183,497,746	19,277	29.7	2.2	57.54%
BASIC MATERIALS	887	994.94	-6.5%	0.9%	10.7%	7,471,049	4,926,379	1,558	23.9	1.5	2.15%
CONSUMER DISCRETIONARY	630	1,226.94	-8.2%	0.9%	64.4%	35,110,625	7,268,236	3,250	18.4	4.5	1.53%
CONSUMER STAPLES	225	738.98	-0.6%	0.8%	-9.7%	2,507,206	1,479,317	271	14.8	1.6	0.55%
ENERGY	287	1,382.03	-5.0%	-0.4%	8.2%	35,236,359	1,321,060	1,140	12.9	1.4	0.70%
FINANCIAL SERVICES	3,974	1,392.20	-2.8%	3.2%	49.7%	817,892,148	92,286,643	24,475	8.8	1.7	9.65%
HEALTH CARE	401	808.06	1.1%	-0.1%	-2.2%	4,016	2,015	8	29.5	5.3	0.97%
INDUSTRIALS	4,026	1,135.92	-4.9%	1.5%	27.5%	108,140,118	45,736,473	10,801	35.6	1.3	9.78%
INSURANCE	657	1,579.90	-0.9%	-0.7%	36.6%	7,186,044	980,171	701	7.7	1.2	1.60%
REAL ESTATE	2,829	1,317.00	-3.3%	1.9%	38.2%	360,461,964	44,318,580	15,474	19.8	1.2	6.87%
TECHNOLOGY	10	742.05	-3.8%	0.0%	47.6%	53,990	5,242	17	-	0.9	0.02%
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	3,302	1,077.18	-1.2%	2.0%	-2.3%	81,943,034	20,613,653	3,933	20.5	1.4	8.02%
UTILITIES	259	618.42	-1.7%	1.3%	-15.2%	6,380,060	1,495,891	509	20.0	4.2	0.63%

Top Gainers

Stock	last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
REMAL	20	6.38	7,317,543	132,679	253
SHIP	489	5.39	5,874,713	2,771,807	512
NICBM	203	4.10	175,264	33,579	25
BOURSA	1948	2.91	2,073,059	3,901,255	908
MUNSHAAT	69.9	1.75	228,353	14,375	22

Top Losers

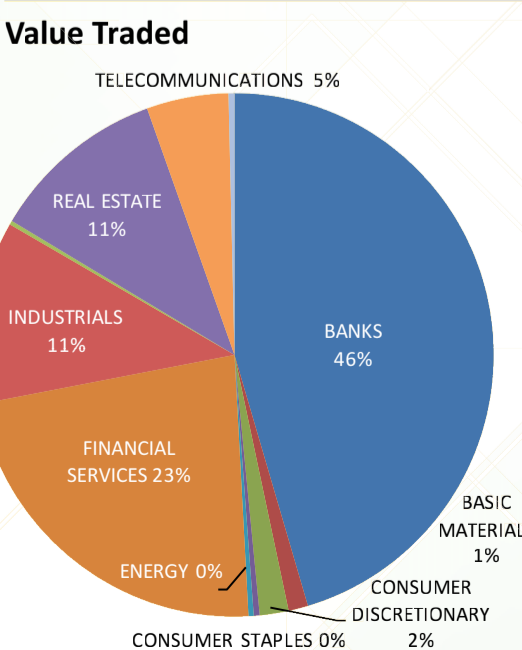
Stock	last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
KHOT	74	-25.93	6,250	506	8
EQUIPMENT	52.7	-21.23	6,312,021	350,977	436
MARAKEZ	68	-20.93	1,382,195	91,949	198
MASAKEN	42.5	-17.95	7,114,089	314,152	417
WETHAQ	51.5	-16.80	5,095,372	272,395	381

Top Volume

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
GFH	92.8	0.98	397,859,765	35,120,847	6,896
AUB	284	-0.35	133,067,840	37,026,548	2,453
KFH	810.0	-2.88	85,103,222	68,625,583	7,584
NRE	214	-4.46	73,875,300	15,782,450	1,981
MENA	53	-15.66	71,637,864	3,710,879	2,417

Top Value

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
KFH	810	-2.88	85,103,222	68,625,583	7,584
NBK	999.0	-1.77	44,433,805	44,100,238	3,217
AUB	284	-0.35	133,067,840	37,026,548	2,453
GFH	93	0.98	397,859,765	35,120,847	6,896
AGLTY	935	-6.22	27,477,240	25,829,464	3,973



Market Summary:

- Premier market volume and value increased 71% and 96%, respectively, due to MSCI rebalancing. Main market volume increased 5%, while value decreased 9% which shows the fall in prices due to the correction the index is going through.
- All indices fell during last week and reached support levels as a result of the Omicron Variant. Unless the market restores previous support levels (now considered as a resistance), the correction might continue.
- Technically, the All-Share index closed at 6936, support levels at 6918, 6862, and 6830, while resistance at 6981 and 7000. Premier index closed at 7532, support levels at 7533 and 7387, while resistance at 7606. The Main index closed at 5774, support levels at 5750 and 5675, while resistance at 5808 and 5880.

Business

Albanian bunkers ravaged by rising tides as erosion takes toll

Experts blame climate change and uncontrolled urbanization for the scourge

SEMAN, Albania: Albania's communist-era bunkers were meant to withstand a nuclear strike, but decades later the fortifications are being devoured by the sea as the country's coastline is battered by erosion. The shores of the Balkan country are among the most affected in Europe by erosion, according to experts, who blame climate change and uncontrolled urbanization for the scourge.

Along the shores of Seman in central Albania, many of the bunkers built under the direction of former dictator Enver Hoxha—who feared imminent invasion by the United States, Soviet Union and China among others—are now underwater. The same goes for the police station, a sports field and an oil well.

On the beaches, tree trunks have been ripped apart, while collapsed roofs testify to the population's helplessness in the face of the ever-advancing sea. "The bunkers were supposed to resist everything but they failed in their one and only battle," Ilir Zani, 80, tells AFP.

According to locals, the Adriatic has advanced by 800 meters (half a mile) in this area in the past three decades alone. Seman resident Izmir Mernica, 47, fears his cafe may be next.

"We are worried, the sea is swallowing everything," he says, pointing to a water tower now marooned in middle of the Adriatic.

'Waves will swallow us'

In 2009, the authorities relied on military tanks to pull seven submerged bunkers from the sea following a string of drowning deaths caused by the whirlpools created by the currents around the structures. More than a decade later, the bunkers are back underwater.

The sea "took them again", says Mernica. According to climate change experts working for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), more than a third of Albania's 427-kilometre (265-mile) coastline is affected by erosion, at a rate of roughly one to two meters (three to seven feet) per year.

Abdulla Diku, an environmental specialist, said that for each hectare of land about 27 tons of soil are lost to encroaching tides each year, which is approximately 11 times the average for other European countries. In central Albania's Qerret, Vlash Moci still maintains his bunker, which once housed anti-aircraft guns and is now a bar that attracts foreign tourists.

Moci, 64, is worried that the rising tides may claim his business soon, with the neighboring bunker—a pale green structure that looks like a flying saucer—already close to being consumed.

"We are afraid that one day big waves will swallow us. It's terrible," he tells AFP. To fight back, the owners of nearby villas and hotels in Qerret have begun constructing illegal jetties perpendicular to the sea. But experts argue the measures only exacerbate the situation.

'Erosion hotspot'

"These are individual solutions that aggravate the problem and harm biodiversity and marine ecosystems," warns Mirela Kamberi, an expert with the UNDP.

With little being done to stop the rising tides, the sea appears to be irresistible for the foreseeable future. Due to climate change, experts predict sea levels in Albania will increase by 40 to 105 centimeters (16 to 41 inches) by 2100, compared with the



KAVAJE, Albania: This photograph taken in Qerret shows an aerial view of a communist-era bunker (front) and the groynes built on the Adriatic shore. —AFP

changes recorded between 1986 and 2005.

To add to the country's woes, deforestation has also taken a toll, while the unregulated dredging of sand from rivers has accelerated their course and uncontrolled urban development along the coast has damaged the area's natural defenses. "The problem is that people have cut down almost all the fir trees to build buildings, damaging nature's systems," says Besnik Zara, 66, as he casts a fishing rod into the sea.

And in the Shupal mountains near Tirana, it is easy to see the damage erosion has wreaked further inland—most of which has been caused by deforestation

and the rivers that feed a nearby reservoir.

This lake, which supplies the capital with drinking water, "is already considered an erosion hotspot", says Diku. To cope, the authorities banned the felling of more trees from the area's forests in 2016.

They have also vowed to implement promises made at the UN climate conferences in Paris and Glasgow and have begun passing new legislation. "Environmental crime will be treated by the criminal code as a crime against life, property or on a par with organized crimes," warned interior minister Bledi Cuci. —AFP

KFH Capital arranges sale transaction of 110m Qurain PIC shares

KUWAIT: KFH Capital Co, the investment arm of Kuwait Finance House Group (KFH), signed an advisory agreement with Petrochemical Industries Company, to act as an advisor and manager for the sale transaction of Qurain Petrochemical Industries Company shares. The deal covers 10 percent of the capital of the company which is listed in Bourse Kuwait (Premier Market), amounting to 110 million shares. The deal is considered one of the major and most significant shares selling deals witnessed in Bourse Kuwait recently.

KFH Capital CEO, Abdulaziz Nasser Al-Marzouq said in a press release after the signing ceremony of the agreement that "Despite the fact that KFH has led the arrangement of several sale transactions for several companies in local and GCC markets, this deal is special as it represents the beginning of cooperation with a government-owned oil company working in the field of petrochemicals. This deal opens the door for interested investors e.g., companies, funds, and individuals inside and outside Kuwait, to invest in a company listed in the premier market, which is the highest rated market in Bourse Kuwait, which attracts elite companies with high liquidity and remarkable market value".

