



**3** Kuwait receives 2 Eurofighter Typhoon jets from Italy



**9** Gulf Bank red plus first Mastercard prepaid cashback card for youth



**11** Al-Bahar: Pandemic showed NBK committed to digital approach



**16** Qatar sees budget outlay up 5% for World Cup



# Kuwait detects first Omicron variant case in European man

## Pfizer/BioNTech says three doses 'effective' against Omicron

### Women can join army from Dec 19

By Nawara Fattahova



KUWAIT: Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah speaks during a press conference yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah yesterday announced registration of Kuwaiti women in the army will start on Dec 19. "We have not forced women to join the army - we only gave them the opportunity to get the same benefits as male officers in the army," he told a press conference. He explained Kuwaiti women are already working at the ministry, but as civilians, which makes them lose the financial benefits paid to officers.

Sheikh Hamad highlighted the achievements of the defense ministry, which succeeded in cutting its debts and expenses even before the end of the fiscal year. He added the ministry will reveal its

Continued on Page 2

By B Izzak & Agencies

KUWAIT: The health ministry announced yesterday that it has detected the first case of the new COVID-19 variant Omicron in a European man who arrived in Kuwait from an African country where Omicron cases had been reported. Health Ministry Spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said the discovery came after authorities conducted sequencing tests that found the European man was infected with the Omicron variant.

He said the man has been placed in institutional quarantine since his arrival at Kuwait airport. The ministry did not say when the man arrived in the country and from which African nation he had come from. It did not also reveal his age or health condition. The pandemic situation in Kuwait has improved dramatically, as health authorities have recorded fewer than 40 cases a day since Oct 11 with a few deaths.

Meanwhile, two doses of the BioNTech and Pfizer coronavirus vaccine may not be enough to protect against the Omicron variant, the companies warned yesterday, but stressed it was "still effective"

after a third jab. Omicron has caused global concern over signs that it can transmit faster than previous strains and fears that its multiple mutations could help it evade immune defenses provided by vaccines. No deaths have yet been associated with the variant.

In preliminary results published yesterday, Pfizer and BioNTech said their vaccine "is still effective in preventing COVID-19, also against Omicron, if it has been administered three times". But they warned that "the Omicron variant is probably not sufficiently neutralized after two doses". According to the early laboratory research using blood serum from vaccinated people, a booster third dose generated around the same level of antibodies against Omicron as is seen after a second dose with other variants.

Blood samples from people who had received two doses of the current vaccine showed on average a 25-fold reduction in neutralizing antibodies compared to the early strain of the virus, the companies said. But they added that another part of the immune response - from T cells - were probably

Continued on Page 2

### A shared commitment to combating corruption underscores strong ties

op-ed



By Alina L. Romanowski  
US Ambassador to Kuwait

Today is International Anticorruption Day, a day to recognize that everyone has a role in tackling corruption. Together we can promote resiliency and integrity at all levels of society.

Corruption affects us all. The magnitude of money movement related to corruption cannot be overstated: A 2018 United Nations study revealed that an estimated \$2.6 trillion is stolen annually through corruption, which is equivalent to more than 5 percent of the global gross domestic product. Illicit actors exploit global markets to hide ill-gotten gains through mechanisms such as shell companies or fraudulent real-estate transactions. Without strong institutions in place, countries can fall victim to embezzlement of public resources and public health systems may unravel, which can further complicate efforts for economic rehabilitation.

The international community has taken numerous measures to fight corruption over the past year. The United Nations General Assembly held its first-ever special session on corruption last June. During the session, it welcomed the Riyadh Initiative, creating an international consortium of law-enforcement authorities to facilitate information sharing and cooperation across borders.

The United States has taken action as well. On June 3, President Biden released the National Security Memorandum on the Fight Against Corruption - a call to action for the US government and its partners to design and implement a plan to modernize and coordinate efforts to better fight corruption, tackle illicit finance, and hold corrupt actors accountable.

Continued on Page 2

### Saudi Crown Prince in Qatar after UAE visit

DOHA: Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman arrived in Doha yesterday as part of a Gulf tour, marking his first visit to the country after the two sides severed ties four years ago. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain cut all links with Qatar in June 2017, alleging it backed radical Islamist groups and was too close to Riyadh's rival Tehran - allegations Doha denied.

Continued on Page 2



Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman meets Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani (left) and Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan (right) during his visits to the two countries.



### India defense chief killed in chopper crash

COONOR, India: Indian defense chief General Bipin Rawat was among 13 people killed in a helicopter crash yesterday, raising questions over the future of military reforms he was leading. Rawat was India's first chief of defense staff, a position that the government established in 2019, and was seen as close to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The 63-year-old was travelling with his wife and other senior officers in the Russian-made Mi-17 chopper, which crashed near its destination in southern Tamil Nadu state. Modi said Rawat was an outstanding soldier and "true patriot" who had helped modernize the country's armed forces. "His passing away has saddened me deeply," the prime minister wrote on Twitter. "India will never forget his exceptional service."

Strategic analyst and author Brahma Chellaney tweeted that Rawat's death "couldn't have come at a worse time" when "China's 20-month-long border aggression has

Continued on Page 2



COONOR, India: Firemen and rescue workers stand next to the debris of an IAF Mi-17V5 helicopter after it crashed yesterday. — AFP

### Scholz vows 'new beginning' as Merkel exits

BERLIN: Olaf Scholz became Germany's new chancellor yesterday after 16 years with Angela Merkel at the helm, pledging his center-left-led coalition would offer a "new beginning" for Europe's top economy. Scholz was officially named the country's ninth post-war leader by President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who urged him to "ensure that the pandemic does not keep us firmly in its grip for another year" as a

fourth wave of the coronavirus outbreak rages.

The former finance minister, who won 395 of the 707 votes cast in the Bundestag lower house, has vowed broad "continuity" with the popular Merkel while making Germany greener and fairer. "It will be a new beginning for our country," Scholz pledged as he officially assumed the office from Merkel and thanked her for her lengthy tenure. "I will do everything to work towards that."

Merkel wished Scholz luck as chancellor, urging him to "take this office and work in the best interest of our country". She then left office by motorcade for the last time as her staff looked on, applauding. Scholz led his Social Democrats from a deep poll deficit to victory in the September 26 election. — AFP



BERLIN: German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and his predecessor Angela Merkel pose after Scholz gave Merkel a bouquet of flowers during a handover ceremony at the Chancellery yesterday. — AFP

## Local

## News in brief

**Amir congratulates  
German Chancellor**

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent yesterday a cable of congratulations to Olaf Scholz on assuming the post of the new German Chancellor. His Highness the Amir wished Chancellor Scholz further success, hoping that both Kuwait and Germany would seek means to bolster the exceptional bilateral relations. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables.

**KJA allows KUNA staff to join**

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Journalists Association Board of Director decided to allow Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) editors, photographers and researchers to apply for KJA membership at the start of 2022. Meanwhile, the board announced forming its working committees, and selected the members in charge as follows: Adnan Al-Rashid, Chairman of the Board, Chairman of Profession and Membership Affairs and Chairman of Sports Media Committee; Jassem Kamal, Secretary General Supervisor Over Internal and External Exhibition Committee with Kamel Al-Shimmari as its chairman; Dhairan Aba Al-Khail, Treasurer, Chairman of Journalism Liberties Committee; Rabeah Al-Jumaa, Board Member and KJA Director, Supervisor of Training, Development and Conferences Committee which is chaired by Fatima Al-Azmi; Owayed Al-Enezi, Board Member, Chairman of New Media Committee and KJA official spokesman; Mushari Al-Mutairi, General Assembly Member; Chairman of the Public Relations Committee.

## PHOTO OF THE DAY



**KUWAIT:** This photo taken by Kuwaiti astrophotographer Abdullah Al-Harbi shows Comet Leonard falling beside the M3 cluster as seen from Kuwait's sky. The comet, which was discovered in 2021, is currently passing through Kuwait's sky, and is expected to be at its brightest point on December 12.

# Photo exhibition marks 60 years of Kuwait-Japan diplomatic ties

**TOKYO:** The Kuwaiti Embassy in Tokyo hosted a photo exhibition yesterday to mark the 60th anniversary of the establishment of Kuwait-Japan diplomatic relations, themed "The Friendship between State of Kuwait and Japan". In a video message, Kuwait's Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah recalled the onset of the Kuwait-Japan relationship in 1961, which he called "a role model of the relations between countries."

"I recall with great appreciation and pride the path of our extraordinary relations throughout the years, and their resilience against the challenges brought about by the rapidly changing international situations. Our relations maintained their continuous growth thanks to the support of our countries' political leaderships," Sheikh Dr Ahmad said. The Kuwait-Japan relations started in the 1950s and developed since Kuwait agreed in 1958 to grant Japan's Arabian Oil Company Ltd an oil and gas concession, the minister noted. "This agreement was one of the most significant aspects of cooperation with the Japanese private companies in this field,"

said Sheikh Dr Ahmad. He added that the first oil shipment was exported to Japan in 1958 before the two countries established their diplomatic relations. "On this day in 1961, Japan was among the first countries to recognize the Independence of the State of Kuwait," he said.

Sheikh Dr Ahmad commended Japan's support to Kuwait and contribution of over \$13 billion to the efforts to liberate Kuwait after the 1990 Iraqi invasion. Touching on the earthquake and tsunami that devastated the northeastern Japan in March 2011, the minister said "Kuwait shared Japan's grief and pain on this tragedy" and "offered urgent humanitarian assistance to alleviate the impact of the devastating earthquake in support of our friends, the people of Japan" upon the directives of the late Amir. Sheikh Dr Ahmad stressed that Kuwait attaches great importance to promoting its relations with Japan, pointing out that 16 bilateral agreements were concluded, and trade volume reached \$1.7 billion in 2020. He also lauded the role of the Kuwaiti Japanese Businessmen Committee established in 1995 and the private sector's active contribution

to strengthening the economic, commercial, and investment relations between the two countries. While expressing appreciation for the friendly countries' historic and deeply rooted relations, Sheikh Dr Ahmad also voiced expectations to promote bilateral relations and advance them in various fields to the level of our countries' leaders and peoples' ambitions.

The exhibition held in the embassy premises with some 40 photos, showed not only images of mutual visits of the high-rank officials, such as the visit to Japan by Kuwait's late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in 2012 and former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to Kuwait in 2013, but also depicted memorable scenes of bilateral cooperation and people-to-people exchanges of the two countries over the past 60 years. The opening ceremony of the exhibition was attended by some 50 guests, including Japanese Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Taro Honda, Governor of Tokyo Yuriko Koike, Chairman of the Japan-Kuwait Parliamentary Friendship League Eisuke Mori, senior government officials, political



**TOKYO:** (From left) Kuwaiti Ambassador Hasan Mohammad Zaman and Japanese Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Taro Honda. — KUNA

figures, diplomats and business people.

Addressing the guests at the opening ceremony, Kuwaiti Ambassador to Japan Hasan Mohammad Zaman hailed the sustainable development of relations between the two countries, while thanking for good friendship, amazing partnership and unwavering support that had shown to the

Kuwaiti Embassy and Kuwait over the last 60 years. "One essential aspect of our relations has been solidarity," he said, highlighting Japan's prompt support to Kuwait after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and Kuwait's assistance to Japan in the aftermath of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake. — AFP

## A shared commitment to combating corruption...

Continued from Page 1

Kuwait, a signatory to the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), has joined the United States in these efforts by strengthening technical capacities to counter illicit finance.

This past June, the US Embassy, through the US Department of Justice, engaged in multiple workshops with over 100 Kuwaiti investigators and prosecutors on combatting illicit finance. Participants exchanged ideas about the latest methods of money laundering, such as using cryptocurrency, forensic accounting, freezing and seizing assets overseas, and using international networks to obtain evidence and hold corrupt actors accountable.

Participation in these workshops demonstrates a commitment to ensuring that Kuwait's legal regime can combat corruption. Kuwait's Public Prosecution has pursued impactful cases, and I have no doubt that they

will be able to face future challenges.

The United States and Kuwait also work through the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to ensure that countries adhere to beneficial ownership transparency standards and other mechanisms to ensure that ill-gotten gains do not pass through the country.

The United States stands ready and committed to work with Kuwait in this regard, from working with law enforcement to assisting Kuwait with its FATF evaluation scheduled for 2022.

Today marks the beginning of a momentous month. Earlier this week, the Biden-Harris Administration released the first-ever Strategy on Countering Corruption, outlining the United States' comprehensive approach to tackling corruption. From December 13 to 17, the international community will convene the ninth session of the Conference of the States Parties to the UNCAC to focus on issues such as asset recovery and international cooperation.

Kuwait has been a key ally and great friend to the United States over the past 60 years. Together, let's internalize the International Anti-Corruption Day theme of "Your right, your role: Say no to Corruption."

hospital, the air force said. Rawat was chief of the 1.3 million-strong army from 2017 to 2019 before his elevation to defense services chief, which analysts said was to improve coordination between the army, navy and air force. New Delhi is looking to increase its military effectiveness in the face of heightened tensions with China following deadly clashes in a disputed Himalayan region, as well as its longstanding conflict with neighboring Pakistan. "He had given a tremendous push to the integration of the three services, so his successor has big shoes to fill," retired Lieutenant General DS Hooda, a former head of the Indian army's Northern Command, told AFP. "He had a tough job... we will need someone to give the same impetus that he had given so that the reforms that he started continue at the same pace."

Rawat came from a military family with several generations having served in the Indian armed forces. The general joined the army as a second lieutenant in 1978 and had four decades of service behind him, having commanded forces in Indian-administered Kashmir and along the Line of Actual Control bordering China. He was credited with reducing insurgency on India's northeastern frontier and supervised a cross-border counter-insurgency operation into neighboring Myanmar. — AFP

## Kuwait detects first Omicron variant...

Continued from Page 1

still effective against the variant, adding that "vaccinated individuals may still be protected against severe forms of the disease". Their results have not been peer reviewed.

The companies said that an Omicron-specific version of the anti-coronavirus vaccine, currently in development by BioNTech, would be available by March. "Although two doses of the vaccine may still offer protection against severe disease caused by the Omicron strain, it's clear from these preliminary data that protection is improved with a third dose of our vaccine," Pfizer Chief Executive Albert Bourla

said in a statement.

The announcement comes after other preliminary results from a small study in South Africa suggested there was up to a forty-fold drop in the ability of the antibodies from the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine to neutralize Omicron, compared to the earlier Beta variant. The results suggest "that there is definitely much less neutralization against Omicron compared to neutralization against the original strains that came out of Wuhan initially," said Willem Hanekom, executive director of the Africa Health Research Institute, which carried out the study.

But he cautioned that it was important to be "extraordinarily careful" interpreting the results because they only reflect a laboratory setting. "What we need is real world results of what is happening out there," he told AFP. Omicron counts more than 30 mutations on the spike protein that dots the surface of the coronavirus and allows it to invade cells.

## Saudi Crown Prince in Qatar...

Continued from Page 1

But relations were fully restored in January after a landmark summit in the Saudi desert city of Al-Ula. Crown Prince Mohammed was greeted by the Amir of Qatar Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, with whom he will hold talks, said the official Saudi Press Agency. His tour comes while a flurry of diplomacy occurs to resolve regional disputes, especially with Iran and Turkey.

Prince Mohammed arrived in Doha after a visit to the UAE, where he met with Abu Dhabi Crown Prince

Mohammed bin Zayed and attended the site of Expo 2020. Security was tight at the Expo, where the lavish Saudi pavilion was closed to visitors and a small crowd of onlookers, including women in black robes, gathered outside.

Saudi songs, including one with the lyrics "Welcome Mohammed", were playing on the loudspeaker at Al Wasl Plaza, the site's central venue. The two countries released a joint statement yesterday, saying they were committed to "enhancing the unity and stability of the Gulf Cooperation Council", which includes Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and Qatar. The Saudi prince had arrived in the UAE from Oman, where the two sides signed agreements potentially totaling \$30 billion, and will also visit Bahrain today and then head to Kuwait. — AFP

## India defense chief killed in...

Continued from Page 1

resulted in a warlike situation along the Himalayan front". Footage from the crash showed a crowd of people trying to extinguish the fiery wreck with water buckets while a group of soldiers carried one of the passengers away on an improvised stretcher.

Rawat was headed to the Defense Services Staff College (DSSC) to address students and faculty from the nearby Sulur air force base in Coimbatore. The chopper was already making its descent at the time of the crash and came down around 10 km from the nearest main road, forcing emergency workers to trek to the accident site, a fire official told AFP. An eyewitness at the scene said he had seen passengers falling from the helicopter before the crash, and that one person had crawled out from the wreckage.

The sole survivor, a captain working at the DSSC, was being treated for his injuries at a nearby military

## Women can join...

Continued from Page 1

financial status annually, which it did not do previously. Sheikh Hamad cautioned that cutting expenses doesn't mean Kuwait is not ready to defend itself in

case of any emergency. "We just received new tanks that were specifically made for Kuwait. We will also receive new aircraft and helicopters," he pointed out.

Sheikh Hamad hailed the success of the 'Be One of Them' campaign, during which 3,120 volunteers joined the army. "We didn't expect this huge number, as we only saw 4,353 people join in the previous four years," he said.

Local

News in brief

**Kuwait, Cook Islands sign deal**

**KUALA LAMPUR:** Kuwait signed a joint agreement with Cook Islands to establish diplomatic relations. Kuwait Ambassador in New Zealand Ahmad Al-Wuhaib said yesterday that he signed the agreement with Cook Islands High Commissioner to New Zealand Elizabeth Wright. Waheeb stated that the importance of relations with the Cook Islands lies in the political, economic, investment and tourism fields, pointing out that Cook Islands have promising investment and tourism opportunities and is an active member of many UN organizations and agencies.

**Deputy FM attends session on Iran**

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Magdi Al-Dhufairi Tuesday took part in a remote briefing session held between GCC officials and US Special Envoy for Iran Robert Malley. During the briefing held through an audio-visual technology, the officials discussed the outcomes of the final round of negotiations between the UN Security Council permanent member states and Germany on one hand, and Iran on the other.

# Kuwait Amir receives Crown Prince, Assembly Speaker, Prime Minister



**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday at Dar Al-Yamama, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Amir also received National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem, as well as His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. —KUNA

## Kamco Invest commits to women empowerment principles

**KUWAIT:** Kamco Invest, a regional non-banking financial powerhouse with one of the largest AUMs in the region, participated in the 'Driving Women's Empowerment Forward: Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) and the Role of Business to Accelerate Equality in the Workplace' event which showcased Kuwait's developments in the area of women empowerment, and welcomed new members into the initiative.

