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16 Man City, Liverpool, Chelsea all win thanks to penalties



Saudi Crown Prince's Gulf tour culminates in numerous deals

Kuwait, Saudi sign pacts to boost cooperation in various fields



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah bestow upon Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman the Order of Mubarak the Great during their meeting yesterday. — AFP

KUWAIT: Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman's tour of Oman, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait has culminated in hammering out a host of agreements and memos of understanding (MoUs) aiming at cementing inter-Gulf cooperation in various domains. In Kuwait, he met HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in the presence of HH the Crown Prince of Kuwait Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

HH the Kuwaiti Crown Prince and his Saudi counterpart co-chaired official talks where they emphasized their determination to enhance cooperation and coordination in the security and military fields between their two countries. They agreed to boost all means of cooperation on international climate policies, implementing the Green Middle East Initiative launched by Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, according to the joint statement released at the end of the visit.

Both sides agreed to maximize benefit from electrical interconnection and commercial exchange of electrical energy. They stressed their intent to

bolster investment, commercial and economic cooperation in the public and private sectors and carry out joint economic projects. The two sides agreed on enhancing bilateral cooperation to encourage direct investment in both countries in line with the activation of the memo signed between them, and on boosting investment exchange opportunities as well as unifying efforts to remove obstacles and provide chances to their investors.

They affirmed the significance of boosting collaboration in finance, sharing expertise and getting the best practices to carry out economic reforms and diversify income sources. They stressed strengthening cooperation in various fields like health, tourism, food security and human development, mainly youth and women's empowerment sectors, in addition to digital transformation and cybersecurity. They affirmed the contents of Al-Ula Statement issued on Jan 5, 2021 that calls for the full implementation of the vision of King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud

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News in brief

Sheikh Duaij Al-Khalifa passes away

KUWAIT: Eminent lyricist and playwright Sheikh Duaij Al-Khalifa Al-Sabah passed away yesterday at the age of 50. He was laid to rest yesterday afternoon. — KUNA (See Page 4)

KNPC denies shares for sale

KUWAIT: Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) yesterday denied offering shares for trading, warning social media users not to believe in "dubious" online advertisements illegally using the company's name. Deputy CEO for Administrative and Commercial Affairs and Official Spokesman Ahd Al-Kharyef said unknown entities had recently posted ads inviting investment in the company's shares, underlining KNPC is fully state-owned and its shares are not for sale. — KUNA

Camel pageant hit by cheating

RIYADH: A high-stakes camel beauty pageant in Saudi Arabia has been hit by a cheating scandal after 43 entrants were disqualified for botox injections and other cosmetic enhancements. The King Abdulaziz Camel Festival is an annual bedouin event held in the desert northeast of Riyadh that lures breeders from around the Gulf with prize money of up to \$66 million. — AFP

Lebanon, Syria seize Captagon pills

BEIRUT: Security forces in Lebanon and Syria said yesterday that they had seized two separate shipments of the banned stimulant Captagon, the latest in a string of similar busts. Lebanon's Internal Security Forces said it "thwarted an attempt to smuggle four million Captagon pills" hidden in a coffee shipment destined for Saudi Arabia via Jordan. In a separate operation, Syrian authorities seized "hundreds of thousands" of Captagon pills in the southern province of Daraa. — AFP

Rush to remit: Indians cash in on weak rupee

By Sajeev K Peter

KUWAIT: Currency exchange companies across Kuwait are doing brisk business these days amid a continuous slide in the value of the Indian rupee,

prompting Indian residents to send money home at very attractive rates. One Kuwaiti dinar fetched nearly 250 Indian rupees yesterday as the currency traded at more than 75 against the US dollar in forex markets on Friday amid a strengthening US dollar and concerns over the new Omicron coronavirus variant. Rising crude oil prices also contributed to the volatility of the rupee, according to market observers.

"There is an unusual rush at most of our branches as people find the current exchange rate quite attrac-

Dozens dead in Kentucky as storms hit US

NASHVILLE: Tornadoes ripped through half a dozen states overnight Friday into yesterday, leaving at least 70 people feared dead in a devastated city in Kentucky and around 100 trapped in a partially collapsed Amazon warehouse in Illinois. Pictures and videos shared on social media from the city of Mayfield in Kentucky showed buildings torn apart by the storm, with

bent metal, trees and dislodged bricks scattered across the streets and only the remnants of houses left behind with Christmas two weeks away.

Images of the tornadoes from US news channels showed a black cylinder sweeping across the ground, illuminated by intermittent blasts of lightning. A number of counties in Kentucky were left devastated by at least four tornadoes that touched down. One smashed through a swathe of 200 miles of the state, Governor Andy Beshear said. "I fear that there are more than 50 dead ... probably closer to somewhere between 70 and 100, it's devastating," Beshear said, adding that it was the "most

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Gaza women seek surgery to brighten smile

GAZA: When Shoruk Shaheen glances in the mirror, she likes what she sees, especially the change in her face after a cosmetic procedure gaining popularity in Gaza: Dimple creation surgery. The resident of the Palestinian enclave - who wore white shoes with a Dior logo and clutched a knock-off Louis Vuitton bag - had the procedure a month ago at a clinic in downtown Gaza City.

"If you have a beautiful smile then you are a

beautiful person," said the 26-year-old communications manager, whose eyes remained fixed on her mirror as she admired the new indentation in her left cheek. Dimple creation surgery is performed worldwide but has particular appeal in Gaza, thanks to its low cost and relative safety.

Expensive, riskier procedures are problematic in Gaza, a deeply impoverished territory with a weak healthcare system and under a Zionist blockade since 2007, the year Hamas Islamists took power. Creating an artificial dimple is "very simple, very easy, very fast" and carries little risk, Shaheen's surgeon Jalaa El-Talmas told AFP.

When performing the procedure, which takes just 10 minutes, Talmas said he applies local anesthetic to the cheek and mouth before making a



MAYFIELD, Kentucky: Heavy damage is seen downtown after a tornado swept through the area yesterday. — AFP



GAZA: Shoruk Shaheen, a Palestinian woman who has undergone dimple creation surgery, smiles at a clinic on Nov 30, 2021. — AFP

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Local

Prince Mohammad's visit newest chapter in Kuwait, Saudi historic ties

Kuwait, Saudi Arabia agree to boost cooperation in all fields

KUWAIT: Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, the Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister, paid an official visit to the State of Kuwait on Friday. The visit stems from the deep-rooted historical ties between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and their peoples, and in enhancement of the bilateral relations as well as upon the directives of Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, according to a joint statement released Friday night.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Prince Mohammad bin Salman, in the presence of His Highness the Crown Prince of Kuwait Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The Saudi Crown Prince conveyed to His Highness the Amir the greetings and appreciation of Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz, the statement noted. King Salman also wished everlasting good health to His Highness the Amir, and further prosperity and progress to Kuwait.

His Highness the Amir, meanwhile, asked Prince Mohammad to convey his greetings to King Salman, wishing him everlasting good health, and further progress and prosperity to Saudi people. His Highness the Amir also decorated Prince Mohammad with the Order of Mubarak Al-Kabeer and Order of Kuwait, in appreciation of his achievements and distinctive efforts for Saudi Arabia and its gracious people, as well as his distinguished efforts for serving stability, security and progress of the kingdom, and solidifying the bonds of brotherhood between Kuwait and the kingdom and among the GCC states.

Cooperation and coordination

Official talks were held between His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman. During the talks, they reviewed the deep-rooted bilateral relations, and horizons of bilateral cooperation and means of developing it in all fields. The two senior officials lauded cooperation and coordination in the commercial, economic, military, security and political fields in a manner that achieves security, stability and prosperity of the two countries. They also commended the establishment of the Saudi-Kuwaiti coordination council that comes upon the desire of the two countries' leaderships. It aims to upgrade cooperation in all fields to the level that reflect the deep-rooted historical sisterly relations.

The two sides stressed the necessity of work on making the required shift in cooperation fields specified in the council in a way that enhances these fields and upgrades relations to the horizons of strategic partnership. In addition, the two senior officials emphasized their determination to enhance and develop cooperation and coordination in the defense and military fields between the two countries. They further extolled current cooperation and security coordination between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. They voiced their desire to continue enhancing it in order to achieve security and stability of the two brotherly countries, according to the statement.

Both sides commended the deep-rooted cooperation in energy and the efforts of the OPEC+ group to stabilize the global oil market. They affirmed the importance of continuing this cooperation and the necessity of abidance of all countries by the OPEC+ deal, according to the statement. They noted that there is ongoing coordination between the working companies in the divided and submerged areas adjacent to it with regard to implementing the terms of the memo and that work is continuing to raise the output in both the joint Khafji and the Wafra operations.



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman Al-Saud, in the presence of His Highness the Crown Prince of Kuwait Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — Amiri Diwan photo

Climate policies

The two sides agreed on boosting means of cooperation on international climate policies, implementing the Green Middle East Initiative launched by Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, and the concept of a circular carbon economy to contribute to addressing carbon emissions in an economically sustainable manner as well as energy, energy efficiency and renewable energy. They focused on technologies and projects for contribution to the sustainability of energy supplies globally, and the importance of boosting cooperation to increase the two countries' benefit from electrical interconnection and commercial exchange of electric energy, and maximize the use of local content of energy sector projects. They stressed their determination on bolstering investment, commercial and economic cooperation in the public and private sectors, and carry out joint economic projects between the two countries as well as raising trade exchange to meet aspirations of the two peoples.

The two sides agreed on enhancing bilateral cooperation to encourage direct investment in both countries in line with the activation of the memo signed between them, and on boosting investment exchange opportunities as well as unifying efforts to remove obstacles and provide chances to their investors. They affirmed the significance of boosting collaboration in finance, sharing expertise and getting the best practices to carry out economic reforms and diversify income sources. They stressed strengthening cooperation in various fields like health, tourism, food security and human development, mainly youth and women's empowerment sectors, in addition to digital transformation and cybersecurity.

They affirmed the contents of Al-Ula Statement issued on January 5, 2021, that calls for the full implementation of the vision of King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud approved by the GCC supreme council. This comes in line with a certain timeframe and completion of the economic system potentials, and the joint security and defense systems. This also aims to crystallize a unified foreign policy in a manner that ensures the GCC states' solidarity and sta-

bility, and enhances their regional role through unifying political positions, developing political partnerships with the international community, and regional and international organizations.

Regional developments

They reviewed the regional and international developments, and affirmed coordination of their stances in a way that serves their interests and enhances security and stability in the region and the world. The two sides reiterated their full support to all legitimate rights of Palestinian people topped with establishing the independent Palestinian state on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, in line with the Arab peace initiative, the two-state solution and the relevant international legitimacy's resolutions in a manner that meets aspirations of the brotherly Palestinian people.

On Yemen, the two sides underlined their identical views on continuing efforts to find a comprehensive political solution to the Yemeni crisis based on the Gulf initiative and its executive mechanism, the outcomes of the national dialogue, the UN Security Council Resolution 2216 and the Saudi initiative so as to end the calamity. They voiced their support to efforts of UN Secretary General's Envoy for Yemen and endeavors made to lift humanitarian sufferings of Yemeni people. They condemned Houthi militias' targeting of the airports, residential areas and vital facilities in Saudi Arabia, and their threats to international waterways. They urged the UN Security Council to assume its role to halt the Houthi attacks that violate international humanitarian law, and affect international peace and security.

The two senior officials stressed the necessity of making comprehensive reforms in Lebanon to help it overcome its crisis and confine arms to the legitimate state's hands, in line with the UN Security Council Resolution 1559 and 1701. They affirmed the necessity of not making Lebanon a haven of any terrorist acts or any groups that target the region's stability and security, the statement noted. On Iraq, they voiced their full backing to the country's stability and security, welcoming the successful

elections and hoping for forming an Iraqi government to combat terrorism, halt foreign interference and develop the country. On Sudan, they welcomed the understandings reached amongst the Sudanese parties and stressed continued support so as to achieve stability and security in that Arab country.

Iran's nuclear file

They affirmed the importance of cooperation and dealing effectively with the nuclear and rocket file of Iran with all its repercussions and components. They stressed their joint stance on this, calling for commitment to the UN Security Council Resolution 2231. In this regard, they called for taking into consideration the interests of the region's countries, and its security and stability. They further stressed that a political solution is the only way to the Syrian crisis, voicing support for the efforts of the United Nations and its Special Envoy to implement the relevant international resolutions, topped with Security Council Resolution 2254 and the Geneva 1 statement, and halt regional interventions and projects that threaten the unity, sovereignty and identity of Syria.

Concerning Afghanistan, the two sides stressed the need to back security and stability in Afghanistan and prevent any presence of safe havens for terrorists and extremists on the country. They condemned any acts aimed at recruiting Afghan refugees in the various conflict areas, expressing the importance of backing relief efforts and humanitarian action in Afghanistan. The Kuwaiti side appreciated Saudi Arabia's call for an extraordinary ministerial meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation member states to discuss the situation in Afghanistan. The meeting is due in Pakistan on December 19, 2021.

On Libya, they welcomed the UN and Libya's efforts made to back political gains agreed upon to enable Libyans to meet their aspirations in terms of the unity, stability, peace and prosperity, in implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 2750. At the end of the visit, Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman thanked deeply 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 for the good reception and hospitality. Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah wished everlasting good health to his Saudi counterpart, and further progress and prosperity to Saudi people. — KUNA



Officials commend efforts to stabilize oil market

Saudi Crown Prince's Gulf...

Continued from Page 1

approved by the GCC supreme council. In Muscat, Omani Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion Qais Al-Yousef and Saudi Minister of Commerce and Minister of Media Majid Al-Qasabi signed two MoUs in the fields of commerce and standardization. One MoU stressed exchanging expertise, protecting national products, developing e-commerce and regulation mechanisms, and marketing research. The standardization deal targets the exchange of data and studies as well as collaboration in fields of specifications and quality. It also encourages holding training courses.

In addition, Omani Minister of Information signed Tuesday with Saudi Minister of Commerce and Acting Minister of Media Majid Al-Qasabi several MoUs aiming to enhance joint media fields. Omani News Agency (ONA) reported that the MoUs include exchanging experiences, expertise

and exploring various media aspects. The MoUs will contribute to strengthening the relations between the two countries, by supporting media platforms and exchanging information relating to news services, ONA added.

Saudi Arabia and Oman also inked 13 memoranda of understanding to launch joint ventures in diverse sectors. On Monday, the Omani group Okio inked three MoUs, one on petrochemicals and renewable energy, and on green hydrogen (with the Saudi company ACWA Power and Abder Product Co), the second on oil storage with Aramco and the third with Sabic for developing the Al-Doqom petrochemical venture.

Another MoU was signed by the Omani group Asyad and the Saudi maritime company, and a fifth one involved Minerals Development Oman (MDO) and the Saudi Arabian Mining Company. Moreover, the Omani group Omran hammered out a memo for investment in tourism with the Saudi Dar Arkan company. Other deals signed by both sides covered fish farming and stocks.

In Doha, both Saudi and Qatari sides agreed, in a joint statement issued at the conclusion of Prince Mohammad's visit, on enhancing cooperation in various fields including politics, security, defense, economy, etc. — KUNA

friend of a relative. "They think that it makes the girl more attractive, when she laughs, when she talks, she becomes more attractive," he said of his clients.

Talmas, who has worked abroad, said he believes the procedure is more popular among Gazans than other Arab women in the Middle East. Gazan women became aware of it from those who had travelled to Egypt and the Gulf, according to doctors. It costs \$30-\$45 per cheek - compared with thousands in some Western clinics. Shaheen started with just her left cheek, but said she plans to do the other side. — AFP

Dozens dead in Kentucky as...

Continued from Page 1

severe tornado event in Kentucky's history." In one incident, the roof of a candle factory collapsed, resulting in "mass casualties" in the city of Mayfield, the governor added. "Mayfield in Graves County will be ground zero," Kentucky emergency management director Michael Dossett told CNN Saturday morning. "The city took the heart, the hardest hit. There is massive devastation in that city," he said.

The governor declared a state of emergency before midnight and said scores of search and rescue officials had been deployed to save lives as power outages continued to hit the area. On the same night a

Rush to remit: Indians cash in...

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Fresh concerns over the Omicron variant has added to the volatility. However, the partially convertible Indian rupee is still higher than its all-time low of 76.87 against the US dollar that it hit in April last year.

"For residents, the weakening of the rupee is a blessing in disguise, as they can send more money to India. Ironically, a weaker Indian currency hurts the economy and fuels inflation in the domestic market," said Raghunathan Iyer, who works at an

storm ripped through a massive Amazon warehouse in the state of Illinois where around 100 workers were trapped inside, local media reported.

Hundreds of officials were working through the early hours of yesterday to rescue employees at the Amazon warehouse - a third of which was reduced to rubble - who were on the night shift processing orders ahead of the Christmas holidays. The Collinsville Emergency Management Agency described it as a "mass casualty incident" with "multiple subjects trapped at Amazon Warehouse." A tornado warning had been in effect in the area at the time.

Footage shared across US news channels and social media of the Amazon warehouse in the city of Edwardsville showed a large part of the facility's roof ripped off, while one of the walls had collapsed into the building, with rubble strewn across the site. Edwardsville police said in a statement there were "confirmed fatalities".

Illinois Governor J B Pritzker said: "My prayers are with the people of Edwardsville tonight." — AFP

investment company in Kuwait City. Forex specialists have also observed an increase in high net-worth remittances over the last few months.

"High-value remittances and volumes to India have increased significantly in the last few weeks," said Fareed Abdulsalam, a currency specialist working with an exchange company in Kuwait City. However, many experts are of the view that a depreciation of the Indian rupee doesn't help residents much in low-income categories. "They are not in a position to take advantage of the favorable forex rates as their incomes remain the same, no matter if the currency rates improve or not," Abdulsalam pointed out. According to currency experts, the rupee will continue to remain under pressure as the dollar is expected to remain bullish in the near term.

Gaza women seek surgery to...

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slight incision in the zygomaticus muscle that extends from the cheekbone to the mouth. Talmas said he is performing the dimple procedure for several young women per month, most of whom request it after seeing the results on a

Local

Saudi Crown Prince's visit comes at much-needed time: Speaker Ghanem

Visit opens new horizons for economic cooperation: KCCI's head

KUWAIT: Kuwait National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem praised the results of the visit of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz to the State of Kuwait. "The visit has added to the edifice of historical relations and fraternity between the peoples of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait," he said in a press statement on Friday. The Saudi Crown Prince's visit to his second home country, Kuwait, as part of his tour of GCC countries, comes at a time when our countries need the utmost levels of cooperation and coordination, he stressed.

Ghanem praised the joint statement issued after the visit and addressing aspects of cooperation and coordination. The statement highlights the common positions on many regional files, including the Palestinian issue, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Sudan and other files, Ghanem said. His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishaal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah granted the Saudi Crown Prince the Order of Mubarak Al-Kabeer and the Order of Kuwait as indication that he is held in high esteem by the Kuwaiti political leadership and people, he noted. Ghanem concluded praying to God Almighty "to guide the steps of the leaders of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries to all that is good, prosperity and well-being of our peoples."

Economic cooperation

Meanwhile, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) Mohammad Al-Sager said on Friday that the visit of the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia Prince Mohammad bin Salman to Kuwait opens new horizons for economic and trade cooperation between both sides. This came in a statement to reporters following the end of the forum organized by KCCI on the occasion of the visit of the Chairman of the Council of Saudi Chambers of Commerce and Industry Ajlan Al-Ajlan, with the aim of discussing investment and trade opportunities between both countries, especially in the fields of energy, petrochemical industry, real estate and major development projects.

In the meantime, Ajlan said that his visit is part of a high-ranking delegation of economic activities to Kuwait, which accompanies the visit of the

Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia to Kuwait. During the forum, which was held at the headquarters of KCCI, they discussed enormous growth opportunities in investment and economic development, he added, stressing that the Saudi delegation is looking forward to expanding cooperation in various fields to the business sector in both countries. The Kuwaiti-Saudi forum, organized by KCCI, witnessed the participation of the Director General of the Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority Sheikh Dr Mishal Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, who explained to the Saudi delegation the details of investment in Kuwait and its success in attracting foreign capital and several international companies.

Kuwait is constantly developing regulations and laws on direct investment, he explained, underlining that investment continues to improve in order to reach Kuwait's 2035 vision, which among its main objectives is to diversify sources of income through the introduction of foreign investments. The forum also witnessed the participation of the Secretary General of the Kuwaiti Supreme Council for Planning and Development Dr Khaled Mahdi, who gave a historical overview of the importance of Kuwait's geographical location that was able to be a major station for transporting goods to neighboring countries. During the forum, a number of commercial agreements were signed between a group of private Kuwaiti companies and their Saudi counterparts, also several economic projects of interest to businessmen in both countries were discussed.