KFH Capital offering of new investment opportunities contributes to the motivation and enhancement of economy, development of market mechanisms and guiding investors abilities to invest their funds in productive projects and companies with remarkable returns and highly valuable shares.

Al-Marzouq added: "KFH Capital enjoys long experience in managing and arranging such deals. After investing in sufficient preparations and abilities to achieve targeted results, we expect high demand on the offered shares considering the favorable environment which Bourse Kuwait is witnessing, as well as an increase in purchase transactions and in the value of several private leading



Al-Marzouq and Al-Azmi after signing the agreement.

shares in various market sectors".

He noted that consecutive announcements will be made on the sale transactions executive procedures and steps regarding to the timing, rules and regulations as determined by CMA and other concerned bodies. He added that all stages were based on thorough studies taking into consideration the market variants and the fact that this deal represents an added value for the stock market and a high-quality opportunity for investors. He expressed his wish to see more of these new deals in the future considering the sound and positive developments witnessed in the market and the state of optimism concerning national economy.

For his part, Mutlaq Rashed Al-Azmi, CEO - Petrochemical Industries Co, said that the company trusts in KFH Capital's ability to achieve the best management and marketing standards for the deal and utilize all its capabilities to conclude this deal and make it a success in a record time. He emphasized that Qurain Company has achieved remarkable success since being listed in Kuwait Stock Exchange. The company incorporates several companies working in various fields, thus achieving remarkable financial performance and cashflows from various sources, enhancing profitability and mitigating operational risks by diversifying its sources of income.

parency about its foreign exchange intervention and said: "The activities of state-owned banks in particular warrant Treasury's close monitoring.

"Given China's long history of facilitating an undervalued currency through protracted, large-scale intervention in the foreign exchange market, and the sheer size of China's reserves, it is increasingly troubling that China has not enhanced the transparency of its foreign exchange policies and practices," the report added. Like many governments, Beijing rolled out huge stimulus measures during the COVID-19 pandemic to support the economy, but the spending "targeted the early resumption of manufacturing rather than supporting household consumption." —AFP



NANTONG: A Chinese bank employee counts 100-yuan notes and US dollar bills at a bank counter in Nantong in China's eastern Jiangsu province. —AFP

US closely monitoring China, Switzerland currency policies

WASHINGTON: The US Treasury said it will keep a close eye on China's economic policies and actions to influence the value of its currency, along with those of Vietnam, Taiwan and Switzerland.

While no country was accused of manipulating its currency to gain a competitive advantage, 12, including China, were put on Washington's monitoring list. The semi-annual US report to Congress looks at countries with large trade surpluses and which actively intervene in foreign exchange markets to keep their currencies from appreciating, which makes their exports more competitive.

However, a Treasury official told reporters it is not concerned about currency actions to address short-term shocks. The findings in the report are largely symbolic and do not entail sanctions.

Beijing has long been a target of scrutiny and Washington has frequently accused the government of keeping the exchange rate artificially low via its massive stockpile of US dollars, undermining US manufacturers and workers. "Treasury is working relentlessly to promote a stronger and more balanced global recovery that benefits American workers, including through close engagement with major economies on currency-related issues," Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said in a statement.

The report criticized Beijing for its lack of trans-

Burgan Bank reveals winners of Yawmi account draw

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced yesterday the names of the daily draw winners of its Yawmi account draw, each taking home a cash-prize of KD 5,000.

The lucky winners are:

- Abdullah Khadher Alfaraj
- Danah Adnan Alhamar
- Laila Nizar Salah
- Zahrah Nasser Haji Bash
- Khaled Faisal Al-Subaiei

Austerity, far right, feminism: Merkel's ambivalent legacy

BERLIN: Crises have a knack for felling leaders. Not Chancellor Angela Merkel. During 16 years in power, the veteran navigated Germany through the 2008 financial turmoil and ensuing eurozone debt crisis, the 2015 refugee influx and then the coronavirus pandemic.

While largely admired at home and abroad even in the final days of her reign, the legacy she leaves behind is marked both by light and shadows.

Party in crisis

Merkel scraped to a narrow win in 2005 against incumbent chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of the Social Democrats, putting her conservative CDU-CSU alliance on the path of power for over a decade. At the zenith of her popularity, Merkel led the conservatives to a thumping win with 41.5 percent of the vote in 2013. With her track record, she was able to end a crucial TV election debate that year with the simple closing words "you know me". But her exit from politics was marred by a succession crisis in her party, culminating in a humiliating loss at September's general elections that sent it into the opposition for the next four years.

Budget dogma

Once dismissed as the sick man of Europe, Germany cemented its reputation as the continent's economic engine on Merkel's watch. Unemployment is at record lows — 5.3 percent in November even as the economy is struggling with the impact of the pandemic.

Budget surpluses chalked up from 2012 also allowed the ageing nation to pay down a huge debt mountain, giving it a buffer against the impact of the health emergency.

But Germany's fixation with balanced budgets has left a sour taste, particularly among southern Europeans battered by the financial and eurozone debt crises. Merkel appeared to ignore pleas for debt relief when Greece was on the brink of economic collapse, triggering huge demonstrations in the country.

While credited with securing huge European bailouts that saved Greece from crashing out of the euro, it was achieved at a heavy social cost including massive job losses. But it was COVID-19 that forced her to make a drastic U-turn on her resistance to mutualizing European debt. Instead, Merkel spearheaded the 800-billion-euro (\$950-billion) EU recovery fund, which sees the European Commission raising money by issuing bonds on behalf of all 27 members.

Climate chancellor?

Merkel made the startling decision to shut Germany's nuclear power plants in the aftermath of

In addition to the daily draw, Burgan Bank also offers a quarterly draw with more chances to win higher rewards, offering the chance to one lucky customer to win KD 125,000 every three months. The Yawmi Account offers daily and quarterly draws, wherein the quarterly draw requires customers to maintain a minimum amount of KD 500 in their account for two months prior to the draw date. Additionally, every KD 10 in the account will entitle customers to one chance of winning. If the account balance is KD 500 and above, the account holder will be qualified for both the quarterly and daily draws.

Burgan Bank encourages everyone to open a Yawmi account and/or increase their deposit to maximize their chances of becoming a winner. The higher the level of the deposit, the higher the likelihood to win.



SASSNITZ, Germany: This file photo taken on April 16, 2019 shows German Chancellor Angela Merkel posing with a toy wind wheel during the opening of the Arkona wind park in Sassnitz, northern Germany. — AFP

the 2011 Fukushima disaster, triggering the "Energiewende"—the shift to sustainable energy.

But the sudden policy shift forced greater reliance on coal energy in the transition period as the country battled to ramp up wind and biomass energy output. Merkel's government was accused of protecting Germany's vital automobile industry by watering down emissions regulation reforms, and its refusal to advance a 2038 deadline to quit coal energy also irked green activists.

In a humiliating ruling against the government's flagship environmental protection plan, Germany's highest court in April ordered Merkel's coalition to draw up an improved plan. Her government subsequently brought forward targets to slash CO2 emissions by 65 percent by 2030 compared to 1990 levels, from an earlier goal of 55 percent. "When I look at the situation, no one can say that we have done enough" for the environment, admitted Merkel in June. "Time is pressing. I can understand the impatience of young people."

Business as usual?

Merkel was lauded by human rights activists in 2015 for keeping Germany's borders open to hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing war in Syria and Iraq. Likewise, while Merkel spoke out firmly against Russia over the poisoning and jailing of Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, she stuck to her guns on completing a controversial gas pipeline called Nord Stream 2.

Far right, Europe faultlines

The arrival of more than a million asylum seekers in Germany further fractured the political landscape. Popular anger over the mass influx sent a far-right bloc, the anti-immigration AfD, to parliament in 2017 for the first time since World War II, making it the biggest opposition force. It also opened up a fault line with former Eastern bloc nations including Hungary and Poland, which have dug in their heels against the new arrivals. Six years on, the European Union has been unable to agree on unified migration policies. —AFP

Lifestyle | Features

ESCAPING SLOW DEATH IN BEIRUT, LEBANESE EMBRACE FARM LIFE



Hasan Trad ploughs a field with his tractor as he prepares it to be planted in the town of Kfartebnit, south of Beirut. —AFP photos



Hasan Trad inspects his dragon fruit nursery at an agricultural field.



Hasan Trad plants thyme seeds at an agricultural field.



Thyme seeds are prepared to be planted in the Lebanese town of Kfartebnit.



Abed Trad (center) ploughs a field.



Lebanese Thuryaya, 28, inspects her avocado trees in the village of Sinay, south of Beirut.

At 28, Thuryaya left behind the Beirut neighborhood where she was born and moved to the family farm, not because of environmental concerns but forced there by Lebanon's bruising crises. "Living in the city has become very miserable," she told AFP from the lush south Lebanon farmland planted with avocado trees that is now her home. "The quiet violence of city life sucks you dry of energy, of money... It was just too much." Lebanon's unprecedented economic crisis, the coronavirus pandemic and last year's massive and deadly explosion of chemical fertilizer at Beirut's port have dimmed the cosmopolitan appeal of the capital.

Many are turning their backs on urban life and heading for their ancestral towns and villages, where they can cut down on living costs and forge new connections with a long-forgotten agricultural inheritance. In October, Thuryaya moved to the two-story house built by her father in the south Lebanon village of Sinay. She took the step only weeks after her Beirut landlord said she would quadruple the rent at a time when electricity generator bills and transportation costs were already spiraling beyond reach for most. "It didn't make sense for me to stay in Beirut," Thuryaya said. "It's pitch dark, there is garbage everywhere and you don't feel safe... it's hostile in its unfamiliarity."

YouTube farming tips

Now, when she's not working remotely for a non-profit group, Thuryaya spends much of her time in her family's farmland, discovering how plants look when they need water and the feel of ripening fruit.

She has turned to YouTube to learn how to prune

trees and pestered local farmers for tips on how to best tend to a plot she hopes to one day take over. "We are about to plant the new season and that's what I'm really excited for," Thuryaya said. "I want to follow the planting from seed to harvest and I want to be there for all of those steps."

