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MP: Expats should only own 2 vehicles to reduce traffic jams



By B Izzak

KUWAIT: MP Abdullah Al-Turaiji yesterday submitted a proposal to the National Assembly calling to restrict vehicle ownership by expatriates to only two and impose extra fees on any additional vehicles, saying the proposal aims at reducing traffic jams.

Turaiji's proposal calls on the interior ministry to take the necessary measures to restrict the number of vehicles foreign residents can own for personal use to only two "to counter the illegal trade in vehicles, reduce traffic jams" and "ensure there are enough spaces for the use of Kuwaiti citizens at commercial malls,

markets and public places".

The proposal states that if residents want to own more than two vehicles, they should apply to the traffic department, and if approved, they must pay extra fees for additional vehicles. The lawmaker said there are scores of dilapidated vehicles on Kuwaiti roads owned by expatriates, causing traffic jams, chaos and accidents. He added that these vehicles are normally parked in public squares and car parks of schools, mosques and commercial malls, and efforts by the Municipality have failed to resolve this problem.

Turaiji said based on reports in the press and social media, dozens and probably hundreds of expats own up to 50

vehicles each. The lawmaker said some residents are using public places and parks to park their vehicles and have exploited such places to trade in vehicles, clearly violating the law. He said although there is no law restricting vehicle ownership by expats, "authorities should intervene to control the situation" in order to serve public interest.

MPs have earlier submitted proposals targeting residents, like urging the government to impose taxes on their money transfers and calling to substantially reduce the number of expats in the country, who currently constitute some 70 percent of Kuwait's population of 4.6 million.



Abdullah Al-Turaiji

CONDOLENCES

Kuwait Times management and staff

convey their deepest condolences to

Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi

and

Al-Kharafi family

on the sad demise of

Fawzi Mohammed

Abdalmohsen Al-Kharafi

May Allah Almighty bestow His mercy on him

Local

Readers take initiative to organize book fair in Kuwait

Event runs till Dec 18 at Jamal Abdul Nasser Park in Rawda

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Over two years have passed since the last book fair was held in Kuwait, due to the pandemic. The National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters, the organizer of the book fair in Kuwait, hasn't announced any date for holding the fair anytime soon. So publishers and readers decided to organize a book fair at Jamal Abdul Nasser Park in Rawda. The 'Lines Cultural Fair' is being held from Dec 9 to 18, 2021, and is organized by Solo Events. Four young women got together and came with this idea, on which they worked for 10 days to bring the event to life.

"The idea of this event is a youth idea which came as a reaction to not having a book fair for two years. We chose this park to respect the health measures that allow organizing outdoor events. All the participating publishers are local, as it was difficult to arrange visas for international publishers in this short

period of time," Fatma Hamad, one of the organizers, told Kuwait Times yesterday.

According to her, over 4,000 people have visited the fair in the past four days. "I have received



Twenty publishers participating in outdoor fair

positive feedback from the participating publishers in the past four days, as they said they had good sales, at par with international fairs. They said peo-

ple visited the fair even in the morning and noon-time," she added.

This event is more than just a book fair. "We called it Lines as there are other cultural activities too. Workshops are held daily onstage for writing, photography, drawing and others. There is also a special section for kids for storytelling, a learning center and fun science workshops. A music show entertains visitors daily as well. Also, stationery items such as calendars, notebooks and others can be found here," Hamad said.

The fair is open from 10:00 am to 10:00 pm. "Due to the high demand, we may extend it for a few more days. Twenty publishers are participating in this fair. The weather is perfect for outdoor events. The local publishers have already participated in the UAE and Saudi Arabia, and next month they have other participations abroad, so now is the perfect time for this fair," explained Hamad.



KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets UK Parliamentary Undersecretary of State for Exports Mike Freer. — KUNA photos



Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah receives credentials of the new Ambassador of Chad Abdulrahman Bashir Brima.

Foreign Minister meets British official

KUWAIT: Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah received yesterday the visiting UK Parliamentary Undersecretary of State for Exports Mike Freer. The two officials discussed the historic bilateral ties and ways to enhance them in all possible domains. Meanwhile, Sheikh Dr Ahmad received the credentials of the new Ambassador of Chad to Kuwait Abdulrahman Bashir Brima.

In the meantime, Sheikh Dr Ahmad discussed the situation in Yemen in a phone call yesterday with the US special envoy to the war-torn nation Tim Lenderking. The US envoy acknowledged Kuwait's efforts to restore stability and security to Yemen, while the Kuwaiti foreign minister said his country firmly backs all attempts to find a lasting solution to the Yemeni conflict. — KUNA

NBK continues safe camping campaign in collaboration with KFF

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) and the Kuwait Fire Force continued their awareness safety campaign during the camping season. NBK volunteers along with the Kuwait Fire Force team visited various camping sites in north of Kuwait to provide campers with a safety camping kit that includes a fire extinguisher, fire alarm and first aid support ensuring that camps adhere to regulations for safety and waste removal.

"The campaign targets limiting the fire incidents in spring camping sites", said Mohammad Al-Sarraf, NBK Public Relations Officer. "NBK aims to help keep the environment clean and people safe this camping season. The camp site visits aim to urge campers to enhance their security as well as environmental awareness about precautions to be taken to prevent campfires and main-



Mohammad Al-Sarraf



tain cleanliness", he added.

The campaign is divided into phases. NBK volunteers and Fire Force team are going to visit more campsites to distribute the safety kits. Representatives from Kuwait Fire Force will also speak with campers and provide them with safety

and security tips. On the other hand, NBK social media channels will be posting tips and videos on safety camping tips.

Meanwhile, Lt Col Rashed Al-Halfi from the Media Department of Kuwait Fire Force, praised the efforts and the influential role this campaign is

playing to avoid accidents during camping. Halfi also indicated that the Kuwait Fire Force puts health and safety in its top priority. "During the camping season, we strengthen our awareness among campers in cooperation with partners such as the National Bank of Kuwait." — KUNA

Zionist entity's PM meets Crown Prince on UAE visit

ABU DHABI: Prime Minister of the Zionist entity Naftali Bennett met Abu Dhabi's crown prince yesterday during the first visit by a leader of the Zionist entity to the United Arab Emirates, just over a year after the two countries established ties. Bennett's visit comes as the Zionist entity pursues a diplomatic push against international nuclear talks in Vienna that could ease sanctions on its arch-foe, Iran.

He was received by Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan at his private palace, where they exchanged greetings before heading inside for more than four hours of talks, officials said. The crown prince hoped Bennett's visit "would contribute to further cooperation for the benefit of the peoples of the two countries and the peoples of the region", the UAE's official WAM news agency said.

The visit comes 15 months after the wealthy UAE broke with decades of Arab consensus and forged diplomatic ties under a series of US-brokered deals known as the Abraham Accords. Bennett, who arrived late on Sunday, said his trip reflected a "new reality" for the Middle East. "In my opinion, this is... the new reality this region is witnessing, and we are working together to ensure a better future for our children," he told WAM.

The Zionist entity is also stepping up its diplomatic efforts against the renewed talks in Vienna with Iran, over the Islamic republic's nuclear program. Bennett has called for the talks to be halted, accusing Tehran of "nuclear blackmail" and charging that it will use any revenue from sanctions relief to bolster a military arsenal that can harm the Zionist entity.

On Thursday, global powers began meetings with Iran in Vienna aimed at reviving a deal to curb the



ABU DHABI: Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan receives Prime Minister of the Zionist entity Naftali Bennett. — AFP

nuclear program after former US president Donald Trump pulled out in 2015. Ahead of those talks, the UAE's national security adviser met Iran's ultraconservative President Ebrahim Raisi in Tehran, a rare trip by a senior Emirati official.

In Abu Dhabi, Bennett and Sheikh Mohammed discussed cooperation in "various investment, economic, trade and development areas", WAM news agency said. The Zionist entity's prime minister also spoke of "limitless future opportunities" to develop trade with the UAE. The UAE last year became the third Arab nation to establish full diplomatic relations with the Zionist entity after Egypt and Jordan, and was swiftly followed by Bahrain and Morocco. Sudan also agreed to normalize ties with the Zionist entity under the Abraham Accords, but full relations have not yet materialized. — AFP

Saudi Arabia projects budget surplus after years of deficits

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia approved its 2022 budget on Sunday, projecting a surplus for the first time since oil prices collapsed in 2014. King Salman said the improved fiscal situation for the world's biggest oil exporter comes "after the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has overcome the economic repercussions and the exceptional stages of the coronavirus pandemic".

Cited by the Saudi Press Agency, he said total expenditures were budgeted at 955 billion Saudi riyals (\$255 billion) and revenues estimated at 1,045 trillion riyals, giving a surplus of 90 billion riyals. Riyadh's projections come with higher global crude prices, despite worries about the Omicron coronavirus variant which is spreading worldwide. Crude prices finished higher on Friday to post their best week since August. Brent North Sea crude for February delivery rose to \$75.15. In New York, West Texas Intermediate crude for January delivery increased to \$71.67 a barrel.

Economic experts have said Saudi Arabia needs a crude price of about \$80 a barrel to balance its budget. At a press conference, Finance Minister Mohammed Al-Jadaan did not answer AFP's question about the price per barrel on which the budget projections were based. The

kingdom produced about 9.8 million barrels per day in October, according to the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries.

If the projections are realized, it will be the first time that the Arab world's largest economy will see a surplus since 2013, when it reached 206 billion riyals. "We aim to place further attention to the security and health of citizens and residents, human development, the continuation of economic growth and diversity, and financial sustainability," King Salman said.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said that "the financial and economic results and indicators confirm that we are progressing positively". Since 2016, the kingdom has embarked on a wide-ranging program to diversify its economy away from oil, which still generates more than two-thirds of Saudi public revenues. After prices collapsed in 2014 from more than \$100 a barrel, the kingdom borrowed heavily and drew from its reserves to plug the shortfall. It also resorted to austerity measures like cutting subsidies on fuel and power and imposing a value added tax.

In September, Jadaan had forecast a 2022 budget deficit of 52 billion riyals. Saudi Arabia was left reeling last year from low oil prices when global demand collapsed during the pandemic and led to an economic downturn. The kingdom estimated its 2020 deficit at 298 billion riyals but for this year the shortfall is seen at 84 billion riyals, to end years of deficits. Jadaan said a surplus is expected in 2023 and 2024 as well. — AFP

Local

Kuwait's Crown Prince represents Amir at 42nd GCC Summit today

GCC Foreign Ministers meet in Riyadh to discuss preparations

KUWAIT/RIYADH: Representative of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah heads to Saudi Arabia today to take part in the 42nd GCC Summit. Saudi Arabia's capital, Riyadh, will host the summit today, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Secretary General Nayef Al-Hajraf said on Sunday.