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah said that Prince Mohammad's visit materialized the brotherly relations with Kuwait and its people. The visit builds on the groundwork laid by our ancestors a long time ago, May God have mercy on their souls, Prince Faisal wrote on his official Twitter account on Friday. The fraternity remained strong thanks to the good tradition followed by the righteous sons of both countries to achieve their peoples' aspiration in all fields, the noted. He added that the Crown Prince's tour of

GCC states confirmed the Gulf's unity and the shared desire to continue working for a better future. Saudi Foreign Minister stressed that the Kingdom along with its sisterly nations are working to ensure the region's stability and security, in addition to prosperity and wellbeing of the people.

Gulf integration

In the meantime, the Council of Saudi Chambers of Commerce and Industry stressed the necessity of accelerating the ongoing efforts in developing commercial relations between Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and diversifying partnerships between the Saudi and Kuwaiti private sectors in line with the Kingdom 2030 and Kuwait 2035 development plans in order to achieve Gulf economic integration.

This came in an economic report issued by the Center for Economic Studies at the Council on the occasion of the official Gulf tour by the Saudi Crown Prince. The report reviewed the advantages of direct investment in Kuwait to improve the business climate to empower the private sector, including simplifying registration and licensing procedures for investors and allowing foreign ownership of up to 100 percent in enterprises.

The report pointed out that foreign projects enjoy investment incentives, including tax benefits, relief from customs duties and exemptions, in addition to the priority of development of promising sectors, including manufacturing, information and communications, technology, logistics supply chains, energy and mining. It emphasized the Saudi-Kuwaiti economic relations that enjoy great support from the political leadership in both countries, and supported by effective institutional organizational frameworks, represented in the Saudi-Kuwaiti Coordination Council, memoranda of understanding and bilateral cooperation agreements in a number of fields. It also highlighted that impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on reducing the volume of trade exchange between the two countries, which amounted to



KUWAIT: Kuwait's National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem welcomes Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman Al-Saud. —Amiri Diwan photos

about SAR 7.7 billion (about \$2.53 billion) in 2020, this ranked Kuwait in the fourth place among the GCC countries in the volume of exchange trade with the Kingdom. The report stressed the need to benefit from data created by the coronavirus pandemic and work more to increase coordination and cooperation in sectors and areas that achieve their economic interests for the Kingdom and Kuwait.

It also pointed out the diversity of commodities involved in the trade exchange between the Kingdom and Kuwait for the year 2020. Commodities exported from Saudi Arabia to Kuwait in 2020 included food supplies, animal products and intermediate industrial goods such as plastics and their products, iron and steel, while commodities imported from Kuwait during the same year were food commodities such as barley, mill products and intermediate goods such as metal products and paper. —KUNA



Joint investment opportunities discussed

Prince Mohammad's tour prepares for historic summit: Journalists



KUWAIT: Members of the Saudi media delegation meet with officials from the Ministry of Information, KUNA, and the Kuwait Journalists Association. —KUNA

KUWAIT: Chairman of the Saudi Journalists Association Khaled Al-Malik stressed the importance of the visit to Kuwait by Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense of the sisterly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as part of a tour of GCC member states. The tour aimed to prepare the atmospheres for a historic GCC summit that will be held in Riyadh after a few days, said Al-Malik, who heads the media delegation accompanying the Crown Prince during the trip. He made the statements to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) on the sidelines of his meeting on Friday, with a number of media officials from the Ministry of Information, KUNA, and the Kuwait Journalists Association. "The GCC tour by the Saudi Crown Prince is the first top-level Saudi trip after the GCC countries' reconciliation, in which Kuwait had an active role at the behest of His Highness the late Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, may God have mercy on him," Malik noted.

In similar statements, Undersecretary of the Kuwaiti Ministry of Information Munira Al-Huwaidi considered that this fraternal visit of Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman as a consolidation of the deep-rooted historical relations between the State of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia over the decades. Huwaidi added that these media meetings aim to raise the level of media coordination between the two brotherly countries in various fields, especially in the field of news, radio, and television and the exchange of training experiences. She pointed out the need for joint coordination between the various media sectors in the two countries by developing an action plan.

In the meantime, head of the Kuwait Journalists Association Adnan Al-Rashed praised Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman's visit to Kuwait. Rashed welcomed the opening of new horizons of



Chairman of the Saudi Journalists Association Khaled Al-Malik (left) with Undersecretary of the Kuwaiti Ministry of Information Munira Al-Huwaidi.

media and press cooperation between the Kuwait Journalists Association and the Saudi Journalists Association, stressing the existing cooperation, pointing to the conclusion of a cooperation agreement between the two sides in the coming weeks in Riyadh.

In turn, the editor-in-chief of the Saudi newspaper Al-Watan Othman Al-Sini said the visit of the Saudi Crown Prince represents a pivotal stage in the relations between the two countries and the joint GCC country action in light of the accelerating events the region is witnessing at various levels. Sini considered that the peoples of the GCC countries will witness in 2022 "a unified GCC that differs from the previous one." Based on the successful tour and the outcomes of Saudi Crown Prince meetings with GCC leaders, the GCC summit will adopt important decisions in Riyadh in the coming few days, the Saudi senior journalist affirmed. —KUNA

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Italian embassy hosts events to mark anniversary

KUWAIT: The Embassy of Italy in Kuwait celebrates from 11 to 15 December the sixtieth anniversary of the Italian recognition of the State of Kuwait (1961-2021). Every day of the week there are events and initiatives aimed to emphasize - in the various sectors - the importance and extraordinary quality of a relationship that has grown stronger over the years, reaching the current levels of excellence. The relationship between Italy and Kuwait is a friendship relationship that has also been consolidated through the common will to contribute to regional and international stability and security. A friendship that has developed over the years, tempered by closeness in difficult moments, which are always those in which the meaning of friendship itself is truly measured.



Ambassador of Italy to Kuwait Carlo Baldocci

In this regard, the Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio writes in the preface to the volume on "Bilateral relations between Italy and Kuwait" published by the Embassy for the occasion: "Our civil societies generously contribute to these profitable dynamics, whose mutual solidarity and closeness has never failed. So it was thirty years ago for Italy in favor of the liberation of Kuwait; so it was in 2020 for Kuwait, in support and in aid of Italy, hit first and, at least initially, more than others during the most acute phase of the pandemic emergency. We look very confidently, with sentiments of friendship and respect, to our common future."

To celebrate this important moment of bilateral relations, the "Quartetto Indaco" (Indigo Quartet) will hold two concerts on December 11 and 12, the first organized by the Embassy of Italy together with the International Women's Group (IWG) at the Auditorium of the National Library of Kuwait, the second by the Embassy at the Yarmouk Cultural Center Theater.

The Ambassador of Italy to Kuwait, Carlo Baldocci, said he was happy for these two events, which represent, among other things - in compliance with the health rules - a live reopening of the country to the great Italian musical tradition, after difficult months marked worldwide by the pandemic closures. He added: "I am pleased that this takes place in close collaboration with the Accademia Chigiana, which had already been here twice, in November 2019 and in February 2020, with the Bel Canto and the Duo Federiciano, events that had recorded an important success of public and critics. I would like to underline that these two Concerts, besides celebrating an important anniversary in the history of bilateral relations, open the 2021-2022 musical season of Italy in Kuwait, which the Italian Embassy is currently defining and which will include next year up to six appointments between ensembles, soloists and singing in Kuwait."

Typhoon aircraft

In the immediately following days, the extraordinariness of the relations between Italy and Kuwait will also be sealed through the arrival in Kuwait of the first two Typhoon aircraft delivered to the Kuwaiti Air Force, as part of the Eurofighter Program signed by Leonardo. "A very important moment of the extraordinary collaboration between our two Countries," Ambassador Baldocci specified.

The inauguration of two important exhibitions, respectively on December 14 and 15, the first on "Islamic Art, from the Bargello of Florence to Kuwait" at the Amricani Cultural Center, presented by the curator Professor Giovanni Curatola and the second on "Italian Urban Planning in Kuwait", presented by Prof Bico Belgiojoso, of Studio BPPR of Milan, both organized by the Embassy of Italy, represent other highlights of the five days of celebrations for the sixtieth anniversary of the Italian Recognition of Kuwait.

The Exhibition from the Bargello at Amricani represents an important opportunity to enhance the dialogue between the Islamic Art collections of the two Countries, thus continuing the long series of initiatives that on several occasions have brought the Al-Sabah Collection to Italy, from Florence, to Milan and finally to Rome. Thus making objects dialogue and testify to a world of contacts and relationships, exchanges, mutual learning and influences. The Exhibition on Italian urban planning in Kuwait, taking place at "Spazio Italia - Kuwait", the area of the Embassy, dedicated to strengthening the people-to-people dimension of the bilateral relations, tells a journey of suggestions and intense work that from 1969 to 1990 contributed to the urban development of part of Kuwait City. "It is also on the basis of these extraordinary successes that we look with confidence and optimism to the next sixty years of the great friendship between Italy and Kuwait," concluded Ambassador Baldocci.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Macaw (*Ara ararauna*) parrots are displayed and released to fly during a show in Kuwait City on Friday. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait opens registration for winter diseases vaccine

Medical center approves breast cancer diagnostic service

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Ministry of Health announced yesterday kicking off registration for taking winter diseases' vaccines for the age category starting from six months. The ministry's official spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said in a statement registration for winter illnesses' immunization is available on the ministry's website. Dr Sanad added that the booster jab against the coronavirus is still being given at the Kuwait Vaccination Center in Mishref, noting that taking the booster shot does not require an advance booking. However, at primary health care centers, an applicant must register on the ministry's official website and show up at the center according to the set date sent via text message. The booster shot is given six months after taking the second dose of any of the accredited vaccines, he said.

Meanwhile, the Kuwait Cancer Control Center

(KCCC) of the Ministry of Health has recently approved a diagnostic service, the first of its kind in the Middle East, concerned with diagnosing breast cancer and evaluating response to hormonal therapy. Director of KCCC Dr Hadeel Al-Mutawa said Friday that the new service that has been approved in the Nuclear Medicine department is based on the use of a substance known as 18F-FES, a positron radiation material concerned with diagnosing hormone receptors for breast cancer patients. Breast cancer ranks first as the most common type of disease locally and globally, she explained, noting that early detection as well as the effectiveness of the treatment used increases the cure rate.

In a similar statement, Head of the Radiology Department at KCCC Dr Mashael Bandar underlined the keenness to produce new materials to keep pace with the latest global developments. In turn, the Head of the Nuclear Medicine Department at KCCC Dr Farida Al-Kandari stressed the importance of the new diagnostic service, as it includes diagnosing the spread of the disease and the possibility of recurrence of infection. Kandari clarified that the material used is approved by the US Food and Drug Administration.



Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad

Meanwhile, Head of the Radioactive Materials Department Shadha Naji indicated that the aforementioned material was successfully produced in October, and the approvals and documentation necessary to start production were completed, as of Thursday, for two cases in the Nuclear Medicine department. It is worth noting that the positron emission tomography (PET) scan forms an image that shows where cancer cells with estrogen receptors can be found in the body. KCCC was established in 1968 and aims to provide care for cancer patients in Kuwait. —KUNA



No registration needed for booster jab

Kuwaiti inventor shows four patents at expo Dubai

DUBAI: Kuwaiti engineer Adel Al-Wasis yesterday showed his four patents while participating in a special corner in Kuwait's pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai. In a statement to the press, Wasis said that the four inventions are safety belt, linear fan, cold steam irrigation and air hammer. He explained that the safety belt invention is a belt that easily can be worn when fires occur in high-rise buildings and towers, which contributes to saving people by breaking pressurized windows and used to climb down the building in a safe manner.

The linear fan works by producing electricity from the wind force and moves in the air direction to pass through a narrow space where the air speed and the density increase, he explained. The cold steam irrigation invention purifies salty and non-potable water into pure, desalinated water, while the air hammer is a device



The safety belt invention.

intended to break solid glasses during gas leak, fire, asphyxia or lack of oxygen, he noted. Based on the keenness of the General Secretariat of the



DUBAI: Kuwaiti engineer Adel Al-Wasis in Kuwait's pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai. —KUNA

Cooperation Gulf Council (GCC) to support talents, they chose the best six Gulf inventors and highlighted their patents on a display screen in its pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai, including Wasis by presenting his air hammer invention. Wasis has won many golden medals for his inventions. —KUNA

Sheikh Duaj recalled for tangible contributions to arts

KUWAIT: The National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters yesterday mourned with deep sorrow and distress demise of the eminent lyric poet and

playwright Sheikh Duaj Al-Khalifa Al-Sabah (1972-2021). Dr Issa Al-Ansari, the council's official spokesperson, conveyed in a statement condolence by Minister of Information, Culture, Minister of State for Youth Affairs and the NCCA Chairman, Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, and the NCCA Secretary General Kamel Abduljelil, as well as all the council personnel to the bereaved family of the deceased. "The lyric poet and playwright Sheikh Duaj Al-Khalifa has departed us leaving behind a lot of contributions in various realms," Ansari eulogized the

demised prominent personality. Dr Ansari recalled Sheikh Duaj for composing patriotic and romantic songs in addition to his contributions to the national theater. He was honorary chairperson of the folkloric theatre, composer of various poetic and literary works published by Kuwaiti and Gulf magazines. Moreover, he also had a hand in the development of the local cinema. The Amiri Diwan announced yesterday the death of Sheikh Duaj Khalifa Al-Abdullah Al-Khalifa Al-Sabah, who passed away at the age of 50. —KUNA



Britain calls for Western unity against Russia, China threats

Indian farmers head home after year-long protest

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TUXTLA GUTIERREZ, Mexico: Bodies of migrants who died in an accident are laid out on the pavement on Dec 9, 2021. — AFP

55 undocumented migrants killed

Mexico urges US migration rethink after horror crash

TUXTLA GUTIERREZ: Mexico on Friday urged Washington to rethink its migration policy after a horror road accident killed 55 undocumented migrants in a truck on a major transit route to the United States. Bodies draped in white sheets lined the roadside near Tuxtla Gutierrez in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas, where a truck transporting some 160 migrants - most from Central America - overturned Thursday.

Passengers, bleeding and with broken bones, lay in the road crying out in pain after the latest disaster to befall desperate people traveling through Mexico in search of a better life in the United States. More than 100 people were injured. Thousands attempt the long, often dangerous, and expensive journey every year to escape violence and poverty in their home nations in South and Central America.

Such tragedies, Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said Friday, should move the world to address "the underlying problem" - despair. "The migration problem cannot be solved by coercive measures, but by opportunities for work and well-being. People don't leave their villages for pleasure, they do it out of necessity," he said. If the United States wanted to prevent migration to its shores, added Lopez Obrador, it should invest in social programs in Central America - a matter he has discussed with Joe Biden.

But "there is slowness," said the Mexican leader.

The victims of Thursday's accident, authorities said, were from Guatemala, Honduras, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic and Mexico. Most of the dead were from Guatemala, said Lopez Obrador. "It was horrible to hear the wailing. I just thought about helping," 18-year-old Sabina Lopez, who lives nearby, told AFP. The driver, who fled the scene, was allegedly speeding when he lost control of the truck. The National Institute of Migration said it was working to identify the dead, pay for funerals and repatriate bodies. It said survivors will be allowed to stay in Mexico.

'Don't close your eyes'

The death toll is likely to rise, with many of the injured taken to hospital in a serious condition, according to Luis Manuel Garcia, a local civil protection official. Lopez told AFP she saw a man pleading with his wounded companion. "Don't go to sleep, don't close your eyes," she recalled him saying. "Remember what you promised your mother! Hold on!" Selvin Lanuza, who left Guatemala hoping for a better life, boarded the truck minutes before the accident.

"I remember the screaming of the people when the trailer overturned — and nothing else, just

screaming. The people from the nearby houses helped us," the 18-year-old told AFP from a Red Cross facility where he was being treated for minor injuries. Isaias Diaz, a nearby resident who arrived 15 minutes after the incident, described a ghastly scene, with "a lot of people lying around, some of them were already dead." Diaz said he saw "five, six children, injured ... People

(who had) broken legs, ribs, heads, cuts on their necks, everything." "The crying, the pain, the desperation. It was a very ugly atmosphere," he said. Another local, Emmanuel Hernandez, 43, said the aftermath was horrendous. "The bodies were like demons, with the skulls protruding, most of them deformed," he said.

Broken hearts

People came spontaneously from nearby settlements Friday to place candles at the accident site and pray. "Our hearts are broken," said Rocio Hernandez, a 52-year-old housewife. The Attorney General's Office has opened a homicide investigation, while government officials denied the truck had been allowed through a roadblock before the crash.



Bodies draped in white sheets lined roadside

Xmas, lies and videotape: Is it curtains for Boris?

LONDON: At the British general election in December 2019, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson campaigned on a pledge to "Get Brexit Done"—and won by a landslide. But just two years on, Johnson's once seemingly unassailable position is looking shaky after a series of scandals have left his credibility in tatters.

In opinion polls and even among members of his ruling Conservative party, there is open talk that he should quit—or be forced out by an internal vote of no confidence. "So far he's been Teflon. Virtually nothing has touched him," Robin Pettitt, a specialist in British politics, told AFP. But he said a succession of scandals and sleaze allegations "adds up over time".

"There's been so many of them that eventually it's going to overflow," he added. There has been mounting public anger at reports that Johnson's staff broke coronavirus rules last year by holding a Christmas party in Downing Street at a time when the public were told to cancel their festive plans.

Johnson's repeated denials of wrongdoing, however, have failed to convince, after

video footage emerged of his staff apparently joking that they knew it was a breach. The situation is "blatant", said Pettitt. "It's so obviously wrong for the makers of the rules to be breaking them, especially at Christmas."

With his mop of unruly blond hair and ill-fitting suits, Johnson has long played up to his image as an unconventional politician. But it has been effective. His simple Brexit pitch won over voters in the heartlands of the main opposition Labour party in northern England, giving him a whopping 80-seat majority in parliament.

Even after a much-criticised start—and a still staggeringly high COVID death toll and infection rate—he has enjoyed a bounce from a successful vaccination campaign. But his characteristic bluster does not seem to be enough this time.

A YouGov poll for The Times on Friday suggested 68 percent of respondents believed he was lying when he denied the rules were broken. And his overall popularity has plunged to an all-time low in other polls, showing Labour in a rare lead.

Political scientist Steven Fielding said that, with the new Omicron strain threatening Britain, Brexit not as "done" as he claims and the economy stumbling, Johnson is not in a good place. "At this very moment, this is when people look at Boris Johnson and think, 'you're a liar, you're not telling the truth'—just when he needs to be seen as a



Boris Johnson

leader, someone that we can trust, someone who is dealing with things in our interests," said Fielding, from the University of Nottingham.

Johnson, 57, who has just become a father for the seventh time, has long been accused of bending the truth. As a fledgling journalist, he was sacked from The Times for making up a quote. He went on to peddle "euromyths" as Brussels correspondent for the Daily Telegraph.

But if the public were prepared to overlook his bumbling eccentricities, they may be less forgiving of claims of dodgy dealing and cronyism. An inquiry this week fined Johnson's Tory party for failing to declare who paid for the lavish refurbishment of his Downing Street flat—a scandal dubbed "cash for curtains". —AFP

France frigate deal is still 'on': Athens

PARIS: Greece will honor a deal to buy three frigates from France, Paris and a source in the Greek defense ministry said yesterday, after a competing offer from the US threatened to overturn the contract. "Since we have been in discussion with the Greeks, the American offer is no longer on the table... We also signed the contract with the Greeks. It was initiated a few days ago," France's armed forces ministry told AFP. A source at Greece's defense ministry said "the agreement is on and moving forward". "It has been done at the highest possible level. The Greek prime minister himself has announced it," the source told AFP yesterday.

On Friday the US State Department said it had approved the sale for \$6.9 billion of four Lockheed Martin combat frigates, known as multi-mission surface combatant ships. The announcement suggested France faced a fresh commercial arms deal threat after the US wrestled away a massive submarine contract for Australia in a shock announcement on September 15 that ruptured relations between Washington and Paris.

France recalled its ambassadors to the United States and Australia and labeled it

Guatemalan authorities declared three days of national mourning, and the Vatican expressed condolences to the victims and their loved ones.

"Migratory alternatives and legal avenues are needed to avoid tragedies like this," the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) tweeted. Human traffickers commonly hide undocumented migrants in trucks bringing them from Guatemala into Mexico, from where they head north to the US border. Accidents are common. Last month, 12 migrants died when two trucks crashed and burned in Chiapas.