In a country where no official census has been held since 1932, there is little data on the demographic shift to rural areas, which are largely underprivileged and



Lebanese Thuryaya, 28, inspects her avocado trees in the village of Sinay.

underserved. But a long-standing trend towards rapid urbanization seems to be slowing partly due to diminishing job prospects in major cities, where the cost of living is 30 percent higher than in the countryside. A spike last year in the number of construction permits outside Beirut suggest such a movement, according to Lebanon's Blominvest bank. Information International,

James Rothschild, 36, - went on to claim that becoming a parent has been on the cards for Paris for some time. Speaking to Us Weekly, she added: "I think this is something that she's wanted for a while."

Hotel heiress Paris, 40, has previously opened up about her desire to start a family, noting that becoming a mother would put her on the path to "real life." Speaking on her "This is Paris" podcast back in January 2021, she said: "We talk about [planning a wedding] all the time and planning our baby's names and all of that. So, I'm really excited to just move on for the next step of my life and finally just have, like, a real life. I really do believe that having a family and having children is the meaning of life. I haven't got to experience that yet because I don't feel that anyone really deserved that love from me and now I've finally found the person who does, so I cannot wait for that next step." —Bang Showbiz

a consultancy firm, estimates that more than 55,000 people have relocated to rural areas.

UN-Habitat Lebanon said that some mayors and heads of unions of municipalities had also reported an increase in the number of people moving, although it said it had no data to verify or quantify these claims. "The lack of rural development plans and the highly centralised nature of Lebanon are expected to ultimately deter a counter-urbanization in the long run,"



Hasan Trad prepares thyme seeds to be planted.

said Tala Kammourieh of the agency's Urban Analysis and Policy Unit.

'Suffocation' of city life

Another Beirut escapee, graphic designer Hassan Trad, was ploughing a craggy field near the southern village of Kfar Tibnit and said he now steers clear of

the "suffocation" of city life. "My return to the village is an escape from three crises," the 44-year-old said, scattering thyme seeds on a bed of soil. He pointed to the country's economic collapse, the pandemic, and the so-called trash crisis that has long left festering piles of garbage strewn across the city. Trad, a father-of-four who works remotely as a freelancer for a daily newspaper, started weaning away from the capital in 2016 but resettled full-time after Covid-19 and last year's portside blast.

Hassan said the cost of schooling his children is about half what it would be in the city but, more importantly, he can grow an agriculture business to supplement his salary. "I took advantage of the crisis and grew closer to farming and working the land," he told AFP from one of his many plots. "I now have a deeper attachment to my village." Writer and essayist Ibrahim Nehme, 35, who was severely wounded when the Beirut port blast ripped through his home, has sought solace in his family's north Lebanon village of Bechmizine. "An explosion that made me lose touch with my ground eventually led me to realize how much I am connected to my land," he wrote in a recent essay reflecting on the months he spent recovering there from his injuries.

In June, he left Beirut and rented a chalet by the sea, only a 20-minute drive away from his family's olive grove. He is not yet ready to commit fully to village life but Nehme said he is growing to realize his role in safeguarding an agricultural legacy left to him by his forefathers. "I am connected here, I am rooted," he said. "I have these olive trees, and one day I will have to take care of them." —AFP

Nicky Hilton thinks sister Paris will start a family 'pretty soon'

Nicky Hilton thinks her sister Paris will start a family 'pretty soon.' The 38-year-old businesswoman is confident that her socialite sister - who married entrepreneur Carter Reum, 38, in November - will soon be a mother, noting that she would be an "amazing" parent. She said: "I think she will have children] very soon. I think she'll be an amazing mom. If how she is with her dogs is any indication, they're going to be very, very loved." The fashion designer - who herself has children Lily, five and Theodora, four with financier husband



Nicky and Paris Hilton

Martha Stewart has started dating again

The 80-year-old businesswoman - who was married to publisher Andrew Stewart until 1990 and has previously been linked to Sir Anthony Hopkins - coyly revealed that she is dating someone, but refused to reveal who. Speaking on 'Watch What Happens Live', when host Andy Cohen asked her outright if she was dating, she said: "No. Well, I shouldn't say no. I mean yes, but I'm not going to tell you." Opening up on her dating history, the television star later went on to reveal about her surprise date with late TV host Larry King.

The former 'Martha Stewart Living' host joked about how her interview with the star turned into a surprise date, as she paid tribute to Larry, who died after a number of health complications in January 2021 aged 87. She said: "Well, I thought we were just talking about journalism and then he started to get a little amorous. Everybody was noticing I was out with Larry King and Larry King was not my type romantically - if you know what I mean. But he was a very nice man and by the way he was - other than you [Andy Cohen] - he was probably the nicest, kindest interviewer on TV. Kind and caring and interested. Yeah, that was Larry King." However, Martha was unable to vouch for claims that the late star was "well-endowed" as she revealed things never got to know. Andy Cohen said: "Someone told me that he was enormously endowed", to which Martha replied: "I never got to know. That would absolutely not [have changed my opinion]. Size always matters in almost everything but not necessarily in...it depends on the whole package." —Bang Showbiz



Martha Stewart

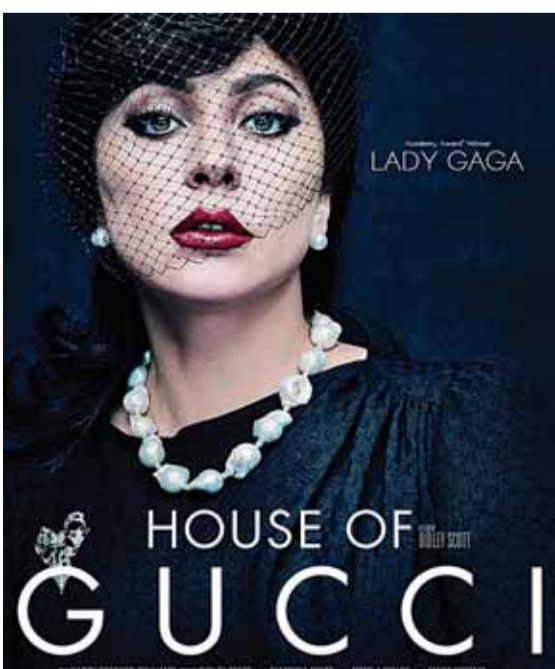
Lady Gaga says House of Gucci movie must be 'extremely painful' for Gucci family

Lady Gaga thinks 'House of Gucci' must be "extremely painful" for the real-life Gucci family. The 35-year-old popstar stars as convict Patrizia Reggiani in the movie, who was married to head of the fashion house Maurizio Gucci and arranged for him to be shot dead in 1995. She said: "This must be extremely painful to watch. A true life story come through in what is essentially our version of what we believe to be the truth and [director] Ridley Scott's version of the story."

The 'Poker Face' hitmaker went on "extend her love" to the Gucci family, as she claims she "did her best" to tell a story of survival. Speaking on NPR's 'Morning Edition', she explained: "I just - I extend my love to the family. And I did my best to make this performance about something more important than even the story itself, which is a story about women and survival." Gaga's com-

ments come after the heirs of former chairman Aldo Gucci released a statement blasting the "inaccurate" way their family had been portrayed on screen.

The statement read: "Although the film claims to tell the 'true story' of the family, the narrative is anything but accurate, depicting Aldo Gucci - president of the company for 30 years - and other members of the Gucci family who were the protagonists of well-documented events, as hooligans, ignorant and insensitive to the world around them. Even more censurable is the baffling reconstruction of events that advocate leniency toward a woman who was definitively convicted as the instigator of Maurizio Gucci's murder. To see her portrayed as a victim - not only in the film but also in statements by the cast - who is trying to survive in a male-dominated corporate culture, is an injustice and could not be further from the truth." —Bang Showbiz



Lady Gaga

RACE, POLITICS AT HEART OF SPIELBERG'S NEW 'WEST SIDE STORY'

For Steven Spielberg, who grew up obsessed by "West Side Story" and its legendary soundtrack, the excitement when rehearsals began for his own version were almost more than he could handle. "I did jump out of my chair, singing out of key and dancing like I had three left feet," he told a press conference this week. "This was the most delightful family affair I've had since E.T." The tragic love story of Tony and Maria—set against racially charged gang rivalry in New York—has been an American cultural milestone since it first appeared on Broadway in 1957 and as a film four years later.

Spielberg's dazzling \$100-million remake, released globally next week, is an act of homage that also seeks to highlight the political messages at the heart of the story. The gangs—the Puerto Rican Sharks and white Jets—are "really fighting about race," the 74-year-old director said. "But the territory they're claiming to be warring about is all under the shadow of the wrecking ball," he added, referring to the way that working-class areas of New York were being bulldozed at the time for large-scale development projects.

'Incredibly radical'

Right from its first appearances on Broadway, some in the Puerto Rican community have taken issue with their depiction in "West Side Story". Certain changes were inevitable for a modern



In this file photo (from left) Ansel Elgort, Corey Stoll, Rachel Zegler, Josh Andres Rivera, Steven Spielberg, Mike Faist, Rita Moreno, Brian d'Arcy James, Ariana DeBose, and David Alvarez attend the New York premiere of West Side Story in New York City. —AFP

remake—not least ensuring that none of the Latino parts were played by white actors. But screenwriter Tony Kushner defended the originals, which he said were "incredibly radical" for the time. "I firmly believe that (the Broadway show and 1961 film) represent enormous strides forward in terms of representation," Kushner said, even if they were "not perfect in any way". Spielberg also

refused to subtitle Spanish parts of dialogue "out of respect".

"The language had to exist in equal proportion alongside the English," he said. The team never considered moving the action into the present day—mostly because the lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, who died last month aged 91 but was closely involved in the production, were written in the language of 1950s youths.



In this file photo Steven Spielberg speaks during the New York premiere of West Side Story in New York City.