This came in a statement issued by the GCC Secretariat General while holding the 150th preparatory meeting of GCC Foreign Ministers for the Summit to be chaired by Saudi Arabia. The 150th session was presided over by Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan, with the participation of Kuwait's Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah. Hajraf lauded the Gulf tour made by Saudi Crown Prince, Deputy Prime

Minister and Defense Minister Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud to the GCC member states. He said that the tour came out of the histor-



GCC chief lauds Saudi Crown Prince tour

ical ties between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries, and in implementation of GCC leaders' directives aimed at developing and boost-

ing relations in all domains.

GCC Foreign Ministers voiced their delight at holding the 42nd summit of the GCC leaders, expressing confidence that it would be continuation of prosperity and progress made over the past decades, Hajraf indicated. They also look forward to bolstering cooperation in all domains and meeting aspirations of GCC citizens, he said. The ministerial meeting discussed the topics of the Summit's agenda, including the Secretariat's report on implementing the vision of Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz that was approved by the GCC Supreme Council in 2015 and others, he stated. In addition, the meeting touched upon the reports and recommendations of the competent councils, the ministerial committees and the Secretariat, in preparation to submit them to the GCC Supreme Council in the 42nd Summit, he concluded. —KUNA



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

Foreign Minister attends GCC-Egypt ministerial talks

RIYADH: Kuwait's Foreign Minister and State Minister for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Naser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah attended ministerial talks between the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council bloc and Egypt on Sunday in Riyadh. The meeting discussed deep-rooted relations between both sides and boosting these ties across various spectrums.

The GCC foreign ministers discussed regional developments, and the Gulf-Egypt historical relations and means of boosting them in all domains with their Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shukri, Saudi top diplomat Prince Faisal bin Farhan said. This came at a joint news conference held between Prince Faisal, Shukri and GCC Secretary General Nayef Al-Hajraf after the ministerial meeting.

The ministers reviewed during the meeting the most outstanding files pertaining to the region's security and challenges facing it as well as how to find political solutions to maintain international peace and security, he said. He extolled Egypt's "key" role on both international and regional levels in backing stability and security. He stressed that coordination and consultation between the GCC states and Egypt are ongoing, adding this is an

essential part of the GCC foreign policy and important for the region's stability and security.

The ministers reviewed the gist of the tour made by Saudi Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Mohammad bin Salman to the GCC states, he said. He went on to say that they "stressed on the importance of boosting cooperation amongst our states to complete the Gulf action path so as to preserve the joint strategic interests". He stated that the GCC leaders would discuss during today's summit "some sensitive issues related to regional security".

In addition, they will look to the future on how to strengthen cooperation mainly the development and economic aspect to push the unified Gulf march forward in a way that enhances the interests of the Gulf peoples in terms of the prosperity and development, the Saudi minister said. He said that the Gulf message to the world is that "we are a unified and ambitious entity that has an effective leadership heading confidently towards the future". "We want to be partners with the world in building a prosperous, stable and secure future for us, in the region and the world," he said.

Meanwhile, Shukri said the meeting is evidence of the continued deep-rooted relations on both popular and official levels. The conferees agreed on "addressing challenges and preserving the Arab national security can be achieved only through solidarity and cooperation either politically or economically," he said. He affirmed that "the security of GCC states is inseparable of Egypt's national security".

Meanwhile, Hajraf said following up on the imple-



RIYADH: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Naser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah (second from left) in a group photo following a ministerial meeting between the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and Egypt. —KUNA

mentation of the vision of Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz approved by the GCC Supreme Council in 2015 was one of the most outstanding topics discussed during today's meeting. He emphasized that the GCC is a key economic bloc, which is ranked the 12th globally,

and it has a lot of reserve of global oil and gas, in addition to its key ports and capitals. "Our message to the world is that we are looking forward to building real partnerships to serve common interests and boost global security and stability," he concluded. —KUNA

CONDOLENCES

With deep regret, the Chairman, Board of Directors, Executive Management and the employees of Zain Group share their heartfelt sympathy with

MR. BADER NASSER AL-KHARAFI

Zain Vice Chairman and Group CEO

On the sad demise of his Uncle

Fawzi Mohammed Abdulmohsen Al-Kharafi

May Allah Almighty bestow His mercy on him

News in brief

Kuwait roads can't
take more taxis

KUWAIT: Traffic authorities in Kuwait have no current plans to license more taxi service offices because Kuwait's roads cannot take in any more taxi cars than what they already have, said Brig Gen Khaled Mahmoud, Assistant Undersecretary for Planning and Research at the Interior Ministry's Traffic General Department. There are around 860 licensed taxi service offices in Kuwait "the majority of which are following the law," he added in an interview published by Al-Jarida Arabic daily yesterday. According to Mahmoud, the law allows each licensed office to operate between 10 and 30 vehicles.

Kuwaiti doctor
in Hall of Fame

NEW YORK: The Retina Hall of Fame (RHOF) — based in New York — chose Kuwaiti ophthalmologist and retina specialist Dr Khaled Al-Sabti amongst its inductees for the class of 2020-21. The list of inductees consisted of 57 medical professionals. Dr Sabti is the first Gulf physician to earn this honor. He said that he was honored to be chosen as one of the best in the world in his field of expertise. This honoring further solidified the status Kuwaiti medical professionals on the map of retinal and eye surgery. Dr Sabti affirmed, adding that he was chosen in recognition of his innovation, contribution and research within his profession. —KUNA

Quartetto Indaco treats Kuwaiti, foreign audience to classical music



KUWAIT: Musicians perform during a Quartetto Indaco concert held at Yarmouk Cultural Club on Sunday. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Ambassador of Italy to Kuwait Carlo Baldocci welcomed guests at a Quartetto Indaco concert held at Yarmouk Cultural Club on Sunday. The concert is the first in a series of concerts and festivities to mark the 60th anniversary of Italian-Kuwaiti relations. "Thank you for accommodating the concert here of our famous Quartetto Indaco group. Myself and my wife, Cristiana Turchetti, arrived in Kuwait on September 15, 2019, and on September 17, 2019, I attended my first event in Kuwait here in this hall - a very memorable moment indeed. For us, live music is Yarmouk Center," he said.

The envoy said the Quartetto concert will be the first of a series of events to mark Italy's friendship with Kuwait. "This will continue from January till December 2022. This is just the beginning," Baldocci said. He explained the week includes several events, including the opening of the "Islamic Art from the Bargello of Florence to Kuwait" exhibition at the Amricani Cultural Center and the "Italy and Urban Planning in Kuwait" exhibition at the Italian Embassy.

Quartetto Indaco was introduced to a full-packed audience led by Eleonora Matsuno, violin, Ida di Vita, also violin, Jamiang Santi, viola and Cosimo Carovani, cello. The concert included several classic music tracks, which focused on the string instruments used in this kind of music. The band



Ambassador of Italy to Kuwait Carlo Baldocci addresses the audience.



played pieces by great composers such as Boccherini, an Italian author of the classical era, also known as the Violoncellist. His pieces were famous for their expressive cheerful melodies.

The band also played Italian composer Nino Rota, who received the Oscars award for the best soundtrack, and also Italian opera composer Giacomo Puccini, who lived between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century - his love and passion for music came through his family.

The performance of the Quartetto Indaco group was characterized by harmony and was a journey of

beautiful feelings and sensations that showed the group's professionalism and its diversity in the musical method, which impressed the audience. The Quartetto Indaco group was founded in 2007. The group has participated in international festivals and events and won numerous awards. In 2020, it released its first album.

On the occasion of the



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Ooredoo Kuwait wins three awards at Arab Media Forum



KUWAIT: Ooredoo Telecom, the first to launch innovated digital services in Kuwait, won three prestigious awards at Advertising Creativity Award 2021 - the ninth edition held by the organizing committee of the Arab Media Forum, in the "Best National TVC", "Public Relations Stars" and "Brand Excellence" categories.

The annual forum took place on Sunday, December 13, 2021 at the Sheraton Kuwait, under the patronage of Abd Al-Rahman Al-Mutairi, Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs, Muneera Al-Huwaidi, Undersecretary of the Kuwaiti Ministry of Information, the Arab League, and Madhi Al-Khamis, general secretary of the Arab Media forum. In addition to the presence of several dignitaries, a group of media representatives, artists and creators in the field of media and advertising in Kuwait, the Arab Gulf and the Arab world, and a number of social media influencers and celebrities.

The forum was attended by Mijbil Alayoub - Senior Director, Corporate Communications; Nazem Al-Ghabra - Manager, Corporate Communications; Abdullah Grace, Gannas Ali Al-Fajji and Yasser Mohammad - Social Media Executives, Ooredoo Kuwait.

The "Best National Day TVC" recognition underlies the high creativity level of the national song launched by Ooredoo as a commemorative gift to Kuwait and its people in celebration of the country's national day.

Further, the "Public Relations Stars" and "Brand Excellence" recognition was a reflection of Ooredoo Kuwait's successful strategy aimed at providing distinguished products and services that meet the changing needs and demands of customers and satisfy their different tastes through innovative advertising campaigns and exceptional offers.

Chosen by an expert panel following a rigorous process of evaluation, the winners of the Arab Media Forum 2021 - the ninth edition, were chosen from a shortlist of nominees. The annual event aims to celebrate and recognize creative work and recognize business achievements at the level of companies and individuals.

Mijbil Alayoub, Senior Director, Corporate



Communications, Ooredoo Kuwait, said: "Ooredoo's founding vision was "enriching people's digital lives" and until today we continue to sustain this commitment by creating innovative products and services. The awards further honors Ooredoo's proven-track in delivering consistent value for its customers, and commitment in achieving consistently high performance in the telecommunications sector in the State of Kuwait."

"Ooredoo has been feted for its pioneering role in creating a value for the community, we do so by sinking below the surface and create our own road map that allows us to achieve excellence. We are beyond happy to win these prestigious awards which ignite us further to intensify our efforts and focus to remain oriented towards achieving long-term value for all customers and society members" Alayoub added.

The Arab Media Forum awards ceremony is considered as one of the renowned events that take place in the region, which brings together representatives from the different industries in one place to celebrate their tremendous revolutionary efforts in innovation and creativity.