Migrants have told AFP that the truck journey entails hours locked up without ventilation, avoiding drinking water so as not to have to urinate. Drivers, they say, ignore pleas for fresh air. Faced with these dangers, many migrants opt instead to join so-called caravans undertaking the long journey on foot, enduring extreme weather and other hardships, including extortion from drug gangs.

The flow of undocumented migrants has increased since Biden came to office with a promise to scrap the hardline border policies of his predecessor Donald Trump. Mexican authorities have detected more than 190,000 migrants between January and September, three times as many as in 2020. Some 74,300 have been deported. The United States recorded a high of 1.7 million people entering illegally from Mexico between October 2020 and September. Many were expelled. —AFP

a "stab in the back" by an ally when Canberra ditched a longstanding deal worth billions of euros to buy conventional French submarines for US nuclear-powered vessels. Later in September, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis sealed a memorandum of understanding with French President Emmanuel Macron to buy three and possibly four French Belharra frigates for three billion euros (\$3.5 billion).

However France said that this time - unlike for the Australian submarine deal - the US had given Paris advance warning of its announcement. "The Americans had warned us that this announcement was going to come out," the armed forces ministry said. "They wrote to us, saying that 'as part of good relations, following the AUKUS problem, we are warning you,'" it said, using the name given to the Australia-UN-US pact that sunk France's submarine deal with Canberra.

"There is no inclination (on their part) to go further," the ministry added. "What happened there was just a result of an administrative process, which it was apparently complicated for them to stop from an administrative point of view." —AFP

International

Britain calls for Western unity against Russia, China threats

FMs from the world's richest nations meet

LIVERPOOL: The West and its allies need to be united against authoritarianism, UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said yesterday, as she hosted G7 counterparts with concern about threats from Russia and China. The two-day gathering of foreign ministers from the world's richest nations in Liverpool, northwest England, is the last in-person gathering of Britain's year-long G7 presidency, before it hands over the baton to Germany.

Russia's build-up of troops on Ukraine's border is top of the agenda, alongside discussions on confronting China, limiting Iran's nuclear ambitions and addressing the crisis in military-ruled Myanmar. "We need to come together strongly to stand up to aggressors who are seeking to limit the bounds of freedom and democracy," Truss said as she formally opened the talks, without mentioning specific countries. "To do this, we need to have a fully united voice. We need to expand our economic and security posture around the world."

Truss held talks on the sidelines of the summit on Friday with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken as well as Germany's new Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock. Blinken flies on to Southeast Asia next week on a visit designed to highlight the region's importance in Washington's strategy of standing up to an increasingly assertive China in the region. Ministers from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) will join the G7 summit for the first time ever on Sunday, in a session earmarked for wide-ranging talks on issues including Covid-19 vaccines, finance and gender equality.

South Korea, Australia, South Africa and India will also participate as Britain's chosen G7 "guests", with many attendees taking part virtually

due to the pandemic and emergence of the Omicron variant. Truss said before the meeting that she wanted deeper ties between G7 nations in trade, investment, technology and security "so we can defend and advance freedom and democracy across the world". "I will be pushing that point over the next few days," she added.

'Alternative' to adversaries

Truss, who replaced Dominic Raab as Britain's top diplomat in September, delivered her first major foreign policy address Wednesday as crises loom around the world. She warned Moscow it would be "a strategic mistake" to invade Ukraine,

following growing concerns over a big Russian troop build-up on the border. That echoed comments delivered by US President Joe Biden to his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin in a virtual summit the previous day.

Britain's G7 presidency has been dominated by responding to Beijing's increasing international assertiveness and alleged widespread domestic rights abuses, including of its Muslim minority Uyghur population. This week, a panel of human rights lawyers and experts in London concluded Beijing had committed genocide by imposing population restrictions, including birth control and forced sterilizations, on the Uyghurs. China rejected the tribunal's findings.

At a G7 leaders' summit in June, Biden pushed for a stronger collective stance towards both China and Russia, and this week saw Washington, London and Canberra announce diplomatic boycotts of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics. Truss has said the West needs to work towards ending the "strategic dependence" of a growing number



LIVERPOOL: (L-R) G7 foreign ministers, Italy's Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio, France's Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Jean-Yves Le Drian, Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs Melanie Joly, Germany's Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, Britain's Foreign Secretary Liz Truss, Japan's Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and European High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs Josep Borrell pose in a socially distanced manner for a group photograph ahead of bilateral talks at the G7 meeting. —AFP

of low- and middle-income countries on its adversaries, in various areas from energy to technology. At the summit she will push attendees to provide those countries with more finance for infrastructure and technology projects, according to the foreign office.

G7 countries and their allies must offer "an alternative to unsustainable debt from non-market economies" like China, it said. Truss will unveil a

UK-led initiative - the Africa Resilience Investment Accelerator - to boost collaboration investing in Africa's "most fragile markets" and help develop "a pipeline of investable opportunities". "It will help the G7 to meet its commitment to invest over \$80 billion into the private sector in Africa over the next five years to support sustainable economic recovery and growth," the foreign office added. —AFP

US hits Chinese, N Korean firms with sanctions

WASHINGTON: The United States unveiled a raft of new rights-abuse sanctions Friday on senior officials and entities in eight countries, including a Chinese firm specializing in facial recognition technology and a giant cartoon studio in North Korea. Timed for International Human Rights Day and supported in part by Britain and Canada, the sanctions took aim at officials accused of abetting the crackdown on anti-coup protestors in Myanmar, the oppression of Muslim Uyghurs in China's Xinjiang region and political violence in Bangladesh under the guise of a war on drugs.

"Our actions today, particularly those in partnership with the United Kingdom and Canada, send a message that democracies around the world will act against those who abuse the power of the state to inflict suffering and repression," the US Treasury Department said. It said China's artificial intelligence company SenseTime, and two ethnic Uyghur political leaders in Xinjiang, Shohrat Zakir and Erken Tuniyaz, took part in the sweeping oppression of Uyghurs. The sanctions and blacklisting can prevent individuals from obtaining visas to the United States, block assets under US jurisdiction, and prevent the targets from doing business with US individuals or entities - effectively locking them out of the US banking system.

Xinjiang surveillance

Zakir was the chairman of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China from at least 2018 to 2021, and Tuniyaz is current acting chairman. Zakir has defended the prison camps as "education centers" that teach people Mandarin and "the true meaning of religion." But international rights organizations have called them a central tool in the Chinese government's "genocidal" policies towards Uyghurs. "The mass detention of Uyghurs is part of an effort by (Chinese) authorities to use detentions and data-driven surveillance to create a police state in the Xinjiang region," the Treasury said. The Treasury said SenseTime's facial recognition programs were designed in part to be used in Xinjiang against Uyghurs and other mostly Muslim minorities, more than one million of whom have been incarcerated in prison camps. The move put new pressure on SenseTime, which was preparing to list its shares in the coming week on Hong Kong's stock market in an initial public offering. The company, which Washington says is part of China's "military-industrial complex," had already been placed on the US Department of Commerce's blacklist in 2019 because its technology had been used for mass surveillance in Xinjiang. SenseTime strongly criticized the decision, saying in a statement it was "caught in the middle of geopolitical tension." "We strongly oppose the designation and accusations that have been made in connection with it. The accusations are unfounded and reflect a fundamental misperception of our Company," the firm said.

First Biden sanctions on N Korea

The Treasury also announced the first new US sanctions to target North Korea since President Joe Biden took office, a move that comes after months of attempting to engage Pyongyang in talks on its nuclear program. The Treasury accused Pyongyang's government-run animation firm, SEK Studio, and companies and individuals related to it, of exploiting North Korean workers to earn much-needed foreign currency and avoid sanctions on the country. SEK Studio has an international reputation and has contributed work to big-budget animated features including Disney's "Pocahontas" and "The Lion King." Also hit with sanctions was North Korean Minister of People's Armed Forces, Ri Yong Gil. —AFP

Macron hails Scholz; Europe's new power couple meets

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron hailed a "convergence of views" with Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Friday as the German leader met his key EU and NATO allies. On only the second day since taking over from his long-standing predecessor Angela Merkel, Scholz plunged into talks with Macron in Paris then European Commission chiefs Ursula von der Leyen and Charles Michel in Brussels. France and Germany are traditionally the joint motor of European integration, and Macron was keen to get the powerful German leader on side as he embarks on a six-month presidency role in the EU and his own re-election campaign.

Later, Scholz - a Social Democrat who runs a coalition government with a Green foreign minister - he was due to see NATO secretary general Jens Stoltenberg, amid tensions with Russia over the conflict in Ukraine top of the agenda. Macron and Scholz, both pro-EU figures, are the new tandem in charge of Europe's biggest economies and both champion strengthening Europe's "strategic sovereignty", a key theme of Macron's coming six

months in the EU chair.

Addressing Scholz as "dear Olaf" and using the informal "tu" pronoun in French, Macron said he had seen "a convergence of views, a desire to have our countries work together, and a firm and determined belief in Europe... which we will need in the months and years ahead". The visit was "a very important moment to build solid foundations for cooperation between our countries", he added at a news conference. Scholz made Paris his first overseas stop after taking over on Wednesday Merkel at the end of her 16 years in power. He said the talks focused on "making Europe strong and European sovereignty".

New agenda

Macron laid out an ambitious agenda Thursday for a "Europe that is powerful in the world" during France's time as the rotating president of the 27-member Council of the European Union in the first half of next year. The 43-year-old wants to make further progress towards building up European defense capabilities and border forces, as well as devising ways of financing huge public investments in strategic industries considered vital for EU sovereignty.

Analysts say Macron's desire for more flexible budget rules in the EU, enabling governments to run larger deficits, could run into opposition from a Germany that has historically insisted on financial rigor. Scholz said there was "not a contradic-



PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron (R) greets German Chancellor Olaf Scholz at the Elysee Palace, in Paris. —AFP

Benin opposition leader sentenced to 20 years in jail

PORTO-NOVO: Benin opposition leader Reckya Madougou was sentenced yesterday to 20 years in prison for terrorism by a special court in the capital Porto-Novo after a brief trial that her lawyers condemned as a "political attack". After more than 20 hours of hearings, Madougou was found guilty of "complicity in terrorist acts" by the Economic Crime and Terrorism Court, or Criet, which on Tuesday sentenced another key opposition figure to 10 years.

Critics say the court, set up in 2016, has been used by President Patrice Talon's regime to crack down on the opposition and pushed Benin into authoritarianism. "This court has deliberately decided to penalize an innocent person," Madougou said shortly before her prison sentence was announced. "I have never been and I will never be a terrorist," the 47-year-old former justice

minister added.

"It's a sad day for our justice system, I maintain that there is no proof," one of her lawyers, Robert Dossou, told AFP. Madougou was one of several Benin opposition leaders banned from running in an election in April in which Talon won a second term with 86 percent of the vote. She was arrested in the economic capital Cotonou in March - just weeks before the election - accused of financing an operation to assassinate political figures to prevent the vote, in an alleged bid to "destabilize" the country.

"Tried at 6am, without witnesses, without documents, without evidence, Reckya Madougou was sentenced to 20 years in prison by three accomplices of those in power," her France-based lawyer Antoine Vey tweeted after the sentencing. "Her crime: to have embodied a democratic alternative to the regime of Patrice Talon." Vey had told the trial on Friday that "this procedure is nothing but a political attack". "Even before her arrest, everything was orchestrated," Vey said a day after arriving from Paris.

He asked for the trial to be cancelled,



PORTO NOVO: Supporters of Reckya Madougou's gather at the Court of Repression of Economic Offences and Terrorism (CRIET), in Porto-novo. A key Benin opposition leader went on trial on terrorism charges nine months after she was arrested. —AFP

before leaving the court and never returning - Madougou's Benin-based lawyers stayed for the remainder. Vey then told AFP that it was "a trial in which nothing was judicial". Madougou said on the stand at the trial that she had "no illusions" about its outcome. "I offer myself to the democracy of my country, if my sacrifice can give your court back

its independence," she said.

Less than a week before the April election, a judge from the special court fled Benin denouncing political pressure to make rulings, in particular in the case of Madougou's arrest. Government officials dismiss claims of political interference and say Benin's judiciary is independent. —AFP

Apex court refuses to block restrictive Texas abortion law

WASHINGTON: The conservative-leaning US Supreme Court refused on Friday to block a Texas law that bans most abortions after six weeks, but left the door open for abortion providers to challenge the law in lower courts. Anti-abortion groups welcomed the ruling, which did not address the con-

stitutionality of the Texas law, while abortion rights advocates expressed concern.

"Today's decision is not okay," said Amy Hagstrom Miller, president and CEO of Whole Woman's Health, which operates the Texas abortion clinics that filed suit against the law. "It is unjust, cruel, and inhumane." President Joe Biden said he was "very concerned" that the Supreme Court allowed the Texas law to stand and reiterated his commitment to abortion rights.

"I will always stand with women to protect and defend their long-recognized, constitutional right," the president said in a statement. Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton called it a "huge win" while Marjorie Dannenfelser, president of the anti-abortion group Susan B Anthony List, welcomed the fact that the Texas law will remain in force for now. "We celebrate that

the Texas Heartbeat Act will remain in effect, saving the lives of unborn children and protecting mothers while litigation continues in lower courts," Dannenfelser said in a statement.

The Texas ruling comes 10 days after the conservative majority on the court indicated in another case that they may be inclined to overturn Roe v Wade, the landmark 1973 ruling that held that access to abortion is a constitutional right. The Supreme Court heard oral arguments on December 1 about a Mississippi law that would ban most abortions after 15 weeks, and the court's conservative wing - which includes three justices nominated by Donald Trump - appeared ready to uphold the law and perhaps even go further and overturn Roe. The court is to render a decision in the Mississippi case by June. —AFP

International

Pakistan's Taliban call off ceasefire with government

Taliban kill policeman after calling off truce

PESHAWAR: The Pakistani Taliban on Friday called off a ceasefire mediated with the help of the Afghan Taliban, accusing the government of violating the terms of the agreed truce. Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) - a separate movement that shares a common history with Afghanistan's new leaders-plunged the country into a period of horrific violence after forming in 2007.

Seven years after the military cracked down on the movement, Islamabad is trying to quell a TTP comeback after the victory of the hardline Islamists across the border. In a statement, the TTP accused security forces of killing some of its fighters and violating a one-month truce that was due to end in early December. "It is not possible to extend the ceasefire in such circumstances," a spokesman for the TTP said. "Now the Pakistani public should decide who is not abiding by the agreement."

A senior TTP commander based in Afghanistan, a government official and a security official had separately told AFP earlier that both sides had agreed to extend the ceasefire. Up to 100 prisoners had been released as part of the negotiations. "We were surprised with the TTP statement," the government official told AFP Friday from Peshawar, a city close to the remote tribal areas near the Afghan border where the TTP are active. "Our

members of the negotiating team were assured about the extension on the ceasefire."

In an audio message, released late Friday, the group's leader Noor Wali Mehsud said no progress has been made in the negotiations with Pakistani government. "No progress has been made in the talks, but extension in the ceasefire depends on the circumstances," Mehsud said. He added that his

“ Pakistani public should decide who is not abiding by the accord ”

group has chosen the path of the armed struggle as well as negotiations, according to Islamic Sharia. "Better if we achieve our goal by negotiations, otherwise jihad is already ongoing," he said.

Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan announced in October that the government was in talks with

the TTP for the first time since 2014, facilitated by the Afghan Taliban, who had seized power across the border in August. The talks have angered many within Pakistan, who remember the brutal attacks-including on schools, hotels, churches and markets-which killed around 70,000 people, according to successive governments. Malala Yousafzai, who went on to win the Nobel Peace Prize, was shot by the TTP as a schoolgirl in her native Swat Valley.

Policeman killed

A Pakistani policeman was shot dead and another officer was hurt while guarding a polio vaccination team yesterday, police said, in an attack claimed by the local Taliban a day after they called off a ceasefire with the government. Two men riding a motorcycle opened fire on police officers guarding a two-woman polio inoculation team who were administering vaccines to children in Tank district in the northwestern province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

"The gunmen opened fire indiscriminately, killing one policeman on the spot and wounding another," district police officer Sajjad Khan said. Another local police official, Kamal Shah, confirmed the incident and said the assailants had escaped. Police guards protecting vaccination

teams in Pakistan have come under attack before, mostly from homegrown militants. The Taliban claimed the latest attack and put the death toll at two, according to a statement from spokesman Muhammad Khurasani.

They accused security forces of killing some of their fighters and violating the one-month truce. The Pakistani Taliban-a separate movement from Afghanistan's new leaders but which shares a common history-plunged Pakistan into a period of horrific violence after forming in 2007. Seven years after a military crackdown on the movement, Islamabad is now trying to quell a comeback by the group after the victory of the hardline Islamists across the border.

In an audio message released late Friday, the group's leader Noor Wali Mehsud said no progress had been made in negotiations with Pakistan's government. Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan announced in October that the government was in talks with the group for the first time since 2014, facilitated by the Afghan Taliban, who seized power across the border in August. Pakistan is one of two countries where polio remains endemic but only one case has been reported this year after 84 in 2020, according to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative. — AFP

Indian farmers head home after protest

NEW DELHI: Thousands of Indian farmers packed their belongings and dismantled tent cities on the outskirts of Delhi yesterday as they headed home following a year-long protest against the government's agriculture policies. In a rare retreat last month, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced and pushed through parliament the repeal of three contentious laws that farmers claimed would let private companies control the country's agriculture sector.

Hundreds of farmers danced and celebrated the victory yesterday as they began removing road-blocks and dismantling thousands of makeshift homes along major highways. They lit firecrackers, hugged each other and distributed sweets as blaring loudspeakers played patriotic and revolutionary songs dedicated to the agitation. At Singhu, one of the protest sites, long queues of lorries and tractors packed the highway heading north into their home states of Haryana and Punjab.

Farmers in India have political heft due to their sheer numbers - tens of thousands had camped out since November 2020 to protest against the laws in the biggest challenge to the Modi government since it came to power in 2014. "We were determined to protest as long as it had taken. But all of us are happy that the government accepted our demands and we are going back to our homes," Satinder Singh, one of the Singhu protesters, told AFP. "It is a big day for the farmers as we can peacefully go back to our homes," he said.

Legal guarantees

Protesters had initially refused to leave the sites despite the repeal of the legislation, pressing other demands including a legal guarantee for minimum benchmark rates for their produce. Some Indian states and central government set minimum prices for crops every year but farmers have long demanded a law to ensure income stability. The government said it will form a commission on fixing



SINGHU, India: Farmers cheer as they prepare to leave the protest site at the Delhi-Haryana state border in Singhu yesterday, as Indian farmers formally ended year-long mass protests after Prime Minister Narendra Modi abandoned his push for agricultural reforms. — AFP

minimum crop prices and promised to stop prosecuting farmers for burning stubble that is blamed for polluting Delhi's air every winter. It also agreed to pay compensation to the families of more than 700 farmers who died during the demonstrations and withdraw criminal cases lodged against protesters during the year-long campaign.

The three agricultural laws passed in September 2020 aimed to deregulate farm produce markets from state control and allow private companies to enter the sector - on which two-thirds of India's more than 1.3 billion population rely for a living. The government said the laws were a necessary reform but farmers opposed the move, saying it would leave them at the mercy of big corporations. "Government should now ensure that they fulfil the promises made to us," Baljot Bawja, a protester at Ghazipur, told AFP.

"We don't intend to come back but if government goes back on its promises, we will be com-

elled to launch another protest," he said. Farmers started local protests in Punjab and Haryana - India's breadbasket states - before tens of thousands headed to New Delhi to press their demands. But they were violently stopped by police at the borders of New Delhi, triggering a year-long impasse that saw authorities erect concrete and steel barricades and metal spikes to stop their advance.

The protests remained largely peaceful, with occasional bouts of violence, including during a tractor rally in January on Indian Republic Day. Modi's governing Bharatiya Janata Party is campaigning in five states, including political bellwether Uttar Pradesh, for elections early next year. Analysts say Modi's retreat on the laws came over fears growing discontent among large sections of the rural population and the stalemate at the Delhi borders were hurting its electoral prospectus. — AFP

Bosnian Serb MPs step up secession push

SARAJEVO: Bosnian Serb lawmakers Friday kick-started a controversial process of withdrawing from Bosnia and Herzegovina's central institutions, despite repeated warnings against the move from the West. The Republika Srpska parliament passed a vote that obliges the local government to organize withdrawal from three crucial joint institutions - the army, tax and justice system - in the next six months.

The process is being shepherded by Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik - a former Western protege turned nationalist - who has been threatening secession for years. The 62-year-old, who is currently a Serb member of the Bosnian joint presidency, tirelessly underlines that the country he co-runs is "impossible". After eight hours of debate, the lawmakers adopted the proposed text by 49 votes for and three against. "This is the moment of conquest for freedom of Republika Srpska," Dodik said.