"There's nothing dated about the score at all," said Kushner. "But it would have felt odd to have those songs transposed into 2021."

'Very strange'

"It's political and more so than the original," agreed actress Rita Moreno, who is the one person with a direct link to both. Moreno became the first Latin

American actress to win an Oscar for her role as Anita in the first film version (one of 10 Academy Awards it picked up). Now 89, she was brought in by Spielberg to play the role of Doc's widow this time (one of the few changes to the story since the part did not exist in previous versions). She admitted it was psychologically challenging.

"I'm not going to say I wasn't envious—that would be a bloody lie," she said. "I wished I could be that young again and do it again. But I got this beautifully written part. I love me in this movie." She added that filming her one scene with Anita was "creepy". "I just kept looking at her and had the toughest time getting inside the scene. It was very strange."

CGI sweat-removal

The film was shot on the streets of New York before the Covid-19 pandemic, with Spielberg keen to avoid too much digital work. They were helped by the fact that "the city of 70 years ago still exists in certain boroughs," he said. But some digital effects were needed to remove air-conditioning units, satellite dishes and sweat—because they filmed the biggest number of all, "America", in the midst of a heatwave in Harlem. "The kids were working so hard, they were sweating through the costumes," said Spielberg. "Through the magic of digital technology... we took out a lot of sweat in post-production." —AFP

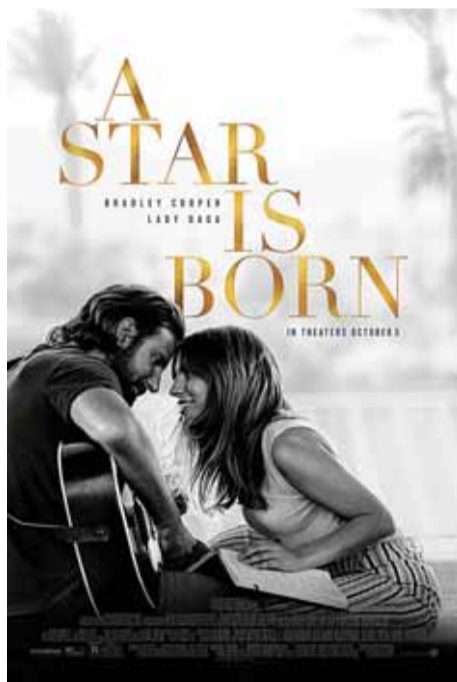
HOLLYWOOD REMAKES: THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE POINTLESS



Heat (1995)



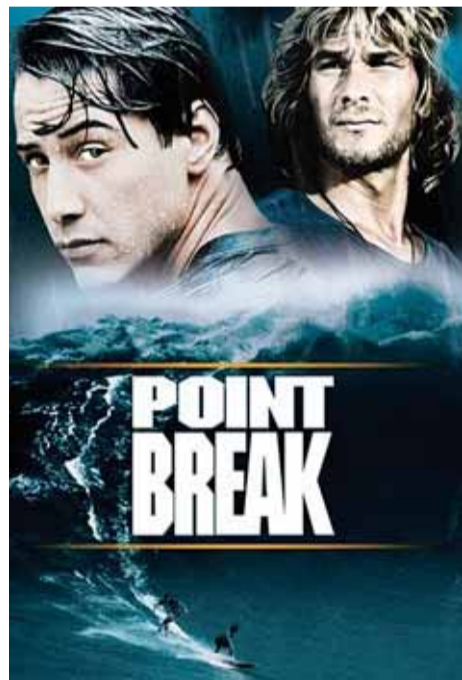
The Birdcage (1996)



A Star is Born (2018)



Flat Liners



Point Break



Psycho (1998)

Steven Spielberg is garnering rave reviews for his remake of the 1960s classic musical "West Side Story", an act of homage that is perfectly in keeping with Hollywood's love of nostalgia. Remakes have become a staple of LA studios as they try to mine the past for safe bets—recent reboots of "Ghostbusters", "Dune" and the never-ending superhero juggernauts make clear. Some remakes have—debatably—managed to surpass the original, while others definitely have not.

The Good

Heat (1995): Not many directors remake their own film (Alfred Hitchcock was an exception with "The Man Who Knew Too Much"), feeling that his first version was too "amateur". But US director Michael Mann felt he could have done more with his 1989 cops-and-robbers tale "LA Takedown", and he was right. "Heat" is a classic crime caper, famous for putting Robert De Niro and Al Pacino on screen together for the first time.

The Birdcage (1996): Beloved theatre and cinema veteran Mike Nichols ("The Graduate") remade the Franco-Italian 1970s film "La Cage aux Folles" almost scene-by-scene, but threw the unique ener-

gy of Robin Williams into the mix. It remains a point of contention as to which is better, but the tale of a gay couple having to pass as straight was certainly a landmark for mainstream Hollywood's depiction of sex and gender. The Departed (2006): It boasted an extravagant cast (Jack Nicholson, Leonardo DiCaprio and Matt Damon), and finally won Martin Scorsese the best film Oscar he should have won decades earlier. But that did not intimidate Andrew Lau, director of the 2002 Hong Kong thriller "Infernal Affairs" on which it was based. "Of course I think the version I made is better," he told Apple Daily. "But the Hollywood version is pretty good too."

A Star is Born (2018): The teaming of Lady Gaga and Bradley Cooper was the fourth time around for the story of an over-the-hill musician taking a fledgling talent under his wing. Many felt it was also the best, thanks largely to Gaga's Oscar-winning "Shallow", which immediately became a staple of karaoke bars around the world.

The Bad

Many attempts to recreate past celluloid magic have flopped hard. Lately, Hollywood has



In this file photo taken on November 8, 1976 Russian cellist Mstislav Rostropovich (left) performs during a rehearsal conducted by US conductor Leonard Bernstein (right) at the Champs Elysees theatre in Paris. —AFP

The music of 'West Side Story', from Bernstein to Metallica

Leonard Bernstein's score for "West Side Story" has become so ubiquitous in Western culture that it has popped up in such unlikely places as Metallica and Wu-Tang Clan albums. The original play first appeared on Broadway in 1957, before transferring to the silver screen in 1961, and early reviews suggest that Steven Spielberg's new film version proves the music still resonates today. Three decades after its appearance, Metallica used a clip from one of its biggest tunes, "America", as the surprise intro to "Don't Tread On Me" on their seminal "Black Album".

One of the pioneers of hard rock, Alice Cooper, also mined the musical for inspiration on his "Gutter Cat vs The Jets" in 1972, using the theme song from one of the rival gangs in the story. The inclusions were less obvious when it came to the Wu-Tang Clan sampling elements for "Maria" in 1997, from the song of the same name in "West Side Story". The Wu-Tang's lyrics over the sample—"Knew this bitch named Traj, she had a hell of a fine ashecan ass"—seem rather distant from the vibe of the original, though that only emphasises how deeply the musical had embedded itself in American culture.

Bernstein, who died in 1990, had not expected the score to have such a long life. Having never actually conducted his own score—either for the stage or screen versions—he was invited to re-record it with opera singers in 1984. "In the documentary about the recording, you can hear him saying that he thought it would have aged badly, but it hadn't at all," said Laurent Valiere, host of a new podcast about the movie. "The music of 'West Side Story' transcends classical music, with elements of jazz, be-bop and Latin rhythms," he added. Although the operatic recording went down as a classic of the genre, it was a fraught process, with Bernstein famously throwing a tantrum at Spanish star tenor Jose Carreras as he struggled with the pronunciation and pacing of playing the all-American Tony.

'An albatross'

The irascible Bernstein, who was head of the New York Philharmonic by then, also grew tired of constantly



In this file photo taken on September 26, 1975 US conductor Leonard Bernstein (left) performs during a concert in the presence of French President Valery Giscard d'Estaing (right) and his wife Anne-Aymone at Saint-Louis des Invalides church in Paris.

being reminded of his most famous work. "It became a sort of albatross around his neck," his daughter told Britain's Radio Times. "He had to work all the harder to get people to focus on his other works, especially his symphonic works." She said he spent his whole life "wishing he could write the great American opera... However, many people will say that 'West Side Story' is the great American opera."

The idea for "West Side Story" supposedly came about when Bernstein and playwright Arthur Laurents were sat around a pool in Hollywood and came across a newspaper story about gang warfare. It struck them as the perfect framing for the updating of "Romeo and Juliet" that they had been searching for. The racial element—with the Puerto Rican Sharks taunted by the white Jets—resonated with Bernstein, who had struggled through anti-Semitism as a younger man. The Puerto Rican element also allowed him to introduce a mambo—which gives the score a "hyper-contemporary" feel, said Valiere. —AFP

IN POOR LAGOS DISTRICT, 'SLUM PARTY' BRINGS HOPE AND LIFE



A dancer spits fire during a slum party at Oworonshoki district of Lagos. —AFP photos



Dancers perform during the Slum party at Oworonshoki district of Lagos.



People dance with outfits made of plastic wastes during a slum party at Oworonshoki district of Lagos.



People dance with outfits made of plastic wastes during a slum party.



Dancers perform during the Slum party at Oworonshoki district of Lagos.



A man walks on a wood walkway at Oworonshoki district of Lagos.

To the rhythm of drums, two plastic giants whirl and kick up dust in an alleyway in Oworonshoki, one of the poorer districts of Lagos, Nigeria's megalopolis economic capital. From shanty houses of wood and tin, inhabitants poke their heads outside, and watch wide-eyed as the strange procession bounces past. Soon, the whole street sways and joins the dancers, whose costumes are crafted entirely from plastic bottles collected from the neighborhood streets. The "Slum Party" kicks off with a burst of music, dance and the flames of a fire breathing act. For three years, a collective of 10 young Nigerian performers has sought to improve the lives of Oworonshoki's residents through dance, hoping to change the reputation of an area once blighted by gang violence.