This initiative is part of Kamco Invest's commitment to establishing a business model that incorporates the UN Sustainable Development Goals within its business functions. As of recent, the Company has begun to take major strides towards environmental, social and governance aspects to further imbed a sustainability mindset into the Companywide strategy, which enables it to add long-lasting value to its stakeholders. Through these collaborations, Kamco Invest can gain a more competitive advantage and have a lasting and more resounding positive impact on the national economy.

As an avid supporter of UN SDG 5 which stands for gender equality, and in line with its long-standing commitment to implement a sustainable development plan, Kamco Invest expressed its dedication towards the global WEP movement and announced its new role as a dedicated member of the cause.

The event was co-hosted by the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development, the European Union Delegation to the State of Kuwait, UNDP, UN Women, Al-Hamra Real Estate Co, the Women's Research and Studies Center at the College of Social Sciences at Kuwait University and supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kuwait. Organized as part of an initiative to enhance women's empowerment in the Kuwaiti private sector, the event served as a follow up to the EU-Kuwait informal Human Rights Dialogue.

Representing Kamco Invest, Nawal Mulla-Hussain, Managing Director of Support Operations, delivered a heartfelt speech highlighting the

Company's stand and approach to ensuring gender equality in the workplace.

Commenting on Kamco Invest's participation, Mulla-Hussain said, "We are proud to have become members of the women's empowerment movement in Kuwait, a subject that we hold dearly close to our individual and corporate values at Kamco Invest. Committing to the Women's Empowerment Principles falls in line with our corporate culture and our strong belief in providing every individual an equal opportunity to excel within our organization, regardless of their gender."

Dr Lubna Alkazi, Director of Women's Research and Studies Center at Kuwait University, commented, "Kamco Invest is the first investment company to join the Women's Empowerment Principles. Being a major investment Company, it will encourage other investment companies to join the WEPs community. By expanding to include the financial sector, not only are we achieving women's empowerment in the private sector, but also the vision of New Kuwait 2035."

Under its sustainable development plan, the Company also extends its social responsibility to empowering the youth across various educational initiatives that aim to assist the younger generation in successfully building their future careers.



Mulla-Hussain concluded, "Through this cause-driven initiative, in addition to the activities organized under our corporate social responsibility program, Kamco Invest strives to contribute towards this global movement that not only highlights the importance of women's inclusiveness and empowerment, but also works proactively to progress towards a more sustainable future, economy, and society. In this regard, Kamco Invest will continue to build on its sustainable development program and further develop a sustainable business model that paves the way for building the aspired modern state."

## Kuwait receives two Eurofighter Typhoons from Italy

**TURIN:** Kuwait Air Force received on Tuesday the first batch of two Eurofighter Typhoons from Italy's Leonardo Group, the manufacturer of the world's most advanced new generation swing-role combat aircraft. The handing-over ceremony, held at Caselle airbase in Turin province, north Italy, gathered, Ambassador to Italy Sheikh Azzam Al-Sabah and Deputy Commander of the Air Force Air Vice-Marshal Staff Bandar Al-Mezyen and other military top brass from Kuwait, as well as Marco Zoff - the Managing Director of the Aircraft Division at Leonardo, and Herman Claesen - the CEO of Eurofighter. The two aircraft of "the Kuwaiti Eurofighter Typhoon squadron," will arrive in Kuwait next week, Air Vice-Marshal Staff Al-Mezyen said on the sidelines of the ceremony. "This is a milestone in our comprehensive strategy to bring about a quantum leap in the preparedness of Kuwait Air Force and the fruit of long a history of the defense cooperation with Italy, notably Leonardo Group," he noted. The State of Kuwait has made tremendous efforts to acquire a Eurofighter Typhoon squadron since 2015 with a view to securing the best aircraft that can meet the current and future needs of the defense forces, he said, commending the efforts of the Kuwaiti leadership in this regard.

"The new squadron of aircraft meets the world's latest standards of multi-role fighters in terms of electronic warfare, the fastest ability to respond, the advanced and diversified missile weaponry, and new E-scan radar (CAPTOR-E)," he pointed out. "This will give momentum to the national defense abilities and upgrade the skills of the Kuwaiti military pilots," he said, praising the partnership with the Italian Air Force. The expanded cooperation with the Italian Leonardo Group helped ensure that the design of the latest generation of these aircraft best suits the Kuwaiti standards, Air Vice-Marshal Al-Mezyen went on.

Meanwhile, Ambassador Sheikh Azzam took

pride in "this great strategic achievement," saying it opens wide horizons for the defense partnership with Italy. He lauded Italy's great role in supporting peace, security and stability in the Arabian Gulf region and in the world at large. "This achievement falls in the framework of decades of cooperation and solidarity between both countries in the face of common risks since the Kuwait liberation war," Ambassador Sheikh Azzam noted. "The Eurofighter project is not only an aircraft acquisition deal but also a milestone in the Kuwaiti strategy to upgrade its defense forces and a crucial moment in the close friendship between both countries," he affirmed.

"Today's achievement opens a new chapter in the defense cooperation between Kuwait and Italy and lays the groundwork of the development of the industrial, technical, educational and training sectors in the State of Kuwait," the Kuwaiti diplomat added. On a similar note, Zoff said the delivery of two Typhoons to Kuwait opens a new important chapter in not only the industrial cooperation but the bilateral relations as well. Leonardo Group, besides handing over the world's most advanced aircraft to Kuwait Air Force, is conveying a full range of integrated technical service that will upgrade the Kuwaiti defense capabilities, he noted.

Meanwhile, Eurofighter CEO Claesen welcomed Kuwait joining the Eurofighter family, noting that the multi-purpose twin-engine, supersonic aircraft incorporates the latest technologies and is manufactured using advanced materials, industrial processes and assembly techniques. The fusion of the aircraft's on-board active and passive sensors gives pilots superior situational awareness and net-centric operational capability.

The Eurofighter Typhoon, selected by nine Air Forces, has flown over 580,000 hours, from Europe to the South Atlantic and the Middle East, he added. At the end of the ceremony, Ambassador Azzam, Air Vice-Marshal Staff Al-Mezyen Eurofighter CEO Claesen, Managing Director of Leonardo Aircraft Division Zoff and Group Captain Staff Sultan Al-Sabah signed their names on a commemorative plaque on this occasion. The Kuwaiti delegation to the event also included Brig Staff Essam Al-Aboud, Col Faisal Al-Seif, Col Thafer Al-Ajmy, and Col Ahmad Al-Meseibeih, as well as military attache in Rome Commodore Staff Khaled Al-Otaibi and head of Eurofighter Program Col Saleh Al-Matar. —KUNA



**TURIN:** Kuwait's Ambassador to Italy Sheikh Azzam Al-Sabah and Deputy Commander of the Air Force Air Vice-Marshal Staff Bandar Al-Mezyen with other military top brass. —KUNA

## On the occasion of the



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## DHAMAN receives HR Professional Excellence Award

**KUWAIT:** Health Assurance Hospitals Company (DHAMAN) announced that its Director of Human Resources Department Ahmad Bourisli earned the HR Professional Excellence Award 2021 in the healthcare sector from the World Medical Council during a ceremony held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. DHAMAN expressed overall pride for presenting such a prestigious international award to Bourisli, which represents a significant form of recognition for the efforts of the company's HR department and encouragement to realize additional efficiency to realize the company's objectives.

Bourisli received this award for excellence in HR management and in recognition of his professional excellence and outstanding contribution in this field. In addition, on the sidelines of the ceremony, Bourisli participated in a panel discussion addressing the challenges facing the HR sector and future innovative approach to enhance the competency of medical professionals.

DHAMAN affirmed that being one of the strategic elements within the development plan New Kuwait 2035, it dedicates great attention to attracting national human resources to work in this new sector of healthcare in Kuwait. The company has developed an integrated employment plan to provide the medical, technical, as well as administrative staff from various specialties and related professional fields in the healthcare sector, which is expected to provide 7,000 job opportunities over the next few years with a considerable percentage of national employees.



## KFH raises awareness on rights of persons with special needs

**KUWAIT:** In line with its commitment to promoting financial inclusion in society, Kuwait Finance House (KFH) endeavors to obliterate all obstacles that would prevent customers with special needs from availing the bank's financial and banking



# Kuwaiti people looking forward to Saudi Crown Prince's visit: Foreign Minister

## Investment, security, renewable energy among topics of discussion

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah said the planned important visit to Kuwait by Saudi Crown Prince, Deputy Premier and Minister of Defense Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud would be an addition to the strong bilateral relations. The Saudi Crown Prince will hold talks with His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the minister told reporters on the sidelines of his participation in a function held Tuesday by the Qatari embassy in Kuwait to celebrate their National Day. He added that Kuwaiti people are looking forward to this important visit by Prince Mohamad bin Salman. Sheikh Dr Ahmad congratulated the Qatari Amir, government and people on their National Day, wished Qatar further progress and stability. He hailed the strong and steadily progressing Kuwaiti-Qatari relations. The top diplomat said high hopes are pinned on the upcoming summit of the leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council for boosting joint action and cementing unity among member states.

### Key visit

Prince Mohammad bin Salman is expected in Kuwait later this week to discuss a host of issues of interest to both countries and Gulf Cooperation Council in general before the GCC summit, due in the Kingdom this month. "The visit comes at an important time and before the GCC Summit in Riyadh this month, which indicates that the visit is to further unify positions for the best interest of the two countries and the GCC countries in general," Kuwait's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Sheikh Ali Khaled Al-Sabah said in a statement to the press yesterday. Prince Mohammad bin Salman, also Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, will also discuss investment and facilitating investing procedures, as well as increasing trade exchange, said Sheikh Ali. The two sides, he added, would also discuss boosting security cooperation and exchange of information to strengthen security and stability of the two countries in particular in the region in general. Energy and renewable energy issues will feature high on the agenda as well, he said. The Saudi Crown Prince will be accompanied by a delegation of government officials and businessmen who will meet their

Kuwaiti counterparts with ultimate goal of achieving objectives of Kuwait's 2035 Vision and Saudi Arabia's 2030 Vision, said Sheikh Ali.

Kuwait and Saudi Arabia has always shared a special bond, which was built on friendship and unity for decades, and the Crown Prince's visit reflects on the relationship the two countries have. Political Science Professor at Kuwait University, Dr Massouma Al-Mubarak stressed yesterday the importance of the Saudi Crown Prince's visit to Kuwait and its role in strengthening the relations between the two countries. Saudi Arabia has come a long way in advancing cooperation with the region and showed a positive outcome which "we will witness its significance in the near future," she noted.

Meanwhile, Political Science Professor at Kuwait University Dr Ibrahim Al-Hadban said that with the GCC Summit approaching, several point of views and opinions were exchanged between the leaders, and that the official visit reflects on the strong ties Kuwait and Saudi Arabia share. Dr Hadban also added that the Saudi diplomacy recently intensified their activity in the region, pointing out that the visits the crown prince is making around the GCC revives the cooperation between the countries. Kuwait and Saudi Arabia signed in 2018 the establishment of the Saudi-Kuwait Coordination Council, which is considered a new start in developing cooperation between the two countries.

### Unremitting collaboration

Gulf and Saudi figures said Prince Mohammad bin Salman's visit to Kuwait as part of a Gulf tour reflects incessant coordination and firm ties between both countries' leaders and peoples. Assistant Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) for Political Affairs and Negotiations Abdulaziz Al-Owaishek said the visit reaffirms the central and deep-rooted relationship between the kingdom and Kuwait. He said that Saudi Arabia marks the strategic depth for Kuwait, while Kuwait constitutes the strategic and cultural extension for the kingdom. He added that both nations share the same evaluation of challenges and perils haunting the region, and are agreed that they need to be addressed through close cooperation, unity, and political, diplomatic, military and security collaboration.

The GCC official noted that both countries are economic partners, given that their two-way trade exchange



Saudi Crown Prince, Deputy Premier and Minister of Defense Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud.

exceeds \$2 billion dollars per annum, and Saudi investments in Kuwait are estimated at over \$1 billion, while Kuwait has great investments in the Saudi market. He pointed out available opportunities for both sides to promote Saudi-Kuwaiti trade exchange and investments through Saudi Arabia's 2030 development vision and Kuwait's 2035 development vision, which both aim at diversifying national economies and curtailing reliance on oil. He underlined that the Saudi Crown Prince's visit to Kuwait this week would unquestionably lead to cementing this strategic partnership in all domains, and strengthening inter-Gulf action.

Dr Ali Al-Debkel, a media professor at King Saud University, spoke highly of the visit as being of paramount significance at this time in particular due to regional crises and "foreign interferences" in the region's internal affairs. He emphasized that inter-Gulf integrity, coordination and unified stances are urgently required ahead of the forthcoming Gulf summit due this month. The Saudi professor went on saying that persistent coordination between both sides' leaderships is essential for producing a single Gulf policy that could be conducive to broader Arab unity. He believed that several issues pertinent to Saudi-Kuwaiti cooperation and collaboration, including stands at the OPEC+ alliance, as well as bilateral investments and trade, will be discussed. Both sides are also expected to consider other significant Arab issues, mainly Palestine, Lebanon, Libya and Yemen where Kuwait has played a substantial role and tried hard to

resolve the Yemeni crisis, he noted.

### 130 years of bonds

Meanwhile, Secretary-General of the Saudi Journalists Association and Deputy Chairman of the Federation of Arab Journalists Abdullah Al-Jahlan said the visit is an extension of consultation and coordination between the Gulf countries. The visit, which mirrors 130 years of deep-rooted and firm bonds, comes ahead of the coming Gulf summit due this month, he said, hoping that the tour would lead to putting agreements and projects in place. He expected both sides to tackle the security situation in the Gulf region and the entire Arab region, together with economic, oil and trade issues.

Echoing Al-Jahlan's views, professor of political science Mnef Al-Malafekh said that the Saudi Crown Prince's visit to Kuwait reflects time-tested relations between the kingdom and Kuwait and the depth of political history of both Gulf nations. Gulf political, economic, military and security topics will be on top of the tour's agenda, given that the Gulf region is of strategic and vital significance, he said. The Saudi professor believed that talks between the Saudi Crown Prince and the Kuwaiti leadership will touch upon concerns over foreign interference in the domestic affairs of Gulf countries, in addition to attempts to destabilize regional security. The Saudi Crown Prince's visit to Kuwait is part of his Gulf tour that started in Oman on Monday and includes the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait. Saudi Arabia will be hosting the 42nd session of the GCC Summit due in mid-December. —KUNA

services.

As part of its CSR program, KFH continues its active participation in the banking awareness campaign 'Diraya', launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait in collaboration with Kuwait Banking Association by publishing educational and awareness materials on social media platforms and on bank's e-channels. This process aims to shed light on persons with special needs and provide all possible means to ensure that they receive all banking services without any additional fees or costs.

According to CBK instructions on services provided by banks to people with special needs, KFH is keen on providing a special branch in each governorate, appropriate car parking, slopes, and elevators to enable wheelchair customers to have an easy entry and exit to the branch and use ATMs and other facilities. There are sufficient wheelchairs in each branch for special needs customers.

Within its endeavor, KFH seeks to provide one ATM at least in each branch for customers with special needs, which can be accessed easily through a slope allocated for wheel chaired persons and that would provide full privacy to the customer in a card operated glass room equipped with earphone usage facility.

KFH provides all service-related information including customer's rights and obligations in a way appropriate to the customer's physical condition. Therefore, there is a dedicated well-trained employee to serve special needs customers in sign language. The branch has Braille printing facilities for account opening, contracts, and the other transaction forms.

Furthermore, KFH provides customers with special needs with easily accessible, comfortable, and appropriate safe deposits and the same banking services provided to other customers including credit and finance facilities without any extra charges, interest, returns, fees or other charges.

KFH organizes training sessions for its employees to learn and master certain skills to deal with special needs customers e.g., sign language to deal with persons having a hearing disability, reception rules and regulations of persons with special needs at branches and points of sale, giving them the priority along with aged customers, understand their needs and provide them with the automated machines and e-channels that would match their technical requirements.

## NCCAL organizes children workshops at Expo Dubai 2020

**DUBAI:** Kuwait's National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) has organized two workshops for children in the Kuwaiti pavilion at Expo Dubai 2020. Kuwaiti writer Amal Al-Randi gave a lecture

during the first workshop titled 'How to write a story', while the second lecture about art and crafts was presented by Kuwaiti artist Sharefah Al-Zamami. Randi said that stories were one of the best tools that enhance the children's ability to create, listen, and respond. Furthermore, reading also helps in strengthening communication skills, she added. In another statement, Zamami said that she was accepting schoolchildren at her workshop, which focus on coloring and forming handicrafts. The workshop will last five days, and aims to boost children's motor and mental skills, Zamami added. —KUNA



DUBAI: Amal Al-Randi's workshop in the Kuwaiti pavilion at Expo Dubai 2020. —KUNA photos



Sharefah Al-Zamami's workshop.



'We're not giving up': Radio station for Afghan women

## Canada proposes treatment over jail for minor drug crimes

Page 6

Page 7



WASHINGTON: In this image released by The White House, US President Joe Biden (R), with Secretary of State Antony Blinken (2nd R) speaks with Russian President Vladimir Putin (on screen) from the White House in Washington. —AFP

# Biden warns Putin of 'strong' response

## Strong Western economic blowback against any attack on Ukraine

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden warned President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday of "strong" Western economic blowback against any Russian attack on Ukraine, while the Kremlin leader demanded guarantees that the NATO alliance keep clear of Russia.

The two leaders met by video link in a two-hour summit seen as a vital chance to defuse tension on the Russian-Ukrainian frontier, where Russia has deployed up to 100,000 troops, sparking fears of a major war in Europe.

Russia denies planning to invade Ukraine, where it already seized swaths of territory in 2014. However, Biden made clear that economic pain, perhaps including "risk" to Russia's new Nord Stream 2 natural gas pipeline supplying Europe, would follow if it does.

"President Biden voiced the deep concerns of the United States and our European allies about Russia's escalation of forces surrounding Ukraine," the White House said in a statement.

Biden "made clear that the US and our allies would respond with strong economic and other measures in the event of military escalation." The US leader also "called for de-escalation and a return to diplomacy," the statement said.

In its own readout, the Kremlin said Putin blamed NATO for tensions in Ukraine and insisted on "legal guarantees" against the Western military alliance

expanding its forces any closer to Russia.