Although in the past Dodik managed to rally all Serb lawmakers to vote unanimously, this time the attempt was unsuccessful and the opposition boycotted the vote. Opposition Serb politician Mirko Sarovic slammed the move by saying that aiming to divide the army without war is "delusional". "I think that the path you have taken, Mr Dodik, is a dangerous one for Republika Srpska," Sarovic said. "We can't follow you down that road."

Several embassies of Western countries - the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Italy - in a joint statement labeled the move "a further escalatory step". Continuing



SARAJEVO: US Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Eric Nelson (L), Special US envoy for Western Balkans, Daniel Escobar (2nd L), members of tripartite Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Zeljko Komsic (3rd L), Sefik Dzaferovic (C), Milorad Dodik (2nd R), EU Ambassador to Bosnia Johann Sattler (R) and Marko Makovec (3rd R), deputy Managing director for Western Europe, Western Balkans, Turkey and the UK at the European External Action Service, pose before meeting in Sarajevo. — AFP

on "this dead-end path" would mean "threatening the stability of the country and the entire region", they said. Following wars in the 1990s that killed roughly 100,000 people, a NATO intervention in the Bosnian conflict helped hammer out the Dayton Accords, which divided the country along ethnic lines and codified a dizzying bureaucracy aimed at preventing future intercommunal violence.

One half of the country was given over to Bosnian Serbs while the other was to be ruled by a Muslim-Croat federation. The two entities are held together by federal institutions - once weak but gradually beefed up over the years by a UN-appointed high representative. In September, Dodik announced plans to form a Bosnian Serb army,

sparking concerns the action could ignite a new round of conflict in the Balkan country. The move spurred a new round of shuttle diplomacy, with Western envoys visiting Bosnia in the hope of persuading Dodik to stand down.

The Peace Implementation Council, which monitors compliance with the Dayton agreement, recently warned in recent days that a "unilateral withdrawal" from federal institutions is not possible and has threatened "consequences" for any party that violates the peace agreement. This statement was not co-signed by Russia, who is part of the PIC, along with representatives of Western countries. The Kremlin supports Dodik's actions, and the Bosnian Serb leader met Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow last week. — AFP

Myanmar citizen pleads guilty in a deadly plot

NEW YORK: A citizen of Myanmar on Friday pleaded guilty in a plot to attack or kill the country's pro-democracy UN ambassador, who has refused junta orders to quit, US officials said. In August, Ye Hein Zaw, a resident of New York in his early twenties, conspired with two others to force Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun to resign or, if he refused, to kill him, according to prosecutors. Zaw agreed to pay \$5,000 for the attack, which was foiled by US investigators. Zaw admitted in court that he "participated in a plot to injure or kill Myanmar's ambassador to the United Nations in a planned attack that was to take place on American soil," US Attorney Damian Williams said in a statement.

"I commend the tireless efforts of our law enforcement partners at all levels of government to ensure the safety of foreign diplomats and officials in the United States and bring the perpetrators of this plot to justice," Williams added. Zaw is due to be sentenced in May. He faces up to five years in prison. It remained unclear what, if any, connection the suspect had with the military junta, which on February 1 overthrew the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in the country earlier known as Burma. Ambassador Tun, chosen by the now jailed Suu Kyi, has remained in office since the coup, asking that the UN let him keep his post. — AFP

Bangladesh protests US sanctions of its security chiefs

DHAKA: Bangladesh yesterday called in the US ambassador to protest sanctions by Washington against its top security officers after seven people including the country's national police chief were accused by the Biden administration of human rights abuses. Washington imposed sanctions against the Rapid Action Battalion, which is accused of involvement in hundreds of disappearances and nearly 600 extrajudicial killings since 2018. Seven current or former officials of the Rapid Action Battalion were also sanctioned. They include Benazir Ahmed, previously the RAB chief and currently the national head of the South Asian country's more than 200,000-strong police force.

"We are determined to put human rights at the centre of our foreign policy, and we reaffirm this commitment by using appropriate tools and authorities to draw attention to and promote accountability for human rights violations and abuses," said Secretary of State Antony Blinken. Bangladesh officials were quick to denounce the move, with foreign secretary Masud Bin Momen summoning the US ambassador "to convey Dhaka's discontent" over the decision, his ministry said.

He "regretted that the US decided to undermine an agency of the government that had been on the forefront of combating terrorism, drug trafficking and other heinous transnational crimes that were considered to be shared priorities with successive US administrations", it added in a statement. One of the sanctioned individuals, RAB deputy chief K.M. Azad, defended the force's operations, saying it never violates human rights. "If bringing down a criminal under the law is a violation of human rights, then we have no objection to violating this human rights in the interest of the country," he said.

But local rights activists welcomed the measures. "It is a perfect move by the US. But more officers who were involved in the abductions and enforced disappearances should have been included," said Sanjida Islam, an organizer of Mayer Daak, which represents victims' families. — AFP

Business

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2021

'So high!'— Sticker shock at US gas pumps as inflation bites

Prices surge to near-40 year high, testing Biden



QUEENS, US: The price of gasoline is displayed at a gas station in Queens, New York on Friday. —AFP

WASHINGTON: Standing with the pump in her hand, Telila Scott was stunned to see the price of gas in Washington—a sentiment many are feeling as costs rise across the United States. “This is outrageous,” said Scott, who is currently unemployed. “I’ll pay \$20 to try to fill my tank back up, but it still doesn’t fill it.”

Data released Friday showed an average rise of 6.8 percent across the United States over last year’s prices, the largest increase since June 1982. “You go to the store,” she said, “and it’s bad-bread, sugar, everything is so high!” Next up at the gas station—where regular gas is \$3.39 a gallon—Earl Walker also finds it more and more difficult to fill his black pickup truck.

“Sometimes I can’t get to work,” lamented the 40-year-old community worker. “I can’t fill my tank right now—it’d be over \$100.” According to the latest figures released, energy prices represented the largest increase (up 33.3 percent), as is the case in many other countries. The report contained signs that the inflation wave may be reaching a crest, but it nonetheless poses a political liability for President Joe Biden and the Democratic party.

A more ‘frugal’ shopper

On his way out of a Wal-Mart, just down the street from the gas station, Edward Harrison explains how he has become “more of a frugal” shopper. An electronic technician, he said that he now eats out less, has started looking for sales and—if necessary—will buy used items. Abby Mitchell, a 29 year old clinical researcher has also become a more conscious shopper: “If I needed a bag of spinach, I would grab a bag without looking at the price—now I’m cross comparing between different brands.”

“I focus more on the value packs, to put in the freezer,” said Stephen Keil, a 30-year-old working in government relations. For him, the price increases are real but “incremental—you don’t notice it until you’re looking at your statement later on.” The question for Biden is whether Americans nationwide will blame him for the higher prices. At least in Washington, a Democratic stronghold, Keil struck a tolerant note. “Everything is COVID-induced,” he said. “Sometimes there is not a lot the administration can do.”

New German govt plans \$68 billion ‘future’ fund

BERLIN: Germany’s new government is planning to earmark 60 billion euros (\$68 billion) to fund “future investment” including its plans to tackle climate change, Finance Minister Christian Lindner said on Friday. The money will be taken from funds approved to help the government tackle the coronavirus pandemic but which “have not been used”, said Lindner in his first major announcement since taking office on Wednesday. The government had signed off a plan to borrow 240 billion euros in 2021 to finance measures to lessen the impact of the pandemic on businesses but will now only need 180 billion euros.

Germany’s coalition government of the Social Democrats (SPD), Greens and liberal FDP has announced ambitious plans to tackle climate change, including ending coal power and generating 80 percent of electricity from renewables by 2030. With an eye on the powerful automotive industry, the parties have also resolved to put 15 million fully electric cars on the road by 2030, up from just over 500,000 currently.

Lindner said the new funds would also be used to invest in the “digitalization” of the German econo-

my. The plans will be presented to the cabinet on Monday, he said.

Debt brake

With the new government pledging not to raise taxes or take on new debt, many have questioned how it intends to pay for investments in modernizing the country and tackling climate change. During the three-way coalition negotiations, the center-left SPD and the Greens had initially proposed more flexibility on fiscal policy.

But Lindner’s pro-business FDP succeeded in pushing for a tougher stance on public finances. The coalition has promised a return to the so-called debt brake—a rule enshrined in the constitution that normally limits Germany’s public deficit to 0.35 percent of overall annual economic output-by 2023.

The debt brake was lifted to help fight the coronavirus pandemic. “Only by ensuring stable finances can we meet the requirement of fairness between the generations,” Lindner said on Friday. The reallocation of funds has drawn criticism from the opposition, with some questioning whether the move is compatible with the German constitution. Christian Haase of the conservative CDU said the move was “questionable under budgetary law... It remains to be seen whether it will stand up to legal scrutiny.”

But a source at the finance ministry said the former conservative-led government had done the same thing with its 130-billion-euro recovery fund launched in June 2020, after the first wave of the coronavirus. —AFP

Test for Biden

US consumer prices rose last month at a rate not seen in nearly 40 years, the government reported Friday, underscoring how inflation threatens the world’s largest economy and President Joe Biden’s public support. The Labor Department’s consumer price index (CPI) jumped 6.8 percent compared to November of last year, its biggest gain since June 1982 as prices for gasoline, used cars, rent, food and other goods continued to climb.

While the report contained signs that the inflation wave may be reaching a crest, it nonetheless poses a political liability for the president, with the Republican opposition using it to argue against his economic policies. Biden countered that the report did not encompass recent declines in prices of energy and used cars—two main drivers of the high inflation readings seen this year—and that supply chain issues which have driven prices higher are being resolved. “Today’s numbers reflect the pressures that economies around the world are facing as we emerge from a global pandemic—prices are rising,” Biden said in a statement. He added that “price and cost increase are slowing, although not as quickly as we’d like,” but later acknowledged inflation was “a real bump in the road.”

Top Senate Republican Mitch McConnell blamed the White House for the price spikes, saying that the data “confirm what every American family already knows: Inflation is out of control on the Democrats’ watch.”

Biden made fighting inflation a top priority last month after the CPI in October saw its sharpest annual increase since 1990. That surprised analysts and gave Republicans ammunition to use against Biden’s landmark Build Back Better plan, which would spend \$1.8 trillion on improving social services and fighting climate change but faces a tough road in Congress, which his Democrats control by a narrow margin. A variety of factors have caused the price increases, including shortages of components and workers, high demand for goods and rebounds in industries that were disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic but are now recovering with the help of vaccines. The degree to which Biden deserves blame for the inflation spike is the subject of debate. —AFP

Faisal Al-Ayyar retires; Sheikha Dana Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad new KIPCO Group CEO

KUWAIT: The Board of Directors of KIPCO - the Kuwait Projects Company (Holding) - has approved Faisal Al-Ayyar’s request to be relieved of his duties as executive on account of retirement after more than 30 years with the company. The board announced that it has appointed Sheikha Dana Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad as the company’s Group Chief Executive Officer, effective January 1, 2022.

Al-Ayyar joined KIPCO in 1990 when it was a \$220 million regional investment company. Under his stewardship, KIPCO developed into one of MENA’s leading holding companies with interests in financial services, media, real estate, manufacturing and education, with operations in 24 countries and consolidated assets of over \$30 billion. He will continue to serve as Vice Chairman.

KIPCO’s Chairman said: “I would like to take this opportunity to thank my life-long business companion, Faisal, for his efforts over the course of three decades, which have led KIPCO’s growth into the regional powerhouse it is today. We are happy that he will continue to serve on the Board of Directors of KIPCO and several of its Group companies.”

He added: “The Board of Directors is delighted that Dana has accepted the position of Group CEO, bringing with her both strategic and operational experience that we are confident will lead KIPCO forward as it realizes its vision of implementing a model of sustainability, agility and business excellence across the Group.”

Sheikha Dana Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad is the Founder and Chair of the Board of Trustees of the American University of Kuwait (AUK). She is also Chairperson of United Education Company. She was formerly the CEO of Al Futtooh Holding Company and has been a KIPCO Board Member since 2020. She holds Board positions in Gulf



Faisal Al-Ayyar



Sheikha Dana Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad

Insurance Group, OSN and Kamco Invest.

Sheikha Dana holds an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from Dartmouth College, USA, and a BA in English Literature from Kuwait University. She also studied at Indiana University in Bloomington, USA. On his part, Faisal Al-Ayyar said: “On this occasion, I would like to extend my gratitude to the Chairman and the company’s shareholders for the trust they place in me for three decades. I would also like to thank the executive team and employees of KIPCO for their dedication in serving the organization and its shareholders, and I am confident that they will take the company to greater horizons.”

Meanwhile, Sheikha Dana Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad said: “I thank the Chairman and the Board of Directors for their trust, and I look forward to working with them to implement a new strategy that will take us forward while serving to enhance value for our shareholders. KIPCO’s reputation and status drives us to exert great efforts to elevate our position in the sectors in which we operate, and also to explore new investment areas. I am confident of the expertise and capabilities of the executive team, and I am delighted to be working with them in this phase.”

S&P lowers Turkey outlook to negative, citing ‘rising risks’

ANKARA: S&P Global Ratings on Friday changed its outlook for Turkey’s credit rating to negative from stable, as the country struggles with high inflation and a depreciating currency. Turkey’s annual inflation has surged above 20 percent to its highest level in three years after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan installed loyalists at the central bank who share his unorthodox vision that high borrowing costs cause inflation

rather than slow it down.

The move was part of Erdogan’s strategy to revive his sagging approval numbers ahead of an election due by 2023. In justifying its outlook downgrade, S&P pointed to both price increases and the lira currency’s loss in value as risks.

“The negative outlook reflects what we view to be rising risks to Turkey’s externally leveraged economy over the next 12 months from extreme currency volatility and rising inflation, amid mixed policy signals,” the ratings agency said. S&P made no change in its ratings of Turkey’s debt. But it warned that could change if the government’s policies “further undermined the exchange rate of the lira and worsened the inflation outlook, heightening the risk of banking system distress.” —AFP

Evergrande eyes restructuring: What’s the plan?

BEIJING: Debt-crippled Chinese property giant Evergrande looks headed for a huge restructuring after it defaulted on \$1.2 billion in bond repayments and remains mired in further liabilities worth more than \$300 billion. What would a restructuring mean for creditors, homeowners and investors?

Who gets priority?

The government is keen to limit any contagion hitting the financial system, but is also deeply concerned about the impact on social stability if masses of angry investors take to the streets. As such, homebuyers who have paid for residences that may or may not be delivered will likely be a top priority, followed by contractors working on the developer’s projects, Capital Economics’ chief Asia economist Mark Williams told AFP.

“Then we get down to the financial creditors and the banks, the bondholders,” he said.

“That’s where I think the fight will really take place... over whatever is left.” Foreign bondholders will likely be fairly low-priority, he said.

Is this a bailout?

It appears not. Concerned about moral hazard, and insisting that Evergrande’s problems won’t affect the financial system, regulators will be “happy to see the firm itself go under and investors take a haircut,” said Louis Kuijs, head of Asia economics at Oxford Economics.

A state bailout would “run counter” to Beijing’s

efforts to deflate a worrying property bubble so as to reduce the economy’s reliance on the real estate sector, added Larry Ong of SinoInsider. Central bank governor Yi Gang said Thursday that Evergrande’s failures to meet its debt obligations would be dealt with by the “market”, a further clear sign that a bailout was not on the cards.

“Policymakers in Beijing will feel that... after all, the banks that have lent to Evergrande are state-owned banks, they can kind of work out their losses, they can cope with those,” Williams said.

What forms could restructuring take?

Based on past experiences, authorities may opt to allow Evergrande’s main property business to continue running while non-core assets are sold, said Shujin Chen, an equity analyst at financial services firm Jefferies. The proceeds could then be distributed among creditors according to legal priority, she added. A creditor committee, where they vote on decisions, may also be formed.

Bondholders, however, might choose to take their cases to court. Beijing could also get state-owned enterprises to buy Evergrande assets and entrust local governments to oversee restructuring work, Ong said. One question mark is how to handle people who bought Evergrande wealth-management products that they now may not be able to redeem.

There could be unrest if Evergrande does not pay off those investors, Chen said. “But it’s also not reasonable to pay off this group first,” Chen said. “This part is probably trickier.”

Regulators face a delicate balancing act in allowing Evergrande to go under without generating too many waves. Kuijs said that to cushion the blow, the government might make it easier for developers to raise financing on capital markets, following earlier easing steps. —AFP

Business

Shell shareholders back move to UK

Chairman hails 'resounding support from shareholders'

ROTTERDAM, Netherlands: Shell shareholders on Friday overwhelmingly backed plans to switch the oil giant's headquarters from the Netherlands to Britain after a century and drop Royal Dutch from the name. Chairman Andrew Mackenzie hailed the "resounding support from shareholders" after they voted 99.77 percent in favor of the plan at a meeting in Rotterdam.

Europe's biggest energy firm says the move will simplify its tax and share arrangements, and speed up its transition from fossil fuels that cause climate change. The Dutch government has said it was "unpleasantly surprised" by the plan, while Britain has hailed it as a vote of confidence in the British economy post-Brexit.

The move "will strengthen Shell's competitiveness and accelerate both shareholder distributions and delivery of its strategy to become a net-zero emissions energy business by 2050, in step with society," Mackenzie said in a statement. Shell's board must formally approve the plans before they come into effect "as soon as reasonably practicable", it said.

During questions from shareholders,

Mackenzie had earlier denied the move was motivated by a Dutch court ruling earlier this year that Shell must cut its emissions. But he admitted a Dutch government decision to drop plans for the scrapping of a dividend tax on big companies was a factor.

"We have always been and will continue to be very proud of how important the Netherlands is to our heritage," he added.

Blow to Dutch prestige

Under the plans, Shell will switch its tax residence and move its top executives including CEO Ben van Beurden from The Hague to London. Its 8,500 staff in the Netherlands will remain. The loss of the Netherlands' biggest company is a major blow for the Dutch government, which had positioned itself as a key venue for investment after Brexit.

It is the second big firm to depart for London after Unilever last year. Royal Dutch Shell was formed in 1907 from a merger of Koninklijke Nederlandse Petroleum Maatschappij and British firm Shell Transport and trading.

The "Shell" name and logo came from seashells imported in the 19th century by

the father of Marcus and Samuel Samuel, the brothers who founded the British firm. But pressure for change has been building, particularly from the activist investor Third Point, which has demanded Shell be broken up, bolster low-carbon investment and return more cash to shareholders.

The landmark court victory for climate activists earlier this year that Shell must slash greenhouse gas emissions also came as a major blow.

Climate questions

Several shareholders quizzed the Shell top brass on whether their plans would do enough to address climate change. Mackenzie insisted the London move would make the company more "flexible" as it transitioned away from fossil fuels, and said it would not "impact" on the court's decision.

The Shell chairman also sought to play down his comments in November that the company was also "driven to go to the UK" by Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte's decision in 2018 to abandon plans to scrap a tax on big companies' dividends.

"It is not dominated by considerations



ROTTERDAM, Netherlands: CFO Jessica Uhl and Chairman of the Board Sir Andrew Mackenzie (right) attend the shareholders' meeting in Rotterdam, about the move of the oil giant to the United Kingdom, Friday. —AFP

about the dividend withholding tax," he said, adding that there were "many factors" in the decision. The tax hit to the country from Shell's departure could amount to billions of euros, local media said. In return, the Dutch parliament

could insist on a "departure tax" that Shell has previously put at around 400 million euros.

Mackenzie however said he thought there was a "low probability" that Dutch MPs would back such a penalty. —AFP

KIB crowns 3 winners in the first draw of 'Your KD equals 1KG in gold' campaign

KUWAIT: Continuing to deliver the most innovative campaigns to reward its customers, Kuwait International Bank (KIB) yesterday announced the winners of the first draw held as part of the bank's new "Your KD equals 1KG in gold" campaign, launched last month to reward its savings account customers with valuable gold prizes. KIB crowned Khaled Mahmoud Al-Shatti with an ounce of a gold, while awarding Ibrahim Al-Ghadouri Al-Enezi and Khaled Garoub an Ottoman gold Lira each.

Over the course of the offer period, extending till



Othman Tawfeeq

two Ottoman gold Liras, in addition to an entry into the final draw for the grand prize of one kilogram of gold for every KD 1,000 deposited in their respective savings accounts. Furthermore, participants should take into account the terms and conditions, the most important of which is maintaining an average balance of KD 500 for the monthly draw and KD 1,000 for the grand draw.