Russian teenager 'blow himself up' at Orthodox school

Swiss prosecutors close case against Spain's ex-king

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BOWLING GREEN, Kentucky: Pete Desai (L), owner of the Cardinal Motel in Bowling Green, Kentucky surveys tornado damage on December 12, 2021. Dozens of devastating tornadoes roared through five US states overnight, leaving more than 80 people dead. —AFP

Biden declares a 'major disaster'

Kentucky Governor Beshear: Cadaver dogs were still finding bodies

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden declared a major disaster in Kentucky on Sunday night after the state was hit by a swarm of ferocious tornadoes that killed dozens of people and flattened towns across the Midwest. At the state governor's request, Biden upgraded an earlier emergency declaration to a "major disaster," allowing additional federal aid to be channeled into recovery efforts.

He had previously called the rare late-season burst of twisters that struck the US heartland on the weekend "one of the largest" storm outbreaks in American history. While emergency workers have continued searching for survivors, federal and local officials have cautioned that the death toll, for now at 94, could yet rise.

Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear said cadaver dogs were still finding bodies. "The very first thing that we have to do is grieve together and we're going to do that before we rebuild together," Beshear told an afternoon news conference. More than 80 people are dead in Kentucky alone, many of them workers at a candle factory in the ravaged town of Mayfield, Beshear said Sunday. "That number is going to exceed more than 100," he told CNN.

Later in the day, the governor said the factory's owner believed more of the workers had been located, and it would be "pretty wonderful" if the toll were to be revised down, but he stressed he

could not verify that information.

"Remember, we're still finding bodies. We've got cadaver dogs in towns that they shouldn't have to be in," Beshear said. At least six people died in an Amazon warehouse in the southern Illinois city of Edwardsville, where they were on the night shift processing orders ahead of Christmas.

Emergency crews worked through the night into Sunday at both locations, and agents from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and Red Cross volunteers were on the scene in Kentucky. But Edwardsville fire chief James Whiteford told reporters the operation had turned from rescue to focusing "only on recovery," fueling fears the toll will rise. Four were killed in Tennessee and two died in Arkansas, while Missouri recorded two fatalities. Tornadoes also touched down in Mississippi.

'Unlike anything I have seen'

Emergency crews were helping stunned citizens across the region clear the rubble. David Norseworthy, a 69-year-old builder in Mayfield,

said the storm blew off his roof and front porch while the family hid in a shelter. "We never had anything like that here," he told AFP.

A nondenominational church in Mayfield was handing out food and clothing to storm survivors while also providing space for the county coroner to do his work, pastor Stephen Boyken of His House Ministries told AFP. People "come with pictures, birthmarks — they talk now about using DNA samples to identify those who have been lost," he said.

The storm system's power placed it in historic company. Storm trackers said it had lofted debris 30,000 feet (9,100 meters) into the air, and the deadly Mayfield twister appeared to have broken an almost century-old record, tracking on the ground well more than 200 miles (320 kilometers).

"The devastation is unlike anything I have seen in my life," Beshear said. As Americans grappled with the immensity of the disaster, condolences poured in, with Pope Francis saying he is praying "for the victims of the tornado that hit Kentucky." Biden's

Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, in a break from tense bilateral relations, said his country "shares in the grief" of those who lost loved ones.

'Hope for a miracle'

Mayfield, a town of about 10,000 near the westernmost tip of Kentucky, was reduced to "matchsticks," its mayor Kathy O'Nan said. Still, she told NBC on Sunday, "there's always hope" of finding survivors. "We hope for a miracle."

Troy Propes, CEO of the company that owned the candle factory, defended his decision not to close it as the storm neared. "We did everything that was supposed to happen," he told CNN on Sunday. "My heart bleeds for absolutely everyone."

Mayfield was described as "ground zero" by officials, and appeared post-apocalyptic: city blocks were leveled, historic homes and buildings were beaten down to their slabs, tree trunks had been stripped of their branches and cars lay overturned in fields.

Reports put the total number of tornadoes across the region at around 30. "This is going to be our new normal. And the effects that we're seeing from climate change are the crisis of our generation," FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell told CNN on Sunday. Biden said he planned to soon travel to the affected areas, once his presence would not infringe upon relief efforts. —AFP

“Death toll to exceed more than 100”

At least one dead from Omicron as UK boosts response

LONDON: At least one person has died in Britain after being infected with the Omicron variant, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said yesterday, as the country launched an ambitious COVID booster shot programme to stop the virus' spread.

Britain—among the countries worst hit by the global health crisis since last year—is believed to be the first government to officially announce a death from the virus mutation. On a visit to a vaccination centre in west London, Johnson said Omicron accounted for about 40 percent of the cases in the British capital, and hospital admissions were rising.

"Sadly, at least one patient has been confirmed to have died with Omicron," he told reporters, a day after warning the country was facing a "tidal wave" of infection. Britain on Sunday sounded the alarm by raising the national COVID Alert Level because of high levels and rising rates of transmission.

In a rare televised address, Johnson said emergency measures were needed to prevent hospitals becoming overwhelmed in the weeks ahead. All adults will now be able to receive a third dose of a COVID vaccine by the end of December after the government brought forward its deadline by one month.

But in a sign of huge demand, the National Health Service (NHS) vaccination

booking site crashed and users requesting rapid testing kits were told they were out of stock. Long queues were seen at London clinics. At one, Sarah Jackson, 29, said she had taken the morning off to get a job before visiting her grandparents at Christmas.

"I don't know if it's going to be enough. I was told there is a queue of two hours to register and then two hours to get vaccinated," she told AFP. "But I have to go back to work at 1:30 pm." The "turbocharged" booster programme has seen military planners asked to set up and run extra vaccination centres around the clock.

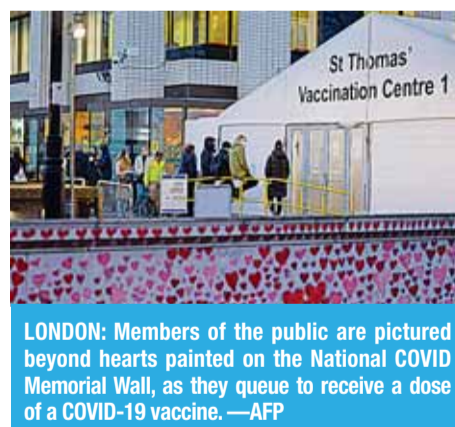
Some 500,000 booster jabs were given on Saturday but to hit the new deadline that number will have to be doubled every day for the remainder of the year to slow the spread.

Wider measures

Concerns have mounted about a new wave because of indications that two jabs are less effective against infection than three. There were 1,239 confirmed cases of the variant recorded on Sunday and scientists have said numbers are doubling every two to three days.

Vaccination rates are high in Britain, with more than 81 percent or 46.7 million of those aged 12 and over having had a second jab. Some 23 million or 40 percent have so far had a booster.

The new measures come after face masks were made compulsory in indoor public spaces last Friday, and new testing and self-isolation rules for contact cases began yesterday. Workers were also told to stay at home, leading to a quieter than



LONDON: Members of the public are pictured beyond hearts painted on the National COVID Memorial Wall, as they queue to receive a dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. —AFP

usual yesterday morning rush hour.

Vaccine passports for certain crowded settings, including at football grounds, are due to be enforced from tomorrow. The rules apply to England only. The devolved governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, which are responsible for health policy, have similar measures.

The race to vaccinate the nation will come at the cost of already delayed elective surgeries, like hip or knee operations, the government admitted. Johnson's intervention on Sunday sought to refocus attention on the pandemic, after a torrid week in which he and staff were accused of breaking Covid rules last year.

Claims of illegal Christmas parties at Downing Street and across government departments have been seen as undermining public health messaging. Johnson is also facing a large rebellion from within his Conservative party at a vote in parliament to make the new rules law today. —AFP

CONDOLENCES

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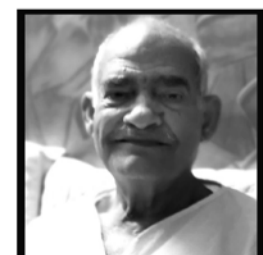
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Extend their Heartfelt condolences to

Mr. Rajesh Gupta & Family

(Vice President – Project Logistics)

on the sad demise of his father in law



Mr Satish Chand Kochhar

who passed away in India

on 12 December, 2021

May his soul Rest in Peace

International

Russian teenager tried to 'blow himself up' at Orthodox school

Teenager wanted to take revenge for being bullied by nuns

SERPUKHOV: A Russian teenager tried to blow himself up at an Orthodox school in a 14th century convent outside Moscow yesterday, wounding ten children.

The attacker, an 18-year-old former student of the school, survived. He was taken into intensive care and had his leg amputated after suffering injuries, authorities said.

"The person who tried to commit suicide is in intensive care," a representative of the Investigative Committee, Olga Vradiy, told journalists.

Police and ambulances lined the red-coloured medieval walls of the convent, founded in 1360.

Russia has seen a rise in attacks on schools in recent years but incidents at religious premises are rare. The interior ministry said the teenager entered "the Orthodox gymnasium next to the Vvedenskiy Vlyachniy convent and blew himself up." The convent is in the city of Serpukhov, 100 kilometres (60 miles) south of Moscow. Ten children were wounded, said Ksenia Mishonova, the children's rights ombudswoman for the Moscow region. "One teenager was hospitalised. The rest of the children are in hospitals in the Moscow region," she said on Telegram. "There is no threat to their lives".

The Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes, said it opened a criminal case into attempted murder and the illegal handling of explosives.

Denis Ryabov, a pupil at the school, said he was praying with his classmates when the incident took place. "I smelt burning, the teacher said there had been an explosion," he said as he left the convent accompanied by his mother.

"A door was blown off. Some children were crying." The school has pupils from the ages of 7 to 16.

Bullying reports

State news agency TASS, citing a police source, said that the teenager wanted the device to go off during morning prayers, but it detonated at the entrance to the school.

Authorities said they were working to establish the motives behind the attack. The Interfax news agency said the teenager could have wanted to take revenge for being bullied by nuns in the convent.

Vladimir Legoida, a Russian Orthodox Church spokesman, said the church will provide assistance to "all those affected."

"Wherever such attacks take place, they cause the same grief and desire to prevent this from happening in the future," he said in a statement on messaging app Telegram.

Since President Vladimir Putin first came to power in 2000, the Russian church has extended its clout on traditionally secular institutions such as schools, with lessons on religion and clerics lobbying for conservative textbooks.

In September, a student killed six people and



SERPUKHOV: Experts work at the entrance to the Orthodox gymnasium of the Vvedenskiy Vlyachniy convent after an 18-year-old graduate of this educational institution entered the school and blew himself up, in the city of Serpukhov, 100 kilometres (60 miles) south of Moscow, yesterday. —AFP

wounded dozens on a university campus in the Ural city of Perm. In May, a 19-year-old opened fire in his old school in the central city of Kazan, killing nine people.