Reflecting the tense atmosphere, Biden was shown in an official photograph sitting behind closed doors with the secretary of state and national security advisor in the White House's Situation Room. Putin, at his resort residence in Sochi, was pictured alone at a long table in front of the video screen.

### Russian denial

The United States says it doesn't know for sure what Russia intends in Ukraine. Russia already supports a powerful separatist rebellion across swaths of eastern Ukraine and annexed the Crimean peninsula from Kiev in 2014. Moscow describes accusations that it is preparing to invade as "hysteria."

"Russian troops are on their territory, they are threatening no one," Putin's top foreign policy adviser Yuri Ushakov told reporters after the video summit.

Instead, Putin says that he sees Ukraine's growing alliance with Western nations as a threat to

Russian security — and that any move by Ukraine to join NATO or to host NATO missiles would be unacceptable.

"Russia is seriously interested in obtaining reliable legal guarantees that will exclude NATO's eastward expansion and the deployment of offensive strike weapons in countries adjacent to Russia," the Kremlin said.

While Ukraine is nowhere near being able to join NATO, the United States and NATO say Russia cannot be given a veto over Ukraine's Western-leaning ambitions.

Biden's national security advisor, Jake Sullivan, told reporters that Biden "made no such commitments or concessions."

### Pipeline in crosshairs?

There is no Western appetite for sending US or European troops into direct military conflict with Russia, leaving limited options for pressuring Moscow. Sullivan said there were sanctions that Washington had held off from in 2014 but was "prepared to do now."

One clear target could be the new Nord Stream 2 pipeline, which has yet to begin delivering natural

gas to Germany. Sullivan said the pipeline's future was at "risk" if Russia does invade Ukraine.

"It is leverage for the West, because if Vladimir Putin wants to see gas flow through that pipeline, he may not want to take the risk of invading Ukraine," he said. Sullivan said that an attack on Ukraine would also prompt calls from NATO's eastern European members for increased US military commitments, and the White House would "respond positively to those things."

Biden talked with the leaders of Britain, France, Germany and Italy after he finished with Putin.

They "underscored their support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as the need for Russia to reduce tensions," the White House said. Biden was due to reach out to Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky today.

### Zelensky to the front

Clad in a combat uniform, Zelensky visited troops fighting pro-Moscow separatists in the country's east on Monday.

"Thank you for protecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine," Zelensky told the soldiers, according to a statement released by Kiev.

The conflict has claimed more than 13,000 lives, and while Ukrainian forces are deadlocked against their separatist opponents, they would likely be overwhelmed by Russian regular troops. —AFP

“ US leader called for de-escalation and return to diplomacy ”

## Rocket carrying Japanese tycoon docks at ISS

BAIKONUR: A Russian rocket carrying a Japanese billionaire docked with the International Space Station yesterday, marking the country's return to space tourism after a decade-long pause that saw the rise of competition from the United States.

Online fashion tycoon Yusaku Maezawa and his assistant Yozo Hirano blasted off from the Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan earlier yesterday.

They docked with the Poisk module of the Russian segment of the ISS at 1340 GMT, the Russian space agency said. "We have contact," Roscosmos tweeted.

Their journey aboard the three-person Soyuz spacecraft piloted by cosmonaut Alexander Misurkin took just over six hours, capping a banner year that many have seen as a turning point for private space travel.

Billionaires Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos and Richard Branson all made breakthrough commercial tourism flights this year, bursting into a market Russia is keen to defend.

A crowd at the launch site — including Maezawa's family and friends — braved freezing temperatures and cheered as the rocket blasted off into the grey sky, leaving a trail of orange flames before disappearing in the clouds.

"This has been a long process. It's so moving. I was about to cry," said Ryo Okubo, a lawyer for Maezawa's space



BAIKONUR: Japanese billionaire Yusaku Maezawa waves before boarding the Soyuz MS-20 spacecraft prior to the launch at the Baikonur cosmodrome yesterday. —AFP

projects. "I'm really excited but he's also my friend so I'm worried about him," a longtime friend of the billionaire, 44-year-old Hiroyuki Sugimoto, told AFP.

Among the revellers was a family-of-three who won spots at the launch from out of a million applicants. The brother and sister were holding hand-drawn banners with Maezawa's face inside a sunflower and a picture of a rocket.

The trio will spend 12 days on the station where the Japanese tourists will document their daily life aboard the ISS for Maezawa's popular YouTube channel.

The 46-year-old billionaire has set out 100 tasks to complete onboard, including

hosting a badminton tournament. The ISS is home to an international crew of seven people including two Russian cosmonauts and a Japanese astronaut.

Russia's Anton Shkaplerov welcomed the trio. "We have already prepared dinner for you," he tweeted. "We are waiting for the hatches to open in a couple of hours!"

Maezawa also plans to take eight people with him on a 2023 mission around the moon operated by Musk's SpaceX. He and his assistant are the first private Japanese citizens to visit space since journalist Toyohiro Akiyama travelled to the Mir station in 1990. Russia has a history of shepherding self-funded tourists to space. —AFP

## US drone strike hits Syria family

AL-RAMI: Ahmad Qassum was driving home with his family when a US drone targeting an Al-Qaeda-linked militant in Syria struck and left all six of them wounded.

"We came across a motorbike that was driving in front of us, and when I tried to overtake it, I felt a strike hit us," the 52-year-old displaced Syrian told AFP from his wife's family home in Idlib province. Shrapnel from the attack, he said, turned his vehicle into a "pool of blood".

It wounded his wife and four children, including his nine-year-old son Mahmud who is still in intensive care for a serious head injury.

"I didn't know who to save first," Qassum said, recalling the moments immediately after the attack.

Idlib is a region dominated by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham alliance, which is led by Syria's former Al-Qaeda affiliate. For years, a US-led international coalition in Syria and Iraq has conducted air raids that are aimed at jihadists but often kill and maim civilians. They include a drone strike on Friday that the Pentagon said killed a "senior leader" of the Al-Qaeda-linked Hurras al-Deen faction.

"The initial review of the strike did indicate the potential for possible civilian casualties," Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby said.

Washington has "launched a civil-

ian casualty assessment report," he told reporters on Monday.

### 'Compensation'

Qassum's family was driving back to the northern town of Afrin when the strike hit a man riding the motorcycle ahead of them.

They had spent a few days visiting relatives in Idlib, their first such trip in nine months, before their family holiday took a tragic turn.

"What did we do that justifies the Americans bombing us?" Qassum said, one hand wrapped in a bandage, while the other fiddled with a rosary bead. "We want compensation... and those who did this to us should be held to account."

The US-led coalition has disclosed at least 1,417 civilian deaths since it started operations against the Islamic State group (IS) in Syria and Iraq in 2014. But the actual number of civilians killed is believed to be higher.

A New York Times investigation last month found the US concealed a March 2019 strike near IS's last Syria bastion of Baghuz that killed 70 people, mainly women and children.

Drawing from confidential documents, interviews with personnel directly involved and officials with top security clearance, the newspaper found the strike "was one of the largest civilian casualty incidents of the war against the Islamic State," albeit never publicly acknowledged by the US military.

The Pentagon said last month it had opened an investigation into the incident. —AFP

## International

# 'In no circumstances' is forced vaccination OK: UN rights chief

## HIV infections drop, but COVID hampers fight

**GENEVA Switzerland:** Countries considering introducing vaccine mandates in the fight against COVID-19 must ensure they respect human rights, the UN rights chief said yesterday, stressing that forced vaccination was never acceptable.

Speaking to a Human Rights Council seminar via video message, Michelle Bachelet warned there were significant rights considerations that needed to be taken into account before making vaccination compulsory. Any "vaccine mandates must comply with the principles of legality, necessity, proportionality and non-discrimination", she said, according to a transcript.

"In no circumstances should people be forcibly administered a vaccine."

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said the aims sought by countries mulling mandates to protect lives as Europe and other regions battle fierce surges in the pandemic, were "of course of the highest order of legitimacy and importance".

But she insisted that "vaccine mandates should be employed only when necessary for achieving compelling public health ends". "And they should only be considered when less intrusive measures such as mask-wearing and social distancing have demonstrably failed to meet such health needs."

She also emphasised that for any mandate to be acceptable, countries needed to ensure that vaccines are truly available and affordable.

"Unless all people have genuine, practical access to vaccines, vaccine requirements will not be con-

sistent with fundamental human rights principles of equality and non-discrimination," she said.

Bachelet also highlighted that "the actual vaccines employed must also be sufficiently safe and effective to achieve (the) public health aims."

Any mandatory vaccination regime also must be flexible enough to allow for "appropriate exceptions, such as where a vaccination is medically contra-indicated for an individual." Bachelet said it could be appropriate to restrict some rights and liberties, including conditioning access to schools, hospitals or other public spaces on vaccination.

But forced injections was never acceptable, she said, "even if a person's refusal to comply with a mandatory vaccination policy may entail other legal consequences, including, for example, appropriate fines".

"Where penalties are imposed, they should be proportionate and subject to review by judicial authorities," she said.

There needed to be "appropriate procedural safeguards, including the right to seek a justified exemption and the right to appeal any form of penalty

before a fair and independent authority," she insisted.

Looking forward, the UN rights chief said any vaccine mandates introduced "should be subject to frequent official review to ensure they remain necessary, proportionate and non-discriminatory."

Meanwhile, HIV infection rates in Africa have decreased markedly, but the continent is still behind set targets, with efforts slowed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Health



**CAPE TOWN:** A member of the Western Cape Metro EMS (Emergency Medical Services) helps people register from an ambulance which has been converted to facilitate vaccinations at a COVID 19 vaccination event in Manenberg, which is part of the Vaxi-Taxi mobile vaccination drive, yesterday. — AFP

Organization said Tuesday. "Africa has made significant progress against HIV over the past decade, reducing new infections by 43 percent and nearly halving AIDS-related deaths," the WHO Africa office said in a statement.

But it warned that Africa was not likely to meet a target to end AIDS as a public health threat by the turn of the decade as COVID has undermined the fight in many countries.

"COVID-19 has made the fight against HIV all the more challenging, but one virus must not win out over another. We must tackle COVID-19 and HIV in parallel," WHO Africa chief Matshidiso Moeti said. COVID has also slowed HIV screening rates because of restrictions of movements.

UNAIDS last week warned that HIV infection rates were not decreasing fast enough to reach the goal of eradicating AIDS by 2030. — AFP

“One virus must not win out over another”

”

## Morocco schools face 'crisis'

**RABAT:** Morocco's state schools are failing students and "deepening inequality", a supervisory body has warned, as authorities scramble to raise the quality of teaching after years of neglect. The High Council for Education (CSE) has warned of a "crisis" in public education and said that government schools "are not giving the majority of pupils basic skills or a fundamental education".

Despite a string of reforms, state schools "are becoming a machine for reproducing inequalities in society", said the CSE in a report last month, cautioning that this "poses a serious threat". The situation has pushed many, including middle class families, to tighten their belts so they can scrape together fees for private schools.

"I pay almost 400 euros a month," says Siham, an employee in the private sector. "It's a lot, but it's essential to guarantee that my two children get a better French and English education, which public school can't give them."

Just nine percent of students in state secondary schools pass exams in French, Arabic and mathematics—against 62, 38 and 49 percent respectively in private schools. "These figures are distressing; they show that we're raising illiterate citizens," said Abderazzak Drissi, head of the kingdom's National Teachers' Federation.

### 'Profound transformation'

The situation contrasts with the lofty goals of Morocco's "New Development Model" presented by a royal commission in May and laying out a string of targets to be met by 2035. The council's warning is just the latest in a string of official reports to raise the alarm over problems in the education system and the resulting high unemployment rate among youth, the age group hardest hit by social inequality.

Chakib Benmoussa, who took office as education minister in October, described the system as "painful". "Improving the quality of public education depends first of all on the quality of teacher training," he told parliament this month. The CSE report agreed, adding that some choose the profession for "lack of alternatives".

According to ministry figures, this year more than 100,000 candidates applied for fewer than 17,000 teaching jobs. Under Benmoussa, the ministry has brought in new rules requiring prospective teachers to be aged under 30 and have a university degree with distinction.

The aim is "to select the best candidates who really want to practice this profession, as is the case at medical or engineering schools", a ministry official told AFP. But while there is agreement on the problems, opinions vary on the solutions.

The new conditions sparked a backlash from the teachers' union and trainee teachers, with street demonstrations erupting last month. Drissi, the union member, said what was needed was "a tougher entrance exam, not an age limit". But the ministry official said that "now it is urgent to reform the education system. We've delayed too much." — AFP

## Canada proposes treatment over jail for minor drug crimes

**OTTAWA:** Canada on Tuesday proposed police and courts treat illicit drug use as a health issue, but stopped short of granting a request by British Columbia to decriminalize possession of small amounts for personal use.

Justice Minister David Lametti unveiled legislation that would roll back 20 mandatory minimum sentences including for minor drug crimes that the government said disproportionately impact indigenous and Black offenders.

The bill, which must still be passed by Parliament, also requires "police and prosecutors to consider diverting people to treatment programs or other supportive services" for simple possession offences, noting that criminal penalties can increase the stigma associated with drug use.

Substances abuse has left thousands dead in British Columbia. Its Addictions Minister Sheila Malcolmson told AFP the province is facing "an overdose crisis that's causing a terrible loss of life."

The pandemic has compounded its impacts, she said, as more and more people "are using drugs alone and often dying alone." "That tells us people are hiding their addiction from family and friends



**MAJURO, Marshall Islands:** File photo shows high-tide flooding in the Marshall Islands capital Majuro. A swathe of Pacific island nations were cleaning up yesterday after storms and tidal surges caused widespread flooding, with rising seas blamed for the inundation in the climate-change affected region. — AFP

## Rising seas blamed as flooding hits Pacific islands

**MAJURO:** Island nations in the South Pacific were cleaning up yesterday after storms and tidal surges triggered widespread flooding, with rising seas caused by climate change blamed for the inundation. The Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands and Federated States of Micronesia all reported flooding, with reports that remote parts of Vanuatu were also hit by rising waters.

"(The) government of the Federated States of Micronesia has been made aware of extensive salt-water inundation across the nation's islands as a result of ongoing king tides and storm surges," President David Panuelo said in a statement.

"The government has received numerous requests from citizens asking for support." In the Marshall Islands capital of Majuro, sea waters surged over boulder barriers and covered sections of road to the airport to a depth of 50 centimetres (20 inches) before receding. Solomon Islands police issued a

and are not talking to their primary health care provider about treatment options," she said.

In Ottawa, her federal counterpart Carolyn Bennett is still considering the decriminalization request, her office said.

But in an interview with public broadcaster CBC after a visit to Vancouver drug treatment sites, Bennett said decriminalization in British Columbia may provide "a very good template" for the rest of Canada. Lametti meanwhile told a news conference his bill "can help individuals dealing with addictions to get the treatment they need and avoid falling into a cycle of criminality."

### 'A step towards being real'

An estimated six British Columbians die each day from opioid-related drug poisoning, and roughly 8,000 have died since the province's chief public health officer, Bonnie Henry, declared the situation a public health emergency in 2016.

From January to July, 1,200 people died of overdoses, an increase of 28 percent over the same period last year, according to the British Columbia Coroners Service.

In addition to upping treatment and recovery services, British Columbia has asked Health Canada for an exemption to allow people 19 years or older to legally carry up to 4.5 grams of drugs such as heroin, fentanyl, methamphetamine, crack and cocaine without risking arrest.

"While the illicit drug poisoning crisis affects all people with substance use disorders — a recog-



David Lametti

nized disability — are disproportionately affected," the application states.

"All levels of government therefore have an obligation to minimize the mortality and morbidity risks of their policies and to not exacerbate any pre-existing inequities."

If the measure is approved, people caught with less than this amount would be given information on how to access local health and social services.

Most Canadians think it's a step in the right direction, according to an Angus Reid survey released last February that found 59 percent of Canadians support decriminalization of small amounts of drugs, a number that rises to 66 percent in British Columbia. — AFP

## Surge in piracy costing W Africa nations: UN

**NEW YORK:** The surge of maritime piracy in Africa's Gulf of Guinea is not just a threat to foreign ship and cargo owners but also carries significant costs for the coastal nations, a new UN report said Tuesday.

The newest hotspot for piracy saw 106 incidents in 2020 with 623 seafarers affected by kidnapping, according to the report, "Pirates of the Gulf of Guinea: A Cost Analysis for Coastal States."

The report, made together with the Stable Seas research group, said that most of the direct costs of the kidnappings and ship seizures would be borne by foreigners, with some \$5 million paid last year for kidnappings of mostly non-African ship crew members. But it said the countries along the Gulf of Guinea coast will pay far more than that to deal with the rise in piracy, from expanded patrols to rescue missions to greater security costs in ports.

The report estimates that those costs could be more than \$1.9 billion annually, diverting important resources from other crucial needs.

"After considering indirect financial damages and opportunity costs, it becomes clear that Gulf of Guinea nations have the most to gain from reducing piracy and armed robbery in the region," the report said.

"The frequency and violence of these attacks has preoccupied navies that could be addressing other maritime security threats, discouraged foreign investment, weakened state control of coastal and offshore areas, slowed the development of the blue economy, emboldened illicit traders and illegal fishers, and terrorized seafarer communities," it said.

"This has exacted a financial and human cost to Gulf of Guinea states that, to this point, has been seen as secondary to the costs borne by multinational shipping companies and non-African entities." — AFP

warning to residents to stay away from swollen rivers and streams.

Climate researcher Murray Ford said the flooding in the Marshalls was due to a combination of bad weather, high tides, a La Nina weather pattern and a long-term rise in sea levels, widely linked to global warming. "An event like this would have been relatively innocuous in the 1990s, but the sea level is notably higher today than back then," the Auckland University academic told AFP.

"Sea level rise is increasing the frequency and magnitude of these sorts of events," Ford said that tidal measuring equipment installed in Majuro in the early 1990s showed sea levels had risen by an average of 4.8 millimetres (0.2 inches) annually.

"Unfortunately, with steady sea-level rise, these flooding events will become more frequent, more widespread, and far more severe. We must plan and prepare for this now," said Majuro resident and former Marshall Islands chief secretary Ben Graham. The Pacific's low-lying islands are among the countries worst affected by climate change, with some at risk of being swamped entirely by rising seas.