On this special occasion, General Manager of KIB's Retail Banking Department, Othman Tawfeeq,

at the end of the year, "Your KD equals 1KG in gold" campaign gives depositors with active savings accounts the opportunity to participate in three monthly draws. Each monthly draw will award three winners for every KD 500 deposited in their account, with a prize of either an ounce of gold or

two Ottoman gold Liras, in addition to an entry into the final draw for the grand prize of one kilogram of gold for every KD 1,000 deposited in their respective savings accounts. Furthermore, participants should take into account the terms and conditions, the most important of which is maintaining an average balance of KD 500 for the monthly draw and KD 1,000 for the grand draw.

It is worth noting that the KIB's savings account has been specifically designed to meet the needs of individuals and provide them with the advantages of simultaneously saving and investing, with the added possibility of opening an account to serve their banking necessities without the requirement of fulfilling a minimum deposit to open or a limit of a minimum balance to keep the account. Additionally, this account comes with a free stylish debit card that can be used at more than 1 million ATMs worldwide, through the KNET network and at various POS touchpoints.

US economy's wild ride in 2021: High prices, fast growth

WASHINGTON: Millions of Americans have returned to jobs lost during the pandemic, but price spikes this year have complicated the US economic recovery. The severity of the inflation was confirmed Friday when the Labor Department reported a 6.8 percent jump in its November consumer price index (CPI), the largest annual increase in nearly 40 years.

Here is latest on the state of the world's largest economy as it rebounds from the COVID-19 downturn:

Millions back to work

As of November, unemployment had declined to 4.2 percent, a stark turnaround from April 2020, when the jobless rate spiked to 14.7 percent after more than 20 million workers lost their jobs when the pandemic forced businesses to close. The economy has added an average of 555,000 jobs a month this year, but the pace of hiring has been uneven.

While the economy remains about four million jobs short of the pre-pandemic level, there were 11 million openings last month and millions of Americans quit to find a better position or switch careers. Many businesses complain that they cannot find enough workers to fill open positions, and some have started offering improved benefits, signing bonuses and wage increases to attract talent.

Prices surging

Rising wages are a part of the inflation surge that



ALHAMBRA, US: People wait in line to order at Philippe's, a downtown Los Angeles restaurant in business since 1908 famed for its "French Dipped Sandwich", in Los Angeles, California on Friday. —AFP

has bedeviled the recovery this year and created challenges for President Joe Biden's policy agenda. The causes are multifaceted. Supply chains worldwide have been hindered by the aftermath of the pandemic closures and shipping delays, which created a shortage of semiconductors that has stricken automobile assembly lines, driving up prices for used vehicles. They also have been overwhelmed by demand, which is particularly apparent in the United States, where consumers have had their wallets juiced by government stimulus passed to aid the recovery.

The Federal Reserve's efforts to prevent a severe downturn, including slashing interest rates to zero, also played a role. The Fed has acknowledged the inflation threat and is expected to trim back its pandemic stimulus more quickly and raise rates as soon as the first half of next year. Economists believe inflation will lessen throughout 2022, though it may get worse before it gets better.

Strong growth

The US economy experienced its most severe downturn in decades last year, but has gained back the lost ground, though at a fluctuating pace. The economy expanded at a strong annual rate of 6.7 percent in the second quarter, but a much weaker 2.1 percent in the third quarter, dragged down by the Delta variant of COVID-19, which complicated business and scared consumers. But with infections from that wave dropping off, economists foresee better growth in the final three months of this year.

Biden took office in January and not long after secured passage of the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan, Washington's third pandemic stimulus package. The White House has pointed to falling unemployment and rapid growth as evidence that the spending has paid off. Detractors name it as a culprit in the inflation surge, saying it flooded consumers and businesses with cash which they have used to spend on goods that now are in short supply. —AFP

Brazil inflation hits 18-year high

RIO DE JANEIRO: Brazil's annual inflation rate hit an 18-year high of 10.74 percent in November, the government said Friday, although the monthly rate fell slightly, showing the central bank's aggressive tightening cycle may be starting to work. Latin America's biggest economy is being hit by both a recession and soaring prices, giving the central bank the unenviable task of trying to brake inflation without sending economic growth into a tailspin.

Surging fuel, transportation and housing prices in November pushed inflation to the biggest year-on-year increase since 2003, the national statistics institute said. However, in a silver lining, food prices fell, helping slow the monthly inflation rate to 0.95 per-

cent, down from 1.25 percent in October and below analysts' expectations of 1.07 percent.

That came after the central bank made seven straight increases to the benchmark interest rate in a bid to bring down inflation, including whopping hikes of 1.5 percentage points at its last two meetings.

The Selic rate now stands at 9.25 percent, its highest since mid-2017. The new inflation figures "provide a crumb of comfort that the headline rate is stabilizing a bit earlier than had been widely anticipated," economist William Jackson of consulting firm Capital Economics said in a note. But "the data still provides plenty for policymakers at the central bank to worry about," he added.

"It won't deter them from hiking the Selic rate by another 150 basis points in February." The central bank has been struggling to come anywhere near its inflation target: 3.75 percent for this year and 3.5 percent for next. Double-digit inflation has left many Brazilian families struggling to make ends meet.



RIO DE JANEIRO: Brazil's annual inflation rate hit an 18-year high of 10.74 percent in November, the government said Friday.

That has further weighed down President Jair Bolsonaro's already sinking popularity.

Polls currently place the far-right leader on track to lose to leftist ex-president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in elections next October. Seeking a pop-

ularity boost, Bolsonaro has nearly doubled the average welfare payment for low-income families to 415 reais (\$72) a month, and moved to expand the number eligible. However, analysts warn a jump in social spending may only further fuel inflation. —AFP

Opinion Editorial

Digitization of Kuwait power supply offers a path to sustainable future

By Rico Lin

Delegates to the COP26 summit this month issued a clarion call to accelerate action towards sustainability. His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah led the Kuwaiti delegation to Glasgow, where he joined other global leaders in committing to confronting climate change and carbon emissions reduction. But for Kuwait, sustainability has been an ongoing effort enshrined in the country's development goals. Kuwait's 2035 Vision is strongly linked to international sustainability goals, tied to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) 2030 agenda. Indeed, two of the seven pillars of the Kuwait National Development Plan (2035 Vision) are directly tied to the environment. These include the creation of a 'sustainable diversified economy' and a 'sustainable living environment'.

Kuwait has also pledged its support for the ambitious Green Middle East Initiative spearheaded by Saudi Arabia. The program aims to invest \$10 billion to reduce carbon emissions in the region and protect the environment.

Amidst these ambitious sustainability goals, the pivotal role of information and communication technologies (ICT) cannot be overstated. More specifically, ICT plays a critical role in three areas: accelerating the transition to cleaner power, supporting zero-emission vehicles, and raising climate ambitions through scientific innovation.

Breakthroughs in the ICT sector further boost environmental protection. 5G networks, for example, are optimized to transmit data at a fraction of the energy consumption per bit of 4G, leading to enormous climate gains when set against the massive amounts of data transmitted through modern mobile networks daily. Leaders at COP26 were vocal that a collaborative and multi-disciplinary approach is required for research to ensure that a diverse range of technology and climate solutions are affordable, available, and accessible to all. There's also an urgent need to transform the way we generate electricity by building new kinds of power sources, particularly solar. With some of the longest sunlight hours in the world, there are great opportunities for large-scale deployment of photovoltaics (PV) and energy storage systems in Kuwait.

Digital power technologies are the foundation of each of these initiatives, especially in recent efforts to integrate the batteries of electric vehicles into newly emerging distributed power grids. Digital power combines ICT and power electronics using AI, cloud, and big data, providing a pathway to low carbon solutions for nearly all sectors. By continuing to develop the capabilities and skills to use these technologies at scale, Kuwait will find itself well on its way to achieving its ambitious goals to tackle climate change and reduce carbon emissions.

Offering clean energy solutions is one of several priorities that Huawei has in Kuwait over the coming years. Founded earlier this year, Huawei Digital Power combines digital and power electronics technology to provide low carbon solutions to end-users that are secure, simplified, and green. Using AI, cloud, and big data will facilitate more efficient operations and maintenance so that providers can provide clean and stable power to the public. For example, combining 5G and digital power allows us to build smart and integrated energy solutions much more efficiently and at lower costs.

Note: Rico Lin is CEO, Huawei Kuwait



Rico Lin

Business

Toyota redefines compact SUV segment, launches new Raize

The compact SUV combines a spacious interior and distinctive styling



KUWAIT: Marking the entry of an exceptionally practical vehicle that is set to redefine the compact SUV segment, Mohamed Naser Al-Sayer & Sons and Toyota have launched the brand-new Raize in Kuwait. Pairing outstanding fuel efficiency and maneuverability with distinctive design and ample interior space, the new vehicle highlights Toyota's focus on catering to the needs of the brand's most discerning customers and comes equipped with a host of convenient features.

The new Raize measures around four meters in length, making it ideal for customers who wish to enjoy the additional luggage space and safety associated with an SUV, while also bringing the benefits of a vehicle that is compact and easy to drive. Equally suited to weekend leisure trips and everyday use, the Raize was developed to be active, practical, and compact and provides world-class mobility for customers in every scenario. All aspects of the vehicle, including its platform and powertrain unit, have been newly developed to deliver performance, comfort, safety, and peace of mind.

Yuichi Imamura, Chief Engineer in charge of development, said: "With the new Toyota Raize, our vision was to differentiate the vehicle from every other SUV on the market by combining an amazingly spacious interior and distinctive styling with a confidence-inspiring balance of maneuverability, safety, and stability. Raize's new platform ensures world-class handling, stability, and ride comfort together with a host of carefully considered features to meet the needs of our discerning customers in the region."

Commenting on the vehicle's launch, Kei Fujita, Chief Representative, Middle East and Central Asia Representative Office, Toyota Motor Corporation, said, "We are excited to introduce the new Toyota Raize in the Middle East. This vehicle opens a totally new genre in the compact SUV market, and we are confident that our customers will enjoy time spent within its surprisingly spacious cabin, whether they are traveling on their daily commute or a weekend adventure."

"The new Raize reflects Toyota's commitment to



developing diverse mobility solutions and offers the space, practicality, and comfort demanded by today's active lifestyle. I would like to extend our gratitude to our customers for their constant support and inspiration, which continue to motivate us to create 'ever-better' cars that exceed their expectations," Fujita added.

The brand-new Raize is available with a choice of two engine options. The 1-liter three-cylinder turbocharged engine provides smooth and responsive acceleration and produces 97 hp and 140 nm of torque, while the 1.2-liter three-cylinder engine option delivers an optimal balance of power and fuel economy and produces 87 hp and 113 nm of torque. Both engines come paired with Continuously Variable Transmission (CVT), which simulates a seven-speed sequential shift transmission to deliver powerful, smooth acceleration from start-off and at low speeds, and quiet and efficient transmission at higher speeds. A newly developed lightweight, highly rigid body and suspension contribute to outstanding handling, stability, and ride comfort. The vehicle also boasts excellent maneuverability, with a 4.9-meter turning radius.

The new Toyota Raize stands out in the segment with a bold, distinctive design that combines the powerful style of an SUV with the form factor of a small passenger car. The vehicle's front end features

a robust and smart look, with angular bumper corners and a trapezoid lower grille, creating a powerful, wide appearance. Muscular wheel arches contribute to the vehicle's assertive stance, while the use of sleek LED headlights and sequential turn lights reflect the advanced technologies within. From the side, the cabin casts a solid SUV silhouette with a low profile that gives the vehicle a sporty, agile appearance. The striking rear is framed by angular bumper corners that mirror the vehicle's front to create a wide and planted stance. LED lamps come as standard on all grades.

The new Raize's interior offers comfort and convenience, with high-quality details like plating and red accents, creating a sense of playfulness. The instrument panel has been designed to ensure an outstanding field of view from the driver's seat. The operational elements face the driver's side, while the gear lever has been positioned for easy operation to create a functional driving space that allows the driver to concentrate fully on the road. Steering wheel switches are also optimally positioned to give the driver intuitive control over multimedia and vehicle functions, and an illuminated center console makes it easier to locate items placed in the tray. The seats feature long and wide seat cushions with wide seatbacks and supportive side bolsters for optimal comfort.

The vehicle's spacious cabin hosts a range of practical features, including an 8-inch multimedia screen that comes integrated with Apple CarPlay, a USB port on the head unit that allows passengers to connect external media devices, a four-speaker sound system, a powerful air conditioning system, and 60/40 split and foldable rear seats. Meanwhile, parents benefit from the added peace of mind provided by Toyota's ISOFIX safety system, which attaches baby seats securely using specially designed tethers.

The brand-new Raize's compact body contains a spacious luggage compartment with a wide opening and dimensions of 1,000 mm in width, 865 mm in



height, and 755mm in length. It features a movable deck board that can be adjusted to provide numerous convenient storage solutions for a wide variety of customer needs. When the deck board is in its low position, the vehicle boasts a class-leading luggage capacity of 369 liters.

As with any other Toyota model, safety remains a top priority for the new Raize, which comes with a comprehensive array of safety features, including dual front SRS airbags, Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), Anti-lock Braking System (ABS), Hill-start Assist Control (HAC), Rear fog lamps, and Tire Pressure Monitoring System (TPMS), among many others.

A choice of seven exciting exterior hues adds to the new Raize's striking visual appeal, including Turquoise MM, White Pearl SE, Red, Gray ME, Black, Silver, and Yellow SE. Further personalization is made possible with the addition of several bi-tone variants - Gloss Black can be combined with Turquoise MM, White Pearl SE, Red, Gray ME, or Yellow SE. The vehicle's interior features an equally stylish color scheme that pairs black upholstery with red piping. The new Toyota Raize also comes with a choice of 16-inch or 17-inch alloy wheels in two intricate designs, with the 17-inch version featuring a special machine-finished black color for an advanced look.

KFH launches 'Baitak Rewards' program to boost credit cards usage

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) launched a new program to enhance the usage of KFH credit and charge cards inside and outside Kuwait "Baitak Rewards". A permanent free program which enables customers, when using their credit or charge cards - Hesabi - in shopping, to receive points on every purchase transaction starting from KD 1. The points may be used later to make other purchases from the shops participating in program. The points are registered, converted and used for purchasing through an application downloaded on mobile or "Baitak Rewards" program webpage.

KFH Group Acting DGM - Credit and Charge Card Products, Talal Al-Arbeed



Talal Al-Arbeed

He added that the program, in its initial stage, comprises a group of highly reputable and distinguished global trademark companies in various sectors. More than 150 companies have participated in the program and more new partners are being invited to participate to provide more options in the reward program for the holders and users of KFH credit cards covered in the program.

Al-Arbeed explained that there are 3 different card categories with Baitak Rewards program. Each category contains exclusive offers customer may avail. Categories include black and silver cards. Cardholders of both categories may earn points through local and international shops by using all points of sale and e-marketing. Also, they may transfer KFH points to any other member in the program. Green card holders may earn points through shops participating in Baitak Reward program only. KFH total points are added automatically within 24 after each purchase transaction which is qualified to earn points, provided that the customer should not be a participant in any other promotional program for the cards.

Al-Arbeed said: "We shall soon witness a new development in the Reward Program. KFH customer will be able to exchange the earned points to purchase travel tickets, hotel reservations, car leasing, and making donations to charity institutions. In addition, a new facility shall be made available soon, allowing KFH reward program points to be exchanged

for the reward points of other programs.

He emphasized that the program is the outcome of several developments made on KFH cards including shape, services, and advantages to encourage customers to further use the cards and benefit from the advantages namely security and easy usage. Cards have become a global language and a secured method in financial transactions, especially during travel. Credit cards are the new modern method of purchasing worldwide. He indicated that KFH has launched the products of "Oasis Club" credit card in collaboration with Kuwait Airways which includes "Oasis Club" MasterCard World Elite, which is allocated exclusively to private banking customers, and KFH "Oasis Club" MasterCard World which is allocated to Tammayoz and Ruwwad customers and qualified persons.

He added: KFH has provided highly advanced payment methods locally and globally to customers e.g., digital wallet, smart watches and mobiles in collaboration with three global applications Samsung Pay, Fitbit and Garmin which include Visa and MasterCard and working at points of sale compatible with NFC technology, smart phones and iPads operating on iOS and Android systems. Also, KFH has launched several campaigns to enhance the usage of credit cards, the last of which was the campaign "With Your Card... The Journey Begins" with KFH MasterCard which gives customers a unique and distinguished banking experience and several opportunities to win valuable prizes, Land Rover (Defender) and mileage from Kuwait Airways Corporation-Oasis club. Also, it had launched earlier a campaign "Ready for Summer" and a campaign for the usage of smart phones and watches to its customers Samsung Pay, Fitbit and Garmin.



BUFFALO: Starbucks employees wait for results of a vote count, on Thursday in Buffalo, New York. —AFP

Starbucks union vote a victory for Gen Z workers

BUFFALO: The Starbucks employees who led a landmark fight to form a union are overwhelmingly in their 20s and show a zeal to improve working conditions at the coffee chain. They won their bid to create the first union in one of the Starbucks' company-owned US cafes, despite heavy pressure from management to defeat the effort.

"This generation, this Gen Z, has the highest favorability of unions in my lifetime," said Richard Bensinger, a seasoned trade union organizer who helped the young baristas in their fight. "They are people that have no hope of owning a home. They have two jobs. They have student debt. They understand there's the billionaire class, and there's everybody else."

Will Westlake, 24 and a member of organizing committee Starbucks Workers United, says he experienced that dynamic his own life. He saw his big sister, 11 years his senior, as she struggled to find work in her field and was forced to do odd jobs to pay off the \$100,000 she borrowed for her studies.

He wants to be able to earn a decent living, even by working in a cafe. "The United States is not a manufacturing hub that it used to be. This is a service economy," he said.

Failing to improve working conditions for those jobs would condemn "70 percent of our population to being poor in the long term," Westlake said.

'Treated like garbage'

His colleague Natalie Wittmeyer was hired at Starbucks only a month ago but quickly joined the union movement, offended by the methods manage-

ment used to monitor employees since the start of their campaign. "I think I speak for a lot of the young people in America who are tired of being treated like garbage because we work fast food... or because you're young," she said.

RJ Rebmann, 26, said the victory "just goes to show that at the end of the day, working-class people know what their interests are, and even when we are being lied to and union busted and intimidated, we can still prevail in the end." The mobilization of these young people may not be surprising given Buffalo's history of strong labor movements, which allowed generations of workers to achieve decent standards of living.

Bensinger said Starbucks employees work just as hard as unionized factory workers, and they want a voice in their working conditions and to "not be patronized by the company." He proudly watched them speak one after the other at the press briefing Thursday following their victory: a clear vote in favor of a union at the Elmwood Avenue cafe in Buffalo, and a majority of the votes at the Genesee Street location, near the airport.

Though some votes have been contested at the Genesee Street shop, the union remains confident. They however lost a bid at a third cafe.

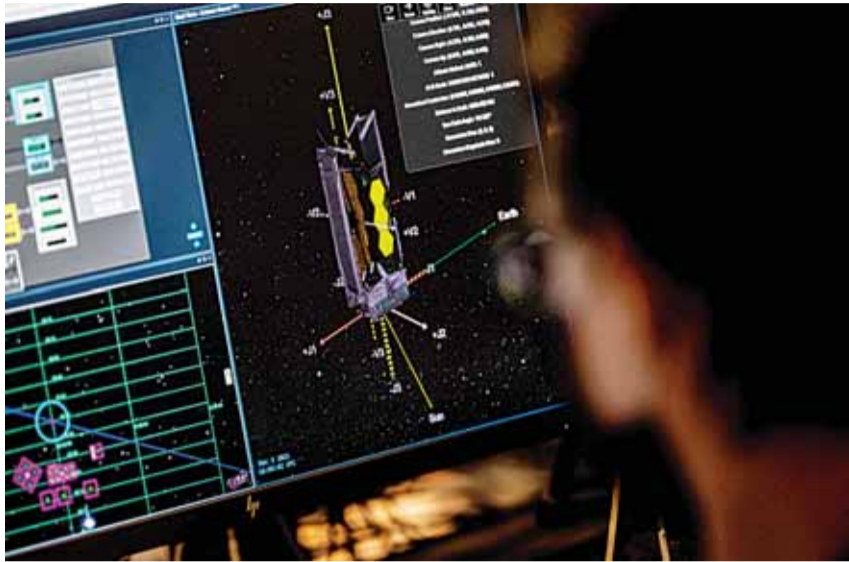
'Fed up'

Ruth Milkman, a longtime specialist in workers' movements at the City University of New York, sees a clear trend building. After years in decline and growing disillusion among older workers, "Unions are cool again for this generation," she said. Workers "are fed up with the economic conditions" and "they're pretty eager to try to make it work," but she cautions that they still face "a very dysfunctional system of labor law."