"In 2019, Oworonshoki was facing a lot of security challenges, and no one was going out in street anymore," said Valu, one of the creators of the "Slum Party" that is held once a year. "We started to dance in the street, so that the people won't be afraid anymore and they started to go back in the street," said Valu, a professional dancer whose real name is Sunday Ozegebe Obiajulu. "We started to bring life again." Throughout the year, the collective organizes dance workshops for children and fitness activities for women in the district. "I just used to stay all day long with my kids at home, but now because of them I do something different, I feel like I exist," said



Dancers perform during the Slum party. Martha Eze, 37, who dances later in the party.

Wealth next to poverty

Owronshoki is located at the foot of the Third Mainland bridge, Africa's second largest, that stretches 12 kilometres above the Lagos Lagoon. In sub-Saharan Africa's largest city where one in two residents lives in poverty, wealthy island districts with swank fashion and restaurants are a world away from the poor mainland districts like Owronshoki. In the distance from Owronshoki across a stretch of the waterways surrounding Lagos, residents can see Banana Island, an exclusive, private Lagos enclave of villas and residences.



Dancers of Ennovate Dance House perform in a street during a slum party.

In Owronshoki, the only dollars visible are those printed on the shirt of a teenage boy wiggling his legs to "Peru", a song by Nigerian singer Fireboy. "I'm in San Francisco jamming... I just arrived from Miami," the children sing along to the lyrics dancing barefoot. Even one of the city's daily power cuts that stopped the music dead did not spoil the party: the audience kept dancing. "We have a lot of fun today, I love dancing," said Beke Olamileken, a 16-year-old boy who dreams of becoming an actor.

Make a difference

More than a simple performance, organizers

also see "Slum party" as a tool for political awareness. "I want to show that you can make a difference with simple actions on the ground," Valu said. Last year, a video showing Valu dancing in a huge mud puddle in front of a police officer to denounce the disastrous state of the roads, was a hit on social media. During the "Slum party", next to the dance floor, on the steps of a ruined house, the collective planted cardboard gravestones, inscribed with the words "People", "Wealth", "Rights", "Security" and "Peace".

Dancer Henry Bethel Wisdom ties his body with an orange rope, and improvises a performance that freezes the crowd. The artist soars into the air, trying to get out of the improvised cemetery, but is caught by his associates who drag him back with rope. None of the dancers makes any reference to it, but the performance recalls the massive protest movement against police violence that gripped southern Nigeria in October last year.

Thousands of young people took to the streets to demand an end to human rights abuses and corruption, before being suppressed by the security forces. "We feel like we are slaves of our government, what we need is security wealth and peace," said Olamide Ballyqueen, one of the dancers. "We don't want to suffer like our parents and we definitely don't want them to suffer like us," she said pointing to the crowds of young children. —AFP

Prince William reveals taste for AC/DC in podcast



Britain's Prince William, Duke of Cambridge plays table tennis during his visit to CATCH, a youth-led charity in Leeds, northern England. —AFP

Britain's Prince William has revealed himself as an unlikely headbanger in a podcast in which he talks of his love for Australian hardrockers AC/DC. The song featured on "Prince William: Time To Walk", recorded for Apple, in which he gives an audio walking tour around the Sandringham royal estate in east England and plays his favorite tracks. The prince said that he listens to the band's driving 1990 anthem "Thunderstruck" to ease himself into the working week. "There's nothing better on a Monday morning, when you're bleary-eyed after the weekend and trying to get back into the grind of the week," said the second-in-line to the throne.

William also talked of his mother, princess Diana, cranking up the volume on US singer Tina Turner's 1980s-era hit "The Best" to alleviate anxiety driving him and Harry back to boarding school after holidays. "My mother, she'd be driving along, singing along at the top of her voice" in a "real family moment", he said, adding that the police protection officer in the car with them would sometimes join in. The celebrity podcast project aims to encourage people to walk more and reap mental health benefits. The father of three also talked about his children, saying Princess Charlotte, six, loves dancing to Colombian star Shakira's 2010 song "Waka Waka" with "a lot of hip movements", while her younger brother Louis, three, tries to copy her. The podcast will be available to hear for free today on the Apple Music 1 radio station, with the tech giant giving donations to the prince's chosen charities. —AFP

Cheryl cancels podcast as it doesn't 'feel right' after Sarah Harding's death

Cheryl has cancelled her 'You, Me & R&B' podcast for the BBC because it "didn't feel right" to "revisit" it following the passing of her Girls Aloud bandmate Sarah Harding. The series for Radio 2 was set to be 12-episodes long with the 38-year-old singer discussing her passion for music and her favorite artists. However, she took a break from recording the podcast in the summer, after Sarah lost her battle with cancer in September, at the age of 39, and now she doesn't feel it's appropriate for her to share the series. The 'Fight For This Love' hitmaker told fans on her Instagram Stories: "It was to be recorded around the same time as Sarah's passing. I took a break from everything then, including the series, and it just didn't feel right to revisit it again..." "Thank you again for all of your love and support these past couple months."

Cheryl took to Instagram after Sarah's death was announced and admitted she was still in a state of "disbelief". She wrote at the time: "Although we

knew this day would arrive I am somehow still feeling at a loss for words that our stunning, unique, crazy, quirky, kind and soft hearted girl has departed. As I try to navigate my way through these painfully strange and horribly unfamiliar waves of disbelief and finality I am experiencing, I wanted to extend my condolences to all of our GA fans. We were like an extended family for so long and we know so many of you by name. I wanted to make sure you knew just how much your love and continued support meant to Sarah through her most vulnerable times. (sic)"

The 'Love Machine' hitmaker explained that Sarah felt heartened by the support of her fans amid her cancer battle. Her Instagram post continued: "She was so grateful and you really lifted her spirits when she needed you most [praying emoji] I also realize so many will be deeply affected by the circumstances of Sarah's passing... I am sending you all so much love [broken heart emoji] I love you Sarah... farewell (sic)". —BangShowbiz



Pink

Pink gives terminally ill fan her dying wish with Zoom call

Pink helped a terminally ill fan tick off an item on her bucket list. The 'Who Knew' hitmaker jumped on Zoom with 63-year-old superfan Diane Berberian, who has bone cancer and is being cared for at a hospice, and made her dream come true. In a clip of their conversation posted to Facebook, Diane told the pop megastar: "You've made my day. I don't even know what's on my bucket list now, because you were so far at the top. All the other things started to happen so it's kinda like, 'Okay, I'll think of somethin' else!'" Her idol told her: "You have a kind of bravery that I don't understand. 'You're bringing comfort to other people while you're walking through this.'"

Diane shared with the 'Trouble' hitmaker that lis-



Cheryl

tening to her music has got her through her battle with the disease. The athlete said: "I always say I'm climbing the stairway to heaven now." "Most of my days start with the song of the day and it's a Pink song usually. "When I race, it's always a Pink song." She concluded: "Pink, I love you, I love everything about you." The music star making her fan's wish come true comes after she urged people to "count your blessings" as she insisted "most setbacks are actually just pauses and opportunities to recalibrate." Pink opened up about meeting "a woman with cerebral palsy who summits 13,000 ft mountains in her chair", and learning "about a blind man that summits Mt Everest".

And while revealing she had a "brutal first week" of recovery from hip surgery, she said last month: "It is humbling for a very independent person like myself to be rendered physically unable and dependent, even if for a couple of months. "I'm learning the gift of accepting help. My journey will be quick and intentional. And I will make a full recovery. For that I am so blessed. "I'm impressed by those that face real, hard challenges, and alchemize their situation into something magical, or meaningful. (sic)" —Bang Showbiz

Sports

Verstappen hits wall in 'terrible' crash; Hamilton on pole position

Mercedes fined 25,000 euros for second incident

JEDDAH: Lewis Hamilton snatched pole position for the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix on Saturday as championship leader Max Verstappen smashed into a wall and could only manage third place. Verstappen's hopes were extinguished when his Red Bull speared into the barriers at the exit of the last bend on his final flying lap on the tight, unforgiving Jeddah street circuit just as he appeared poised to unseat his rival. "It was terrible," said a shaken but unhurt Verstappen.

Hamilton's Mercedes teammate Valtteri Bottas was second and will share the front row. "What a tough track this is," said Hamilton after a lap of 1min 27.511sec and who remains on course for a record eighth world title. "It's incredibly technical and complex. It's amazing what they have built, the speed, it's phenomenal. "We were quick through practice but particularly FP3 and qualifying, we were struggling with the pace and the tyres, so for us to get a one-two, really proud of Valtteri and the team. It's a great result. "Given where we were, I'm

grateful for what we have got today."

For Hamilton, who has cut Verstappen's championship lead with successive wins in Brazil and Qatar, it was a fifth pole of the season and 103rd of his career. Verstappen, who has an eight-point lead over Hamilton with just two races left, can claim his first world title yesterday if he wins the race and Hamilton finishes outside the top six.

If not, the 2021 title battle will go down to the wire in Abu Dhabi next weekend. "I don't really understand what happened (on the final flying lap). I locked up a bit," Verstappen. "It was terrible but in general, it was a good qualifying. It was a bit hard to switch on the tyres because it's a street circuit but I knew the pace was there."

'Pretty brutal'

He added: "P3 is disappointing but today did show that the car is quick around here so we'll see what happens tomorrow." Red Bull team chief Christian Horner was hoping Verstappen's car did not suffer gearbox damage. If it needs to be replaced the Dutchman will face a grid penalty for the race. "That was looking like the lap of the year. It's a great shame," Horner told Sky Sports. "He just grabbed the front end at the last corner and tried to keep the momentum - as he could see on his dash he was

0.4 up going into the corner - and unfortunately he has run out of road.

"Pretty brutal but we'll hope the gearbox isn't damaged and see what we can do tomorrow. Max

will be frustrated. He knows what a good lap it was." Ferrari's Charles Leclerc and Sergio Perez in the second Red Bull made up the top five for the next race, the first to be held in the kingdom. Pierre Gasly (AlphaTauri), Lando Norris (McLaren), Yuki Tsunoda (AlphaTauri), Esteban Ocon (Alpine) and Antonio Giovinazzi (Alfa Romeo) complete the top 10. Securing pole capped a dramatic day for seven-time champion Hamilton.