They are also threatened by increasingly powerful cyclones, while droughts and flooding are becoming more common across the region as the weather swings from one extreme to the other. — AFP

## International

# 20 Bangladesh students sentenced to death for political murder

## Remaining five perpetrators were handed life terms

**DHAKA:** Bangladesh sentenced 20 university students to death yesterday for the 2019 murder of a young man who criticised the government on social media.

The battered body of Abrar Fahad, 21, was found in his dormitory hours after he wrote a Facebook post slamming Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for signing a water-sharing deal with India.

He was beaten with a cricket bat and other blunt objects for six hours by 25 fellow students who were members of the ruling Awami League's student wing, the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL).

"I am happy with the verdict," Fahad's father

Barkat Ullah told reporters outside court after the sentencing. "I hope the punishments will be served soon." The remaining five perpetrators were handed life terms.

All those given death sentences were between 20 and 22 years old at the time of the murder and attended the elite Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology alongside Fahad.

Three of the defendants are still at large while the rest were in the courtroom. Faruque Ahmed, a lawyer for some of the defendants, said the sentence would be appealed. "I am very disappointed at the verdict. It is not fair," he told AFP.

"They are young men and some of the best stu-

dents of the country. They were sentenced to death despite no proper evidence against some of them."

### 'Highest punishment'

Fahad had put up a post on Facebook that went viral hours before his death.

In it, he criticised the government for signing an accord that allowed India to take water from a river that lies on the boundary the two countries share.

Fahad had been seen — in leaked CCTV footage that went viral on social media — walking into a dormitory with some BCL activists.

About six hours later, his body was carried out by the students and laid on the ground. Protests in the days after Fahad's murder called for the attackers to be harshly punished and for the BCL to be banned.

Hasina vowed soon afterwards that the killers would get the "highest punishment". The country's justice minister Anisul Huq said the verdict showed that "nobody will be able to walk freely after committing such crimes".

Chhatra Odhikhar Parishad, a leading student group, held a demonstration to praise the verdict and demand quick execution of the death sentences. "The verdict is the victory of the people," said Akram Hossain, the group's general secretary.

The BCL has earned notoriety in recent years after some of its members were accused of killing,



**DHAKA:** Police escort one of the 20 convicted university students, after their sentence to death for the brutal 2019 murder of a young man who criticised the government on social media, out of a court in Dhaka yesterday. —AFP

violence and extortion. In 2018, its members allegedly used violence to suppress a major anti-government student protest. Those rallies were sparked by anger over road safety after a student was killed by a speeding bus.

Death sentences are common in Bangladesh with hundreds of people on death row. All executions are

by hanging, a legacy of the British colonial era.

In August, a court sentenced six Islamist extremists to death for the murders of two gay rights activists. Sixteen people were handed the death penalty in 2019 for burning alive a 19-year-old student who accused her seminary's headteacher of sexual harassment. — AFP

## Malaysian former premier loses corruption appeal

**PUTRAJAYA, Malaysia:** Former Malaysian leader Najib Razak lost his appeal against a corruption conviction and 12-year jail term yesterday, with the judge branding his actions a "national embarrassment" but allowing him to remain free.

The 68-year-old was found guilty on all counts last year in the first of several trials he is facing related to the looting of the 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) sovereign wealth fund. Najib and his cronies were accused of stealing billions of dollars from the investment vehicle, with the allegations contributing to his long-ruling coalition's ejection from power in 2018. The former prime minister's first trial was related to the transfer of 42 million ringgit (\$9.9 million) from a former 1MDB unit to his bank accounts. Najib—who has remained free on bail—denies wrongdoing, but the Court of Appeal upheld his conviction on charges including money-laundering and abuse of power. Judge Abdul Karim Abdul Jalil rejected the defence's argument that some of Najib's actions were in the national interest.

"There is no national interest here, only national embarrassment," he told the court in the administrative capital Putrajaya. Najib had "dishonestly misappropriated" the money, he added. Judge Karim also rejected Najib's defence that he believed the cash was a donation from Saudi royalty, saying there was "no evidence" for the claim.

But he agreed to a request for Najib to stay out of prison on bail while he lodges a final appeal with Malaysia's top court. Najib has been making a political comeback in recent months, campaigning for his party and presenting himself as a man of the people who defends the interests of the ethnic



**KUALA LUMPUR:** File photo taken on August 19, 2019 shows Malaysia's former prime minister Najib Razak arriving at the Kuala Lumpur High Court for his trial over 1MDB corruption allegations in Kuala Lumpur. —AFP

Malay Muslim majority.

He followed proceedings online after a member of his legal team tested positive for the coronavirus, and said he was "disappointed" with the verdict. "I did not know, nor did I ask nor did I order the transfer of 42 million ringgit to my account," he told reporters.

His lawyers had sought to delay yesterday's ruling over the COVID case in the legal team, and by seeking to introduce new evidence at the 11th hour as part of the appeal. But the court rejected both moves. Najib's final appeal to the top court will likely take months. If that fails, his only option will be a pardon from the king. If Najib—who remains an MP—loses the next court challenge, he will be jailed and barred from holding political office. Despite his conviction, he is still influential and popular among some voters—a group of supporters gathered outside court yesterday, urging the judges to rule in Najib's favour. The blue-blooded politician, whose father and uncle were both prime ministers, has about 4.6 million followers on Facebook, where he frequently comments on the news and criticises rivals. —AFP

## Shooter kills two in Moscow public services office

**MOSCOW:** A Russian army veteran killed two people and injured four more — including a 10-year-old girl — in a shooting inside a public services office in Moscow on Tuesday, city authorities and media reports said.

Russian news agencies reported that the shooter, who they identified as a 45-year-old former serviceman, believed the coronavirus pandemic to be a conspiracy theory and had refused to put on a mask. Mayor Sergei Sobyanin called the incident a "tragedy" and confirmed two people were killed by the gunman, who had been detained.

Deputy Mayor Anastasia Rakova said two employees of the public services centre — "an administrator and a security guard" — were killed in the shooting in southeastern Moscow.

She said four people were injured, including the girl. Doctors said the child had been wounded in the neck, and that she had undergone a successful operation. Three wounded adults were also operated on, authorities said.

The incident took place at a multi-functional government office that deals with a variety of administrative issues.

Rakova said the Ryazansky Public Offices Centre's staff and visitors were "immediately" evacuated when the shooting started at around 3:00 pm Moscow time (1200 GMT).

In a statement, the interior ministry said the man entered the centre "and started firing at the citizens there, after which he tried to hide".

A law enforcement officer who was at the scene "managed to catch and neutralise the attacker," the ministry added.

Policeman Georgy Domolayev told national television that he ran after the shooter, who he said had a gun and knife attached to his waist.

### 'Worldwide conspiracy'

Several Russian news agencies, citing law enforcement sources, said the gunman believed the coronavirus pandemic to be a conspiracy and that he began behaving aggressively after being told to put a mask on.

"He spoke about coronavirus and about a worldwide conspiracy," state news agency RIA Novosti cited a source as saying.

The shooter will undergo a psychiatric examination. Russia's Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes, launched a criminal probe into the shooting. In a statement, investigators said a man had entered a room in the government-run building and "opened fire with a firearm on the people who were in the room".

"Two people died on the spot from their injuries," the statement said.

Mass shootings in Russia are relatively rare. The country was rocked this year by two separate tragic killing sprees — one at a school, another at a university — spurring lawmakers to tighten laws regulating access to guns.

Authorities have blamed foreign influence for school shootings, saying young Russians have been exposed online and on television to gun attacks in the United States and elsewhere.

In one high-profile public shooting in 2019, a gunman opened fire near the FSB domestic intelligence agency headquarters in central Moscow, killing an officer and wounding five people.

Other high-profile shooting cases have taken place in Russia's army.

In November 2020, a 20-year-old soldier killed three fellow servicemen at a military base near the city of Voronezh south of Moscow. In a similar attack in 2019, a young recruit shot dead eight servicemen. — AFP

## 'We're not giving up': Radio station for Afghan women

**KABUL:** From Taliban-controlled Kabul, Radio Begum is broadcasting the voices of women that have been muted across Afghanistan. Station staff fill the airwaves with programming for women, by women: Educational shows, book readings and call-in counselling. For now, they operate with the permission of the hardline Islamists who regained power in August and have limited the ability for women to work and girls to attend school.

"We're not giving up," pledged 48-year-old Hamida Aman, the station's founder, who grew up in Switzerland after her family fled Afghanistan a few years after the Soviet Union invaded. "We have to show that we don't need to be scared," said Aman, who returned after the ousting of the Taliban's first regime in 2001 by US-led foreign forces. "We must occupy the public sphere."

### 'Vessel for voices'

The station was founded on March 8, International Women's Day, this year, five months before the Taliban marched into Kabul and finalise their defeat of the US-backed government.

From a working-class neighbourhood, it continues to broadcast across Kabul and surrounding areas — and live on Facebook. "Begum" was a noble title used in South Asia, and it now generally refers to a married Muslim woman.

"This station is a vessel for women's voices, their pain, their frustrations," Aman said.



**KABUL:** This picture taken on November 28, 2021 shows students attending a class on-air at Radio Begum in Kabul. From Taliban-controlled Kabul, Radio Begum is broadcasting the voices of women that have been muted across Afghanistan. —AFP

The Taliban granted permission for the broadcaster to stay on the airwaves in September, albeit with new curbs. Radio Begum's 10 or so employees used to share an office with male colleagues who worked on a youth radio station.

Now they are separated. Each sex has its own floor and a large opaque curtain has been installed in front of the women's office. Pop music has been replaced with traditional songs and "quieter music", Aman said. Nevertheless, staff members said working at the station was a "privilege", with many women government workers barred from returning to offices. The Taliban have yet to formalise many of their policies, leaving gaps in how they are implemented by the group across the country.

Most public secondary schools for girls have been shut since the takeover.

But twice a day the radio studio resembles a classroom. When AFP visited, six girls and three boys — all aged 13 or 14 — pored over their books as the presenter gave an on-air lesson about social justice. "Social justice is opposed to extremism," said the 19-year-old teacher, a student of journalism until a few months ago. "What is justice in Islam?" she asked.

Mursal, a 13-year-old girl, has been going to the studio to study since the Taliban blocked some secondary schools from reopening. "My message to girls who can't go to school is to listen to our program carefully, to use this golden chance and opportunity," she said. —AFP

## Dead or alive? On the trail of Taliban's supreme leader

**KANDAHAR:** When the Taliban overran Kabul in mid-August, seizing power for the second time, the years-old mystery over the whereabouts of the movement's Supreme Leader Hibatullah Akhundzada deepened further.

Whether the elderly cleric is alive or dead is something many Afghans are uncertain about, and even the most dedicated analysts have doubts about who is really leading the group. AFP went on the trail of the elusive leader, and the findings are inconclusive.

On October 30 — two months after a Taliban spokesman insisted Akhundzada was alive and well in Kandahar-rumours swirled in the southern city that the "emir" had delivered a speech at a Koranic school, or madrassa.

Taliban officials gave their stamp of authenticity to his appearance at the Hakimia madrassa, releasing a crackling audio recording lasting more than 10 minutes. "May God reward the oppressed people of Afghanistan who fought the infidels and the oppressors for 20 years," intones an aged and echoing voice, said to be that of Akhundzada.

His public profile had previously been largely limited to annual written messages released for Islamic holidays. In one of the poorest suburbs of Kandahar, between a litter-strewn stream and a dirt track, two Taliban fighters stand guard in front of the Hakimia madrassa's blue-and-white gate. It has become something of a magnet since October 30, attracting curious-albeit respectfully distant-crowds of Taliban supporters.

When the supreme leader visited, he was "armed" and accompanied by "three security guards", the madrassa's head of security Massum Shakrullah told AFP. "Even cellphones and sound recorders" were not allowed into the venue, he added.

One of the students, Mohammed, 19, said "we all were watching him and were just crying". Asked if he could confirm that it was definitely Akhundzada, Mohammed said he and his peers were so overjoyed that they "forgot to watch... his face". —AFP

# Business

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2021

## EU wants new trade powers to fight foreign bad actors

### 'Anti-coercion' tool to counter potential dirty tricks

**BRUSSELS:** The European Commission yesterday launched a bid to equip Brussels with new powers to swiftly retaliate against efforts by foreign governments to undermine the European economy and businesses. The EU executive has not been specific about who would be targeted with the new powers to impose regulatory controls on foreign goods and to deny government contracts and research grants to foreign firms.

The package is to be known as an "anti-coercion" tool. The plan's main backers pushed for the new weapon in the wake of Donald Trump's presidency, when EU officials felt unfairly targeted by the whims of the US leader, especially on trade.

Potential dirty tricks by China and Russia are also thought to be on the minds of the tool's backers, which was demanded by the European Parliament, where the desire for a vigorous EU foreign policy is strong. It is also tied in with France's ambition for Europe to exercise "strategic autonomy" against the global supremacy of the US and China, which is seen as increasingly destabilizing and unpredictable.

"With this proposal we are sending a clear message that the EU will stand firm in defending its interests," EU executive vice president Valdis Dombrovskis said. "The main aim of the anti-coercion tool is to act as a deterrent. But we now also have more tools at our disposal when pushed to act," he said.

Under current law, decision-making on

European foreign policy requires unanimity among the 27 member states, making a robust response during a geo-political crisis very difficult. The new powers could arguably be used in situations similar to when Lithuania complained last week that its exports had been banned by China, because Vilnius allowed a Taiwanese diplomatic representation to be opened on its soil.

The EU cautioned however that they would not be available to respond to trade disputes, which can be handled at the World Trade Organization, or in any matters governed by EU trade deals, such as with Britain.

#### No problem?

As proposed, the EU's executive in Brussels would have a list of options to answer economic intimidation by foreign governments, with member states only given the ability to stop the riposte if a qualified majority of countries decided to do it. These could include freezing access to public contracts, holding up health and safety authorizations on certain products or bans from EU-funded research projects.

"The instrument is there to fend off any third country from pressuring the EU or its member states in a way that would seek to interfere in our domestic affairs in violation of customary international law," an EU official said. The commission's plan now goes to parliament and to the EU's member states, where some governments already have



**BRUSSELS:** EU executive vice president Valdis Dombrovskis said "With this proposal we are sending a clear message that the EU will stand firm in defending its interests."

big questions about the need for handing such unprecedented powers to Brussels.

They argue that anything that goes outside the conflict-resolution practices at the World

Trade Organization would be unwise. In a government paper, the Swedish government doubted "the problem is large enough to justify the proposal." —AFP

## Google disrupts cybercrime web infecting 1m devices

**WASHINGTON:** Google said Tuesday it has moved to shut down a network of about one million hijacked electronic devices used worldwide to commit online crimes, while also suing Russia-based hackers the tech giant claimed were responsible. The so-called botnet of infected devices, which was also used to surreptitiously mine bitcoin, was cut off at least for now from the people wielding it on the internet.

"The operators of Glupteba are likely to attempt to regain control of the botnet using a backup command and control mechanism," wrote Shane Huntley and Luca Nagy from Google's threat analysis group. Large technology companies like Google and Microsoft are increasingly pulled into the battle against cybercrime, which is conducted via their products thus giving them unique understanding of



and access to the threats.

Google said the network includes about one million Windows-using devices worldwide for crimes that include stealing users' credentials, and has targeted victims from the United States, India, Brazil and southeast Asia. The company also filed a lawsuit in a New York federal court against Dmitry Starovikov and Alexander Filipov seeking an injunction to block them from wrongdoing on its platforms.

Cybersecurity experts first noticed Glupteba in

2011, which spreads by masquerading as free, downloadable software, videos or movies that people unwittingly download onto their devices. However, unlike conventional botnets that rely on predetermined channels to ensure their survival, Glupteba is programmed to find a replacement server in order to keep operating even after being attacked, says Google's lawsuit.

Because the botnet web combines the power of some one million devices it possesses unusual power that could be used for large-scale ransomware or other attacks. To maintain that network, the organization "uses Google advertisements to post job openings for the websites" carrying out the illegal work. The hackers also used Google's own services to distribute the malware: the internet giant took down some 63 million Google Docs and terminated over 1,100 Google accounts used to spread Glupteba.

The botnets can "recover more quickly from disruptions, making them that much harder to shut down. We are working closely with industry and government as we combat this type of behavior," Google said in a blog post. —AFP

Qazi added. But bondholders are likely to face deep haircuts, and even if restructuring provide some answers, the broader impact of Beijing's sweeping property crackdown remains to be seen.

#### What about other Chinese developers?

At least 10 property firms have defaulted on bonds since concerns started to grow over Evergrande in June. Hong Kong-listed Sunshine 100 defaulted after missing a deadline to make \$179 million in payments this week, and Kaisa failed in a debt swap to buy crucial time for raising cash. Property firms made up 36 percent of the \$10.2 billion of offshore bonds that Chinese borrowers defaulted on this year, Bloomberg said.

#### How will China's economy be impacted?

The People's Bank of China said last week that Evergrande's problems came from its own "poor management and blind expansion" in a bid to reassure investors. Regulators have said they would safeguard the rights of homebuyers, while the banking and insurance authority stressed the need to "focus on satisfying mortgage needs for first homes." With the local government sending a working group to the firm, the Evergrande crisis has drawn parallels with government intervention in other indebted companies, notably aviation conglomerate HNA Group.

HNA's restructuring did not cause investor panic—although Evergrande's higher profile means this time will likely prove a bigger challenge. But whatever happens to Evergrande, Beijing's broader clampdown has already had a major impact on the property sector and deepened worries over key firms' financial health, bringing home sales and prices down.

#### And what about the global economy?

A slowdown in the Chinese real estate sector, which accounts for a significant proportion of the country's economic output, could have ripple effects on global growth. Evergrande's woes have rocked stock markets—and the real estate sector makes up much of distressed dollar-denominated debt internationally. But an Evergrande default has long been expected, and fears over a "Lehman moment"—a reference to the Wall Street titan whose collapse prompted panic worldwide during the 2008 global financial crisis—have already been dismissed. —AFP

## Evergrande: How will a 'controlled demolition' impact?

**BEIJING:** As Chinese real estate behemoth Evergrande reportedly prepares for a government-backed mega-restructure, here is an explainer on what Beijing's bid to limit a contagion could mean for the wider economy:

#### What happened to Evergrande?

The Chinese government sparked a crisis in the property industry when it launched a drive last year to curb excessive debt among real estate firms as well as rampant consumer speculation. Evergrande, a real estate giant with a presence in over 280 Chinese cities, was the most prominent developer to pay the price for Beijing's clampdown.