"Winning an election is great, but it's only the first step," she said. While the company has the obligation to negotiate "in good faith," that does not necessarily lead to a salary agreement. —AFP

Lifestyle | Features

WEBB TELESCOPE AIMS TO ANSWER ASTRONOMY'S 'BIGGEST QUESTIONS'



A technical drawing is seen on screen as Systems Engineers Christopher Murray (right) works at his console at the Webb Mission Office ahead of the James Webb Space Telescope's launch at the Space Telescope Science Institute (STScI) in Baltimore, Maryland. —AFP Photos



A sign hangs on Webb Mission Office announcing it is a controlled area ahead of the James Webb Space Telescope's launch at the Space Telescope Science Institute (STScI) in Baltimore, Maryland.

It's been three decades in the making: the largest and most powerful telescope ever to be launched into space is finally ready to take up its orbit and beam back new clues to the origins of the Universe and Earth-like planets beyond our solar system. NASA's James Webb Space Telescope, named for a former director of the American space agency, follows in the footsteps of the legendary Hubble - but intends to show humans what the Universe looked like even closer to its birth nearly 14 billion years ago. In a recent Tweet chat, cosmologist and astrophysicist John Mather, who co-founded the Webb project, described the telescope's unprecedented sensitivity. "#JWST can see the heat signature of a bumblebee at the distance of the Moon," he tweeted.

All that power is needed to detect the weak glow emitted billions of years ago by the very first galaxies to exist and the first stars being formed. Hubble is capable of observing events that happened in space some 500 million years after the Big Bang, and Webb

can go back even further to around 200 million years after that event. "This telescope is designed to answer the biggest questions in astronomy today," NASA astrophysicist Amber Straughn said in a 2017 TED talk.

"With Webb we hope to see these infant galaxies," she said, "and learn how galaxies grow over time." It will also give new information about nearly 5,000 exoplanets. While we know some planets outside our solar system are the right distance from their stars to make them habitable, scientists also want to know what their atmospheres are like and whether they could contain water. The ultimate goal is to find out whether Earth is unique or whether there are similar planets that could give rise to life.

Infrared vision

"There's a lot of excitement - we've been waiting for this moment for a long time," Pierre Ferruit, a project scientist from the European Space Agency (ESA), told AFP. The ESA and the Canadian Space Agency collaborated on Webb and Ferruit like thou-

sands of his colleagues has been working on it for most of his career. Already, he said, researchers are competing for access. "Observation time is in very high demand. The ESA has received over a thousand applications for just the first year of operation," he said. "Even after 20 years, the questions Webb was made to answer are still just as pressing."

The telescope is unequalled in size and complexity. Its mirror measures 6.5 meters (21 feet) in diameter - three times the size of the one on the Hubble telescope - and is made of 18 hexagonal sections. It is so large that it had to be folded in order to fit into the Ariane 5 rocket that will carry it to its orbit. Once the telescope is in place, the challenge will be to fully deploy the mirror and a tennis-court-sized sun shield - a process that will take two weeks.

Its orbit around the sun will be 1.5 million kilometers from the Earth, much farther away than Hubble, which has been 600 kilometers above the Earth since 1990. The location of Webb's orbit is called the Lagrange 2

point and was chosen in part because it will keep the Earth, the Sun and the Moon all on the same side of its sun shield. "This will put it in darkness and in extreme cold," said Ferruit, conditions which will allow the telescope's infrared sensors to "see" without interference - a kind of observation of which the Hubble was incapable.

'Fill up the tanks'

The NASA project, launched in 1989, was originally expected to deploy in the early 2000s. But multiple problems forced delays and a tripling of the telescope's original budget with a final price tag of nearly 10 billion dollars (8.8 billion euros). Webb was built in the US and transported to its launch site in Kourou in French Guyana this year. Its launch date of December 18 was slightly delayed after a small accident in late November. An Ariane 5 rocket is now set to carry it into space on December 22, and it is estimated that it will take a month to reach its point of orbit. "All that's left is to fill up the gas tanks!" said Ferruit. —AFP



Senior Spacecraft Engineer Michelle Elie works at her console at the Webb Mission Office.



Klaus Pontoppidan, project scientist in the Webb mission office, holds a model as he speaks during an interview ahead of the James Webb Space Telescope's launch at the Space Telescope Science Institute (STScI) in Baltimore.

WEBB TELESCOPE TO LOOK FOR FIRST LIGHT OF COSMIC DAWN

Peering into deep space and billions of years back in time, the James Webb telescope promises to offer the clearest glimpse yet of the Universe's cosmic dawn, when the earliest galaxies began to form.

The largest and most powerful telescope ever to be launched into space, which will take over from Hubble, will "directly observe a part of space and time never seen before," says NASA. This is the Universe in its youth, just a few hundred million years after the Big Bang. With "very lofty science goals in mind", Webb will look back 13.5 billion years to when the first galaxies evolved in the Universe, said Begonia Vila, instrument systems engineer at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in a briefing.

It aims to allow us to observe "how they change and evolve to get to the type of galaxy where we live in today," she said, as well as looking at the first stars and trying to detect "the type of elements that we identify as a sign of the life as we know it: water, carbon dioxide, methane". Looking farther into space means looking farther back in time because of how long it takes for light to travel - sunlight, for example, takes eight minutes to reach our eyes on Earth. Hubble reached its limit at 13.4 billion years, with the discovery of the oldest galaxy yet observed, GN-z11.

That ancient galaxy may have been an unprepossessing little dot but it was also "a surprise, with a luminosity that one did not expect at such a

distance", said the Swiss astrophysicist Pascal Oesch, who first reported GN-z11. Hubble, which was launched in 1990, looks mainly at visible light - but Webb, set to launch on December 22, focuses on infrared. Light emitted by the very first luminous objects has been "redshifted" by the Universe's continual expansion, according to NASA, arriving today as infrared.

Webb, with its significantly greater sensitivity than Hubble, is expected to provide much more detailed images, which Oesch said "will allow us to explore this era in extraordinary detail". He is betting that "many, many more galaxies will then be revealed, but they will be much less luminous". Its infrared capability will also allow Webb to penetrate the interstellar dust clouds that absorb starlight and hide them from Hubble's view. This "makes it possible to see what is hidden in the clouds, the birth of stars and galaxies", said David Elbaz, an astrophysicist at the French Atomic Energy Commission.

Lights, action

Webb has been jointly developed by NASA, the European Space Agency and the Canadian Space Agency. The ambition is to help explain a key stage in the evolution of the Universe, when "the lights went on, when the very first stars began to form", said Oesch. After the Big Bang triggered the expansion of the Universe, it entered a virtually lightless period, the cosmic dark ages, where it was

cast in a gaseous fog of hydrogen and helium swirled, making it opaque. This period continued for hundreds of millions of years until the first stars began to form.

These are thought to have been giants - up to 300 times more massive than our Sun - that burnt only for a few million years before exploding as supernovae. How and when those first stars were formed remains uncertain. One idea is that dark matter - a substance whose existence is so far still theoretical - played a role. This was a crucial time in the Universe's evolution, with the radiation from these massive stars able to split hydrogen atoms back into electrons and protons - ionising them.

As it ionised, the Universe became more transparent, leading eventually to the "clear" conditions now detected in much of Space. To study this phenomenon is to investigate the formation of galaxies. The hope with Webb is to see "the first galaxies, which carry the second generation of stars, which will perhaps teach us things about the first", said Nicole Nesvadba, astronomer at the Lagrange laboratory of the Observatory of the Riviera.

And this, experts hope, will ultimately provide clues to our own existence. "If we really want to know where our atoms came from, and how the little planet Earth came to be capable of supporting life, we need to measure what happened at the beginning," said John Mather, senior project scientist for the Webb telescope, in comments on the project's website. —AFP

Space Telescope: A giant leap towards 'other Earths'?

There is only one Earth... that we know of. But outside our own solar system, other stars give warmth and light to planets and, possibly, life. Soon to offer a better look at these so-called exoplanets is NASA's new James Webb telescope, which is set to launch this month and become the largest and most powerful observatory in orbit.

One of its major missions is to look for conditions that could sustain life outside our solar system, where scientists have only recently been able to look for it. The first exoplanet observed - 51 Pegasi b - was discovered in 1995 and since then nearly 5,000 others have been noted, from gas giants similar to our solar system's Jupiter or Neptune to rocky planets like Earth. Some are a habitable distance from their suns, in a range fancifully named the Goldilocks Zone.

But beyond being neither too close to, nor too far from the stars they orbit, little is known about these planets or what they are made of. They are too far away to be observed directly and rocky planets, which are more susceptible to be capable of sustaining life as we know it, tend to be even smaller and harder to observe. So far, astronomers have detected them as they pass in front of the stars they orbit, capturing tiny variations in luminosity. This has allowed them to determine their size and density but the rest - their atmospheric composition, what's going on on their surfaces - is left to discover.

'Look at their innards'

Astrophysicists hope the Webb telescope will help fill in some of these gaps. Equipped with a new piece of technology called the Mid-Infrared Instrument (MIRI), it will use a camera and a spectrograph to see light in the mid-infrared region of the electromagnetic spectrum, invisible to the human eye.

"It will revolutionise how we see planets' atmospheres. We're going to get a look at their innards!" said Pierre-Olivier Lagage of the French space agency who worked on MIRI with a US and European team. Pierre Ferruit, a Webb project scientist at the European Space Agency, explained that MIRI will be able to read the infrared signature of light filtered through various substances in planets atmospheres as they pass in front of their stars.

In this way, Ferruit told AFP, scientists should be able to tell whether they contain molecules like water vapour, carbon monoxide and methane. Those three substances are present in Earth's atmosphere and could potentially signal biological activity on a planet's surface. "To think that twenty years ago we knew of almost no exoplanets and now we are about to find out what their atmospheres are made of - it's huge," Ferruit said.

Trappist-1

Rene Doyon is head of the Institute for Research on Exoplanets in Montreal and main scientist on another of the Webb's instruments, the Near Infrared Imager and Slitless Spectrograph. "My dream would be to find an atmosphere around a rocky planet in a habitable zone with water molecules," Doyon told AFP, describing three conditions that would make life as we know it on Earth possible. But there are pitfalls: on Venus for example scientists recently thought they found phosphine, associated with biological activity on Earth. Subsequent research, however, showed there were no traces of the gas.

Doyon said finding the origins of biological molecules will probably be "beyond the capabilities" of the Webb telescope. "That will be for later," confirmed Ferruit. "For now we are looking for conditions that are favourable to life, like the presence of liquid water." Such clues will narrow the focus of future missions that aim to discover "whether the Earth is one of a kind, or not". Webb is already set to probe a system around the planetary system Trappist-1, around 40 light years from Earth, which was discovered by Belgian scientists who named it after famous beer-brewing monks.

It has seven planets, of which three are in a Goldilocks zone and orbit a dwarf star, whose not-too-bright light will make it easier to detect the composition of the atmosphere. Other instruments for direct observation will allow Webb to examine the atmospheres of "hot Jupiters" or "mini Neptunes", said Doyon. He said he expects new categories of exoplanets could be discovered along with plenty of surprises. "Surprise is what exoplanet discovery is made of," he said. —AFP



Afghan refugees collect waste at a makeshift dumping ground in Istanbul. —AFP photos



Afghan refugees collect waste at a dumping ground.



Refugees collect waste at a makeshift dumping ground.

ILLEGAL BUT ESSENTIAL, MIGRANTS RECYCLE ISTANBUL'S WASTE

Shrouded by acrid smoke, a young Afghan crouches sorting waste he has pulled from the trash bins of Istanbul, anxious that Turkey will soon strip him of even this subsistence. "I start at eight in the morning and finish at eight at night," said Issam Raffur, who has spent four of his 20 years in Turkey.

"It is very hard and poorly paid, but I have no choice," he shrugged, smoke billowing from a fire barely warming his makeshift sorting centre on a soggy winter day. Considered the poorest of Turkey's poor, Afghans have joined Kurds, the Laz, Roma and other ethnic minorities and undocumented migrants in doing work others snub. For less than \$10 a day, they roam the streets of Istanbul, a megapolis of nearly 16 million people straining under the weight of a currency crisis and a flood of refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and other conflict-riven states.

Diving headfirst into dumpsters, they dig up plastic bottles, glass and other waste they then sort and sell in bulk—a self-organized, unregulated business that keeps the city clean, and men such as Issam fed. But as public sentiment turns against migrants and other foreigners in Turkey, the state-appointed prefecture of Istanbul has declared this work bad for "the environment and public health". Issam and his friends suspect that what Turkish officials really want

is to put this potentially profitable business under the control of a few, well-connected recycling firms.

"If the big companies take over, they will saw off our last branch of support," said Mahmut Aytar, a Turk who manages one of the small recycling centres on the Asian side of Istanbul. "They will throw us in the ravine." Speaking to AFP, Deputy Environment Minister Mehmet Emin Birpinar did little to ease Aytar's concerns. "Waste can be bought and sold, so we have started to view it as a raw material with other uses," he said. "After the price of raw materials increased, the value of recycled goods has risen."

Women and children

Born in multi-ethnic southeastern Turkey, Aytar, 28, launched his recycling business out of desperation after failing to find work befitting his biology degree. "This job does not require experience or training. Anyone can do it, but it is mostly the people excluded by the system who get involved," he said while watching his press machines crush plastic bags and empty bottles. After being shrunk into tidy bales, the plastic waste is loaded onto trucks of small, independently run recycling operators who convert them into granules. Aytar said he runs one of 2,500 or so impromptu recycling depots in Istanbul, receiving dozens of trash collectors—called "cekceki" (pronounced "chekchekchi" and roughly translated

as those who pull carts) — every day.

Tugging white, muddied carts filled with paper, cardboard, plastic and bottles, they dart between honking cars and pedestrian streams, earning 80–120 liras (\$6–\$9) a day. Women and minors specialize in cardboard boxes, which they find after the shops close at night, their babies sometimes riding along in the carts' lower folds. Each kilogram of waste is worth about a lira (seven US cents), and the bravest collect about 150 kilograms of waste a day. "They probably don't realise it, but by being impoverished, they contribute to protecting the environment," said Aytar. "They are helping society."

'Harassment'

They do so while living in destitution and depend on the whims of the police. In early October, security forces rounded up more than 250 cekceki in one day, releasing them after a few hours but keeping their precious cargoes of waste. "It's harassment," said Ekrem Yasar, who started managing his own depot after collecting trash for 12 years.

"Each confiscation costs me about 560 liras, which I earn in three days." Istanbul prefecture officials defended their crackdown. "These cekceki work illegally," one official told AFP on condition of anonymity. "It is up to the city to take care of recycling and to collect revenues from it." Conceding



that his work has no legal status, collector Ekrem Yasar said he would be happy to pay taxes if ever given the chance.

"We are not asking for state handouts, but if they take away our jobs, tens of thousands of people will be left with nothing," he said, pinning his hopes on the first cekceki union, which is still in the process of being set up. Most of the trash collectors and warehouse workers live on-site in crudely arranged containers, huddling around open fires in Istanbul's industrial zones. "Imagine, life in the city," Yasar said with a bitter laugh. "You think we are making money? Look, we only have one teaspoon between us," he said while serving tea. —AFP



Actress Rita Moreno (2nd left) and daughter actress Fernanda Gordon (2nd right) arrive for the premiere of Steven Spielberg's 'West Side Story' at the El Capitan Theatre in Los Angeles. —AFP

Spielberg launches Latina stars in 'West Side Story'

It is every aspiring actor's dream: hand-picked by Steven Spielberg from 30,000 contenders for a starring role that launches her into Hollywood's A-list and Oscars contention. But Rachel Zegler insists the process of her casting as Maria in the new film adaptation of "West Side Story," which hit US theaters on Friday, was anything but straightforward.

"It didn't feel like a fairy tale when it was happening, I was actually very stressed out!" Zegler, who was 16 when she submitted a video of herself singing "I Feel Pretty," told AFP. Zegler, a New Jersey native, went through "eight or nine" rounds of auditions over nearly a year. "I left every single round thinking if I don't get it, I can't wait to see this movie, and I've had today and I've met these cool people, and maybe they'll keep me in mind for the next thing. I had the greatest time — and then I got to actually make the movie," Zegler added.

Due to pandemic delays, the Spielberg motion picture was kept under wraps for more than two years after filming finished, during which time she has been cast as Snow White in Disney's upcoming live-action remake. Zegler, now 20, is being tipped as a contender for best actress at the Oscars held in March, with the film's campaign blitz launching her into the public eye. "It's the most jarring, overwhelming experience," said Zegler, adding that "she doesn't know how to feel" about becoming a celebrity. "Being known is fun, being known is cool too," she said.

'We're different'

Spielberg's decision to remake a beloved 1961 film which won 10 Oscars — the most ever for a musical — drew criticism from many fans who felt it could not be improved upon. Reviews have been glowing, how-

ever, with Zegler and Ariana DeBose — who plays the fiery Anita — drawing particular praise. Additional controversy came from the 1950s Broadway musical's stereotyping of Puerto Rican immigrants as gang members, and its use of racial slurs.

But while the original film version was criticized for casting a white actress as Maria, and painting Rita Moreno's skin darker to play Anita, Spielberg cast his movie more authentically. DeBose, who is Afro-Latina, said her real-life heritage helped her performance stand out from the legendary Moreno, who joined her on set for Spielberg's film as a new character.

"It wasn't intimidating because we're different. I mean, sure, she's 100 percent an icon, she's beloved," she told AFP. "But by virtue of me being Afro-Latina, we are inherently different women, with different lived experiences and my lived experience informs this character fully," said DeBose. "I walk through the world in a very different way. So I feel like when you know that you have something to offer a character you hold fast to that. And you don't focus on the pressures of someone else's legacy."

Moreno, one of the elite club of entertainers to have won an Emmy, Grammy, Oscar and Tony award — popularly known as an "EGOT" — "showed us that there was possibility of success," said DeBose. "For my character specifically, now young Afro-Latinas finally get to see themselves as a main character in the context of this story," Zegler, who is of Colombian heritage, added: "As a Latina, I could not be more proud to be a part of a project that represents our people in such a beautiful way, and represents real-life experiences that we've all had, and that our ancestors had when they came here for the first time." —AFP

Gahan on imposter syndrome and risk-taking

Dave Gahan, the revered singer with electronic pioneers Depeche Mode, says he discovered new-found vigor plunging himself into an unlikely set of covers for his other group's new album "Imposter". Singing with the band Soulsavers, he takes on a wide-ranging set, mixing classics from Nat King Cole and Elvis with more eclectic choices such as Frank Ocean or Cat Power. He even tackles one from that most outrageously talented of vocalists, Jeff Buckley.

"You have to take risks if you want to change," he told AFP on a visit to Paris. "What this record did for me, the process of recording it, was to realize how amazing it is where I am — the opportunities I have around me if I just take the risk to explore them," he said. "These songs once again gave me a new vigor to step into a character that felt familiar." But even someone as successful as Gahan knows imposter syndrome.

He may have hogged the limelight in Depeche Mode, but the songs, until recent years, were all the work of instrumentalist Martin Gore. "We all feel like imposters now and again," said Gahan. "Even before I made music, when I was a teenager, I was looking for something to be a part of, to disappear in, to be accepted. That's part of life for all of us."

Second home

Gahan has found a second home with Soulsavers, a rotating group of musicians with a love of bluesy rock and gospel. Now on their third album together, the band's sound fit well with Gahan and his rocky history. Turning 60 next year, he has been through severe addiction and survived multiple overdoses, an on-stage heart attack and even attempted suicide. "There are behaviors that you think are solutions to how you feel, but it's not real — drugs, alcohol, love, whatever," Gahan said.

"But music is the one consistent thing in my life that's reminded me that it's something I really care



In this file photo, lead singer of the English electronic band Depeche Mode, Dave Gahan, performs at the 43rd Paleo music festival in Nyon, western Switzerland. —AFP

about. "Soulsavers, over the course of 20 years, have developed a sound, an atmosphere that I'm very aware of and I fit very nicely into that atmosphere. I can do my best performances in there," said Gahan. Led by Rich Machin, Soulsavers recorded their new album before the pandemic in Malibu at the Shangri-La studio of mixing desk sorcerer Rick Rubin. But they were not just there for the sunshine: Rubin produced the beloved Johnny Cash covers album "American Recordings", which includes the Depeche Mode classic "Personal Jesus".

'A lost art'

Machin and Gahan talk with childish glee of the live recording experience. "It's sort of a lost art — performance," said Gahan. "I'm trying to hold on to it because the most important part of what you do is capturing a performance. "With my experience, with 40 years of making music, I knew we had captured something special." The fear was that the events of the past 18 months might have destroyed the magic they captured in the studio. "We weren't in a room together for two years," said Machin. "The chemistry can alter, and it's been a pretty weird time, so you come back into it with a deep anxiety, but within 24 hours of being back together you realize it's fucking great still. "Those two years — it's like it never happened." —AFP

France approves controversial Notre-Dame redesign

A controversial redesign of the interior of Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris has been approved by heritage authorities, including possible street art installations and softer mood lighting. Church authorities are adamant the plans — part of a wider rebuilding project following a devastating fire in 2019 — are not revolutionary and will simply offer visitors a warmer welcome.