In October 2018, another teenage gunman killed 20 people at a Kerch technical college in Crimea, the peninsula Russia annexed from Ukraine in 2014.

He was shown in camera footage wearing a similar T-shirt to Eric Harris, one of the killers in the 1999 Columbine High School shooting in the US, which left 13 people dead.

The attacks have led some in Russia to call for stricter gun control in the country and for reinforced security in schools. —AFP



Ten children were wounded

Australia warned bid for nuke subs carries 'enormous' risks

SYDNEY: Australia's bid to develop a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines will cost more than US\$80 billion and take decades in the "most complex" project the country has ever embarked on, a study released yesterday warned.

The report from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute—an influential Canberra-based think tank—said ownership of the high-tech subs built with US or British know-how would offer a major advantage in deterring aggression from China or elsewhere.

But it will also be a fiendishly difficult task requiring a step-change in Australia's military and industrial capabilities. It is "probably the largest and most complex endeavour Australia has embarked upon. The challenges, costs and risks will be enormous," the think tank warned. "It's likely to be at least two decades and tens of billions of dollars in sunk costs before Australia has a useful nuclear-powered military capability."

The project, announced last month, will make Australia the only non-nuclear weapons power to own nuclear-run submarines, which are capable of travelling quickly over long distances carrying long-range missiles and state-of-the-art underwater drones.

Canberra plans to equip them with conventional rather than nuclear weapons. It has yet to decide whether it will buy US or British technology, what class, size and capabilities the subs will have, where they will be built or how radioactive material will be handled.

Even under an optimistic schedule, the first submarines are unlikely to be operational before 2040, according to the report's authors, who include former Australian defence department officials and an expert on nuclear physics. The price tag will be eye-watering, with an eight-boat programme costing Aus\$116 billion (US\$83 billion) "at an absolute minimum", almost a tenth of annual gross domestic product.

Among a litany of tasks ahead, the navy will have to triple the number of submariners it recruits, refurbish docks, and develop extensive nuclear safeguards. On the diplomatic front, Australia will need to reassure neighbours and the International Atomic Energy Agency that the subs do not present a nuclear proliferation risk.

"Regardless of the Australian government's declared intentions," the report said, "once Australia possesses (weapons-grade enriched uranium), the breakout time to develop and construct nuclear weapons would be less than a year if a simple nuclear-weapon design were pursued."

The submarine plan has already caused diplomatic headaches for Canberra, with nearest neighbour Indonesia expressing concern, and the decision to ditch a contract to buy French non-nuclear submarines causing fury in Paris. —AFP

8 Indians arrested for 'offensive' posts on dead military chief

NEW DELHI: Eight Indians have been arrested for making "offensive" social media posts about the death of the country's military chief in a helicopter crash, according to officials speaking to AFP yesterday and local reports.

General Bipin Rawat, who was killed along with his wife and 11 others in last week's accident, was a hugely popular figure seen as close to Hindu nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi. But he also courted controversy, in one instance presenting an award to an officer who tied a civilian in Kashmir to the front of his military vehicle in a show of force.

One man was arrested within hours of the chopper crash for posting to Instagram that Rawat had "burnt alive even before entering Jahannum", the Muslim word for hell. He was arrested along with two others in Rajasthan state for "hurting public sentiment", police confirmed to AFP.

Five other arrests across India were reported by local media outlets on the weekend. A bank staffer in Jammu district was suspended from work after accusations she had reacted to a Facebook news post of Rawat's death with an emoji of a laughing face.

Two people were being investigated in the southern state of Karnataka, where chief minister Basavaraj Bommai ordered the arrest of "perverted minds" who had disrespected the military com-



NEW DELHI: India's Army General Manoj Mukund Naravane pays his tribute in front of the coffins containing the mortal remains of Chief of Defence Staff Gen Bipin Rawat and other 12 victims who lost their lives in a helicopter crash. —AFP

mander. Police have arrested hundreds of Indian internet users in recent years, with rights groups sounding the alarm over growing curbs on freedom of speech in the world's largest democracy.

More than a dozen people were arrested in October for celebrating Pakistan's defeat of India in a cricket match, with several still in custody after being charged under sedition and anti-terror laws. —AFP

Sudan police fire tear gas at protesters

KHARTOUM: Sudanese police fired tear gas yesterday to disperse hundreds of protesters who rallied near the presidential palace in Khartoum demanding civilian rule, witnesses said. It was the latest rally in recent weeks by Sudanese opposed to a military-dominated government in the country where top general Abdel Fattah al-Burhan seized power in an October coup.

Yesterday's protesters in Khartoum waved Sudanese flags and changed "civilian is the people's choice" as well as "the people are stronger". Witnesses said protests were also underway in parts of eastern Sudan, including Kassala and Gadaref states.

"Protesters are in the centre of the city and are chanting 'no to military rule'," Kassala resident Mohammed Idriss told AFP. Speaking from Gadaref, resident Amal Hussein said around 600 protesters rallied there, where they also waved Sudanese flags and chanted slogans demanding civilian rule.

Following the October 25 coup, previous protests were met by a violent crackdown that left 44 people killed and hundreds wounded, mostly by bullets, according to a pro-democracy doctors' union. On that day Burhan seized power and detained Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok but reinstated him in a deal signed on November 21 after international condemnation and mass protests.

Critics lambasted the agreement and pro-democracy activists vowed to maintain pressure on the military-civilian authority. Burhan has insisted that the military takeover was "not a coup" but a step "to rectify the transition" towards full democracy that started with the



KHARTOUM: Sudanese demonstrators including persons with disabilities chant as they rally along the central Mek Nimr avenue in the capital Khartoum. —AFP

2019 ouster of autocratic president Omar al-Bashir. He has pledged to lead Sudan to "free and transparent elections" in July 2023. —AFP

Zionist entity frees firebrand Islamic cleric

TEL AVI: Zionist entity authorities yesterday released from jail firebrand Islamic cleric Raed Salah, a rival of the first Arab party leader to support the Jewish government, who was imprisoned for incitement to terrorism.

Salah was greeted with fireworks and a crowd of some 1,000 supporters who were chanting "Raed, the sheikh of Al-Aqsa" as he arrived in his home city of Umm el-Fahm.

Last year, a Zionist entity court convicted him

of "incitement to terror" for "praising, sympathising or encouraging terrorism" in remarks made after attackers from his home city killed two policemen in Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque compound three years earlier.

Salah, who walked free after serving a 16-month sentence, heads a group known as the northern branch of the Islamic Movement.

The political wing of the movement's southern branch, called Raam, is headed by Mansour Abbas, who in June agreed to support a government headed by right-wing Zionist entity Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, backing that enabled Bennett to form a government.

The Islamic movement split in 1996. Salah's group was outlawed in 2015 for incitement linked to the Jerusalem holy site. His supporters say his sermons are within the bounds of free speech and that

his arrests constitute political intimidation intended to silence dissent. Salah served a nine-month sentence on similar charges in 2017.

Salah's movement calls for the boycott of Jewish elections by Palestinian citizens of Zionist entity on the grounds that they give legitimacy to the institutions of the Jewish state.

Before the March election, Abbas said his party was willing to work with any Jewish government that would take steps to improve the lives of Arab citizens, who have long complained of unequal treatment compared to Jewish Zionists.

Abbas then emerged as a surprise kingmaker and joined the coalition in a historic deal that included a multi-billion dollar pledge to tackle some of the problems experienced by Palestinian citizens of Zionist entity, who constitute more than 20 percent of the country's population. —AFP

International

New Caledonia pro-independence groups reject referendum result

'This referendum did not respect the spirit or the letter of the Noumea accords'

NOUMEA: Pro-independence parties in New Caledonia yesterday rejected the result of a weekend referendum which overwhelmingly approved the Pacific territory remaining part of France, causing fears of political tension ahead. A statement from a coalition of pro-independence groups, which had boycotted the vote, said that they "do not recognise the legitimacy or the validity of this vote which was confiscated."

"This referendum did not respect the spirit or the letter of the Noumea accords", a reference to the agreement forming the legal basis of successive referendums on the island group's future. A total of 96.49 percent of Sunday's referendum votes were against independence, with only 3.51 percent in favour.

But turnout was a mere 43.90 percent, with most of the archipelago's indigenous Kanak population heeding the boycott call. Speaking earlier on the France Inter radio, France's minister in charge of overseas territories defended the result, saying it had full legal force. "Whatever the turnout level, legally speaking it's a vote that has the same weight as the two previous ones that returned a 'No' vote," Sebastien Lecornu said, referring to two previous referendums in 2018 and 2020. He admitted that "politically it means something: We need to look at this division."

Police on alert

French authorities pushed ahead with the referendum despite calls from pro-independence groups to delay the vote because of fears that COVID-19 would make a fair campaign impossible. Kanaks, who tend to favour independence, were also called by their traditional community leaders

to observe a day's mourning on Sunday for those killed by the coronavirus.

Police reinforcements have been sent to the islands in case of unrest. About 2,000 officers were deployed for the vote, which passed off without incident. "The path of dialogue has been broken off by the stubbornness of a French government that is incapable of reconciling its geopolitical interests in the Pacific with its obligation to decolonise our country," the statement from the main independence groups such as FLNKS said.

President Emmanuel Macron noted "the high



An independent New Caledonia would move closer to Beijing: Experts

abstention rates" in a recorded message on Sunday, but he said that France could be "proud" of a more than 30-year process designed to settle the islands' status. Having rejected independence in 2018 and then again last year, islanders were called on Sunday to answer one last time whether they wanted New Caledonia "to accede to full sovereignty and become independent".

'A failure overall'

At stake in the vote was one of France's biggest



NOUMEA: Independentists demonstrate the morning after the self determination referendum in Noumea, in the French South Pacific territory of New Caledonia yesterday. — AFP

overseas territories which is home to about 10 percent of the world's reserves of nickel, which is used to make stainless steel, batteries and mobile phones. The islands are also a key part of France's claim of being a Pacific power, with New Caledonia granting Paris rights to the surrounding ocean, as well as serving as a military staging post.

Experts suspect that an independent New

Caledonia would move closer to Beijing, which has built up close economic links and political influence on other Pacific islands. Macron said that "a period of transition" would now start which is expected to result in Paris granting more political autonomy to the islands, which are split along ethnic lines between white Europeans and the indigenous population. But some predicted a rocky road ahead. — AFP

Pregnant nurse among seven dead in Sicily building collapse

SICILY: Rescuers yesterday worked to free the body of a pregnant nurse from the rubble of collapsed buildings in Sicily, after a massive explosion which killed at least seven people. The blast, likely caused by a gas leak, tore through four residential buildings late Saturday in the southern town of Ravanusa, with one survivor describing it "as if a bomb had gone off".