More than \$300 billion in debt, it teetered for months on the edge of default, returning each time from the brink thanks to a last-minute repayment. But according to Bloomberg it has now missed a 30-day grace period on overdue coupon payments worth \$82.5 million, while agency S&P Global Ratings has said a default now "looks inevitable".

#### What happens now?

After Evergrande warned last week it may not be able to meet its financial obligations, the local government in Guangdong—where the firm is headquartered—summoned billionaire chairman Hui Ka Yan, and said they will send a "working group" to the company. Analysts said this moment signaled the formal start of the giant's debt restructuring—a process that will likely take years.

#### What does it mean for investors?

Signs that the state is taking a bigger role in Evergrande's future have eased investor concern of a disorderly collapse. "It's pretty clear that the state is seriously involved in managing the situation," Shehzad Qazi, managing director of data analytics firm China Beige Book, told AFP.

It will "ultimately be a 'controlled demolition'."

## Qatar and Turkey extend currency swap deal

**DOHA:** Qatar and Turkey have announced they agreed to extend a currency swap deal between their central banks, as Ankara's lira has plunged in value fuelling an economic crisis. According to a joint statement on Tuesday, the two sides "welcomed the signing of the agreement on the extension and amendment of the Turkish lira-Qatari riyal currency exchange arrangement" between their central banks.

The announcement came during Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's visit to Doha, where he met with Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani and discussed enhancing cooperation in various fields including the economy. The agreement in 2018 was extended for the first time in May 2020, with the overall limit increased from \$5 billion equivalent of Turkish lira and Qatari riyal to \$15 billion.

Turkey's annual inflation rate surged last week above 20 percent — its highest in three years. The nation of 84 million has seen the lira plummet and consumer prices soar, with the lira losing more than 45 percent of its value against the dollar since the start of the year.

Turkey's currency crisis is now more acute than one it experienced during a diplomatic standoff with then US president Donald Trump in 2018. Turkey and Qatar, a close US ally, have become economic and political partners in recent times. —AFP

## Jazeera Airways launches carbon offset program

**KUWAIT:** Jazeera Airways yesterday announced a partnership with the Norwegian climate and technology company, CHOOOSE, to enable customers to offset their carbon emissions by supporting a set of CO2-reducing climate solutions, consisting of a portfolio of renewable energy and community-based projects. To celebrate this initiative, the Jazeera Airways traditional blue branded website has been changed to green for the week.

The new service is integrated in Jazeera's booking process where customers can choose to offset their carbon emissions. It automatically calculates a flight's carbon footprint, providing passengers with the CO2 emissions expected for their trip and the option to compensate for their travel footprint.

Customers can then voluntarily choose to offset their flight's carbon emissions by contributing to climate projects. If selected, the contribution gets added to the final payment. Highlighting the significance of the partnership, Jazeera Airways Chief Executive Officer, Rohit Ramchandran, said, "Jazeera is a forward looking airline and takes responsibility to safeguard the safety and well-being of its customers, employees and environment. We have already invested in A320neo aircraft which are environmentally more friendly - cutting CO2 emissions by 50 percent, with 50 percent engine noise reduction and 18 percent greater fuel efficiency. Today, we're enabling our customers who have genuine concerns about the environment to offset the carbon emitted from their trip and at the same time contribute to support some really beneficial community climate projects in countries we fly to."

Certified by the most comprehensive and stringent international standards, these projects contribute to multiple United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), and improve ecological values and social benefits for communities around the world affected by climate change. "Everyone at CHOOOSE are proud to partner with the great team at Jazeera to further their sustainability focus and provide all their passengers with the option to do even more. Jazeera already operates a highly fuel-efficient fleet and is a strong contributor to building travel back better", says Andreas Slettvoll, founder and CEO at CHOOOSE.

All travellers who compensate for their journey will be able to monitor their carbon offsetting for Jazeera flights through the CHOOOSE platform. Jazeera Airways is a member of IATA (International Air Transport Association), which has committed the airline industry to achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.



Rohit Ramchandran



Business

# Gulf Bank launches red plus, first Mastercard prepaid cashback card for the youth segment

Red plus card offers the youth segment access to the highest cashback program in Kuwait



GBK team after the press conference

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank has announced the launch of its Mastercard prepaid red plus card, the first prepaid card with a cashback program targeting the youth segment in the Middle East. In a series of unique milestones, Gulf Bank's new red plus card offers red account customers the highest cashback program in Kuwait, and it is also the first vertically designed Mastercard prepaid cashback card for the youth segment.

of unique benefits, including 15 percent cashback on local and international coffee shops and restaurants, telecommunication bills, and movie theaters, with up to KD 300 cashback every year."

Aleisa added: "Gulf Bank's "red plus" Prepaid Cashback cardholders can enjoy a multitude of benefits, including discounts of up to 25 percent at more than 550 renowned restaurants and cafes in Kuwait as part of the Bank's Gulf dining program. Red plus cardholders can also avail instant discounts of up to 30 percent at more than 300 retail outlets across travel, entertainment, health, beauty, and lifestyle segments as part of Gulf Bank's Gulf Promotions program. The card is equipped with fraud protection with Gulf Bank's 3D secure feature for a safer online shopping experience."

**Digital development**

Ahmad Al-Amir, Deputy General Manager for Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, stated: "Getting a red plus card has also never been easier, with the application process taking place entirely online through Gulf Bank's Mobile App or Online Banking, and customers will receive their card from any branch of their choice or through a dedicated courier within 2-3 working days. Customers can then activate and load their cards online anytime, anywhere through Gulf Bank's Online and Mobile Banking services."

Al-Amir also added: "Gulf Bank is undergoing rapid digital transformation, as part of our new strategy for 2025, which aims to provide a seamless and quick experience for all Gulf Bank customers, by offering innovative products and services that meet the expectations of the new generation."

Nadia Ghissassi, Country Manager for Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, and Iraq, Mastercard, said: "The introduction of the Mastercard Prepaid red plus card offers huge potential to transform the way payments are made by students and young adults in Kuwait. We are pleased to launch the first-of-its-kind prepaid card in partnership with Gulf Bank to further build the domestic payment ecosystem with safe and secure electronic payments. In addition to delivering a fast, intuitive, reliable, and seamless payment process, The Mastercard prepaid red plus card empowers the Kuwaiti youth to try new and exciting offerings, making it an ideal card to enjoy all the features and benefits the country has to offer."

**red account**

Earlier this year, Gulf Bank launched a series of updates and improvements to its red account, complete with a new and innovative design that was designed by the youth, for the youth. Gulf Bank's red card and red plus card have a simple and distinctive card design that protects the user's privacy, going so far as to include the cardholder's name on the back of the card, in addition to other features and characteristics that constitute the ideal banking experience. To further encourage Gulf Bank's youth community, the bank also launched an exclusive Instagram account for its youth segment, making it easier to keep up with everything Gulf Bank has to offer them.

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 gives 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. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with the different relevant parties to achieve it.

For more information on Gulf Bank's various initiatives and activities, customers can visit one of Gulf Bank's branches or log on to Gulf Bank's Online/Mobile Banking services. Customers can also direct their queries via WhatsApp on 1805805 for round-the-clock assistance from Gulf Bank representatives, or call the Customer Contact Center on the same number.



KUWAIT: (From left) Ahmad Al-Amir, Mohammed Al-Qattan and Najla Aleisa



Mohammed Al-Qattan holds the red card



Najla Aleisa



Ahmad Al-Amir

As one of the most important banking accounts that caters to the bank's younger clients in high school and university, Gulf Bank's red account currently offers customers a free red plus prepaid card upon opening an account.

"At Gulf Bank, we know how important tangible and unique rewards are for our youth segment," said Mohammed Al-Qattan, General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank. "That's why we are proud to launch our new red plus card as not only the first Mastercard prepaid card with a cashback program dedicated for the youth, but also the highest cashback program in Kuwait with 15 percent cashback. We would like to encourage new high school and college-level students to submit their applications for the red account and start taking advantage of the numerous benefits of red plus."

**Offers and exclusive features**

Gulf Bank's Deputy General Manager of Consumer banking (Marketing), Najla Aleisa, said: "With a Gulf Bank red plus card in hand, cardholders can take advantage of a variety

**red.**

**Like two peas in a pod!**  
Manage your expenses with the new red plus cashback prepaid card.  
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## Business

# Kaisa share suspension furthers China property sector fears

## Contagion spreads within country's debt-ridden real estate sector

**BEIJING:** Chinese property firm Kaisa suspended share trading in Hong Kong yesterday as questions swirl over its ability to make repayments and contagion spreads within the country's debt-ridden real estate sector. The Chinese government sparked a crisis within the property industry when it launched a drive last year to curb excessive debt among real estate firms as well as rampant consumer speculation.

Companies that had accrued huge debt to expand suddenly found the taps turned off and began struggling to complete projects, pay contractors and meet both domestic and foreign repayments.

Kaisa, China's 27th-largest real estate firm in terms of sales but one of its most indebted, became the latest company to spook investors when it announced on Friday that it had failed in a bid for a debt swap that would buy it crucial time.

Yesterday morning the firm announced it was suspending trading in Hong Kong, where it is listed, "pending the release by the Company of an announcement containing inside information". It is the second time the company has suspended trading in the last month.

Kaisa last month announced a plan to delay the repayment timeline for some of its bonds, offering an exchange for at least \$380 million of notes, which would have given it some room to find money further down the line. But the offer failed to win the 95 percent approval from bondholders needed for the plan to go ahead.

The company currently has some \$11.6 billion of dollar notes outstanding. It previously defaulted on a

dollar debt in 2015, becoming the first Chinese developer to do so.

The most indebted Chinese property firm is Evergrande, which set off the current confidence crisis earlier in the summer. The Shenzhen-based behemoth racked up an eye-watering \$300 billion in loans before Beijing began to rein in the sector.

### Mega-restructure

On Tuesday, Evergrande missed a deadline to repay some of its overseas creditors, raising the prospect of it defaulting as it prepares for a government-backed mega-restructure. Bloomberg News reported some of the \$82.5 million in overdue coupon payments it owed by the end of Tuesday—when a 30-day grace period ran out—remained unpaid. Ratings group S&P has predicted that a default by Evergrande is now "inevitable".

Questions have swirled over whether Evergrande is simply too big to be allowed to fail, given its collapse could send shock waves through the wider Chinese economy. But signs now point to Beijing being willing to close the chapter on the 25-year-old real estate empire that has typified China's breakneck growth in recent decades.

After Evergrande said Friday it may not be able to meet its financial obligations, the government summoned the company's founder and announced several moves that have given the clearest picture yet of Beijing's plans to end the crisis. A new seven-strong "risk management committee" has been set up to manage the restructuring. Only two executives from the company are on the committee—others include officials from state entities.



**BEIJING:** This file photo taken shows a flag of Chinese developer Kaisa Group fluttering next to a Chinese national flag outside the company's office building in Beijing. —AFP

Guangdong's provincial government is also sending a working team to the company, which analysts at Jefferies said indicated a "potential takeover of Evergrande".

Evergrande has yet to comment on the restructuring. Kaisa and Evergrande have become the

most visible faces of the debt crunch within China's property sector but defaults have rippled throughout the sector. According to Bloomberg News, at least 10 lower-rated real estate firms have now defaulted on onshore or offshore bonds since the summer. — AFP

## KIB sponsors IFN Roadshow OnAir 2021 - Kuwait edition

**KUWAIT:** As part of its continuous efforts to actively participate in key industry events and drive knowledge transfer within the banking sector, Kuwait International Bank (KIB) recently sponsored and took part in the Kuwait edition of the IFN Roadshow OnAir 2021: a global roundtable series organized by Islamic Finance News (IFN). The global event was held virtually in Kuwait after having made the rounds in several countries, including Russia, Turkey, Bahrain, Pakistan, Qatar, South Africa, which are considered among the key emerging Islamic financial markets worldwide. The show's virtual roundtables included keynote addresses and a distinguished panel of leading experts and practitioners in the financial and economic fields from each market.

Representing KIB, General Manager of the Financial Control and Planning Department, Ajai Thomas, virtually took part in the Kuwait edition of the Roadshow, which was hosted under the title: "The Next Phase: Islamic Banking, Finance and Investment in Kuwait". As a main panel speaker, Thomas addressed a number of pressing economic and financial topics including: ways to improve Islamic product offerings in Kuwait; how rating downgrades have impacted sukuk issuances from Kuwait and whether banks will



Ajai Thomas

continue to lead issuances; ESG and green sukuk prospects; as well as changes to the Islamic finance landscape over the course of the past year.

Speaking about the Bank's participation in the event, Thomas said: "At KIB, we are always looking to play a bigger role within our industry and to actively participate in the larger economic discussions taking place across its various sectors. It is absolutely vital for the development of the industry that business leaders and subject matter experts continue to connect and exchange insights, views and practical experiences to help foster growth and innovation. The pace of change within our sector is faster than ever before and demands ongoing change and development."

In his panel discussion, Thomas focused on the topic of sukuk, something which KIB has become heavily invested in. He said: "The sukuk market continues to grow across the globe, and in the region in particular, and it presents many opportunities for attractive long-term investments and high value deals. Over the past few years, at KIB we have been proud to play a growing role within the regional capital markets, participating in a series of high-level sukuk issuances and completing various other prominent financial transactions. We truly do believe that the market's potential is huge and we remain committed to helping drive sustainable growth within it."

It is worth noting that KIB had sponsored the IFN Roadshow OnAir program this year, and joined in as a lead partner, given the great educational value of its comprehensive content, as well as the wealth of knowledge, information, and insights presented to its audiences around the world during the interviews conducted with prominent figures in the economic and financial sectors. In addition to addressing the latest developments in Islamic banking and finance, the forum covered a wide range of other banking and financial topics, including raising capital value, investment opportunities for each market, financial technology (FinTech), as well as the local retail sector, asset management and many more.

## Jaber Hospital first reference center to use Lyra for physiotherapy in ME

**KUWAIT:** Lyra, one of the latest physiotherapy devices in the world, was launched for the first time in the Gulf and Middle East region, in the presence of Dr Abdullah Zaman, Director of Physiotherapy Services Department at Ministry of Health and Dr Nader Al-Awadi, Director of Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital, in an event organized by Al-Sayer Medical Company, one of Al-Sayer Holding Group companies and the exclusive dealer of the German company Thera-trainer in Kuwait.

The event started with a speech by Dr Siham Al-Jadaan, Head of Medical Equipment Division in MoH Physiotherapy Services Department, in which she explained the remarkable development in all preventive and therapeutic physiotherapy services in the State of Kuwait and the Physiotherapy Services Department's constant pursuit to overcome difficulties and achieve constructive cooperation with various government and private sectors inside and outside Ministry of Health, as well as the development and improvement of the therapeutic services provided to patients to keep up with global development and Ministry of Health's plans by providing the latest medical physiotherapy devices and equipment with

the proper training for physiotherapists. The most important achievement is providing Lyra, the first of its kind in the Gulf and Middle East region. This device is one of the best modern therapeutic methods for training on walking for different age groups as it helps strengthening muscles, improving joint flexibility and helping the patient regain self-confidence by improving Balance. It also treats various neurological diseases such as brain injury, spinal cord injury, cerebral palsy and spinal muscular atrophy. Dr. Siham also expressed her gratitude to Al-Sayer Medical Company and the German Company Thera-trainer.

Dr Hossam Afffy - General Manager, Al-Sayer Medical Company thanked the Physiotherapy Services Department in Ministry of Health and



Physiotherapy Division in Jaber Al-Ahmed Hospital and congratulated them on operating the world's latest advanced physiotherapy devices produced by the German company Thera-trainer which is exclusively represented by Al-Sayer Medical Company in the State of Kuwait. He stressed the keenness of Al-Sayer Medical Company to provide the latest medical devices and equipment from major international companies to the health sector in the State of Kuwait keeping in line with Ministry of Health's objectives and constant endeavor to develop health services in all specialties.

Dr Hossam Afffy added that the Physiotherapy Division at Jaber Al-Ahmed Hospital has been announced as the first reference center for using Lyra device in the Gulf and Middle East Area by the German company Thera-trainer. An accreditation certificate was presented by the representative of the German company Thera-trainer to Dr Abdullah Zaman, Director of Physiotherapy Services Department, Dr Nader Al-Awadi, Director of Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital and Dr Soad Al-Thamer, Head of Physiotherapy Department at Jaber Al-Ahmed Hospital.

## IBS holds virtual training program with Dave Ulrich

**KUWAIT:** Prof Yaqoub SY Alrefaei, Director General of the Institute of Banking Studies, stated that the Institute hosted a virtual program with the most influential global HR leader, Dave Ulrich, one of the top 100 influential figures in the field of human resources in the world, and ranked No. 3 thought leader in 2021 by PeopleFirst. The program was titled, "Competition through Human Capability: Specific Actions for Today's Business Leaders" on December 7, 2021.

A selection of participants working in various sectors such as the financial and banking sector, the real estate sector, and other important sectors working in the State of Kuwait participated in the attendance of this program. Dave Ulrich is the Rensis Likert Professor at the Ross School of Business, University of Michigan and a partner at the RBL Group (<http://www.rbl.net>), a consulting



firm focused on helping organizations and leaders deliver value. He has published over 200 articles and book chapters and over 30 books.

Professor Alrefaei indicated that this program is considered one of the most important programs and activities implemented by the Institute during the current training year, using the virtual training mechanism, as it was presented by one of the best lecturers in the world in the field of leadership and human resource development, and many important topics in the world of management and modern human resources were presented and discussed in this program, such as: appreciating that now is the time for human capability issues as part of your organization's success, recognizing and defining four elements of human capability, learning innovative ideas, cases, and tools for: Talent, Organization, Leadership and Human resource, and preparing a sustainable transformation plan for your organization focused on organization guidance systems (OGS) of where to invest in human capabilities to deliver key outcomes.

The Institute of Banking Studies is keen to host international and experienced lecturers specialized in various fields. In recent years, the Institute has hosted the most famous lecturers and international experts to present programs/seminars/workshops for executives across the private and public sectors in the State of Kuwait. Over the last eight years, IBS invited the following international experts and speakers to present professional programs, seminars and workshops: Robin Sharma, Dr John C. Maxwell, Tom Peters, John Baldoni, Mark Sanborn, Adrian Gostick, Michael Neill, Joel Garfinkle, Steve Farber, and Michael Wade, Erik Qualman. Also IBS invited James Dowd, Senior Fellow, Managing Director, Executive Education; Linda A. Hill, Professor of Business Administration, Faculty Chair, Leadership Initiative; and Francesca Gino from Harvard Business School, and Mohd Al-Qahtani, holder of the world championship in diction and rhetoric, 2015, and Latifa Al-Loughni from Kuwait.