But the changes have sparked criticism, with around 100 public figures putting their names to an opinion piece in right-wing newspaper Le Figaro on Wednesday saying they "entirely undermine the decor and religious space" of the Gothic landmark. That did not sway the 20 experts of the National Heritage and Architecture Commission, who voted in favor of the church's plans

on Thursday. "The experts gave a favorable verdict on the interior renovation program," the culture ministry told AFP.

They had a couple of minor reservations, including wanting to see a prototype of the new benches (with their own lights and a mechanism to raise them in and out of the floor) that will replace the old straw chairs. "We are very satisfied with this decision which respects the broad principles that we outlined, including the work on the lighting and the guidance for visitors," said Father Gilles Drouin, who is in charge of the interior renovation.

There was worldwide shock over the fire of April 15, 2019 that destroyed much of the roof and spire of Notre-Dame, which is visited by some 12 million people a year. The diocese is taking the opportunity to rework the interior ahead of

its planned reopening in 2024. The culture ministry confirmed to AFP that street art pioneer Ernest Pignon-Ernest, as well as other modern artists such as Anselm Kiefer and Louise Bourgeois, are among the names being considered for display when new art installations replace some of the little-used 19th-century confessionals.

Other ideas include Bible quotes to be projected in multiple languages on the walls and softer lighting. One Paris-based architect told The Art Newspaper that this risked turning Notre-Dame "into Disneyland". Critics in Le Figaro called for the authorities to respect the work of Viollet-le-Duc, the architect who overhauled the 12th-century cathedral in the late 1800s, though in keeping with the Gothic style that was enjoying a renaissance at the time. —AFP

Lifestyle | Features

FATHER TIME: PAKISTAN'S LONELY CLOCK COLLECTOR



A collector Gul Kakar shows his antique clocks at a museum housed inside the city's tribal police headquarters compound in Quetta. —AFP photos



Photo shows an antique clock from Gul Kakar collection at a museum housed inside the city's tribal police headquarters compound in Quetta.



An employee maintains an antique clock, handmade in 1847 by East India Company colonial administrator John Jacob, in a government building in Jacobabad, Sindh province.



Photo shows an antique clock from Gul Kakar collection at a museum housed inside the city's tribal police headquarters compound in Quetta.

The tick-tock of hundreds of antique clocks fills a small hall in the southwestern Pakistani city of Quetta, where collector Gul Kakar swears he will spend all the time he has left caring for them. Delicate wristwatches, weighty pocket pieces and battered table models clutter every surface, while the pendulums of wall-mounted and standalone grandfather clocks sway as their deep bongs mark each new hour. "I know their language," Kakar, a 44-year-old police officer, tells AFP during a visit to his collection. "They tell me their problems, and I understand."

Kakar's collection, some of which dates back to 1850, is housed inside the city's police headquarters compound. That means they are behind heavy gates and high concrete blast walls in a province that for years has been rife with ethnic, sectarian and separatist violence. The tight security may contribute to the lack of traffic, though Kakar admits he has found few other aficionados to admire his museum and there are hardly any visitors. "People in Quetta don't show much interest," he confesses.

Kakar's obsession began decades ago, when two family clocks fell out of order and were sent for repairs. "I started taking an interest... then I got the idea that I should get more clocks." Soon he began collecting in earnest and his museum today is the result of more than 18 years of scouring the internet for antiques - even persuading friends overseas to buy secondhand pieces and ship them to him. He has also lost count of how many he has - or how much he spends on his collection - but income from a family-run landholding means a "major portion" of his police salary goes to clocks.

Oldest clock

"For as long as I am alive, I will take care of them," says Kakar, dressed in a smart black vest and carrying a brass-topped walking stick. He admits, however, that nobody in his family shares the passion, and that after his death, the collection may simply be sold. He is ready to donate everything if an official or the private sector steps in to fund a museum in his name. "I have

not so far received any such offer," Kakar admits. Despite all the pieces, he still yearns for one last item - a grandfather clock similar to a famed 19th-century timepiece kept in Jacobabad, in Sindh province. That clock - said by some to be the oldest in what is present-day Pakistan - was handmade in 1847 by John Jacob, the East India Company colonial administrator who gave the town its name. Kakar lights up as he explains the mechanism of the clock, whose pendulum is sunk 32 feet deep in a well. He has never seen it, but is keen to one day. "I would give up my entire collection for that one." —AFP

Christmas tree turns symbol of hope at Brazil dump

An illegal garbage dump seems an unlikely setting for a holiday story, but when a photojournalist captured 12-year-old Gabriel Silva pulling a Christmas tree from a fetid mountain of trash, the image quickly went viral. Silva lives with his mother and two older brothers in a small mud hut next to the dump in the town of Pinheiro, in northeastern Brazil. It is a disturbing landscape of rotting waste and discarded plastic, where dozens of trash-pickers compete for scraps of food with vultures, cats, dogs and cattle.

Silva was with his mother on November 8, digging through the garbage as he does most days after school, when he unearthed a blue plastic bag with a small artificial Christmas tree inside. "I had never had a Christmas tree before," he says. His face has an inscrutable expression in the picture that photographer Joao Paulo Guimaraes captured of that moment, as if the shirtless young trash-picker were unsure what to make of this find: it intrigued the child in him, but would do nothing to feed his family.

But then the image went viral on social networks, and the little plastic tree turned into an unexpected Christmas present. Silva and his family's dirt-floor hut now has a giant, sparkling Christmas tree inside - not the one from the dump, but a gift from a benefactor who was moved by the photograph. It is just one of a flood of donations the family has received. "We've gotten clothes, mattresses, baskets of food. Thank God, we'll be able to get by fine for Christmas this year," says Silva's mother, 45-year-old Maria Francisca Silva.

There has also been money, thanks to online collections - a windfall for Maria Francisca, who earns around 600 reais (\$105) a month selling recyclable materials from the dump. The family hopes to soon fulfill their dream of building an actual house. They have already realized one longtime wish, thanks to an initial donation of 500 reais: install a hydraulic pump to bring up water from their well, replacing the rope and bucket they used to use. But Silva's favorite gift is a bicycle he received from a teacher at his school.

'Like the apocalypse'

Silva spends much of his free time at the dump with his mother. "I prefer to bring him with me. If I let him run around in the street, he could get into drugs, do things he's not supposed to," she says. "He's a good boy. He always helps me." The episode has turned Silva into a local celebrity. "Every day, people want to take my picture, ask me things," he says. Guimaraes, a freelance photographer who collaborates with AFP, lives in the neighboring state of Para. He got the idea to shoot pictures at the dump after seeing a video of residents there running after a garbage truck carrying waste from a supermarket. "It was just crazy. There were probably 50 people chasing it," says Pinheiro's public defender, Eurico Arruda, who shot the video.

"That dump is like something out of the apocalypse. There are fires and smoke everywhere, vultures, dogs. It's the bottom rung of destitute poverty," Arruda, who has set up a cooperative to help the trash-pickers defend their rights, says he hopes the Christmas tree picture will raise awareness about the plight of people like the Silvas. The local government has already promised monthly welfare payments of 100 reais (\$18) for the trash-pickers, and vowed to build a legal dump next year that complies with sanitation regulations. —AFP

AFGHAN DIRECTOR NOW IN TALEBAN'S SHADOW



Afghan film director Salim Shaheen displays a print of him posing with Indian Bollywood actor Sunny Deol, during an interview with AFP in his residence in Kabul. —AFP



Afghan film director Salim Shaheen works at a computer in his residence in Kabul. —AFP

Four years ago, Afghan film director Salim Shaheen was in the spotlight at Cannes, but now he spends his days confined to his home, afraid of the new Taliban regime and their clamp-down on arts and music. Prolific and exuberant, Shaheen often speaks in the third person or as the on-screen personas developed in his 125 ultra-low-budget films.

A mention of his moment in the Cannes limelight elicits particular rapture. "It was the most beautiful day of my life!" Shaheen cries out from his home in Kabul. "All the French knew me. They were shouting: 'Shaheen! Shaheen!'" The film presented at Cannes was a documentary called "The Prince of Nothingwood," produced by journalist Sonia Kronlund, which followed Shaheen as he made his 111th film.

The 56-year-old still savors the memory of the minutes-long standing ovation he received after the documentary's press screening at Cannes. But all

that now seems very far away, and though he has not received any direct threats from the Taliban, he now lives in fear of the hardline Islamists who returned to power in mid-August after a two-decade insurgency. "I'm afraid," he admits, momentarily ditching his theatrical persona. "I'm no ordinary guy going out onto the streets. I am Salim Shaheen."

'Cinema has died in Afghanistan'

Shaheen fled to Pakistan during the Taliban's first brutal regime of 1996 to 2001, when cinema and television were banned and the arts severely restricted. Afghanistan's new government has pledged a softer rule this time round-television has so far been permitted but with heavy restrictions on content, while the country's few cinemas have mostly closed because of the worsening financial crisis. But restrictions on dancing, playing music and singing have been imposed variably across provinces.

When the Taliban rolled unopposed into Kabul on August 15 during the collapse of the Western-backed regime, Shaheen burned dozens of posters of his films, keeping only two in an otherwise bare room. He tried to leave the country later that month and he says he was on a list of people accepted by France. "I was meant to leave the day of the explosion at the airport," says Shaheen, referring to an August 26 suicide bombing by an Islamic State group affiliate that killed more than one hundred people. He was in a vehicle at the airport when the explosion took place, and "we received a message telling us to get out of the area," he explains. He has since closeted himself away at home, along with 12 other family members who were also meant to be evacuated.

"All the actors and actresses from my films are currently in France... I want to go to somewhere I can resume my art and cinema," he says. His films focus on social issues including violence against

women, crime, and drugs - topics not to the Taliban's taste. Taking inspiration from Bollywood, he flirts with all the main genres-drama, comedy, police action-while song and dance are also integral features. His exaggerated style isn't always appreciated by educated Afghans, but he is very popular among ordinary folk-many in Kabul break into a smile at the mere mention of his name.

The Taliban's Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice has made it clear that films that it says go against Islamic and Afghan culture are not permitted. In mid-November, it also issued a religious directive urging Afghan television channels to stop broadcasting dramas featuring women. A ministry spokesman told AFP he was not familiar with Shaheen or his work. The filmmaker has just finished editing his last three projects, but doesn't know if they will ever reach the public. "Cinema has died in Afghanistan-and Salim Shaheen has died too with that!" —AFP

Sports

Ruthless Australia crush England in first Ashes Test

Australia cruise by in style by nine wickets

BRISBANE: A ruthless Australia crushed England by nine wickets to win the first Ashes Test in style just after lunch on day four at the Gabba yesterday. Needing just 20 runs after bowling England out for 297 in their second innings - with Nathan Lyon taking his 400th Test scalp - Australia cruised to the target in 5.1 overs when Marcus Harris square-drove Mark Wood for a boundary. The only blemish was the wicket of makeshift opener Alex Carey, who was out for nine, caught behind off the bowling of Ollie Robinson.

Regular opener David Warner was unable to bat due to a rib injury he suffered when he was twice hit by Wood in the first innings. Australia will carry a 1-0 lead in the five-match series into the second Test, which starts in Adelaide on Thursday. "A lot of things did go right," said Pat Cummins, making his debut as Australia Test skipper. "So someone was smiling on me. I'm really proud of everyone, I thought it was a really complete performance." England will need to regroup after being dismantled with both bat and ball at the Gabba.

After being bowled out for 147 in the first innings, England then struggled to make any impression with the ball, with player of the match Travis Head (152), Warner (94) and Marnus Labuschagne (74) all punishing the English attack, particularly left-arm spinner Jack Leach. The visitors did fight back on the third day with a defiant partnership between captain Joe Root and Dawid Malan, but once they both fell early yesterday, English resistance crumbled.

"Frustration, we worked really hard to get ourselves back into the game last night and we knew

how important this first session was," said Root. "If we had got through to the new ball unscathed and carried that partnership forward we would have given ourselves a really good opportunity to go in and post a total that would have kept us in the game. "It's a shame we couldn't quite get through that initial phase (today) because it could have been very different."

England collapse again

After starting the morning in a reasonable position at 220-2, the English lost eight for 77 in the extended first session. England's batting issues at the Gabba were mirrored in the broadcast compound, where a power failure resulted in the worldwide television feed going down for 45 minutes. No wickets fell during this period but when the broadcast problems were finally resolved, Lyon struck. The 34-year-old

Nathan Lyon takes 400th Test scalp

off-spinner had looked ineffectual on Friday as he searched for his milestone 400th wicket. But he finally broke through when Malan got an inside edge onto his pad and the ball popped up to Labuschagne at silly mid-off, sparking huge celebrations around the Gabba. Malan made 82.

Lyon, in his 101st Test, became just the 16th player worldwide to achieve the feat of 400 Test wickets, and only the third Australian after Shane Warne and Glenn McGrath. England were rocked in the next over when Root, on 89, wafted at a ball outside off stump from Cameron Green and got a thin edge to wicketkeeper Carey, leaving England 229-4 and Root still searching for his first Test century in Australia. Lyon then struck again, getting a ball to bite and leap off the Gabba pitch and take the thick



BRISBANE: England's Ollie Robinson (right) reaches for the ball during day four of the first Ashes cricket Test match between England and Australia at the Gabba in Brisbane yesterday. — AFP

edge of Ollie Pope's bat, Steve Smith taking a comfortable catch at slip.

Ben Stokes and Jos Buttler tried to steady the ship as Australia took the new ball, but Cummins brought himself on and had immediate success. Bowling with real pace and aggression, Cummins squared Stokes up with a brute of a ball that took the outside edge and flew to Green in the gully, leaving England 266-6. Two runs later, Josh Hazlewood, who was under an injury cloud after not bowling after tea on Friday, drew a faint edge from Buttler to leave England staggering.

Robinson joined Chris Woakes at the crease and the pair put on 18 runs to ensure Australia had to bat again. But Robinson attempted a reverse sweep off Lyon and spooned a simple catch to Head at backward square leg. Lyon took his fourth wicket just before the scheduled lunch break when he bowled Wood, who had attempted an extravagant drive. With nine wickets down, the umpires called for an extra 30 minutes to be played before lunch and Green wasted no time, snaring Woakes. It only took 20 minutes after the lunch break for Australia to take the win. — AFP

Ons Jabeur in Kuwait for Arab Tennis Masters Tournament

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The Arab Tennis Masters Tournament will be wrapped up today at Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah International Tennis Complex in the presence of President of Arab and Kuwait Tennis Federations Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Sabah, board members of ATF and KTF along with diplomats and sports figures.

Meanwhile the Masters title will be contested by Malik Jaziri and Syrian Mohamad Naqo in one semi-final and Hadi Habib from Lebanon and Mohamed Aziz from Tunis in the other semi-final. Meanwhile, the doubles will be contested between Tunis and Lebanon in one semi-final and Kuwait and Egypt in the other.

WTA's seventh ranked player Tunisian Ons Jabeur arrived in Kuwait yesterday as a guest of honor for the tournament and was received by President of KTF and ATF Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber and Federations officials. Ons will attend the singles and doubles final matches. President of Bahrain Tennis Federation Sheikh Abdelaziz bin Mubarak Al-Khalifa is pleased with Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah International Tennis Complex - calling it a five star tennis facility.

Deputy Chairman of ATF Ayman Azmi lauded the



good organization of the tournament. "I supervised the Qatar Open from 1993 until 2008 and now I am at the first Arab Masters - which revealed Kuwait's technical and administrative capabilities. The Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdallah International Tennis Complex (with its outdoor and indoor courts) is a significant addition to tennis - not only in the region but the world," he said.

Results of Friday's competitions were as follows: in the doubles, Kuwait's Abdelhameed Jumaa and Ali Al-Shatti defeated Sudan's Mohammad Abdallah and Khalid Derar 6-3/6-0 and they will face Egypt's Sherif Makhoulouf and Amr Mohamed. Meanwhile, Kuwait's Bader Antar and Essa Qabazard are out of the tournament after losing to Lebanon's Hady Habeeb and Hassan Ibrahim 1-6/3-6. Tunisians Wisam Abdulrahman and Mohamed Aziz reached the semi finals as well. The singles matches saw Kuwait's Abdulhameed Jumaa depart after losing to Syria's Mohammad Hazem 6-3/6-3.



First blood to Hamilton before the title decider

ABU DHABI: Lewis Hamilton's quest to make Formula One history at the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix began brightly with the Mercedes driver topping the timesheets after Friday's practice as challenger Max Verstappen struggled for pace. Hamilton, chasing an unprecedented eighth world title, goes into today's season-closing race level on points with Verstappen. And on the evidence of the opening two practice sessions - Verstappen finished over half a second behind Hamilton - Red Bull have work to do to match the Mercedes' speed at the modified Yas Marina circuit ahead of the qualifying.

It was the Dutch title contender who was quickest out of the blocks though, taking the honors in the morning. Hamilton, placed third, turned the tables emphatically under the floodlights in the second practice with a 1min 23.691 lap to get his weekend off to an encouraging start. "It doesn't feel too bad," said the 36-year-old Briton. "It started off good but got a bit worse in P1, then started off better in the second session with some changes we made. "Now we just have to crank through the data and try to figure out how we can improve."

He added: "I feel good, I feel great in my body. "And as I said I think we made some positive steps set-up wise, so we'll try and perfect it tonight and come back hard tomorrow." Alpine's Esteban Ocon led the chasing pack, 0.343sec adrift, followed by Valtteri Bottas on his last runout for Mercedes before moving to Alfa Romeo for next season. Verstappen, who won at this circuit last year to end six years of domination by Mercedes, was placed fourth, at 0.641sec. "We're still learning and understanding a few things," said the 24-year-old Verstappen.

Red Bull team principal Christian Horner said the team's boffins will be hard at work trying to find more speed to make up the difference in pace with Mercedes. "We've still got 24 hours or 23 hours (before qualifying) to try and find a better set-up and a bit more pace." Hamilton approaches today's closing chapter of a 2021 season that will live long in the memory on a high after wins in Brazil, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. His late season surge brought him dead level at the top of the drivers' standings - the last time that happened was in 1974.

'Our aim is to win'

The maths are simple - whoever finishes with more points takes the title. But Verstappen will prevail should they both end up all square - (one finishes ninth, the other 10th with the fastest lap) or fail to score any on the strength of winning nine races to Hamilton's eight. Abu Dhabi is the 22nd and final port-of-call for a season that has seen sparks fly between Mercedes team principal Toto Wolff and Horner.

But the two team chiefs met and shook hands on Friday, both quick to play down fears the title could be decided by a crash, like at Silverstone with Verstappen retiring or Monza with both cars knocked out. "Nobody approaches the race saying it's going to end in a crash," said Horner. "Our aim is to win on the track." He added: "It's almost like 'Squid Game' (the popular Netflix series), the fact that we've arrived here level." "May the best man and the best team win," added Wolff, with Mercedes and Red Bull also fighting it out for the constructors championship. —AFP



Equestrian Sport Club horse jumping championship

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Equestrian star Ali Jassim Al-Kharafi won the Alsaqb Equestrian Sport Club horse jumping championship that was held at Al-Messila after jumping in the main round (over 135-140 cm in 40.70 second) without any faults following fierce competition. Ghazi Al-Jeraiwi took the second position with 42.12 seconds and two faults, while Equestrian Club rider Khalid Al-Khubaizi ended in third. Chairman of Alsaqb club Mohammad Al-Meliam handed the winners their prizes.

Shorthanded Suns sink Celtics; Bucks stop Rockets

LOS ANGELES: JaVale McGee scored a season-high 21 points as the short-handed Phoenix Suns earned their 20th win in the past 21 games by cruising to a 111-90 victory over the Boston Celtics on Friday. McGee also had 15 rebounds while Cameron Payne came off the bench to score 17 points in front of a crowd of 17,000 at Footprint Center in Arizona. Jae Crowder and Cameron Johnson added 16 points apiece for the Suns, who played without star guard Devin Booker and centre Deandre Ayton. Booker missed his fourth straight game with a hamstring injury while Ayton was sidelined with an undisclosed illness that the team said was not Covid-19.

Mikal Bridges added 14 points while Chris Paul and Landry Shamet scored 10 each. Paul also handed out a game-high 12 assists for the Suns, who made all 11 of their free throws. "It was next man up," said Paul. "We got a lot of guys on our team who understand their jobs. Whatever it takes to win I got to do it." Jayson Tatum had a game-high 24 points and seven rebounds for Boston, who dropped their third

straight and ended a five-game road trip with just one win.