He escaped a sanction for yellow flag incidents in Saturday practice after being summoned over an alleged failure to slow under double waved yellow flags, and for blocking the Haas of Nikita Mazepin. However, the Mercedes star was cleared of any wrongdoing after the stewards admitted that a double-waved yellow light panel had been activated accidentally. Mercedes were fined 25,000 euros for the second incident. Verstappen was hit with a five-place grid penalty for failing to respect double-waved yellow flags during qualifying in Qatar last month. —AFP

News in brief

Kilde wins WCup downhill

LOS ANGELES: Aleksander Aamodt Kilde notched his second World Cup win in two days on Saturday, sweeping to a downhill victory at Beaver Creek a day after cementing his return from injury with a super-G triumph. Kilde clocked 1min 39.63sec on the Birds of Prey course in Colorado, with Austrian Matthias Mayer settling for the second step of the podium, 66-hundredths of a second back. Switzerland's Beat Feuz, the four-time defending champion in the discipline, was third, 1.01sec behind the winner. "It's unbelievable," Kilde said. "I love to be here, love to be back competing. Great weather, great conditions, great crowd and good skiing - that's a good package." Kilde, who won the overall title in the pandemic-shortened 2020 season, saw his 2021 campaign cut short by a ruptured right knee ligament last January. —AFP

Axelsen powers into final

JAKARTA: Badminton world number one Viktor Axelsen inched closer to a second title at the three back-to-back events in Indonesia on Saturday by reaching the final of the World Tour Finals. The Olympic gold medalist, who also won the Indonesia Open last week, dominated both sets against India's Lakshya Sen, winning their semi-final 21-13, 21-11 in 39 minutes. The Dane will face unseeded Thai player Kunlavut Vitidsarn, who beat Malaysia's rising star Lee Zii Jia 21-18, 21-18. South Korea's An Se-young reached the women's singles final after winning 25-23, 21-17 against Thailand's Pornpawee Chochuwong. An is hoping to add to her Indonesia Masters and Indonesia Open triumphs. The 22-year-old will played Pusarla Venkata Sindhu of India in yesterday's final. —AFP

Kongwatmai secures first win

PHUKET: Thailand's Phachara Kongwatmai took home his first Asian Tour victory yesterday, claiming the \$1 million Laguna Phuket Championship after fending off two fellow countrymen and South Korea's Bi-o Kim by a single shot. Phachara's 10-under par total of 270 came after he holed a 12-foot par putt on the 18th, eking out a win with Kim, Panuphol Pittayarat and Denwit Boriboonsub hot on his heels. "I feel very happy and very excited for this year... (I've) been waiting for about six years," he said. "Right now it is my time and I feel great." The young Thai star sprang on to the golf scene in 2013, triumphing at the Singha Hua Hin Open as a 14-year-old amateur. In 2015, he won twice during the Asian Development Tour, but the pandemic halted his seemingly unstoppable ascent. —AFP

Leipzig coach Marsch quits

BERLIN: RB Leipzig said yesterday that coach Jesse Marsch is leaving his job with immediate effect, amid a disappointing season for the ambitious Bundesliga side. The 48-year-old American had come under increasing pressure due to a series of poor results, with Friday's 2-1 loss to Union Berlin—their third successive Bundesliga defeat—proving the final straw. Until Sunday Leipzig had never sacked a coach since they joined the top flight in 2016. "RB Leipzig and head coach Jesse Marsch have mutually agreed to part ways," the club said in a statement on their website. "The decision is the result of an in-depth analysis and intensive discussions after the Bundesliga match against Union Berlin." Jesse Marsch will be released with immediate effect and assistant coach Achim Beierlorzer will take charge of the team ahead of the upcoming home (Champions League) game against Manchester City. —AFP

Garbisi hits 100-point

PARIS: Italy fly-half Paolo Garbisi reached 100 points for the season as Montpellier beat Perpignan 30-6 in the French Top 14 on Saturday and Bordeaux-Begles moved above Toulouse to the summit of the table with a 17-7 win. Garbisi, 21, who started all of the Azzurri's November internationals kicked 13 of his side's final tally to keep them third in the table. "We were patient and it opened up. The Catalans gave a lot in the first half," Montpellier coach Philippe Saint-Andre told reporters. "We're still in the race. It's our fifth straight win, you can't forget that." Garbisi, the former Treviso stand-off, started in the No. 10 shirt a week after scoring the 79th-minute winning penalty in last Saturday's 25-24 win over Castres with South Africa playmaker Handre Pollard on the bench. —AFP

Team Pro Rider takes first at Red Bull Bar Bahr 2021

KUWAIT: Red Bull Bar Bahr recently concluded, with 15 powerful teams participating in the well-received land and sea race. The 2021 edition saw team Pro Rider take the championship in yet another tough and competitive race, which took place just this past Friday, on December 3 at Al Khiran, the beach resort complex in Kuwait.

The tournament went down to the wire in what was once more a very exciting championship race for the series. The spectacular team duo of athletes Mishary Bushaiba (quad) and Abdul Rahman Al Omar (jet ski) were the underdog team to come out on top, exceeding even a few big name athletes in the tournament, and they did so with determination and style.

Red Bull Bar Bahr is a land and sea relay race where the first rider, on land, traverses a man-made circuit on a quad, and once completed, hands the keys to the second race vehicle to their team member, to complete the jet ski section of the race. The combination relay of two incredibly popular sports makes the tournament unique, as dual-combination tournaments are generally few and far between.

As per usual, there were strict safety measures in place. All team members wore a full face helmet at



all times, and had a valid driving license for the vehicle they piloted over the course of the event. Other on-the-spot measures were taken by the judges, as they watched the tournament unfold. The winning teams received valuable prizes, and the



proud sponsors this year were the Basel Al Salem Al Sabah Motor Racing Club, Voss Water, Room Service, and Kuwait Times. To find out more about Red Bull Bar Bahr, follow @RedBullKuwait on Instagram and Twitter, and @RedBull on Facebook.

Kuwait to host 2 tennis events



By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: President of Kuwait and Arab Tennis Federations Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Sabah said Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah International Tennis complex will host two events - the first is the Arab Masters Tennis Tournament (from December 6 to December 12) with the best players from 16 Arab countries, and the second event is the opening ceremony of the Gulf Games to be hosted next month.

Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber, who spoke during a press conference on Saturday said the players will start arriving today, and the draw will be made tomorrow. The tournament is a five-day event. Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber said hosting the Arab Tennis players in the masters event was included in an integrated plan.

Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Sabah said the seventh ranked player in the world Tunisian Ons Jabeur will be the guest of honor, adding that he is proud to have the first Arab player ranked in the top 10 players in the world to be present in Kuwait. Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber welcomed the delegations and urged fans to attend matches. Al-Jaber thanked the Public Authority for Sport for their support as well as the Health and Interior ministries for their cooperation.

Kuwait shooting tournament ends

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The Late Sheikh Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah annual shooting tournament concluded on Saturday with a closing ceremony that was attended by Sheikh Bader Sabah Al-Salem Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, Sheikh Abdallah Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah and Sheikhha Mariam Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. President of the Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations Engr Duaij Al-Otaibi, Secretary General of both federations Obaid Al-Osaimi were also in attendance.

The results of the three-day event were as follow: Mansour Al-Rashidi won the skeet event followed by Mohammad

Nayef Al-Daihani (second) and Abdelaziz Al-Saad (third). The trap event was won by Talal Al-Rashidi; Khalid Al-Mudhaf (second) and Nasser Al-Miqlid (third). Finally, the Juniors Trap Event was won by Yousuf Al-Rashidi; Salah Al-Rashidi (second) and Talal Al-Enezi (third).

President of Kuwait Shooting Federation Engr Duaij Al-Otaibi said that the tournament was distinguished by the large number of shooters. He said the local champions are at an important stage in preparation for the Gulf Games and HH the Amir Grand Prix in January and March. He also congratulated the winners.

Secretary General of KSF Obaid Al-



Osaimi said the Kuwait Shooting Sport Club is honored to organize this championship each year since the establishment of the club in respect of the late Sheikh -

for his role in support of the shooting sport. He said the club is keen to have juniors in the tournament to prepare a strong generation.

Sports

Bayern down Dortmund to go four points clear

Lewandowski nets double

BERLIN: Robert Lewandowski scored twice as Bayern Munich opened up a four-point lead at the top of the Bundesliga with a 3-2 win at second-placed Borussia Dortmund on Saturday. Julian Brandt and Erling Haaland scored Dortmund's goals at Signal Iduna Park, but Lewandowski netted and converted the winning penalty, either side of a Kingsley Coman goal.

Dortmund coach Marco Rose was shown a red card for arguing with the referee after a Mats Hummels handball led to Lewandowski converting the key spot-kick 12 minutes from time. "In the first half, we should have led by more and in terms of how we played, I'm not sure we deserved to win," said Bayern forward Thomas Müller. "But in terms of fighting, we were there."

This was Bayern's seventh straight win over Dortmund, including five Bundesliga victories and two German Super Cup triumphs. Dortmund were unhappy to not be awarded a penalty after Marco Reus appeared to be fouled just before Lewandowski's crucial spot kick. "We always had the feeling that we could win. That's why it's doubly bitter that we lost like that," fumed Reus. Dortmund forged ahead in the fifth minute when Brandt, who was later stretched off after a clash of heads, slammed in a superb shot.

A Hummels mistake led to Lewandowski equalizing four minutes later against his former club when the Poland striker motored onto a Thomas Müller pass and fired home. Bayern capitalized on another Dortmund error when Coman's excellent strike put the visitors in front before half-time. Just 120 seconds after the break, Dortmund

were level when Haaland shot past diving Bayern goalkeeper Manuel Neuer after Dayot Upamecano cheaply gave away possession.