The search "continues unabated" for two more people missing after the disaster, firefighters said. A photograph on the firefighters' Twitter account showed them standing amid the rubble, as "a fresh day of searching painfully begins".

The blast levelled four structures, including a four-storey apartment building, in the central residential district of the town of nearly 11,000 inhabitants, according to Italy's civil protection agency. Images from the scene showed a mass of concrete rubble, wooden beams and mangled steel in a large empty space, with neighbouring buildings charred and damaged.

The victims included nurse Selene Pascariello, 30, who was nine months pregnant, and who had been due to give birth next week, according to the Corriere della Sera newspaper. Pascariello's body was found alongside that of her husband Giuseppe Carmina, and his parents. The couple had been visiting the soon-to-be grandparents on the third floor of their building.

The family had known well one of the first victims to be found, retired high-school teacher Pietro Carmina, who had recently recovered from a life-threatening case of coronavirus, it said.

'A tremendous roar'

Two women were recovered alive from the debris early on Sunday after being found by sniffer dogs, but rescuers have not heard further signs of



RAVANUSA: This handout picture taken and released by Italian Firefighters (Vigili del Fuoco) shows a four-storey apartment building collapsed, following a gas explosion, in Ravanusa on December 12, 2021. — AFP

life. An investigation has been opened into the cause of the explosion, which authorities said was most probably a gas leak.

Local resident Calogero Bonanno said "neighbours had told me there was a smell of gas". "I heard a tremendous roar, as if a bomb had gone off or a plane had crashed into the house," he was cited as saying by Italian media. "Then the window frames exploded. We immediately went down to the street, there was fire everywhere, rubble all around," he said after fleeing along with his wife, three children and in-laws. "It's a miracle we're alive".

Natural gas distributor Italgas said in a statement it had received no reports of gas leaks in the week leading up to the incident. No construction

work was under way in the section of pipeline affected in the blast and the town's distribution network was fully inspected in both 2020 and 2021, it said.

The Repubblica daily said the town's gas pipelines—installed 36 years ago—were among the oldest in Italy, and ran through unstable ground, susceptible to soil erosion and landslides. Sicily, one of Italy's poorest regions, suffers from sub-standard and ageing infrastructure.

Many homes and other structures constructed in past decades were built using cheap, sub-par materials that make them more prone to collapse, often because of interference in building contracts by the Mafia. — AFP

Swiss prosecutors close case against Spain's ex-king

GENEVA: Swiss prosecutors said yesterday they have closed a case against former Spanish king Juan Carlos over suspicions he received \$100 million in kickbacks for facilitating a high-speed rail contract in Saudi Arabia awarded to a Spanish consortium.

After three years of investigation, the Geneva top prosecutor's office said in a statement that the money transferred into a Swiss bank account had "not been sufficiently documented". But it said the probe had "not permitted to establish in a sufficient manner a link between the amount received from Saudi Arabia and the contract to build the high-speed train."

Geneva prosecutors opened their probe on August 6, 2018 into suspicions of "aggravated money laundering" against the 83-year-old former monarch following media reports about possible illegal commissions he had pocketed in connection with the high-speed train deal.

A Spanish consortium was awarded the lucrative contract in 2011 to build the high-speed rail link between Medina and Mecca. The suspicions centred on \$100 million

that Saudi Arabia's late King Abdullah deposited in 2008 into a Swiss bank account to which Juan Carlos had access.

The Geneva prosecutors said their investigation had established that the money had indeed been deposited into an account with Geneva bank Mirabaud & Cie belonging to the Lucum foundation, for which Juan Carlos held the economic rights.

They also determined that there was evidence the ex-king transferred the bulk of this money in 2012 to an account in the Bahamas belonging to a company held by his former mistress, German businesswoman Corinna Zu Zein-Wittgenstein.

The prosecutors said that the complexity of the transactions, using a foundation and various companies, "showed a will to dissimulation", but said there was not enough evidence to proceed. The ex-king, a key figure in Spain's transition to democracy following the death of dictator Francisco Franco in 1975, has meanwhile also been the target of several probes in Spain over his financial dealings there. Spanish prosecutors decided earlier this month to push on with their investigation for another six months. The probes have especially been focused on whether there was any illegal dealings after the former king abdicated in 2004 and lost his immunity. While he has not been charged with any crime, the probes have tainted his reputation and that of the Spanish monarchy. — AFP

Surgery on conjoined twins postponed

DHAKA: Bangladeshi surgeons working to separate conjoined toddlers said yesterday they had been forced to halt and postpone the mammoth procedure after complications. The two-year-old girls, Labiba and Lamisa, were born joined at the back and share a spine, genitalia and part of their digestive tract.

A team of 35 doctors at Dhaka Medical College Hospital began the operation yesterday but were forced to stop after four hours when they found the skin too thick to proceed, chief paediatric surgeon Ashrafur Haque said.

Silicon balls have been inserted that will be gradually filled with saline water, stretching the skin to make the separation of the twins easier, Haque added. In the meantime the sisters will be kept under observation for the next few weeks.

Doctors had previously partially separated their rectums nine days after birth, but follow-up surgery was also postponed last year because of the COVID-19 pandemic. "My babies are now in the intensive care unit. They are talking to us. So we're a bit relieved for now," Lal Mia, father of the twins, told AFP.

The toddlers cannot sit or properly lie down together. Doctors in the same hospital have safely separated two other sets of conjoined twins in 2017 and 2018 and expressed confidence they could do the same for Labiba and Lamisa. Conjoined twins develop when an embryo only partially separates, leaving babies connected after birth. Many conjoined twins are stillborn or die shortly after birth, but advances in surgery and technology have improved survival rates. — AFP

News in brief

Indian arrested in fake death case

GHAZIABAD: An Indian man who tried to fake his death by murdering a builder and passing the body off as his own has been arrested, police said yesterday. He did it to avoid being tried for another alleged murder, they added — Sudesh Kumar was charged with but not convicted of the 2018 killing of his daughter who had eloped. Kumar was released last year as authorities tried to prevent coronavirus outbreaks by decongesting overcrowded prisons. Police last month found a body in Ghaziabad, on the outskirts of the capital New Delhi, wearing Kumar's clothes and carrying his ID card. "The body was partially burnt and its face was beyond recognition," police superintendent Iraj Raja told AFP. — AFP

Thousands shut indoors

LOS LLANOS DE ARIDANE: Spain yesterday ordered more than 30,000 people to remain indoors on La Palma island because of toxic gases from a volcano that has been erupting for months. After several days of low-level activity, the Cumbre Viejo suddenly sprang to life on Sunday with several explosions sending a vast cloud of ash and smoke into the sky. The regional government of the Canary Islands, which lie off Africa's northwest coast, ordered residents of three municipalities to lockdown owing to high levels of sulphur dioxide in the air. The three municipalities are home to roughly 33,000 people, or 38 percent of the population of the island, according to national statistics institute INE. — AFP

Two missing after ships collide

STOCKHOLM: Two people were missing yesterday after two cargo ships collided in waters south of Sweden in the early morning hours, the Swedish Maritime Administration said. The ships collided in the Baltic Sea between the Swedish city of Ystad and the Danish island of Bornholm, the head of press at the Swedish Maritime Administration, told AFP. "Shortly after half past 3 am (0230GMT), we received an alert through our sea and flight rescue central that two freight vessels had collided," Carl-Johan Linde said. "One of the ships has capsized and is upside down," Linde said, adding that two people from that vessel had ended up in the water as a result of the collision. — AFP

Yemen military official killed

DUBAI: A Yemeni senior military commander was killed in fighting between government forces and Huthi rebels for the strategic city of Marib, the defence ministry said yesterday. The ministry announced the "martyrdom of head of the government forces' military operations, Nasser al-Zubiani, who died in the line of duty while leading battles against the Iran-backed Huthi militia on the outskirts of Marib", according to Yemen's official Saba news agency. A defence minister source had earlier told AFP that Zubiani was among 28 troops killed in clashes with the Huthis in the past 24 hours. Government forces and the Huthi rebels have been locked for months in a fierce battle for Marib, the government's last stronghold and capital of the northern oil-rich province of the same name. — AFP

Business

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2021

Zain receives five awards at Kuwait Creativity Award

Event held under the patronage of Minister of Information, Culture, and Youth Affairs



Muneera Al-Huwaidi and Madhi Al-Khamees present Zain's awards to Al-Khashti and the company's team



Al-Huwaidi and Al-Khamees recognize Al-Khashti

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced that it has received five accolades at the Arab Media Forum's 9th Kuwait Creativity Award, recognizing the company's distinguished track of media productions and awareness campaigns. The event was held under the patronage of Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, and witnessed the presence of Undersecretary of Kuwait's Ministry of Information Muneera Al-Huwaidi and many actors, artists, and public personalities from the local and regional scenes.

Zain received a total of five awards: Influence Award for its Eid 2021 TVC produced by Joy Productions, National Productions Award for its National Day 2021 TVC produced by Joy Productions, Awareness Campaigns Award for its #ActivateYourRole digital campaign to raise environmental awareness, CSR Creativity Award for its social and humanitarian efforts throughout the year and during the pandemic, as well as the PR Stars Award presented to Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Communications and Relations Officer Waleed Al-Khashti.

The annual event, hosted by the Arab Media Forum in collaboration with the Kuwaiti Media and Communications Society and the Integrated Media Academy, witnessed the presence of many media organizations, public figures, creative people, and media professionals from across the Arab world.

Zain received the National Productions Award for its National Day television commercial for 2021, which starred great Kuwaiti singer Sulaiman Al-

Qassar along with aspiring Kuwaiti stars Haneen Al-Kandari and Nasser Al-Meshari. The national production featured lyrics by Kuwaiti poet Saher and was composed by Bashar Al-Shatti and directed by Khalid Al-Refai.

As it does every year, Zain launched its national production to mark the celebration of Kuwait's National and Liberation days in February. This year, the celebrations were even more special as the country commemorated the 60th anniversary of its Independence Day and 30th anniversary of its Liberation Day. The TVC, which reflected national pride and values with its wonderful lyrics and beautiful music, has exceeded one million views on Zain's official YouTube channel during the first days of its launch.