## Kalyan Jewellers recognized among top 500 companies by Fortune India

**KUWAIT:** Kalyan Jewellers, one of India's most trusted and leading jewelry brands, has marked its debut on the prestigious Fortune India 500 list. After being successfully listed on the National Stock Exchange in March 2021, Fortune India has ranked the company at 164th position in the overall list and 3rd among the public-listed companies from Kerala.

Fortune India 500 List is a definitive ranking revealed annually, rating the public-listed companies in India, basis a detailed analysis of sales and gross revenue figures. As categorized by Fortune India, Kalyan Jewellers has been awarded 2nd position in the gems and jewelry industry. This showcases the growing dominance of the company in India and West Asia. In 2019, Kalyan Jewellers was featured in the Deloitte's Top 100 Luxury brands list globally. The brand was ranked 35th on the overall list and 2nd among Indian luxury brands.

Kalyan Jewellers which was founded in the year 1993, has been catering to a diverse range of customers from different parts of the country. With its presence across 21 states in India, Kalyan Jewellers has consistently strengthened its brand footprint with 120 showrooms in India and 30 showrooms in West Asia. Apart from completing 28 years in the Indian jewelry industry, the company is India's only jewelry brand to have over 100 company-owned showrooms in India.



## Business

# Al-Bahar: Pandemic showed how serious and committed NBK is to digital approach

## Bloomberg hosts webinar titled 'Are You Prepared for the New Age of Digital Banking?'

KUWAIT: Shaikha Al-Bahar, the Deputy Chief Executive Officer of National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) Group said that the pandemic accelerated the drive towards digitization while differentiating how serious and committed each bank is to its digital approach.

Al-Bahar's statements came in her participation in a webinar themed "Are You Prepared for the New Age of Digital Banking?", which was organized by Bloomberg and hosted a number of regional banking leaders.

Al-Bahar went on to say that NBK's diversification strategy has paid off during the challenging times of the pandemic, noting that this goes back to the eighties when it expanded sectorally and geographically in key financial locations across the world.

### Partnership with the youth

Al-Bahar mentioned: "NBK is present in 14 countries and offer all financial services including conventional, Islamic banking, investment banking and wealth management, trade and project finance among others. More importantly and as of last week, we also launched "Weyay", the first digital bank in Kuwait, reflecting the vigorous and tech-savvy nature of the Kuwaiti society and representing a long-term partnership with the youth and meets their needs in a way that suits their lifestyles."

"The new digital bank is a major milestone in our digital transformation agenda as we witness the changing landscape of financial services across the world," she elaborated.

She noted that "Weyay" offers an integrated package of advanced products and services that help the youth track and organize their expenses in a better way, which contributes to increasing their ability to accumulate savings, as well as provide appropriate investment channels for growing these savings.

### Technology as a way for growth

Al-Bahar stated: "When developing our digital agenda, one of our key objectives was to align the technology investments and digital roadmap to NBK group strategy to standardize even at the international locations. This will consolidate, rationalize and simplify the IT application portfolio within the Bank and will further allow improvement on cost synergies and create room for cross-selling of products and services across the bank's network."

"We are using our digital investments and the capabilities built in Kuwait (including NBK Digital Factory) as a critical growth avenue in the short- and medium-term, particularly for growing our retail banking operations across the group," Al-Bahar added.

"Our digital bank "Weyay" will act as the platform to penetrating new markets in our network. The focus will be on markets where we have identified a growth opportunity and where a digital offer will ramp up growth and grow our market share and targeted segment penetra-



Shaikha Al-Bahar

tion," she explained.

"Egypt and Saudi Arabia are our key growth markets outside Kuwait and we see great potential to leveraging Kuwait-developed digital capabilities to growth in these two markets, she noted."

### NBK's digital agenda

NBK Deputy Group CEO shed light on the bank's digital agenda emphasizing that it is embedded in the bank's strategy and hence it is committed to implement it and to keep pace with the most advanced Fintech solutions.

Al-Bahar noted that NBK's strategic direction revolves around being the digital leader and trendsetter in Kuwait and in the region, building next generation digital banking experience, and being digitally working bank with all employees. Our digital activation ratios, mobile usage and digital transactions fundamentally increased as we accelerated our action plan towards enhancing/revamping our existing channel experiences and in developing new ones, Al-Bahar added.

In parallel, new skills and capabilities are being injected into NBK by recruitment of diversified talent and internally developing others using best-in-class training programs and techniques, she added.

### Group's digital office

Al-Bahar said: "We established NBK Group Digital Office as a key enabler in the organization for digital transformation and is also responsible for increasing innovative products and service portfolio through Fintech partnerships."

"Wealth management services is a strategic priority

- Our diversification strategy has paid off during the pandemic, and we acted as a key supporter of recovery

- We launched the first digital bank reflecting the dynamic and tech-savvy nature of the Kuwaiti society

- "Weyay" embodies a long-term partnership with the youth, and meets their needs

in a way that suits their lifestyles

- Our strategic directions revolve around strengthening our regional leadership and building a new generation of digital banking services

- We made radical changes to the digital culture and mindset across the Group

for NBK and with digitization at the core of our strategy. Smart Wealth (our digital wealth management platform) integration paved the way for that avenue of growth. Enabling NBK Mobile customers to open NBK Capital Smart Wealth account digitally and transfer money to their accounts in a hassle-free way via NBK Mobile Banking App through seamless integration with Smart Wealth," she added.

### State-of-the-art data center

Al-Bahar said that for NBK, the priority was also to invest in a state-of-the-art data center, which was established in Kuwait. This suggests the importance of data analytics, consumer behavior and ability to offer bespoke products to customers. She added that heavily investing in digital infrastructure improves productivity, meet customer expectations, and capture market share, that can only be done through leveraging big data capabilities, noting that NBK strives to improve the reliability and sustainability of our digital infrastructure with a strong emphasis on cyber security and regulatory compliance.

### Investment in talent

On banks' need for new skillset to support more innovation and expansion in the digital banking space, Al-Bahar said: "NBK's vision and mission was to always invest in local talent, making NBK the main attraction for Kuwaiti Talent which is demonstrated by the amount of new Kuwaiti recruits in 2019 (pre-pandemic) which exceeded 600 new recruits within a year."

"We focus on internal and external recruitment procedures, prioritizing our in-house employees, as NBK highly supports talent mobility to retain existing talents in the organization and for promoting career development," she added.

"We have over the years developed exceptional training programs with top universities globally, to ensure best quality training is delivered across various seniority levels across the Group," she mentioned.

### Advancing gender equality

The webinar also discussed gender equality on which

Al-Bahar emphasized that there are no restrictions in anyways on female representation in the work force in Kuwait generally and the banking sector specifically, noting that there is some room to increase the representation of women in senior positions and board membership as you said and I believe this is an area of focus that has been gaining more attention recently. "We are highly committed to advancing gender equality as a key element of our talent development management. To this end, we have taken many initiatives and measures towards increasing the presence of women in leadership positions through proper guidance and providing appropriate opportunities for their career development, as well as embedding the culture of women empowerment across the whole Group," Al-Bahar pointed out.

Al-Bahar mentioned that staff figures are a very good representation of NBK's commitment to gender equality where females represented 46 percent of the total employees as of Sep-2021. Also, programs to support women empowerment by the Bank included "Women's Leadership Development".

"We also expand our diversity and inclusion commitment to our customers where we have been launching some products and services for our female customers and female entrepreneurs. An area we will continue to develop further as part of our commitment to advance financial inclusion," she added.

### Strategic sustainability pillars

The webinar discussed the progress made by NBK towards achieving its sustainability pillars, on which Al-Bahar said: "We are looking forward to continued progress in making ESG standards a basis for dialogue with customers, embedding sustainable finance in all its operations, and building sustainability as an integral part of our corporate culture."

Additionally, NBK strives to strengthen its position as a leading provider of sustainable banking services. The Bank also expects to announce initiatives to better measure ESG impacts, with the highest priorities focused on assessing direct and indirect environmental impact, as climate change risks continue to emerge, she emphasized.

## stc wins 'Corporate Governance and Stakeholder Protection Kuwait - 2021' award

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced that it has won the 'Corporate Governance and Stakeholder Protection Kuwait - 2021' magazine award from Capital Finance International ("CFL.co") in recognition of the Company's outstanding achievements.

stc received the award after completing a profound and comprehensive exercise aimed at strengthening and enhancing its corporate governance and stakeholder protection policies and procedures under the guidance of its advisor, PwC Middle East. The advisor was diligent in providing all the necessary support to ensure that the governance framework is in line with the laws, regulations, and leading industry practices. stc considers its compliance to the corporate governance requirements issued by the Capital Markets Authority in Kuwait, and other regulating bodies, to be an essential component in operating its business.

The CFL.co judging panel considered stc's board composition and member responsibilities, compliance policy, transparency, regulatory reporting requirements, risk management, internal and external controls including audit, code of conduct, and the regulations to address conflicts of interest and other potential problems. After completing the certification process, stc was commended for its exemplary framework that aims to ensure strategic guidance for the Company's rules and procedures, while protecting the interests of all stakeholders.

In a statement, stc highlighted that the award, which will be announced in the Summer 2021 CFL.co magazine issue, reflects the standards and commitment that stc continuously builds on, providing stakeholders with the highest degrees of transparency, accountability, and competence. Through an established mechanism of procedures and policies, stc has shaped its culture to promote integrity and a robust framework applicable across all levels, reinforcing its foundation for sustainable success. This in return has aided the Company in fostering a wholly supportive corporate culture that addresses the needs, aspirations, and hopes of stakeholders as expressed in stc's various policy statements, while exceeding the requirements set by regulators.

In the same context, stc indicated that the Compliance and Corporate Governance Department, effectively implemented and introduced various initiatives that played a major role in



Engineer Maziad Alharbi (second right) receives the award

formulating the Company's governance framework. The enhanced compliance process executed by the team led to zero financial fines, maintaining the Company's integrity and reputation. The team also focused on maintaining a response time frame shorter than the required SLA on queries submitted officially and non-officially by regulators.

Commenting on the award, stc CEO, engineer Maziad Alharbi said, "With the guidance of our Board of Directors, strong leadership of our management team, and dedication of our employees, we are committed to providing our stakeholders with the very best, whether it is our employees, customers, investors, partners or our community. Our corporate governance framework enables stc to demonstrate its level of innovation, efficiency, and ability to adopt best practices while protecting the interests of all stakeholders. Moving forward, we will continue to deliver our wide range on innovative services and platforms in line with the highest ethical and governance standards to maintain the level of trust and confidence we have developed over the years with our loyal customers and partners."

Alharbi added, "This award is a testament to the team's hard work and dedication in structuring and formulating a solid sustainable framework in coop-



eration with our trusted advisors. As a leading telecom and pioneer in digital transformation in Kuwait and the region, we are proud to set a standard in our industry built on a long-standing credible governance system."

In appreciation of the award, Alharbi thanked the organizers for recognizing the hard work and

effort stc placed into formulating and enhancing its corporate governance and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) framework over the years. He also extended his appreciation to the stc team for their individual and collective roles that led to the favorable outcome in collaboration with PwC Middle East. In his final words, Alharbi stated that stc will continue to introduce new-to-market digital solutions, enhance its business model, and adapt to current market conditions to achieve its vision and enable digital transformation in Kuwait.

It is worth mentioning that CFL.co is a renowned organization that publishes a print journal and online resource reporting distributed to over 162,000 readers on business, economics, and finance. The journal recognizes that the traditional distinction between emerging and developed markets is now far less meaningful as world economies converge. Headquartered in London, the world's most multicultural city, CFL.co covers and analyzes the drivers behind that change. Combining the views of leading multilateral and national organizations with thought leadership from some of the world's top minds - CFL.co's dedicated editorial team ensures that readers better understand the forces influencing and reshaping the global economy.

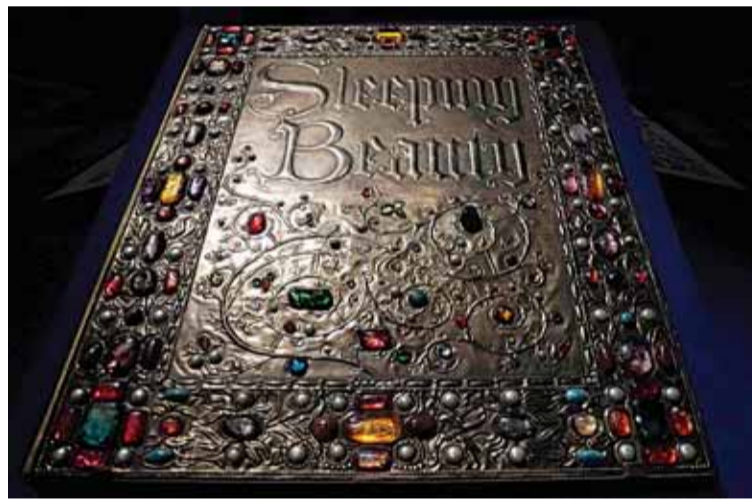
# TALKING TEAPOTS - THE ANTIQUES THAT INSPIRED DISNEY MOVIES



People look at a screen during a press preview for "Inspiring Walt Disney: The Animation of French Decorative Arts" at the Met in New York. —AFP photos



Items on display during a press preview for "Inspiring Walt Disney: The Animation of French Decorative Arts" at the Met in New York.



Items on display during a press preview for "Inspiring Walt Disney: The Animation of French Decorative Arts" at the Met in New York.

What was the inspiration for the talking teapots and singing candelabra that populate Walt Disney's movies? A new show in New York suggests they can be traced back to antiques and artwork that the animation master encountered in Paris as a young man. The Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibi-

tion uncovers how Disney artists have for decades drawn from the lavish Rococo style of Sevres porcelain and gilded sofas, as well as from Gothic Revival architecture and medieval influences. From "Snow White and the Seven Dwarves" (1936) and "Sleeping Beauty" (1959) to "Beauty and the Beast" (1991), the show

explores how Disney classics have mixed fantasy with detailed research.

Curator Wolf Burchard said he believed Disney artists and their 18th-century colleagues were connected not just by their style, but also by a wish to "address our emotions and not our intellect." The show, which opens on

December 10, exhibits 60 works of 18th-century European art alongside 150 Disney production works. Born in Chicago in 1901, Walt Disney made his first trip to France in December 1918, shortly after World War I, as a volunteer for the Red Cross. He returned to Europe in 1935, and then multiple times after World War II. —AFP

## 'SQUID GAME', ALEC BALDWIN AMONG TOP GOOGLE SEARCHES



Google said Wednesday its most popular search terms in 2021 include "Squid Game," Alec Baldwin and the cryptocurrency Dogecoin. Sports were also big on the platform: the top eight search terms had to do with cricket, the NBA and international football tournaments like Euro 2021, Google said. The wildly popular and uber violent Netflix series "Squid Game", a South Korean-made survival game about people desperate to get out of debt, came in ninth position. The American actor Baldwin, who accidentally killed a cinematographer on the set of a film in October with a loaded gun, was the most frequently looked-up personality on Google.



Alec Baldwin

## NASA'S LATEST ASTRONAUT TRAINEES ARE ALREADY DREAMING OF THE MOON

As a former national team cyclist who'd fix her own bikes, and before that as a child helping out on her family's cattle farm, NASA trainee astronaut Christina Birch has plenty of experience working with her hands. With America's sights now set on returning to the Moon—this time establishing long-term habitats—Birch is dreaming big: "If I could assist the mission in any way, by helping build something on the Moon, that would be super cool," she told AFP. The 35-year-old is one of ten new recruits announced by the US space agency this week, the latest members of what it calls the "Artemis generation," named for the Artemis program to put American boots on lunar soil later this decade, and later on to Mars.

Selected from a competitive field of 12,000 applicants, their diverse profiles have been picked with the goal of accomplishing humankind's toughest exploration missions to date. Among them are high-level scientists. Chris Williams, 38, is a medical physicist and assistant professor at Harvard, whose research focused on developing image guidance techniques for cancer treatments. "I was very inspired by the Moon missions as a kid, and so NASA's Artemis program to go back to the Moon in a sustainable way is something that I'm really passionate about," he said in a video call.

Birch holds a doctorate in biological engineering from MIT. Her dreams of space travel were inspired by the work she was doing in her own laboratory. "It probably wasn't until I was working in the lab, you know, as a bio engineer, doing these experiments with cells and proteins, and I saw that similar experiments are being done aboard the space station. And I said, 'Well, hey, I've got those skills!'" Another feather in her cap: She's an ex-track cyclist on the US team, who qualified for the Olympics and has won World Cup medals in the team pursuit and Madison race. "I love having a training plan or regimen, and working towards a big goal," she explained. However, unlike the many experienced pilots chosen, she has no flying experience and looks forward to jet training. "The fastest I've gone is



(From left) Astronaut candidates pose for a group photo at the NASA's 2021 Astronaut Candidate announcement event on December 6, 2021 at Ellington Field in Houston, Texas. —AFP

on the Velodrome on the track, self-propelled," she said.

### 'Exciting new adventure'

NASA is targeting a crewed landing on the Moon in 2025. Unlike the Apollo era, the space agency will carry out the mission partly with the help of private companies, including SpaceX who will operate the lander vehicle. In a sign of the times, one of the future astronauts is returning to NASA from a stint at Elon Musk's company, which he joined in 2018.

Physician Anil Menon, who at 45 is the oldest of the astronaut class of 2021, was SpaceX's first flight surgeon, having previously fulfilled the same role for NASA, overseeing the health of astronauts on missions. It was Menon, who got selected after his fifth time applying, who pulled Frenchman Thomas Pesquet out from his Dragon capsule when it splashed down in November after the crew had spent six months in space. "It

will be incredible to be able to physically experience it myself," he said.