Dortmund were unlucky not to be awarded a penalty when their captain Marco Reus appeared to be fouled by Lucas Hernandez. At the other end, Hummels was again at fault when VAR confirmed his handball, to Rose's fury, and Lewandowski made no mistake. It was Lewandowski's 22nd goal in 15 Bundesliga games against Dortmund, who he left in 2014. Bayern midfielder Corentin Tolisso fired wide of an open Dortmund goal during 10 tense minutes of stoppage time.

Dortmund coach Marco shown a red card



Schick hits four
Earlier, Czech Republic striker Patrik Schick scored four second-half goals as third-placed Bayer Leverkusen romped to a 7-1 thrashing of bottom club Greuther Fuerth. Schick became the first Leverkusen player to score four goals in one half of a Bundesliga match. "In the first half I didn't have a single shot at goal. The second half was like opening a bottle of ketchup," Schick quipped.

Amine Adli and Edmond Tapsoba scored early goals for Leverkusen before Fuerth pulled a goal back from Jeremy Dudziak. Schick was then involved in the next five Leverkusen goals as the hosts ran riot. He set up Ecuador's Piero Hincapié just before the break, then fired in four goals in just 27 minutes—two with his left foot, one with his right and a header.

Schick has now scored 12 times in 11 league games this season and trails only Lewandowski,



MILAN: AC Milan's Spanish midfielder Brahim Diaz (left) challenges Salernitana's Slovenian goalkeeper Vid Belec during the Italian Serie A football match between AC Milan and Salernitana on December 4, 2021. —AFP

who has netted 16 goals, in the scoring charts. Wolfsburg crashed to a 3-0 defeat at Mainz ahead of Wednesday's all-or-nothing Champions League clash at home to Lille. Wolfsburg never recovered from conceding a goal by forward Jonathan Burkardt after just 68 seconds and were 2-0 down after only four minutes when Anton Stach scored from outside the box. To compound Wolfsburg's misery, their French defender Maxence Lacroix scored a late own goal.

Hoffenheim climbed into the top four with a 3-2 home win over Eintracht Frankfurt, whose three-match winning streak was ended. Colombia striker Rafael Borré gave Frankfurt an early lead, but goals by Dennis Geiger, Georginio Rutter and Diadie Samassekou put Hoffenheim in command. Substitute Goncalo Paciencia scored Frankfurt's second to set up a tense final 20 minutes, with empty stands in Sinsheim due to high numbers of Covid cases in the region. —AFP

Kuwait top league, thrash Qadisiya 3-0

By Ahmad Jabr

KUWAIT: Kuwait SC beat Qadisiya SC 3-0 in a marquee matchup that highlighted the third week competitions of Kuwait Premier League. The win gives Kuwait nine points from three matches as the club currently sit alone on top of the standings. Meanwhile, Qadisiya suffered their first defeat of the season and failed to carry momentum of their emphatic win against title holders Al-Arabi last week.

Ahmad Al-Zanki put the hosts ahead early with a goal in the eighth minute during the match held Saturday at Kuwait Sports Club Stadium in Kaifan, before scoring again 12 minutes later. Qadisiya gained some momentum after the break following a first half in which Kuwait controlled most of the pace, before Talal Al-Fadhel's goal in the 82nd minute sealed the deal for the hosts.

Kazma were held to a 1-1 draw against Al-Nasr earlier on Saturday, whereas Al-Arabi vs Salmiya



ended in a 2-2 draw in the week's other key matches. Kazma sits second in the standings with seven points, followed by Qadisiya with six. Al-Nasr with five and Al-Arabi and Salmiya respectively with four points each.

Kuwait look to maintain their lead when they vis-

it Salmiya on Friday, while Kazma have a chance to take over the lead temporarily when they host Al-Shabab. Qadisiya look to recover from their defeat when they host Al-Tadhamon, while Al-Nasr and Al-Arabi play against Al-Yarmouk and Al-Fahaheel respectively in other week 4 matches.

AC Milan go top of Serie A; Inter see off Roma

MILAN: A much-changed AC Milan saw off bottom side Salernitana 2-0 on Saturday to take top spot in Serie A ahead of previous leaders Napoli's match against Atalanta, while Inter Milan cruised to victory at Roma. Milan coach Stefano Pioli made six changes to his starting XI from the midweek victory at Genoa, with Tuesday's crucial Champions League match against Liverpool in mind.

But Franck Kessie and Alexis Saelemaekers both scored inside the first 20 minutes to ensure a straight-forward victory for the hosts at the San Siro. Milan have given their bid for a first league title since 2011 a boost this week after bouncing back from two straight defeats with successive victories. Pioli's men sit one point clear of reigning champions Inter, who beat Roma 3-0, and two ahead of Napoli, who host fourth-

placed Atalanta later on Saturday.

"I am satisfied with a good performance, a decent victory, because some assumed this could be taken for granted," Pioli told DAZN. "It would've been better if we had scored more goals, especially considering how many chances we created." The seven-time European champions have to beat already-qualified Liverpool in their final group game in Milan next week to have a chance of reaching the last 16.

"We wanted to be in this position and now we can only try to give our best," Pioli said of the Liverpool game. "We know Liverpool will inevitably cause us some issues, but the spaces can open up too, because they are certainly not unbeatable or impenetrable in defense." They made the perfect start against struggling Salernitana, as Kessie tapped in a fifth-minute opener. With Zlatan Ibrahimovic rested and Olivier Giroud part of a lengthy injury list, 20-year-old Pietro Pellegrini was handed a full league debut for the club.

But the youngster, a close-season loan signing from Monaco, hobbled



MILAN: AC Milan's Spanish midfielder Brahim Diaz (left) challenges Salernitana's Slovenian goalkeeper Vid Belec during the Italian Serie A football match between AC Milan and Salernitana on December 4, 2021. —AFP

off after less than 15 minutes. Milan doubled their advantage in the 18th minute, though, as Brahim Diaz slipped in to Saelemaekers whose shot found the bottom corner. Rade Krunic, Diaz and Junior Messias were

among the players to miss chances for Milan, but Salernitana never threatened a comeback. Salernitana remain rooted to the foot of the table after taking just one point from their last six matches. —AFP

Nuggets rout Knicks as Spurs hold off Warriors

NEW YORK: Nikola Jokic scored 32 points and pulled down 11 rebounds as the Denver Nuggets schooled the New York Knicks in a 113-99 NBA victory on Saturday. The Nuggets won for just the third time in 10 games—and it wasn't even close. Second-year big man Zeke Nnaji contributed a career-high 21 points off the bench for a Denver team that never trailed.

It was a third straight defeat for the Knicks, who fell to 5-8 on their home floor at Madison Square Garden. "I like something here," reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Jokic said of the historic Manhattan arena—where he exchanged courtside

comments with famous Knicks fan Spike Lee. "I don't know what it is," Jokic connected on 14 of his 19 shots from the floor, including three of seven from three-point range. He handed out five assists in just under 27 minutes on court in his third game back since missing four games in late November with a wrist injury. The Nuggets capitalized on the defensive lapses of the Knicks, pushing their lead to as many as 30 points and connecting on 52 percent of their shots from the field. New York, trailing 60-49 at halftime, chipped away at Denver's lead early in the second half, trimming the deficit to six points. But Denver responded with a 23-3 scoring run and took a 21-point lead into the fourth quarter. The Knicks, limited to 40 percent shooting, remained in 11th place in the Eastern Conference, outside the playoff window. The Nuggets, at 11-11, are eighth in the West. In San Francisco, Derrick White scored 25 points while Dejounte Murray had 22 points and 12 rebounds as the San Antonio Spurs closed the fourth quarter with an 8-1 run to beat the Golden State Warriors 112-107. —AFP



NEW YORK: Nerlens Noel #3 of the New York Knicks gets the steal from Davon Reed #9 of the Denver Nuggets at Madison Square Garden on December 04, 2021 in New York City. —AFP

News in brief

Rangers maintain record

GLASGOW: Giovanni van Bronckhorst enjoyed a comfortable home league debut as Rangers manager with a routine 3-0 win over Dundee on Saturday to open up a seven-point lead at the top of the Scottish Premiership. Joe Aribo's deflected strike opened the floodgates and only sterling work by Dens Park goalkeeper Adam Legzdins kept the Taysiders in the game. However, visiting defender Ryan Sweeney put a cross from Aribo into his own goal 10 minutes after the break before Alfredo Morelos added a third 20 minutes from time. Van Bronckhorst has now won all four games since replacing Steven Gerrard as Rangers boss. "We were very in control," said the former Dutch captain. "That's what you want when you play at home. We created a lot of chances and didn't give any away." —AFP

West Brom end winless run

LONDON: West Brom beat Coventry 2-1 on Saturday to end their winless run and climb to third in the Championship as Blackburn won again to consolidate their position in the play-off places. Kyle McFadzean's controversial own goal shortly before the interval proved decisive after Karlan Grant had put the Baggies ahead in the 20th minute. McFadzean turned into his own net following what appeared to be an obvious handball by Cedric Kipre but there is no VAR in the English second tier. Defender McFadzean then scored again at the right end, this time with a header from Todd Kane's corner, but it came too late to rescue Coventry. It was Valerien Ismael's side's first win in five league games stretching back to November 6. —AFP

Karim Benzema injured

MADRID: Real Madrid striker Karim Benzema was forced off with an injury in the first half of Saturday's La Liga match against Real Sociedad. Benzema went off with discomfort in his left leg, with the Frenchman appearing to point to the area around his knee and hamstring. Luka Jovic replaced him. The 33-year-old has scored 20 goals for Real Madrid this season and his absence would be a blow, especially ahead of Tuesday's Champions League game against Inter Milan. Both teams have already qualified for the last 16 but the winner of the match at the Santiago Bernabeu will go through as group winners. —AFP

MLS: COVID hits Union

NEW YORK: The Philadelphia Union will field a depleted lineup for this weekend's Major League Soccer semi-finals after 11 players were listed on Saturday as out due to COVID-19 protocols. Philadelphia will play host to New York City FC yesterday in the Eastern Conference final for a berth in next Saturday's MLS championship match against either the Portland Timbers or Real Salt Lake. Union midfielder and captain Alejandro Bedoya, goalkeeper Andre Blake and defenders Jack Elliott, Jakob Glesnes, Alvas Powell and Kai Wagner were last week's starters who were placed into MLS health and safety protocols. Also listed out in an injury report were reserve goalkeeper Joe Bendik, forwards Cory Burke and Sergio Santos and midfielders Ilesinho and Quinn Sullivan. —AFP



MANCHESTER: Manchester United's Portuguese defender Diogo Dalot (left) vies with Crystal Palace's Ivorian striker Wilfried Zaha during the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and Crystal Palace yesterday. — AFP

Man United's Rangnick kicks off in style

Tottenham crush Norwich 3-0 to extend their revival

LONDON: Manchester United started the Ralf Rangnick era with a 1-0 win against Crystal Palace yesterday as Tottenham crushed Norwich 3-0 to extend their recent revival under Antonio Conte. Leeds struck late to draw 2-2 with Brentford as new Aston Villa manager Steven Gerrard prepared to lock horns with his former boss at Liverpool, Brendan Rodgers, in the late match against Leicester.