Dennis Schroder added 15 points, Robert Williams scored 10 and Al Horford had nine in the loss. Boston's Marcus Smart missed his first 11 shots and finished with a dismal four points - shooting just one of 13. Overall the Celtics sank just four of 26 from beyond the arc. In Houston, Giannis Antetokounmpo's full arsenal was on display as he scored 41 points and grabbed 17 rebounds and the Milwaukee Bucks cooled off the red-hot Houston Rockets 123-114.

Antetokounmpo also had five assists, three steals and two blocked shots as the Bucks snapped the Rockets' winning streak at seven games. "I was just looking to be aggressive," Antetokounmpo said. "Last game I wasn't as aggressive as I wanted." He got plenty of support from his teammates, especially Khris Middleton and Bobby Portis, who each scored 21 points and added eight rebounds. The Bucks extended their lead to seven points, 119-112, with 47 seconds left in the fourth when Antetokounmpo slammed a dunk home. Milwaukee coach Mike Budenholzer said they know they can count on Antetokounmpo and Middleton down the stretch. "When you have a good team and have players like that, you're fortunate to put the ball in their hands and let them make plays," he said. —AFP

Sports

Lille's Champions League run gives French football a lift

Football reeling due to repeated incidents of crowd violence

PARIS: With French football reeling this season due to repeated incidents of crowd violence, Lille's achievement in reaching the Champions League last 16 comes as a much-needed bright spot. While an all-star Paris Saint-Germain dominate the headlines, Lille have followed up their remarkable Ligue 1 title triumph last season by making it through to the knockout stages of Europe's elite club competition for the first time since 2006/07.

That they did it by winning their group, while PSG only came second behind Manchester City in



WOLFSBURG: Lille's Canadian forward Jonathan David (left) scores past Wolfsburg's Belgian goalkeeper Koen Casteels during the UEFA Champions League group G football match VfL Wolfsburg v Lille LOSC in Wolfsburg. — AFP

Lille book Champions League last 16

their section, is all the more notable. A Champions League group also containing Red Bull Salzburg, Sevilla and Wolfsburg may not have been the toughest in the competition, but it was the most competitive. Lille did not win any of their first three games but bounced back to win all of their final three matches, including beating Wolfsburg 3-1 in Germany on Wednesday, to top their group.

Now they will be seeded in Monday's last-16 draw, ensuring they will avoid many of the biggest names, although holders Chelsea are among the

potential opponents. "It is the first time Lille have won their group, so it is a historic achievement," said coach Jocelyn Gourvennec. "It is an important moment in the history of the club. We have done Ligue 1 proud." Lille won the title in May despite being burdened by big debts, and they saw inspirational manager Christophe Galtier leave for rivals Nice, while outstanding goalkeeper Mike Maignan and midfielder Boubakary Soumare were sold.

Eyebrows were raised when Gourvennec, out of management since leaving modest Guingamp after

their relegation in 2019, was appointed as Galtier's successor. Their title defense has not got off the ground and they remain in the bottom half despite winning their last two matches. Their European form should now provide a lift for a club that boasts France's top scorer in Canadian hitman Jonathan David, who has 11 Ligue 1 goals and 14 in all competitions. The only question now is whether they will be able to hold onto their best players in the January transfer window, with French international Jonathan Ikone one who could be sold. —AFP

Kazma on top as Kuwait stunned in premier league

By Ahmad Jabr

KUWAIT: Kazma climbed to the top of the Kuwait Premier League standings after former leaders Kuwait were stunned by Salmiya 1-0 on Friday - suffering their first defeat of the season. Kazma had beaten Al-Shabab 1-0 two days earlier, improving to 10 points from four matches overall. Meanwhile, Kuwait's total points froze at nine as they sit in second place ahead of Qadisiya on goal difference.

Salmiya meanwhile remains in sixth place with seven points behind Al-

Arabi, who have the same number of points but are ahead on goal difference. Hussain Al-Mousawi scored Salmiya's goal in the first half during the match held at Thamer Stadium in Salmiya. Al-Arabi beat Al-Fahaheel 2-1 in an early Week 4 matchup on Wednesday, while Qadisiya struggled to beat Al-Tadhamon 3-2 at home with a late goal from Jamaican international Romario Williams. Al-Nasr were able to stay in fourth place with a narrow 1-0 win against Al-Yarmouk.

Kuwait look to regroup and take the lead at least temporarily when they host Al-Fahaheel on Wednesday, while Kazma have a tougher task as they visit titleholders Al-Arabi three days later. Salmiya look to keep the momentum of their win going when they visit Al-Tadhamon, while Qadisiya and Al-Nasr look to avoid any slumbers as they go against Al-Yarmouk and Al-Shabab, respectively.



KUWAIT: Salmiya's Mohammad Al-Huwaidi #8 vies for the ball against Kuwait's Meshari Al-Azmi #4 during their match at Thamer Stadium in Salmiya on Friday. —KUNA photo

COVID-postponed Spurs v Rennes tie cancelled

LAUSANNE: UEFA yesterday announced the cancellation of Tottenham's COVID-postponed Europa Conference League game against Rennes. The two clubs were unable to find a suitable date to reschedule Thursday's game and "as a consequence, the match can no longer be played", European football's governing body explained. UEFA's disciplinary wing will determine a result for the scrapped fixture. The ruling will please Group G winners Rennes. The French side had flown to London and accused Spurs of making a "unilateral decision" in calling off the match on Wednesday.

Tottenham were level on points with third-placed Vitesse Arnhem and required a win to seal second and go through to the play-off round. But according to UEFA rules Antonio Conte's side face being declared 3-0 losers, ending their participation in the third-tier competition. Conte revealed on the eve of the game in north London that eight of his players and five members of staff had tested positive for COVID-19. Rennes go on a winter break on December 22 and did not take the postponement well.

They accused Spurs of causing "London fog" by refusing to tell them how many cases they had and informing them on Wednesday afternoon that the game

would be played-only to call it off an hour after they had arrived in the British capital. Tottenham's Premier League match at Brighton today has also been postponed. Spurs were forced to close their first-team training centre on Wednesday as a result of the severe outbreak. Their Premier League match at Leicester on December 16 will also be in doubt, not only due to the situation in Conte's squad but because the Foxes have been hit by a less widespread Covid outbreak.

The postponement of further games will cause sig-

nificant scheduling problems for Tottenham, who have already had a Premier League game at Burnley in November called off because of snow. In response to Tottenham's virus problems, the Premier League are reported to have told their 20 clubs to resume emergency protocols to combat the spread of the Omicron variant. Clubs with high vaccination rates had relaxed some of the measures but must now reimpose restrictions after the British government announced a return to stricter protocols on Wednesday. —AFP



LOIRE: Rennes' French forward Martin Terrier celebrates with teammates after scoring a goal during the French L1 football match between at the Geoffrey Guichard stadium Saint-Etienne, central France. — AFP

Cardinals can clinch NFL a playoff berth

LOS ANGELES: The Arizona Cardinals take a league-leading 10-2 record into their marquee Monday-night clash against the Los Angeles Rams, seeking to clinch their first NFL playoff berth since 2015 with a victory. Arizona quarterback Kyler Murray says the Cardinals - who have won all seven of their road games but are just 3-2 at home - need to get off to a hot start when they play for the first time in almost a month at their State Farm Stadium.

"That's something that has to be different than it has been," Murray said. "Our closer games have been at home. We've started slow at home. We've got to somehow bring that type of (away) energy and it's got to be different, because what we've been doing hasn't been working." The Rams are coming off a 37-7 rout of the Jacksonville Jaguars last week and trying to gain ground on the Cardinals in the NFC West

division. Cards coach Kliff Kingsbury expects Murray to shine on the national stage.

Despite missing three games this season with an ankle injury the third-year pro is in the Most Valuable Player conversation along with veteran greats Tom Brady and Aaron Rodgers. This season he has become the fourth-youngest player ever to pass for 10,000 career yards and leads the NFL in passer rating. This season he completed at least 70 percent of his passes in half a dozen games. Against the Chicago Bears last week the nimble QB rushed for a season-high 59 yards and two touchdowns.

That was his first game back from injury, and Murray said he was, as expected, sore after it. But he expected to be at full strength against the Rams. The Rams can pull within one game of the Cardinals in the division with a win. Rams quarterback Matthew Stafford is eager to make that happen and expunge the memory of a 37-20 loss to Arizona earlier this season. "I think the later you get into the season, the games, you don't have that many left. And you've got to go out there and make them count," Stafford said. "It's a big game in the division."

With so much at stake, Murray, who won the prestigious Heisman Trophy, awarded to the top college player, has said he's more focused on winning than individual awards, but he acknowledged this week it felt good to hear his name mentioned in the MVP discussion. "As far as being mentioned up there with Tom Brady, Aaron Rodgers, those types of guys, those are guys you look up to, the best to ever play the game, so it's definitely an honor," he said. "Hopefully, we keep playing at a high level." Brady's Tampa Bay Buccaneers and Rodgers's Green Bay Packers both have a chance to clinch playoff spots today, but each would need not only a win but help from other results.

Rodgers leads the Packers against NFC North rivals Chicago while Brady and the Super Bowl champion Bucs take on the Buffalo Bills. Rodgers made headlines in the season's first Packers-Bears clash in Chicago, where a sideline camera showed him shouting "I still own you" after scoring a touchdown in the Packers' 24-14 victory. Rodgers, a three-time NFL MVP, said he didn't expect any blowback from Bears players. —AFP

News in brief

Benzema fit for Madrid derby

MADRID: Real Madrid manager Carlo Ancelotti said yesterday that forward Karim Benzema, who injured a leg last weekend against Real Sociedad, "will play" the derby against Atletico Madrid today. "Benzema trained today, he has good feelings, he is available and he will play tomorrow," Ancelotti told a press conference. The derby is already crucial for the race for the title. Victory would put Real Madrid 13 points ahead of reigning champions Atletico at the top of the standings. "If we win, we will simply have three points more than a direct opponent, who will be fighting with us until the end, I am sure," Ancelotti said. "The statistics say that there are only three points at stake, but there is also the emotional aspect," he added. — AFP

Racing crush Northampton

NORTHAMPTON: Racing 92 overwhelmed Northampton 45-14 on Friday in the opening match of the European Rugby Cup season. Finn Russell orchestrated the Parisian attack with four "assists" in Northampton. The Scottish fly-half set up two tries for winger Juan Imhoff and two of flanker Wenceslas Lauret's three tries. While the Saints, who are third in the English Premiership, went through hell on their home turf, Racing rebounded from three straight Top 14 losses in emphatic style. "We said we wanted a reaction," said Lauret. "The European Cup is important to us and we wanted to find ourselves, to regain confidence. Mission accomplished." The French club went for the throat from the start. Two penalties from Maxime Machenaud put the visitors six points up after four minutes. — AFP

No fans at Chinese football

BEIJING: The Chinese Super League will be played behind closed doors because of the pandemic when it resumes after a four-month break. Matches in China's top flight restart today after a hiatus so that the national side could concentrate on World Cup qualifiers. But after fans were permitted at some games earlier this year, they won't be allowed "in order to protect the health of the public", the CSL said in a statement. It comes with the Beijing Winter Olympics less than two months away. The CSL will determine at a later date whether games can be opened back up to the public, based on the COVID situation at the time. Teams will square off in two cities-Suzhou and Guangzhou-with the championship decided early next month. Tens of thousands of spectators were allowed to attend games earlier this year as China largely brought the pandemic under control. — AFP

Watford not fit for 'battle'

LONDON: Watford manager Claudio Ranieri said his side have to learn to battle for their place in the Premier League after conceding twice in the final six minutes to lose 2-1 at Brentford on Friday. Ranieri's men were heading six points clear of the relegation zone thanks to an Emmanuel Dennis header midway through the first half. But they failed to hold out as Watford slipped to a sixth defeat in seven league games. "It is a missed opportunity," said Ranieri. "We knew it was an important game. "The Brentford team were ready for the battle and some of my players weren't. Every situation is a fight and we have to be smarter." Brentford were still missing talismanic striker Ivan Toney due to a positive test for coronavirus, but the Bees turned the game around in a dramatic finale. Captain Pontus Jansson powered home a header for his first goal for the club from Marcus Forss' flick on. — AFP

Bach warns of 'problem' sports

LAUSANNE: IOC president Thomas Bach has warned that the continued inclusion of weightlifting, boxing and modern pentathlon in the Games was in doubt but that skateboarding, climbing and surfing would be kept on the program in Los Angeles in 2028. Speaking at a press conference at the end of a three-day International Olympic Committee Executive Board in Lausanne, Bach also expressed thinly-veiled frustration with FIFA and announced that the three nominees for IOC seats included a refugee athlete. Bach called boxing and weightlifting the IOC's "problem children". He laid out what the International Weightlifting Federation (IWF) and the International Boxing Association (AIBA) must do to be included at the next Games in Paris in 2024. "AIBA must demonstrate that it has addressed concerns around its governance, its financial transparency and the integrity of its refereeing and judging," Bach said. — AFP

Salah spoils Gerrard's return

Man City, Liverpool, Chelsea all win thanks to penalties



LIVERPOOL: Liverpool's Brazilian goalkeeper Alisson Becker (left) prevents a shot from Aston Villa's English striker Danny Ings during the English Premier League football match between Liverpool and Aston Villa at Anfield in Liverpool, north west England yesterday. — AFP

LIVERPOOL: Mohamed Salah's penalty ensured Steven Gerrard's return to Liverpool as Aston Villa manager ended in a 1-0 defeat while Manchester City and Chelsea also needed spot-kicks to avoid slipping up in the Premier League title race yesterday. City edged 10-man Wolves 1-0 thanks to Raheem Sterling's controversial winner, while Chelsea required two Jorginho spot-kicks to see off Leeds 3-2. Gerrard was given a subdued reception at Anfield as the former Liverpool captain faced his old side for the first time in his playing or coaching career.

His side were largely outplayed, but stayed in the game thanks to a combination of dogged defending, good goalkeeping from Emiliano Martinez and couple of calls in their favor from referee Stuart Attwell, who dismissed two first-half appeals for a Liverpool penalty. However, Gerrard's men did not escape for a third time when Tyrone Mings pulled down Salah inside the box 25 minutes from time. Salah smashed home his 21st goal in 22 games this season to ensure Liverpool remain just one point behind City at the top of the table.

'Crazy decision'

The champions had fortune on their side to see off Wolves thanks to Sterling's 100th Premier League goal. Wolves boss Bruno Lage was furious as Raul Jimenez was dismissed for two quickfire yellow cards before half-time. The Mexican was booked for a trip of Rodrigo and then sent-off for preventing the Spaniard taking a quick free-kick. "The first yellow card is a crazy decision for me, in my opinion. A hard decision to accept," said Lage.

The visitors' anger was compounded by the origin of the winning goal as Joao Moutinho was judged to have handled Bernardo Silva's cross despite the ball appearing to come off the Portuguese midfielder's body onto his upper arm. Sterling showed no mercy as he coolly slotted home from the spot to bring up

his century of Premier League goals. "His contribution to this club is massive," said City boss Pep Guardiola, who has routinely left the England international out over the past year. "He is back scoring goals, has confidence. It's good."

Jorginho saves Chelsea

Chelsea needed late drama at Stamford Bridge to prevent their title challenge stumbling for the fourth time in six games. Leeds took the lead through a penalty of their own converted by Raphinha. Mason Mount leveled for the European champions and order seemed to have been restored when Jorginho slotted home the first of his two spot-kicks just before the hour mark. However, an injury ravaged Leeds hit back once

more when teenager Joe Gelhardt came off the bench to level with his first touch seven minutes from time. But four minutes into stoppage time a third penalty of the game was awarded for Mateusz Klich's challenge on Antonio Rudiger. Jorginho has missed a number of high-profile penalties for Italy of late, but is yet to miss for his club this season and converted to keep Chelsea just two points off the top.

Arsenal shrugged off the absence of captain Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang due to a disciplinary issue to ease past Southampton 3-0. Aubameyang was not included in Mikel Arteta's squad after reportedly missing training on Friday. The Gunners comfortably bounced back to winning ways as Alexandre Lacazette and Martin Odegaard struck before half-time. Gabriel then rounded off the scoring on 62 minutes as Arsenal moved up to fifth and within one point of the top four. Manchester United can go level on points with fourth-placed West Ham when they travel to Norwich later on. — AFP



Arsenal ease past Southampton 3-0

Bayern down Mainz to go 6 points clear

BERLIN: Bayern Munich extended their lead at the top of the Bundesliga to six points yesterday after coming from behind to seal a 2-1 home win against Mainz. Second-half goals by Kingsley Coman and 18-year-old Jamal Musiala sealed the victory behind closed doors at Munich's Allianz Arena after Mainz took a shock early lead.

Bayern remain firmly on course to win the German league for the tenth straight season after stretching their lead at the top of the table as second-placed Dortmund drew 1-1 at Bochum. Bayern boss Julian Nagelsmann enjoyed his 100th win in the Bundesliga as a coach, but the jaded hosts only took the lead 16 minutes from time.

Bayern made a slow start, looking tired at the end of a busy week after last Saturday's 3-2 win at Dortmund and

Wednesday's 3-0 win over Barcelona to secure a sixth win from six in the Champions League's group stages. Mainz earned a shock 2-1 win over Bayern last April and the visitors took a deserved lead when Karim Onisiwo headed past Manuel Neuer after 22 minutes.

Bayern levelled when a long pass by Corentin Tolisso found Coman, who sprinted clear past Mainz goalkeeper Robin Zentner. Bayern sealed the win when Musiala took his marker out of the game with a superb first touch and slotted past Zentner.

Dortmund suffered a Champions League hangover, four days after their 5-0 thumping of Besiktas, when they were held 1-1 at Bochum. Dortmund coach Marco Rose, suspended after a red card last Saturday against Bayern, had to watch from the bench with two goals in stoppage time by Christopher Nkunku and Benjamin Henrichs.

Freiburg yielded fourth-spot in the table to visitors Hoffenheim, who poached a 2-1 away win in the Black Forest as US defender Chris Richards, on loan from Bayern, blasted in a stoppage time header. — AFP

put the hosts 1-0 up at the break.

Dortmund had a Marius Wolf goal disallowed when the VAR spotted Bellingham offside, but the visitors breathed a sigh of relief when Brandt came off the bench to smash in the equalizer. Domenico Tedesco got off to a winning start as new coach of RB Leipzig, who cruised to a 4-1 home romp against Moenchengladbach to stop the rot after three straight German league defeats.

Four days after a 2-1 home win against Manchester City in the Champions League, Leipzig took the lead when Josko Gvardiol headed in a free-kick, then striker Andre Silva scored from close range and hit the crossbar. Gladbach pulled a late goal back through Algeria defender Remy Bensebaini, but Leipzig made sure of the win with two goals in stoppage time by Christopher Nkunku and Benjamin Henrichs.

Freiburg yielded fourth-spot in the table to visitors Hoffenheim, who poached a 2-1 away win in the Black Forest as US defender Chris Richards, on loan from Bayern, blasted in a stoppage time header. — AFP

Vlahovic strikes twice; Fiorentina sink Salernitana

MILAN: Dusan Vlahovic added two more goals to his rapidly growing tally for Fiorentina in yesterday's 4-0 Serie A win over Salernitana which continues an encouraging season for the Tuscans. Serbia forward Vlahovic lashed home the Viola's second five minutes after half-time and tapped in Riccardo Sottil's low cross six minutes from the end to make it 15 league goals for the season and move two clear of Ciro Immobile at the top of the goalscoring charts in Italy.

Giacomo Bonaventura opened with a well-struck volley in the 31st minute while Youssef Maleh netted following a saved Vlahovic shot in the final minute as Fiorentina move up to fifth on 30 points, three ahead of sixth-placed Juventus who are at Venezia in

yesterday's early evening match. "Dusan is good, he needs to keep that hunger he has, he needs to keep training as he is... he has a tremendous future in front of him," said Fiorentina teammate Jose Callejon to DAZN. Vincenzo Italiano's side are also four points from Atalanta in the final Champions League spot ahead of their trip to Verona today. Vlahovic, 21, has now scored 32 Serie A goals in 2021 and is leading Fiorentina to what looks to be their best season in years.

With 10 wins so far this campaign Fiorentina have already beaten last year's tally and are aiming to qualify for Europe for the first time since 2016. He had been targeted with insults by supporters earlier in the season after refusing to sign an extension to his current contract which expires in the summer of 2023. However his form-seven goals in his last five matches-has brought the crowd in Florence back on his side. Salernitana's sixth defeat in their last seven matches leaves them rooted to the bottom of the league on eight points from their 17 matches. — AFP