The pandemic circumstances witnessed by Kuwait and the entire world has inspired Zain to select fast-paced and cheerful music mixed along with hopeful lyrics in an attempt to spread positivity in the nation's future. In the TVC, singer Sulaiman Al-Qassar - who is locally renowned for performing wedding ceremonies - introduced Kuwait as the bride and praised her beauty in melodies inspired by Kuwaiti wedding ceremonies. Zain has hand-picked Kuwaiti youngsters Haneen Al-Kandari and Nasser Al-Meshari to perform parts of the TVC to reflect its strong belief in the unlimited talents of Kuwait's youth.

Zain also received the Awareness Campaigns Award for #ActivateYourRole, an online awareness campaign the company launched on its official social media platforms that aimed at raising public



Al-Khashti and Al-Khamees with Zain's team and awards

awareness towards climate change, sustainability, and preserving natural resources.

Through this campaign, Zain used its social media platforms to spread facts that many people might not have heard of before. These facts showed the shocking impacts of climate change on people's health and on the environment. The company hoped this message would encourage positive change and bring more efforts towards achieving sustainable goals in Kuwait.

This recognition comes in light of Zain's distinguished advertising and media involvement, and further showcases the company's role as a leading private sector company launching distinguished marketing and advertising campaigns all year round. Zain will continue supporting this very important field which carries significant and informative messaging to the public at large and the communications world as a whole, whether through traditional or modern media tools.

Fed, ECB grapple with inflation and Omicron

WASHINGTON: Rising inflation and the spread of a new variant of the coronavirus will weigh on central banks' minds this week as they meet to decide how quickly to withdraw their pandemic-era stimulus. As policymakers on both sides of the Atlantic contend with soaring inflation and the rate of infection of the Omicron variant, the US Federal Reserve is scheduled to announce its latest interest-rate decision tomorrow, followed by the European Central Bank on Thursday.

Both will have to carefully calibrate their response between raising rates and pulling the rug from under a tenuous recovery, or sticking to the status quo and letting inflation rise even further. In the US, the economy has heaved itself out of recession but employment figures have yet to reach pre-pandemic levels.

The arrival of the Omicron variant has raised



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.—AFP

concerns of new economic disruption, supply chain bottlenecks and even higher prices. But the pick-up in US inflation to 6.8 percent year-on-year in November, the fastest pace since 1982, already seems to be pushing Fed policymakers towards a faster exit from its asset-purchase program than first announced.

The government had gained the approval from the German parliament to borrow 240.2 billion euros this year 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 pro-business FDP has announced ambitious plans to tackle climate change, including ending coal power and generating 80 percent of electricity from renewables by 2030.

The fund, which builds on a previous "Climate and Energy Fund", will hold "around 76.2 billion euros" after the supplementary budget measures are passed, Lindner said. The fund would be topped up in future through the government's budget, the new finance minister said.

Lindner stressed that the money did not amount to "new debt", a politically controversial subject in Germany. The coalition has promised a return to the so-called debt brake — a rule

Fast Fed

Rising prices already induced the Fed in November to embark on the phase-out of its stimulus program. Amounting to \$120 billion a month, the purchases under the scheme were set to be progressively reduced by \$15 billion a month, before being ended completely in June next year.

But discussion has moved on since the meeting and at a congressional hearing last month, Fed Chairman Jerome Powell announced that the so-called "taper" — as the asset purchase phase-out is known — could end "a few months sooner" than planned, opening the door to rate hikes shortly afterwards.

The question facing the Federal Open Market Committee this week will be how far to bring forward the date and what the new calendar for interest-rate increases will look like. Powell will announce the decision tomorrow at his first press conference since being renominated by US President Joe Biden.

But closing the taps too early could "stall" the US economy's recovery from the initial shock of the coronavirus pandemic, said Oxford Economics analyst, Kathy Bostjancic.—AFP



UK airlines lash out at govt over Omicron curbs

LONDON: A group of airlines accused the UK government yesterday of a "haphazard and disproportionate approach" to travel restrictions in the wake of the Omicron variant and demanded further state help to prevent a "permanent scarring" of the industry. "Whilst we fully recognize the need to take steps to contain the initial impact of the Omicron variant, travel has been singled out with the introduction of disproportionate restrictions." Airlines UK — which includes British Airways and Virgin Atlantic, as well as Irish carrier Ryanair — said in a joint letter.

"A package of bespoke economic support measures should be provided immediately to bridge the sector through this crisis." Britain last week rolled out new travel curbs to try and prevent transmission of the Omicron variant.

On Sunday, Prime Minister Johnson warned of a looming "tidal wave" of Omicron, and brought forward a target to give over-18s a booster jab by one month to the end of December. The airlines demanded an urgent meeting with Johnson to discuss the situation facing the sector and called for emergency testing for fully-vaccinated passengers to be removed before Christmas. "Pre-departure and upon-arrival testing clearly add very little value to our COVID protection, but unnecessarily disrupt Christmas for families as well as businesses, while severely damaging the UK travel industry," the letter said.—AFP



BERLIN: Germany's Finance Minister Christian Lindner announces a 60 billion euro (\$68 billion) climate investment plan after the cabinet meeting yesterday.

enshrined in the constitution that normally limits Germany's public deficit to 0.35 percent of overall annual economic output — by 2023.—AFP

German cabinet OKs \$68bn climate investment plan

BERLIN: The new German government approved a 60 billion euro (\$68 billion) climate investment plan in a cabinet meeting yesterday, laying the first stone towards achieving its ambitious environmental targets. The agreement was announced by Finance Minister Christian Lindner, who celebrated a "booster" for Europe's top economy and "the beginning of a climate-neutral and digital future for Germany". The investment in the new government's "Climate and Transformation Fund", first announced on Friday, comes from unused debts intended to tackle the coronavirus.

Business

KFH wins 5 awards in the creativity and distinction category for 7th year in a row

The awards affirm KFH creativity in public relations and social media: Al-Ruwaieh



KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) received five awards in the creativity and distinction category for the seventh year respectively in the 9th edition of the Kuwait Creativity Prize event for the year 2021. The event was organized by the Arab Media Forum under the patronage of the Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs, Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, and the Arab League, in presence of Ministry of Information Undersecretary Muneera Al-Huwaidi, a group of VIPs, reporters and experts in the fields of public relations, marketing, advertising and media.

KFH won the Public Relations Creativity Award and Social Media Creativity Award for its distinction in KFH Talk program, Advertising Creativity Award TVC for "Your Financing is Easier with KFH" campaign, Content Creativity Award TVC for the "Smile Again" and Influencing Creativity Award TVC for "Gergean" commercial.

KFH Group DGM, Public Relations and Media Yousef Al-Ruwaieh expressed his sincere gratitude to and appreciation for the Arab Media Forum and the sponsors of the Kuwait Creativity Award 2021 which affirms the distinction of the winners in creativity and innovation in the field of public relations, media, social media, and marketing and enhance the

continuation of efforts to raise the standards of the public relations industry in all fields.

He indicated that the five awards, received by KFH, affirm its creativity regarding the diversification and inclusiveness of the public relations, media, marketing and promotional campaigns and the innovative contents thereof. These campaigns had a tremendous influence and remarkable professional performance in enhancing the bank trademark for the last 12 months as they were the focus of appreciation and interest by all society categories.

Al-Ruwaieh emphasized that the programs which KFH launched during the year through social media, marketing and advertising campaigns for its products and services created a tremendous impact, enhanced communication with the public and prevailed on the banking industry and advertising levels. The programs posted through various media tools and social media achieved tremendous viewing and received the best ratings by viewers and followers.

He added that KFH exhibited an outstanding performance in the field of public relations, media, and social responsibility for which it qualified to receiving the award. KFH advertisements and programs on social media have contributed to the spread of public awareness on the bank's services and products in

a creative and distinguished manner and achieved all targeted objectives.

Al-Ruwaieh reiterated the pioneering role of the public relations and media campaigns in enhancing the concept of social responsibility. The innovative and qualitative campaigns and programs launched by KFH in 2021 focused on introducing the bank's services and products, spreading banking and financial culture and awareness among customers and all society members. The programs have fulfilled the youth category aspirations which has reacted tremendously to the promotional campaigns of the bank and took great interest in its products and services.

He added that KFH has succeeded in taking the concept of social responsibility initiatives to a new level in its programs and campaigns which have covered various issues, namely environment, by launching "KFH is Green" campaign aiming to ensure environment protection and call for the plantation and greening of Kuwait.

Al-Ruwaieh noted that considering this campaign, certain strategic partnership agreements were signed with the Public Authority for Agriculture Affairs and Fish Resources, aiming to support its efforts in the planting and greening campaign of



Kuwait areas for the agricultural season 2020/ 2021. Also, agreements were signed with Sidra Initiative and Green Dream Team. KFH supported and participated in several environmental activities including beach cleaning campaigns to spread environmental culture and spread awareness on the significance of maintaining a healthy environment. KFH subject activities were rated in two stages by a highly professional and experienced judges committee comprising 10 reporters and academic experts in media. The committee praised KFH work contents and high-quality professionalism which matched the level of work introduced by global media companies, content, and impact-wise.

Nespresso, Johanna Ortiz capture the essence of forest this season

KUWAIT: This holiday season, Nespresso is collaborating with Colombian fashion designer Johanna Ortiz, to enchant coffee lovers with the launch of its annual festive collection, inspired this year by the forest. Inspired by the beauty and depth of Nature's forests, Nespresso's 'Gifts of the Forest' collection encapsulates the brand's devotion to the precious environment coffee is grown in. The collection features a range of limited-edition coffees for both the Original and Vertuo systems, along with Festive infused accessories, making for delightful and inspiring gifts for family and friends. Coffee lovers can also gift this Festive season knowing Nespresso is giving back to the forest, as the brand goes beyond its agroforestry commitments, by helping to protect 10 million trees in the Amazon.

To bring the design of their limited-edition collection to life, Nespresso has partnered with Colombian luxury fashion designer Johanna Ortiz, whose innovative designs and interplay between nature and sustainability truly transports coffee aficionados into Nespresso's festive universe.

Johanna Ortiz says "For me, design and nature go hand in hand which is why this collaboration resonated personally. Colombian coffee also has a truly special place in my heart and as an active supporter in the fight against climate change, knowing that Nespresso is going beyond its agroforestry commitments by supporting the protection of 10 million trees in the Amazon, it was another huge reason why this collaboration made perfect sense. When designing the collection, I took the idea of capturing the beauty of the forest throughout every piece, by incorporating rich forest canopies and dark earthy tones within my designs.

It's been an amazing process and partnership which I have deeply enjoyed." From forest fruits to luscious canopies of trees, this year's Festive coffee range includes two flavored coffees and one black coffee.