In addition to contributing to medical research, "I think that medical knowledge is going to keep people healthy and safe," he said. Born to parents from India and Ukraine, he is also used to working under difficult emergency conditions. In 2010, he went to Haiti to help after a devastating earthquake. Then in 2015, he landed in Nepal by chance minutes before a massive earthquake, and once again helped treat patients flocking to local clinics. In January the new recruits will report at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas, where they will begin two years of intensive training. They will learn how to operate and maintain the International Space Station, carry out spacewalks, develop robotics skills, safely operate a T-38 training jet, and learn Russian to communicate with their counterparts. "It'll be a big change for our families, but it's an exciting new adventure," said Williams. —AFP

# 'NAMASTE KUWAIT' - A SPECTACULAR CULTURAL EVENT

Unique blend of music and dance celebrates 60 years of Kuwait-India relations

By Sajeev K Peter

A two-day Kuwait-India cultural festival titled 'Namaste Kuwait' got off to a glittering start at the National Museum of Kuwait on Tuesday evening. The festival, a unique blend of music and dance of both India and Kuwait, was inaugurated jointly by National Council of Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) Assistant Secretary General Dr Bader Al-Duwaish and Indian Ambassador Sibi George in the presence of National Museum of Kuwait Director (NCCAL's Museums and Antiquities Department) Salman A Boland and Joice Sibi. The cultural event celebrates the vibrant and dynamic partnership between India and Kuwait as the year 2021-22 marks the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

"Namaste Kuwait" - the Kuwait-India cultural festival - is an important event as it is held on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the diplomatic relations between Kuwait and India," Duwaish said in his remarks following the inaugural ceremony. Events such as 'Namaste Kuwait' will further enrich the cultural interaction between the two friendly countries, he said, adding that he envisaged more cooperation in the fields of art and culture between the two countries in the future.

"It is my honor to present to you 'Namaste Kuwait', bringing alive the cultural heritage of the majestic land that India is and connecting the cultures and peoples of our two friendly countries," George said in his inaugural remarks. This is another effort by the two countries to further broaden the rich canvas of cultural engagement and further strengthen the close civilizational affinities and linkages, the ambassador stated.

"Our ties are time-tested. They have been built over strong foundations by our peoples over centuries based on mutual trust and respect. I am confident that this relationship will continue to prosper and evolve into a new age. The New India-New Kuwait partnership connects the visions of the leadership of our two friendly countries for mutual development and progress of the peoples of our two countries," he said.

## Milestone year

The ambassador said the year 2021-22 bears a remarkable significance for both countries. "This year, we celebrate a unique confluence of important milestones. This is an important milestone in our shared journey towards a shared history of sustainable progress, development and prosperity of the peoples of our two friendly countries. And this year, we, in India, celebrate the 75th anniversary of Independence of



Joice Sibi lights the traditional lamp during the inauguration of the cultural festival as Dr Bader Al-Duwaish (left), Sibi George and Salman A Boland look on.



A dance performance by Shivadham School of Dance.



Sibi George delivers his inaugural address.



Renowned Kuwaiti singer Mubarak Al-Rashed performs.



The traditional Punjabi 'Bhangra' dance by Dhol Beats Bhangra Boys.

India," George pointed out.

The ambassador thanked Kamel Abdul Jalil, Secretary General of NCCAL, and his team for being in the forefront of taking the cultural relations of the two countries to a new higher level of partnership. He also thanked the leadership of the National Museum.

The cultural festival commenced with a traditional Indian classical dance performance by the students of Srishiti School of Dance, followed by a musical segment led by well-known Kuwaiti singer Mubarak Al-

Rashed. Mubarak enthralled the audience with his Bollywood favorites and ever-green Hindi hits such as 'Papa Kehte Hai' and 'Tum Paas Aaye'. Asharupa Barman, Master Rohit Shaym (Arabic), Upasana and Nabeel also rendered a variety of songs.

'Advanced Vinyasa Yoga' presented by 'Kuwait Yoga Meet' was received with a big round of applause. The dance segment presented by Anjali School of Dance, Taal Dance Studio, Rritta Dhyana,

Dancing Divas, Shivadham School of Dance, Break House and Nandanam School of Dance consisted of a rare mix of India's folk and classical dance forms. Dhol Beats Bhangra Boys came with a bang and took the audience by storm with their traditional Punjabi 'bhangra' dance.

The 'Namaste Kuwait' celebrations scheduled for yesterday evening at the National Museum were cancelled in view of a tragic incident in India in which India's top defense chief and 12 others lost their lives.



A gold, cameo and enamel diadem by Jacques-Amboise Oliveras, circa 1808, (left) and a Carnelian, enamel and gold diadem, circa 1800, (right), believed to have belonged to Empress Josephine Bonaparte of France, are displayed during a photocall at Sotheby's auction house in London. —AFP

## 'Majestic' tiaras of Josephine Bonaparte sold in UK

A pair of "highly rare" centuries-old headpieces encrusted with jewels and believed to have belonged to the French empress Josephine Bonaparte sold at auction in London Tuesday for nearly £600,000 (\$795,000, 710,000 euros). The two tiaras—offered from a private British collection dating back at least 150 years—are thought to have been given to Napoleon Bonaparte's wife by her sister Caroline early in the 19th century, according to Sotheby's.

Both headpieces, each part of a pair—a set of matching jewelry designed to be worn together—are set with gemstones engraved with classical heads, several of which are possibly ancient, the auction house said. The more ornate of the duo—comprising carnelian, enamel and gold—fetched £450,600, while the other sold for £126,000, as part of a "Treasures" sale of various valuable and rare items. "These majestic jewels mounted with cameos and intaglios certainly evoke the style of the grand Empress Josephine—her rank as wife of Napoleon Bonaparte, her impeccable taste and her interest in the classical world," said Kristian Spofforth, of Sotheby's.

"The jewels offered here demonstrate the finest delicate work by the finest French workshops, and, today, there are hardly any comparable

pieces in the world. "When fashions changed, jewelry was broken up and re-modeled, making their survival a truly exceptional one." Josephine Bonaparte was likely given just the engraved gems, which Sotheby's said were a possible combination of Roman examples dating back to as early as 100 BC as well as more contemporary Italian engravings. The auctioneers believe the jewels were then mounted for her in the French capital in around 1808 in the neo-classical style, citing marks on the crowns pointing to Paris and its famed goldsmiths of the age.

They were believed to endow the wearer with their various depicted qualities such as heroism, faithfulness and love, all while blazing a trail in the fashion world of the day. "By being the first to incorporate these cameos and intaglios into her dress, wearing them side by side with pearls and diamonds, she created an entire new fashion that swept Paris and the world, based on neo-classical forms," explained Spofforth. No details were immediately released Tuesday on the identity of the buyers. Sotheby's said the tiaras were possibly acquired from Josephine or her estate by British landowner, art collector and politician Edward Lascelles, and then passed on to his descendants. —AFP

## THE ARCHITECT TRYING TO FINISH THE SAGRADA FAMILIA AFTER 138 YEARS

Jordi Fauli is the seventh chief architect of Barcelona's iconic Sagrada Familia since Antoni Gaudi began work on the basilica in 1883, and he had been expected to oversee its long-awaited completion. But the pandemic has delayed efforts to finish this towering architectural masterpiece, which has been under construction for nearly 140 years, and it is no longer clear whether Fauli will still be in charge when it is finally done. "I would like to be here for many more years, of course, but that's in God's hands," says Fauli, 62, a wry smile on his lips. He was just 31 when he joined the architectural team as a local in 1990 — the same age as Gaudi when the innovative Catalan architect began building his greatest work in the late 19th century, a project that would take up four decades of his life.

"When I arrived, only three of these columns were built and they were only 10 meters (33 feet) high," he explains from a mezzanine in the main nave. "I was lucky enough to design and see the construction of the entire interior, then the sacristy and now the main towers." When finished, the ornate cathedral which was designed by Gaudi will have 18 towers, the tallest of which will reach 172 meters into the air.

The second-highest tower, which is 138 meters tall and dedicated to the Virgin Mary, will be officially inaugurated on Wednesday with the illumination of the gigantic 5.5-tonne star crowning its highest point. It is the tallest of the nine completed towers and the first to be inaugurated since 1976.

### Construction halted by Civil War

In 2019, the Sagrada Familia welcomed 4.7 million visitors, making it Barcelona's most visited monument. But it was forced to close in March 2020 as the Covid-19 pandemic took hold, with its doors staying shut for almost a year. This year, there have been barely 764,000 visitors, municipal figures show. And as entry tickets are the main source of funding for the ongoing building works, the goal of finishing the basilica by 2026 to mark the 100th anniversary of Gaudi's death—he was run over by a tram—has been abandoned. "We can't give any estimate as to when it will be finished because we don't know how visitor numbers will recover in the coming years," Fauli says. It is far from the first time Gaudi's masterpiece has faced such challenges. During the Spanish Civil War in the late 1930s, construction work stopped and many of Gaudi's design plans and models were destroyed. For critics, this major loss means they do not view what was built later as Gaudi's work, despite the research carried out by his successors.

UNESCO, the United Nations' cultural agency, has only granted World Heritage status to the Sagrada Familia's crypt and one of its facades, both of which were built during Gaudi's lifetime. But Fauli insists the project remains faithful to what Gaudi had planned as it is based on the meticulous study of photographs, drawings and testimony from the late Modernist architect.

### Some local opposition

Nominated chief architect of the project in 2012, Fauli took over at the head of a team of 27 architects and more than 100 builders. Today, there are five architects and some 16 builders working to finish the Sagrada Familia. "It is a lot of responsibility because it's an iconic project, which many people have an opinion about," says Fauli.

Building such a vast monument which draws huge numbers of visitors is not welcomed by everyone, with some arguing that the hoards of visiting tourists are destroying the area. Many also oppose plans to build an enormous staircase leading up to the main entrance, the construction of which will involve the demolition of several buildings, forcing hundreds to relocate. "My life is here and they want to throw me out," says one sign on a balcony near the Sagrada Familia. Fauli said he understands their concerns and wants to find "fair solutions" through dialogue. And if he could ask Gaudi one question? Fauli pauses to reflect for a few moments. "I would ask him about his underlying intentions and what feelings he wanted to communicate through his architecture," he says. —AFP



The architect director of the works of the Sagrada Familia basilica, Jordi Fauli, poses outside the catholic temple during an interview with AFP in Barcelona on December 1, 2021. —AFP photos



A general view of the Sagrada Familia basilica in Barcelona.



A general interior view of the Sagrada Familia basilica.

## Sports

# Cummins savors 'dream start'; England slump to 147 all out

## Cummins takes 5 wickets in a scintillating start to his captaincy

**BRISBANE:** Pat Cummins took five wickets in a scintillating start to his captaincy as Australia routed England for 147 on the opening day of the Ashes at the Gabba yesterday. After England skipper Joe Root won the toss and opted to bat, the Australian pace bowling trio of Cummins, Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood ran riot to bundle the tourists out in just 50.1 overs.

Cummins, in his first game as Test captain since taking over from Tim Paine, claimed 5-38, while Starc took 2-35 and Hazlewood 2-42 as the English batters failed to adapt to the bounce and movement of a Gabba green top. England made a disastrous start to the series when they lost Rory Burns to the first ball of the match, Starc bowling the left-hander around his legs. Dawid Malan, who scored six, and Root, for a duck, quickly followed as a shell-shocked England slumped to 11-3.

"It was a dream start really - it wasn't a bad toss to lose and I thought we all bowled really well and did our jobs," Cummins said. "To keep them to 150 was a tremendous start. I was really proud of how consistent and composed everyone was. Personally, it was nice to get a couple of wickets at the end to make it a five-for - it was just a really good start." Cummins chimed in to remove the dangerous Ben Stokes for five and leave England struggling on 59-4 at lunch, on a hot and humid Brisbane morning.

It was only a momentary respite. In the first over after the interval Haseeb Hameed edged Cummins to Steve Smith at second slip to leave England teetering at 60-5. Jos Buttler came out and launched a

fightback with a glittering array of attacking shots to put the Australian attack on the back foot for the first time. However, with the score on 112, Buttler - who had reached 39 - feathered a catch to debutant wicketkeeper Alex Carey.

Six runs later, Ollie Pope was caught at deep fine leg for 35 to give Cameron Green his first Test wicket. England's flimsy challenge was all but over, despite some late hitting from Chris Woakes, who was last man out for 21 as Cummins mopped up the tail. Pope said England had failed to adapt to the conditions swiftly enough. "They bowled very well and the steepness of the bounce you get at the Gabba - the pitch felt quite soft and I think that tennis-ball bounce probably dragged a few shots that you don't have to play," Pope said.

"It's probably the adjustments you have to make on a day-one Gabba pitch that we didn't make quickly enough," Pope said.

It said it was imperative that England bowled at the same level as their arch-rivals when play resumes today, the day's action having ended prematurely after heavy rain. "I think it will quicken up and the nicks will definitely carry so if we put it in the right areas early, hopefully we can make some early inroads," he said.

### Unwanted history

Earlier Root had taken the brave decision to bat in the bowler-friendly conditions. Brisbane has been experiencing a wet start to the summer, washing out most of the tourists' scheduled warm-up games. Having had little chance to become acclimatized to



**BRISBANE:** Mitchell Starc of Australia (center) celebrates taking the wicket of England's Rory Burns with the first ball of the match during day one of the first Ashes cricket Test match between England and Australia yesterday. — AFP

the conditions, England's top order struggled badly with the pace and movement of the Australian attack. The crowd of just over 30,000 were barely settled in their seats when Starc clean-bowled Burns behind the left-hander's legs with a full, swinging delivery that should have been defended.

It was only the second time in Ashes history that a wicket had fallen on the first ball of the series. The only previous victim was England's Stan

Worthington in 1936, also in Brisbane. England, already missing the rested Jimmy Anderson, made the surprise decision to leave out veteran seamer Stuart Broad. They instead opted for a seam attack of Woakes, Mark Wood and Ollie Robinson, bolstered by Stokes and left-arm spinner Jack Leach. "It was a little surprising - I thought either one of those two would play in every game, if not both of them," Cummins said. —AFP

## Arab Master Tennis Tournament results

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** Results of the Preliminaries in Arab Master Tennis Tournament were as follows: Rabei Sleem (from Syria) defeated Abdallah Al-Barwani (from Oman) 6-3/6-2. Mohamed Said (from Mauritania) defeated Zakaria Aweis from Somalia 6-0/6-0. Sulaiman Al-Qasem (from Saudi Arabia) defeated Oman's Muneer Alrawahi 6-3/6-4. Hassan Ibrahim (from Lebanon) defeated Libya's Ahmad Mouhan. In the final match, Jordan's Seif Adas defeated Somalia's Mahdi Ahmad.

Meanwhile the Arab Tennis Federation Board of Director held its ninth meeting that was chaired by Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Sabah. The board approved holding the second Arab Masters in Kuwait in 2022, and a similar tournament will be organized for women. It also agreed to establish a data base for all Arab member states that will include the number of tournaments, players, and clubs. There will also be a permanent committee for the pioneers in the Arab Federation - and a tourna-



ment approved for them to be held in Jordan in the first quarter of 2022.

Deputy Chairwoman of ATF Board Dr Salma Mouelhi expressed her pleasure at the resumption of Arab Tennis activities at Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah International Tennis Complex, which she considered an architectural art work. Dr Mouelhi lauded the efforts of the ATF Chairman Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber in developing and improving the technical level of Arab players. She said "even though the coronavirus affected all sports in general, we are seeing a triumphant return

of Arab tennis and we hope to see good competitive matches and promising talents".

On his part, Arab Tennis player Malek Jaziri (from Tunisia) held an open discussion meeting during which he spoke about his career in tennis and how he became attached to the game. He said he picked a racket when he was two years old. He said he faced various difficulties along the way - in addition to injuries that kept him away from the game for two years. Jaziri went to three Olympic games, and played with top players like Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic.

## Kuwait's delegation returns with gold, silver and bronze

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** Decorated with gold, silver and bronze medals, Kuwait's delegation to the 4th Asian Para Games that was held in Bahrain returned home on Tuesday night. The delegation was received by Chairman of the Kuwait Paralympic Committee Nasser Al-Ajmi and Honorary Chairwoman of Al-Irada Disabled Club Sheikhah Suhaila Al-Sabah and Chairman of Al-Irada Club Duajj Al-Hajiri. Nasser Al-Ajmi lauded the players' achievement adding that "in her first participation Malak Al-Enezi was able to win gold, as Mohammad Al-Rashidi won silver and Hussein Al-Bannai won bronze. He said this was due to cooperation by all the people involved.



Sheikha Suhaila said she was very happy with the Asian achievement which made all Kuwaitis proud. Kuwait athletes win more medals in the coming events. She thanked the clubs which were behind victories. The winner of the Table Tennis gold medal, Malak Al-Enezi dedicated her medal to HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Kuwaitis.

## Pakistan beat Bangladesh in race against dying light

**DHAKA:** Off-spinner Sajid Khan claimed 4-86 and finished with a match haul of 12 wickets as Pakistan defied fading light to beat Bangladesh by an innings and eight runs and take the two-Test series 2-0 in Dhaka yesterday. All-rounder Shakib Al Hasan let Bangladesh's middle order in a brave resistance but could not salvage a draw as the hosts' last wicket fell just minutes before sunset. Shakib top-scored for Bangladesh with 63 off 130 balls and in the process made an all-round career double of 4,000 runs and 200 wickets, the quickest in history and beating a record long held by Ian Botham.

But despite a 51-run partnership with Mehidy Hossain for the seventh wicket, Bangladesh's hopes were dashed when Pakistan skipper Babar Azam trapped his teammate. "I felt that I needed to bowl at that stage and really happy I got that wicket," said Babar of his maiden Test wicket. "Our batsmen and especially openers gave us a good start and our mindset was just to dominate despite the bad weather," he added.

Sajid, who took 8-42 in the first innings, broke through the defense of Shakib in the next over to bowl him out. He also took the final two wickets when the light started dimming, which prevented Pakistan's fast bowlers from bowling at the tail-enders. Mushfqr Rahim and Liton Das earlier scored 48 and 45 runs respectively for Bangladesh, but two wickets apiece from Hasan Ali and Shaheen Afridi held the side to 25-4 after Pakistan forced the follow-on.

Mushfqr made decent partnerships with Liton and Shakib before he was run out on the stroke of tea. "In the second innings we had an opportunity to play better than the first," said Bangladesh captain Monimul Haque. "Though some of our senior players played well, we couldn't hang on." The hosts could only add another 11 runs to their first innings total after resuming with three wickets remaining to get dismissed for 87, their lowest score on home soil and 213 behind Pakistan. — AFP

## Djokovic on entry list for Australian Open, no Serena

**MELBOURNE:** Men's world number one Novak Djokovic was named among the entries for the Australian Open yesterday, following intense speculation about his vaccination status, but women's great Serena Williams was missing. The Serbian had cast doubt on whether he would defend his Melbourne title next month, refusing to reveal whether he was inoculated against coronavirus, a requirement to play.