Rangnick, taking the reins for the first time, named an unchanged side at Old Trafford after United beat Arsenal 3-2 in midweek and was rewarded with a high-energy performance in the first half, backed by a vocal crowd. Cristiano Ronaldo had the hosts' best chances as Palace initially struggled to get a foothold but the game remained goalless at half-time.

United's performance levels dipped in the second period and Rangnick threw on Mason Greenwood and Anthony Elanga for Jadon Sancho and Marcus Rashford to inject fresh energy into his attack. But it was often-maligned Brazil midfielder Fred who broke the deadlock, curling home a superb strike past Palace

goalkeeper Vicente Guaita from outside the box after a pass from Greenwood. The three points lifts United to sixth place in the table, three points behind fourth-placed West Ham.

Spurs stroll

Spurs are one point ahead of United with a game in hand after cruising to a 3-0 win against bottom side Norwich - their third straight victory in the Premier League. Lucas Moura opened the scoring in the 10th minute. After a nice piece of skill to round a Norwich defender, he played a one-two with Son Heung-min, turned his marker and thundered an unstoppable drive into the top corner from 20 yards.

Tottenham doubled their lead midway through the second half when Davinson Sanchez smashed home a loose ball from a corner. Son made it 3-0 in the 77th minute with a fine goal as Ben Davies and Oliver Skipp combined before the South Korean fired into the bottom corner. Conte took over from the sacked Nuno Espirito Santo early last month, with Spurs languishing in mid-table after a poor run of results and is starting to

make an impact.

Brentford were denied a win at Elland Road as Patrick Bamford scored deep into stoppage time to rescue a point for his side. Tyler Roberts gave Leeds a 27th-minute lead, sliding on to Raphinha's cross from the left to stab the ball home. Shandon Baptiste equalized for Brentford from the edge of the penalty area in the 54th minute and Sergi Canos put the Londoners ahead seven minutes later. But Bamford had the last word, poking home from close range in the 95th minute following a corner.

Man City 3 Watford 1

Bernardo Silva backed up Pep Guardiola's claim he is the best player in the Premier League right now by scoring twice as Manchester City briefly cruised to the top of the Premier League with a 3-1 win at Watford. Silva's sumptuous cushioned volley against Aston Villa in midweek earned Guardiola's glowing praise and he produced two more fine finishes to take his tally to seven goals in his last 12 Premier League games. "Thanks to Bernardo because he made me not wrong," said City boss Guardiola.

"I know he's so humble, there are top players in the Premier League and he is doing so well."

In stark contrast to Manchester United's 4-1 humbling at Vicarage Road a fortnight ago that ended Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's reign, City virtually killed the match as a contest within four minutes. Phil Foden picked out Raheem Sterling at the back post for the simplest of headers to open the scoring. Silva slotted home from a narrow angle to double the visitors' lead and produced a stunning strike into the top corner after the break.

"The game could have been over after 15 minutes," added Guardiola, whose side took advantage of Chelsea's 3-2 defeat at West Ham to move one point clear of Liverpool at the top of the table. "The most important thing is that we won. We played in a consistent way, controlled, we played a good game again." Guardiola also has a clean bill of health for his squad heading into the hectic festive period as Foden and record signing Jack Grealish returned to the starting line-up, while Kevin De Bruyne made his comeback from coronavirus as a sec-

ond-half substitute.

Foden made an immediate impact by picking out Sterling, who was given an incredible amount of space to head in his 99th Premier League goal. A slick City move soon doubled their lead as Silva fed Ilkay Gundogan and when the German's effort was saved by Daniel Bachmann, the Portuguese international followed up to slot in at the near post. Silva made clear his desire to leave City in the summer, but the 27-year-old is back to playing some of the best football of his career.

Mohamed Salah's free-scoring form for Liverpool may deny him individual awards come the end of the season, but Silva is also putting together his best goalscoring campaign in the Premier League. His second of the game was a thing of beauty as he turned onto Kyle Walker's pass and curled the ball high into Bachmann's right-hand corner. City have now won seven consecutive games with their form looking ominously like the beginning of a similar run to the 21-game winning streak that started last December and saw them streak towards the title. — AFP

Pressure piles on Puel after Rennes thrash St Etienne

PARIS: Rennes heaped more misery on floundering St Etienne yesterday whipping the Ligue 1 tailenders 5-0 and adding to the mounting pressure on their manager Claude Puel. Martin Terrier's first hat-trick at this level along with a strike by Lovro Majer and a comical own goal by Yvann Macon propelled Rennes into second spot in the table, albeit 11 points adrift of leaders Paris Saint Germain.

PSG needed an equalizer by Dutch international Georginio Wijnaldum in time added on Saturday to draw 1-1 with Lens. Defeat leaves former Leicester boss Puel's side on 12 points-with just two wins in 17 matches-and bottom due to a worse goal difference than Metz. The latter played Monaco later yesterday. "That really hurts," St Etienne midfielder Zaydou Youssouf told Prime Video. "It is a disaster, to lose 5-0 at home is inadmissible, we have no right to lose like that. "We have to show a different side to ourselves because that was rubbish."

Puel for his part bemoaned failing to take their chances during a "decent 20 minute spell" but admitted once Rennes broke the deadlock their heads went down. "We were very fragile,"



SAINT-ETIENNE: Rennes' French midfielder Baptiste Santamaria (right) fights for the ball with Saint-Etienne's French midfielder Mahdi Camara during the French L1 football match between AS Saint-Etienne and Stade Rennais FC yesterday. — AFP

said Puel, who coached Monaco to the 2000 Ligue 1 title. "They are a team packed with quality and are ruthless if you show any sign of weakness. "The group will pick itself up and fight. "We cannot afford to give up."

Rennes, though, were all smiles as they rebounded from a loss to Lille-the only one in their last 14 matches in all competitions. "The priority was to resume our positive dynamic after the defeat against Lille," said Rennes coach Bruno Genesio. "That has been achieved with a very good win and we are very happy." Rennes face a near impossible task of catching PSG, although the Qatar-owned club are hardly playing like a side filled with superstars.

Meanwhile, Georginio Wijnaldum's injury-

time equalizer allowed Paris Saint-Germain to snatch a 1-1 draw away to Lens in Ligue 1 on Saturday in a match which confirmed Lionel Messi's difficulties adapting to the physical nature of French football. Messi was felled by a strong tackle and some PSG players stopped playing in the build-up to Seko Fofana's goal which gave Lens a 62nd-minute lead in northern France. It looked as if that would be enough for Lens to claim a victory which would have been just reward for an outstanding performance that delighted the crowd of close to 37,000. However, PSG equalized in the second minute of injury time as Kylian Mbappe crossed for fellow substitute Wijnaldum to head home. — AFP

Real ease past Real Sociedad

MADRID: Real Madrid stretched their lead at the top of La Liga to eight points on Saturday with a slick 2-0 win over Real Sociedad but the victory was tarnished by an injury to Karim Benzema. Carlo Ancelotti said Benzema is likely now to miss Tuesday's Champions League game at home to Inter Milan although was hopeful the striker could return to face Atletico Madrid next weekend.

Madrid's eighth consecutive win proved even more valuable after both Atletico and Barcelona lost, with Atletico undone by Mallorca and Barca succumbing to the impressive Real Betis for their first defeat under Xavi Hernandez. Barcelona stay seventh, now a hefty 16 points behind Real Madrid, while Atletico drop to fourth, six points in front of Barca, but 10 points off the top.

"We have an advantage but the league is still open," said Ancelotti. "We can't think now about winning La Liga. I don't want anyone to think like this." Barcelona and Atletico will now have to pick themselves up ahead of crunch Champions League group games in midweek. Barca need to win away at Bayern Munich to guarantee their place in the last 16 and could be without Gavi after the midfielder

was taken to hospital with a head injury. Atletico have to beat Porto in Portugal to even have a chance of going through.

Madrid, meanwhile, face Inter in a decider for first place in Group D, almost certainly without Benzema. The 33-year-old was forced off in the first half at the Reale Arena with what appeared to be a problem around his left hamstring. Yet Madrid marched on without their star striker to register another impressive win over high-flying Real Sociedad as Vinicius Junior continued his brilliant run by scoring the opener before Luka Jovic, Benzema's replacement, added a second.

Vinicius' 12th goal of the season came in the 47th minute as he weaved in from the left and played a clever reverse pass into Jovic, who held the ball up and turned it back to Vinicius, who drove in. Jovic has endured a torrid time since joining Madrid for 60 million euros in 2019 but he could be given a run now in Benzema's absence. After teeing up Vinicius, he stooped low to head in Casemiro's flick-on from a corner for his first goal of the season. Xavi had begun with two league wins out of two but even he admitted the results against Espanyol and Villarreal owed a lot to good fortune. — AFP