For original

A canopy of trees shelters Forest Black's coffees to protect the flavor hidden in each bean. Discover this blend of shade-grown coffees from Colombia and beyond. A spicy espresso, its exotic woody notes will transport taste buds to the depths of the forest.

Taste the berries of the forest

Like gems that light up the forest floor, forest fruits are the gifts trees give us. Juicy berry aromas run through this season's flavored espresso as the South American Arabicas' lingering cereal character takes on a festive sweet pastry note.

Forest Almond Flavor is the forager's delight of the season. With the sweet, nutty flavor tucked into this espresso's South American Arabicas, get ready to uncover almond notes marked by vanilla and a light fruitiness in this coffee's smooth cereal character.

For Vertuo

Discover leafy canopies and complex aromas with Forest Black

Forest Black's arabicas from Colombia and beyond grow in the sheltering shade of a canopy of trees that protect the flavors hidden in each bean. Experience this coffee's alluring spice and cereal notes amidst exotic woody aromas that celebrate the magic and timelessness of the forest.

Sip on juicy berry and sweet pastry notes with Forest Fruit Flavor

Forest Fruit Flavor celebrates a delightful explosion of color with a coffee whose flavor recalls the forest floor-teeming with bushes dappled with ripe berries, ready for the picking. This festive flavoured coffee brings those same juicy berry aromas in a smooth cereal-noted base blend of Latin American and African Arabicas. Gifts given by trees are no small thing, Forest Almond Flavor celebrates both the harvest bestowed by the forest and the delicious and



complex nutty aromas found in many high-quality coffees around the coffee belt. This Latin American and African Arabica blend's inherent cereal character is an ode to harvest season. "Nespresso lovers can surprise and delight guests with delicious Gifts of the Forest coffee cocktail recipes, specially crafted to enhance the sensory experience. Each coffee-infused recipe has been curated by Nespresso with the Gifts of the Forest collection in mind, bringing a taste of nature and sophistication to each glass." Yassir Max Corpataux - Nespresso Coffee Ambassador for the Middle East and Africa.

Give the Gift of the Forest

Nespresso is also offering a range of limited-edition accessories and gifts this Festive season to surprise loved ones. Countdown in style with the Nespresso x Johanna Ortiz advent calendar.

To kick off and add excitement to this year's festivities, Nespresso is proud to bring back its highly coveted Advent Calendar. For this edition, its stunning packaging has been designed by Johanna Ortiz as part of her festive collaboration. Available for both Vertuo and Original coffee lovers, this year's advent calendar will take Nespresso lovers through a different coffee each day from December 1 to 23, with a special gift on the 24.

Afghan currency plunges to record low against dollar

KABUL: Afghanistan's currency dived to a record low against the US dollar yesterday, taking its losses over the last week to 30 percent as an economic collapse and humanitarian crisis grip the country.

There has been an enormous shortage of dollars since the Taliban seized power in August as international donors suspended billions in aid provided annually to the previous US-backed regime. Afghanistan's Money Exchange Commission said it has urged the central bank to intervene in the market to shore up the afghani, which sagged to 130 against the dollar in yesterday trade, down from around 100 a week ago.

"We asked them to interfere in the

market and distribute dollars," said Haji Zeerak, a spokesman for the commission. Since the Taliban takeover, the central bank has been cut off from nearly \$10 billion in reserves it held overseas, mainly in the United States.

The afghani's depreciation began gathering pace early last week, propelled by market fears that a major bank might collapse. Banks have placed severe restrictions on customer withdrawals, rocking confidence in the financial system.

The country's cash crunch has fed into an economic collapse that has left it facing a deepening humanitarian crisis. Many people in the capital Kabul have resorted to selling personal items to feed themselves. "I have



KABUL: Afghanistan's currency dived to a record low against the US dollar yesterday

sold my gold jewelry to have some dollars for the expenses of our house," said housewife Khalida, lamenting a surge in prices for cooking oil and flour. More than half of

Afghanistan's 38 million people face "acute" food shortages, according to the United Nations, with the winter forcing millions to choose between migration and starvation. —AFP

CBK bonds and related Tawarruq

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the most recent issues of CBK bonds and related Tawarruq at a total value of KD 290 million for three months with a rate of return at 1.125 percent.

China's SenseTime postpones HK IPO after US blacklisting

BEIJING: Chinese artificial intelligence start-up SenseTime said yesterday it was postponing a \$767 million initial public offering in Hong Kong after it was blacklisted by the United States over accusations of genocide in Xinjiang.

The US Treasury announced the ban on Friday, saying SenseTime's facial recognition programs were designed in part to be used against Uyghurs and other mostly Muslim minorities in Xinjiang, where UN experts and researchers estimate more than one million have been incarcerated in prison camps. The blacklisting immediately cast a shadow over the company's upcoming IPO plans in Hong Kong, which had been due to take place a week later. It also illustrated the risks investors face from competing sanctions as relations between the world's two biggest economies sour.

Yesterday, SenseTime filed a statement to the Hong Kong stock exchange saying it would postpone its listing "to safeguard the interests of the potential investors" as they weigh the impact of being placed on the blacklist. SenseTime said it "remains committed" to listing in Hong Kong soon and would fully refund those who had already invested.

The US 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. A blacklisting would make it all but impossible for US investment banks usually involved in Hong Kong listings to get involved, or for a US national to invest in the offering.

China yesterday decried the latest sanctions, which were also placed on two government officials in Xinjiang. "If the US insists on acting rashly, China will have to take effective measures to firmly fight back," foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told reporters.

Washington says SenseTime is part of China's "military-industrial complex". It had already placed the company on the US Department of Commerce's blacklist in 2019 because its technology had been used for mass surveillance in Xinjiang. It says SenseTime has developed and deployed facial recognition software that can determine a person's ethnicity, including whether someone looks Uyghur. —AFP

Business

Business sentiment cautious in Japan as virus fears linger

BoJ survey offers a glimmer of hope for economy

TOKYO: Japan's major manufacturers remain cautious about the economy's trajectory, with business sentiment flat for the quarter as concerns about the pandemic linger, a key survey showed yesterday. Among major non-manufacturers however, there was an improvement in confidence about the world's third largest economy, offering glimmers of hope.

The Bank of Japan's Tankan business survey—a quarterly poll of about 10,000 companies—showed a reading of plus 18 for major manufacturers, unchanged from the previous quarter and slightly lower than market consensus of plus 19. Among large non-manufacturers meanwhile, confidence improved to plus nine from plus two in the previous quarter, the sixth consecutive improvement.

The short-term business sentiment survey reports the difference between the percentage of firms that are upbeat and those that see conditions as unfavorable. A positive figure means more companies see business conditions as favorable than those that consider them unfavorable. It is considered to be the broadest indicator of how Japan Inc. is faring.

The latest reading comes with concerns over the Omicron variant of the coronavirus. For medi-

um-sized manufacturing firms, confidence was unchanged at plus six, while sentiment for small companies improved to minus one from minus three. Japan has seen a smaller virus outbreak than many countries, with fewer than 18,400 deaths despite avoiding harsh lockdowns.

Emergency virus measures that largely affected bars and restaurants as well as limiting large events were in place in parts of the country for much of the year, but were lifted finally in October.

To address concerns over the Omicron variant, Japan earlier this month abruptly asked airlines to stop taking all new incoming flight reservations for a month, but later softened the blanket ban to make it easier for citizens to return. Its vaccination program, which began later than in many developed countries and started slowly, has picked up speed however, with around 78 percent of the population now fully inoculated.

And the government this month started administering the third dose of vaccine, initially targeting health workers. The government has also pledged large stimulus measures in a bid to support economic recovery and those hit by the pandemic downturn. — AFP



KAWASAKI, Japan: A man walks on a bridge as the Keihin Industrial Zone is pictured behind in Kawasaki yesterday. —AFP

NBK International Markets Report

Omicron risk, China slowdown threaten to derail recovery

KUWAIT: A combination of worries over the emergence of the Omicron virus strain, increasing virus-related restriction measures across Europe and slower growth in China have threatened to knock some of the momentum from the global economic recovery of late. Key equity market indices in the US, Europe and Japan all fell 3-5 percent in November, although remain up significantly year-to-date. At the same time, anxieties over rising inflation driven by strong demand, loose policy and supply bottlenecks have intensified (especially in the US and Europe).

Indeed, for most major western central banks, high inflation has become the dominant concern and the US Fed in particular looks set to accelerate its policy tightening program imminently - that is unless the worst of the latest concerns about Omicron (and its potential impact on economic activity) materialize. Oil prices also dropped sharply in late November, from \$80 to temporarily below \$70, though have since partially recovered. OPEC+ opted to stick to its production increase schedule, despite expectations that it might pause given the risk of softer global oil demand.

Fed seen accelerating tapering

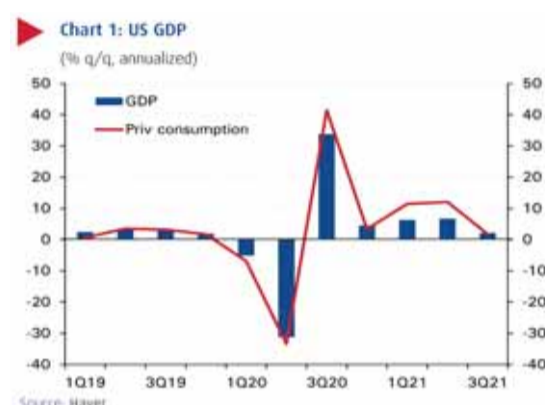
US economic growth slowed sharply in Q3 amid the ongoing supply chain shortages and the spread of the Delta variant. GDP growth for Q3 stood at an annualized 2.1 percent q/q, missing expectations and sharply lower than the 6.7 percent growth in Q2. Consumer confidence (as measured by the Conference Board's index) continued to weaken, falling to 109.5 in November, the lowest since February 2021, with high inflation the main culprit. Despite a relatively weak increase (210k) in non-farm payrolls in November, there are many indicators that the recovery in the labor market is solid: the unemployment rate dropped to 4.2 percent in November while labor participation increased to 61.8 percent, both at the best levels since the outbreak of the pandemic.

In addition, new weekly jobless claims continued to trend downwards, averaging 208k for the past two readings, which is in line with the level seen just before the pandemic's impact was felt in the US. GDP is expected to grow by around 4 percent (annualized) in the final quarter of the year.

Meanwhile, Congress finally passed the \$1 trillion infrastructure bill, unlocking funds to a wide range of areas including roads/bridges, railways, ports/airports and water/energy. In addition, the House passed President Biden's social safety and climate bill (Build Back Better Act) for a total value of \$1.7 trillion, which is less than half the original target of \$3.5 trillion.