But after being named on Tuesday as part of the Serbia team for January's ATP Cup in Sydney that will precede the opening major of the year, he was also listed for the Grand Slam. Williams, who is marooned on 23 Grand Slam titles - one short of the all-time record held by Margaret Court - had been expected to play, but she is not fully fit. The American superstar turned 40 in September and may have played her last Australian Open.

The seven-time Melbourne champion said she had withdrawn following advice from her medical team. "While this is never an easy decision to make, I am not where I need to be physically to compete," she said. "Melbourne is one of my favorite cities to visit and I look forward to playing at the AO every year. I will miss seeing the fans, but am excited to return and compete at my highest level." Despite Williams being stuck on 23 Slams, her French coach Patrick Mouratoglou told AFP in September her legacy was secure.

"I don't mean to disrespect Margaret Court, but it's another era. Yes, it would be better if Serena broke her record, but if she doesn't, she will still be the greatest player of all time," he said. Otherwise, all of the women's top 20 were confirmed as playing, headlined by world number one Ashleigh Barty and Japanese star Naomi Osaka. In the men's draw, Spain's Rafael Nadal will challenge Djokovic to be the first man in history to win 21 Grand Slam titles.

Swiss legend Roger Federer, who also has 20 Slam crowns, had already announced he would miss the event as he recovers from injury. Ahead of the main draw being announced, Australian Open organizers had reiterated that all players must be vaccinated, amid reports they could seek a medical exemption for Djokovic with the backing of Tennis Australia. Those reports were quickly shut down. "All players, patrons and staff at the Australian Open have to be vaccinated," Tennis Australia said in a statement. "Any suggestion that Tennis Australia is seeking 'loopholes' within this process is simply untrue."

Government officials in Victoria state, which hosts the Australian Open, have been adamant for months that only vaccinated players will be able to access Melbourne Park for the tournament from January 17-30. And the state's Deputy Premier James Merlino rammed that home yesterday. "Everyone's looking forward to the Australian Open and everyone who will attend - spectators, players, officials, staff - everyone is expected to be fully vaccinated," he told reporters. — AFP



Sports

# Olesen 'embarrassed' by claims he drunkenly groped woman on flight

## Witnesses describe the 'completely bizarre' behavior

LONDON: Ryder Cup winner Thorbjorn Olesen told a court he was "embarrassed and felt horrible" after being accused of drunkenly groping a woman on a British Airways flight from the United States to Britain. The 31-year-old Danish golfer was on board with other professionals, including England's Ian Poulter and Justin Rose following a tournament in Memphis in 2019.

Witnesses have described the "completely bizarre" behavior of the five-time European Tour winner, who was ranked 51st in the world at the time, during the eight-hour flight from Nashville to London. The London court has heard that Olesen ran around the cabin "like a little boy", was unable to operate the toilet door, and became verbally abusive to cabin crew when challenged. He is said to have pushed one British Airways worker, kissed another's hand before making the sign of the cross, and touched a woman's breast.

He was eventually led back to his first-class seat, where he cried before falling asleep, but later urinated on another passenger's seat, the jury has been

told. Olesen, who lives in London, denies sexual assault, assault by beating and being drunk on an aircraft on July 29, 2019. Giving evidence on Tuesday, he told the jury he would never "consciously" risk his career by committing a crime and has no memory of



Golfer ran around 'like a little boy'

the flight after taking sleeping pills. "I felt absolutely horrible and I was very sorry. I could not believe what they were saying what happened," he said. "I was just embarrassed and felt

horrible." Olesen said he "felt fine" as he boarded the aircraft and was handed a drink, adding: "My last memory is getting a glass of champagne and sitting down in my seat and I think I remember taking off." He says he does not recall any of the incidents he is accused of. "The first thing I remember is police coming into my seat," he said. "I felt a bit all over the place. I was very confused and I think in shock mostly."

Questioned by the prosecution, Olesen denied he was "in a party mood" when he boarded the flight and said he had "definitely not" taken the pills with alcohol "for fun". The court heard that, following his arrest, Olesen lost lucrative sponsorship deals with firms including Nike, BMW, Rolex and Titleist, and was suspended from the European Tour. Olesen was temporarily reinstated to the Tour pending the outcome of the trial but has plunged to below 400th in the world rankings. "I think it's been very difficult to concentrate and play when you don't know if you have ruined your career and maybe never play professional golf again," he said. The trial continues. —AFP



Thorbjorn Olesen

## VO and ASMEK kick off their partnership at Amir's Cup final

KUWAIT: VO, the first Kuwait-based integrated youth platform for incubating young talents, and the Association of Small and Medium Enterprises of Kuwait (ASMEK) launched an agreement with the Kuwait Football Association to provide a space for Kuwait's small and medium companies to exhibit their businesses, products, and services at no cost during His Highness the Amir's Cup Final taking place on 21 December 2021 at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium.

In an official statement, the President of the Kuwait Football Association, His Excellency Sheikh Ahmed Al Youssef Al Sabah, praised the efforts of VO and ASMEK in supporting Kuwait's small and medium enterprises and expressed his optimism that such partnerships will lead businesses in Kuwait to rapidly recover the economic repercussions of the pandemic and grow faster than expected.

He then added: "The Kuwait Football Association welcomes Kuwaiti businesses to their dedicated space at the Amir's final cup. We look forward to supporting Kuwaiti brands in any way possible and be inspired with their unique ideas and high quality products." The joint-efforts of VO and ASMEK come as part of their memorandum of understanding that was signed in October 2021 to provide abounding opportunities to support the recovery and growth of the small and medium enterprises in Kuwait. VO and ASMEK's partnership will also launch multiple projects that will offer Kuwaiti brands and businesses the opportunity to integrate other markets in the region.

"After VO's success in empowering and publicly highlighting Kuwaiti talents in the field of media and entertainment, we are now tapping into other talents and interests of Kuwaiti youth including leadership, sports, culinary, and many more. However, entrepreneurship is definitely one of our



important pillars. Thus, our goal is to support Kuwaiti small and medium businesses to swiftly recover and start launching programs that will help our brands integrate other markets," stated Riham Al Ayyar, CEO of VO Kuwait.

In her statement, she also underscored the importance of considering Kuwait's small and medium enterprises in such major official events that will gain local and regional traffic whether physically or through media coverage. Al Ayyar explained that entities in Kuwait should work together by all means to globally position Kuwait and support its economic diversification. She stressed on the importance of consolidating all state efforts towards achieving those goals and considering Kuwaiti talents and entrepreneurs in their decisions, events, and public campaigns.

The Chairman of ASMEK, Mohammed Al Anjari, announced that all interested businesses can start



Riham Al Ayyar



Eng Mohammed Al Anjari

applying for an exhibition slot through the official website of the association: [www.asmek.net](http://www.asmek.net) starting 8 December 2021 until 11 December 2021. He also expressed his gratitude towards the Kuwait Football Association for their strong interest in supporting Kuwait's small and medium enterprises and providing all the necessary facilities, logistics, and coordination to provide a well-equipped space for Kuwaiti businesses to exhibit their products and services during the major event.

In his statement, he reaffirmed ASMEK's commitment towards Kuwait's small and medium enterprises and added: "We would like to assure Kuwaiti entrepreneurs that we are focusing all our efforts to support their recovery and establish partnerships that will provide them with fruitful opportunities to grow their businesses in Kuwait and across other markets."

Founded in July 2020, VO nurtures and supports Kuwaiti talents and inspiring initiatives in various fields including entrepreneurship. The platform launched its all-inclusive creative hub and official mobile-application in 2021, and is currently establishing an academic program for Kuwaiti youth and a 'smart' app to nurture their talents while promoting their creative productions on a seamless, high-tech and efficient digital platform.

## Error-strewn Leicester head to Napoli seeking Europa League spot

PARIS: Leicester coach Brendan Rodgers said his side's errors have cost them dearly before they head to Napoli today needing just a draw to secure a Europa League last 16 place. Rodgers' side have won just twice since the end of October. The Foxes lost 2-1 at Aston Villa on Sunday after conceding from a second-half corner as they failed to win for the sixth time in eight games since winning at Brentford on October 24.

"Defending set-pieces, it's really starting to hurt us. It starts to sap our confidence when you concede the goals we've been conceding. That's a big concern," Rodgers told the BBC. "The story for us is we can play well but we have to cut out mistakes. Even if we've won games recently we've made some mistakes. It's a worry for us. But we'll find a solution," he added.

Napoli, who lost top spot in Serie A at the weekend for the first time since late September, need to match Spartak Moscow's result at Legia Warsaw due to their superior goal difference, to claim a knock-out spot. Luciano Spalletti's team were also beaten at the weekend, losing 3-2 to Atalanta, as AC Milan moved into the top spot. Spalletti could be without up to eight players through injury for match against Leicester at the Diego Armando Maradona Stadium.

One positive for the home side is the expected return of Greece international centre-back Kostas Manolas who returned to training on Tuesday. Spalletti backed his outfit to compete despite the long list of absentees. "This is a credible team that will allow us to stay in the group of the top teams, until we get everyone back and then we'll be able to rotate more, but this team as it stands has still enough to stay where we are," Spalletti said. "What we are doing is right and I am convinced we will go far like this," he added. —AFP

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(K.S Rathore)  
First Secretary (Community Affairs) and Marriage Officer, Embassy of India, Kuwait. Email: [cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in](mailto:cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in)

## Perfect Liverpool knock Milan out

Atletico qualify; Walker sent off as Man City crash at RB Leipzig



MILAN: Liverpool's Belgian forward Divock Origi (Top left) and AC Milan's French goalkeeper Mike Maignan (right) go for the ball during the UEFA Champions League Group B football match between AC Milan and Liverpool on December 7, 2021. — AFP

**MILAN:** Liverpool made it a perfect six Champions League wins from six on Tuesday with a 2-1 victory at AC Milan which knocked one of Europe's most storied clubs out of continental competition for another season. Fikayo Tomori had given Milan, who needed to win and a favorable result between Porto and Atletico Madrid, hope they could make the last 16 with his tap-in just before the half hour mark at the San Siro.

But a quick reply from Mohamed Salah and Divock Origi's nodded finish 10 minutes after the break ensured Jurgen Klopp's side, missing a raft of starters, finished Group B on 18 points, the first English team to achieve that total. "It's an exceptional performance... with that many changes, the boys have to be confident enough to show how good they are," Klopp told reporters. "I saw so many good things tonight it was unbelievable."

Atletico Madrid won a bad-tempered game in Porto on Tuesday to qualify for the last 16 of the Champions League as Liverpool and Ajax both completed the group stage with 100 percent records. Diego Simeone's Atletico, who lost to Real Madrid in the 2014 and 2016 finals, needed to beat Porto in Portugal to advance to the knockout phase and they duly triumphed 3-1 in a game which featured three red cards.

Antoine Griezmann put the Spanish champions ahead in the 56th minute at the Estadio do Dragao but they then had Yannick Carrasco sent off for wrestling

Otavio to the ground. With tempers flaring, Porto were also reduced to 10 men as Wendell was sent off for elbowing Atletico's Matheus Cunha in the neck, before their substitute goalkeeper Agustin Marchesin also saw red.

With Porto pushing forward in search of the draw they needed to qualify, Atletico got their second goal on the break in the last minute through Angel Correa before Rodrigo De Paul scored their third in injury time. Sergio Oliveira's penalty was a mere consolation for Porto. Atletico finish second in Group B, a huge 11 points behind group winners Liverpool, who made it six wins out of six in Europe this season by beating AC Milan 2-1 at San Siro despite fielding a virtual reserve side. Milan had to win to stand a chance of going through and they went ahead midway through the first half through Fikayo Tomori.

Mohamed Salah did start for the visitors and he equalized in the 36th minute before Divock Origi—who scored a stoppage-time winner in the Premier League at the weekend—made it 2-1 10 minutes into the second half, heading in after Sadio Mane's shot was saved. "It's

an exceptional performance," said manager Jurgen Klopp. "With that many changes, the boys have to be confident enough to show how good they are. I saw so many good things tonight, it was unbelievable." Milan finish bottom of the group in their first Champions League campaign since 2013-14, with Porto parachuting into the Europa League.

### Real Madrid top group

Elsewhere, Real Madrid secured top spot in Group D with a 2-0 defeat of Inter Milan at the Santiago Bernabeu. Both sides had already qualified for the last 16 and Real just needed a draw to top the group. They went ahead through an early Toni Kroos strike, and Inter

had Nicolò Barella sent off just after the hour mark before substitute Marco Asensio sealed Real's victory with a stupendous strike. "Our objective is to go all the way, not just reach the last 16," said Real coach Carlo Ancelotti. Moldovan debutants Sheriff Tiraspol had already secured third place before Boban Nikolov's injury-time goal earned them a 1-1 draw at bottom side Shakhtar Donetsk, for whom Fernando had opened the scoring.

### Haller strikes again

Ajax made it six wins out of six in Group C by defeating Sporting Lisbon 4-2 in Amsterdam in a game played behind closed doors due to coronavirus restrictions in the Netherlands. Sebastien Haller put Ajax ahead with an early penalty for his 10th goal in the group stage, while Brazilian duo Antony and David Neres added further goals and Steven Berghuis was also on target. Nuno Santos and Bruno Tabata netted for Sporting, who had already secured second place to qualify ahead of Borussia Dortmund. The Germans crushed 10-man Besiktas 5-0 with Donyell Malen getting the opener and Marco Reus scoring a brace before Erling Haaland came off the bench to score two headers in the second half.

### Mbappe, Messi doubles

Earlier Manchester City, having already clinched first place in Group A, lost 2-1 at RB Leipzig, with Dominik Szoboszlai and Andre Silva on target for the Germans in their first game since sacking coach Jesse Marsch. Riyad Mahrez pulled one back for City, who had Kyle Walker sent off late on as Leipzig took third place. Paris Saint-Germain, who finish second in the group, crushed Club Brugge 4-1 with Kylian Mbappe and Lionel Messi both scoring twice. Mbappe's goals both came inside the first seven minutes and he then set up Messi's first goal, with the Argentinean adding a penalty as he moved on to five Champions League goals in five appearances this season. — AFP



### Real dispatch 10-man Inter to go through

## Nets fight back to thump Mavericks

**LOS ANGELES:** James Harden and Kevin Durant led a late fightback as the Brooklyn Nets overturned a 17-point, third-quarter deficit to edge past the Dallas Mavericks on Tuesday. Harden and Durant combined for 47 points in a 102-99 road victory for Brooklyn, who lead the Eastern Conference with 17 wins against seven losses. Brooklyn's victory was sealed by a devastating burst of scoring in the fourth quarter, with the Nets overwhelming Dallas 27-13. Brooklyn took the lead for the first time in the game with a Harden free throw to make it 91-90 with 6 min 41 remaining. Dallas star Luka Doncic twice regained the lead for the Mavericks, but a 25-foot three-pointer from Patty Mills edged Brooklyn back in front at 98-97 with just under three minutes on the clock.

A Harden layup put Brooklyn 100-97 ahead and Durant's fadeaway completed the Nets' scoring. The win at Dallas's American Airlines Center was vindication for Brooklyn coach Steve Nash, who left Harden and Durant on the court for over 41 minutes and 40 minutes respectively. "I like to be on the court," Durant said afterwards. "A game like tonight we were struggling a little bit and we needed a bit of juice going into the fourth quarter. Coach kept me and James on the court to give us an extra push and it worked."

Nash said Tuesday's victory augured well for the rest of the season. "I'm proud of the way we've been able to find solutions and win games," Nash said. "We're knocking on the door of elevating our play into a little bit higher category." Dallas were left ruing their inability to strike from distance. Doncic led the Mavs scorers with 28 points, but Dallas paid the price for making just nine of 46 attempts from three-point range.



DALLAS: Kevin Durant #7 of the Brooklyn Nets and Dorian Finney-Smith #10 of the Dallas Mavericks battle for control of the ball in the first half at American Airlines Center on November 7, 2021. — AFP

The defeat dropped the Mavs below .500 at 11-12, seventh in the Western Conference.

In Los Angeles, the Lakers scored a comfortable win over the Boston Celtics at the Staples Center. LeBron James finished with 30 points while Russell Westbrook added 24 in a 117-102 win for the Lakers, who improved to 13-12 with the win. James, who returned to playing duty last week after entering the league's COVID-19 protocols following a series of conflicting test results, has now posted 30 points or more in four of his last five appearances.

"We had a lot of good moments tonight and we want to continue to build off that. There's a lot we can clean up but tonight was one of the best 48 minute games that we've had so far," said James, relieved to be playing again after a season disrupted by injury, suspension and last week's COVID-19 intrigue.

"Unfortunately I haven't been out on the floor as much as I would like this season, but I felt really good tonight," James said. "My teammates picked me up and I tried to pick them up. Hopefully we can keep it going for the foreseeable future." Anthony Davis had 17 points and 16 rebounds for the Lakers while Talen Horton-Tucker chipped in with 12 points.

Boston's scoring was led by Jayson Tatum, who finished with 34 points after draining 13 of 22 from the field, including five three-pointers. Elsewhere Tuesday, the New York Knicks halted their three-game losing streak with a 121-109 win on the road over the San Antonio Spurs. RJ Barrett led the New York team, scoring with 32 points as six Knicks players finished in double digits. The Knicks improved to 12-12 with the win to remain just outside the Eastern Conference playoff places in 11th. — AFP

## Qatar sees budget outlay up 5 percent for World Cup

**DOHA:** Qatar foresees a nearly five percent rise in government expenditures next year due to its hosting of the 2022 World Cup, budget estimates released Tuesday show. The emirate's planned expenses for 2022 rose by 4.9 percent from last year to 204.3 billion riyals (\$55.7 billion), Finance Minister Ali bin Ahmed al-Kuwari said, according to the official Qatar News Agency. This was "mainly due to the temporary increase in operational expenses related to the World Cup hosting activities, which include security and operating costs for all related events to the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022," the minister said.

Qatar, the world's biggest exporter of liquefied natural gas, conservatively projects total revenue of 196 billion riyals, based on an average oil price of \$55 a barrel, Kuwari said. That leaves an expected deficit of 8.3 billion riyals, which the finance ministry would work to cover "through available cash balances and issue of local and foreign debt instruments if the need arises," he said. A year ago the government projected its 2020 budget surplus of 500 million riyals would be wiped out in 2021 after energy prices fell due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Kuwari said there had been a "remarkable recovery in global energy prices". — AFP