European slowdown

A surge in COVID infections across Europe through October and November - even in some



countries with high vaccination rates - ushered in a new range of restrictions that is set to slow the economic recovery in 4Q21 and possibly beyond. This included tighter rules for unvaccinated people in Germany and an even harsher full lockdown in Austria. The economic impact of this wave is likely to be less severe than that associated with earlier ones, not least because vaccinations have lowered the risk of infections causing severe disease (and thus changing people's behavior) and firms and individuals are better adapted to restrictions than before. Still, governments look set to adopt a precautionary approach in terms of public health policy and with some health systems already under severe pressure, restrictions could even tighten if the Omicron variant turns out to be more infectious or deadly than earlier virus strains.

So far, signs of any negative impact on economic activity have been limited. The Eurozone composite PMI remained in solid growth territory at 55.4 in November and up from 54.2 in October; however, the survey's drop in business confidence suggests that the improvement could be short-lived as firms anticipate pandemic-related disruption to increase - potentially worsening supply chain issues. Similarly, the unemployment rate has continued to fall reaching 7.3 percent in October (versus a pandemic peak of 8.6 percent last year), but would likely capture a softening of economic conditions only with a lag. But overall, having picked-up to 2.1-2.2 percent q/q in both Q2 and Q3 2022, Eurozone economic growth is now set to slow to around 0.7 percent in Q4, with output only just exceeding pre-Covid levels and still far from its pre-pandemic path. Looking ahead, growth in 2022 is seen at around 4 percent versus 5.1 percent this year.

Meanwhile in the UK, the Bank of England surprised the markets by leaving interest rates on hold in November versus expectations of a 15 bps increase (from 0.1 percent to 0.25 percent). The hike could now come at the December 16 meeting instead, although given worries over Omicron even this move seems uncertain. UK inflation jumped to a 10-year high of 4.2 percent y/y in November driven by energy and fuel price rises and is forecast to peak as high as 6 percent next April.

Japan's economy contracts

Japan's economy contracted by a more-than-expected 3.6 percent annualized rate in the third quarter (-0.9 percent q/q). The decline, which followed a gain of 2.0 percent in 2Q21, was caused by a combination of supply-chain disruptions and the state of emergency that was extended during the quarter to contain resurgent COVID-19. Fixed investment (-8.2 percent) and private consumption

home in France, Jean-Claude Trichet, the president of the ECB, organizes the injection of billions of euros of liquidity in August.

Calm returns before the collapse of Lehman Brothers in September 2008, sending shockwaves around the world. The ECB ups its response by offering unlimited credit to banks at fixed interest rates, while lowering its collateral requirements.

'Whatever it takes'

In early 2010, the escalation of the Greek sovereign debt crisis puts the single currency under pressure and threatens to spread to other countries in the eurozone. To counter speculation on countries being squeezed by rising interest rates for their debt, the ECB begins buying sovereign bonds, first from Greece, then Portugal, Spain, Ireland and Italy to allow them to finance themselves sustainably.

Around 210 billion euros (\$237 billion) are spent between 2010 and 2012 under the controversial "SMP" program, the target of fierce criticism from

(-5.1 percent) were especially hard-hit. Economic growth has struggled to take off while the pandemic persists, forcing policymakers to maintain extensive fiscal and monetary support, including a new, record-breaking stimulus package worth 56 trillion yen (\$490 billion) which Prime Minister Fumio Kishida unveiled in mid-November.

Chinese GDP growth slows

China's GDP growth softened to 4.9 percent in 3Q21, easing from record rates set earlier in the year. The quarter was notable for serious energy shortages affecting businesses and industry, a property market slowdown that almost caused real estate giant Evergrande to default on its obligations, and repeated lockdowns imposed on cities across the country as China persevered with its zero tolerance policy towards COVID-19. The energy crunch was exacerbated by government restrictions on carbon emissions and coal usage, which along with soaring commodity prices more generally, pushed producer price inflation in October to its fastest rate since 1995 (+13.5 percent y/y). Inflation pass-through to consumers was substantially less - the CPI rose by only 1.5 percent y/y in comparison - suggesting that businesses had so far borne the brunt of the surge in raw materials and input costs.

India's GDP grew by 8.4 percent y/y 3Q21 (2Q of FY21-22) moderating from the exceptional 20 percent in 2Q21, mainly on a fading base effect. By sector, growth in Q3 was underpinned by private consumption (8.6 percent), government spending (8.7 percent), investment (11 percent) and exports (19.6 percent). Activity and sentiment was also helped by an improvement in virus-related conditions, with new daily infections down to pre-second wave levels of around 26,000 by end-September versus a peak of nearly 400,000 in May (they have since fallen further still to just 8,000).

Oil prices drop

Having been above \$80/bbl for several weeks, Brent crude oil prices plunged in late November, rattled by the spread of the Omicron variant and the prospect of accelerated Fed tapering of its asset purchase program. Tighter monetary policy is typically bearish for commodities. International crude oil benchmark Brent dropped 16.4 percent in November to close at \$70.6/bbl, its worst monthly performance since March 2020. Moves by large oil consuming nations to coordinate a release from their strategic oil reserves (to lower domestic fuel prices) also helped shift sentiment in that month in a more bearish direction. About 85 mb of crude oil is scheduled to be released by the end of 1Q22. By mid-December, oil prices had partially recovered to \$75.

OPEC+ held its ministerial meeting on 2 December amid speculation that it would react to the SPR releases and the emergence of Omicron by pausing or even reversing the planned supply increase for January. OPEC+ has consistently maintained that oil demand remains fragile while the virus continues to spread and that oil balances will swing into a heavy surplus as early as 1Q22, posing a downside risk to prices. In the end, OPEC ministers opted to continue increasing supply at the monthly rate of 400 kb/d but also gave themselves the option of adjusting production on the fly should oil demand weaken. The actual supply increase may fall short of target due to supply outages and capacity constraints among some members.

central bankers in Germany, who, unfazed by the crisis, see it as a means of directly financing states, a no-go under the European treaties.

As banks balk at the idea of providing more credit in 2011, the ECB under its new president, Mario Draghi, launches a series of exceptional inexpensive loan schemes, known as LTROs (Long-Term Targeted Refinancing Operation). In August 2012, with investors still convinced that the eurozone risks going under, Draghi improvises his famous utterance that the ECB will do "whatever it takes" within its mandate to save the euro, assuaging market fears.

To back up its threat, the ECB brings out a financial bazooka, "Outright Monetary Transactions", to buy unlimited amounts of debt from vulnerable countries. The program never needs to be used.

Deflation challenge

With the sovereign debt crisis in the rear-view mirror, Europe comes face-to-face with deflation in

IBS collaborates with Cambridge for English tests

KUWAIT: The Institute of Banking Studies has contracted with Cambridge Assessment English (part of the University of Cambridge) in the United Kingdom to offer English standard placement tests and is now providing this service for candidates in the banking sector and other sectors in Kuwait. Eng Suha Isaac was pleased that the Institute has collaborated with Cambridge University for the eighth year in a row in this field. This test was recently developed and the Institute has been named "Trusted Partner" for English-language tests by Cambridge Assessment English.



Eng Suha Isaac

The University of Cambridge was an early pioneer in the field of English testing and has been at the forefront of this field for over 100 years. The CPT is a new computerized test which has been designed using Artificial Intelligence. It combines the high academic standards of a world-leading academic institution with the latest technological developments.

It is an adaptive test of general English, which tests Reading, Use of English and Listening. The test is suitable for candidates of any level. Each learner gets a test score as well as a CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) level.

Burgan Bank reveals KD 125,000 cash prize winner

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced Afrah Abdullah Mohammad as the new KD 125,000 cash prize winner in the Yawmi quarterly draw. The winner expressed her excitement for being the winner of the rewarding cash prize with Yawmi Account from Burgan Bank.

The Yawmi quarterly draw offers customers chances to win higher rewards, entitling one lucky customer to win KD 125,000 cash prize every three months. To enter Burgan Bank's Yawmi quarterly draws, customers should maintain a minimum amount of KD 500 in their account for two months prior to the draw date. Additionally, every KD 10 in the account will entitle customers to one chance of winning.

2014, a self-sustaining downwards spiral in prices, salaries and investments. The ECB's interest rates, its main lever for affecting the economy, have been kept at low levels for years to stimulate growth.

To stop the fall in prices, the Frankfurt-based institution takes the unprecedented step of taking its rates into negative territory, including a -0.10 percent overnight deposit rate, penalizing banks who sit on their money instead of lending it out.

In parallel, a series of big new loans known as TLTROs (Targeted Long-Term Refinancing Operations) are handed out to banks that increase their supplies of credit to business.

With inflation going negative at the end of 2014, the ECB announces a massive program of asset purchases in January 2015 known as quantitative easing to further try to fuel the economy.

At the beginning of 2020, the spread of the novel coronavirus sends ripples through financial markets. The new president of the ECB, Christine Lagarde, holds a press conference from her kitchen. —AFP

Sub-prime to COVID: How ECB reacted in times of crisis

BRUSSELS: The coronavirus pandemic is not the first crisis to force monetary policymakers into drastic action to avert economic disaster. As the European Central Bank readies for a crunch meeting Thursday to discuss soaring inflation and a path out of stimulus, here is a look at other times the Frankfurt institution was put to the test, and how it reacted.

Sub-prime fallout

The sub-prime mortgage crisis explodes mid-2007 in the United States, leading banks around the globe to stop lending to each other and threatening the financial system with collapse. From his summer

Lifestyle | Features



Fisher, Sacha celebrate being together in style

The couple - who have children Olive, 12, Elula, eight, and Montgomery, four, together - marked two decades since they first met at a party with an "amazing" night away in California and the 'Confessions of a Shopaholic' star admitted it was lovely to return to a place they had such fond memories of. Speaking on Australia's 'Today' show, Isla said: "We went away to a place for the night that is somewhere we had been early on in our relationship, when we first went to California. "So it

was just nice to go back there, and it was actually just amazing." The 'Back to the Outback' star is "very grateful" she's been with Sacha - who she married in 2010 - for so long. She joked: "You do count the years, but they do all of a sudden get to 20. It's a lot, it's a lot." She then added: "But I'm very grateful." The former 'Home and Away' star's comments came a few days after she and the 'Trial of the Chicago 7' star reflected on their 20-year relationship.

Megan Thee Stallion dedicated award to her late grandmother



The 'WAP' hitmaker was "honored" to receive the prize in her hometown of Houston - where she was raised after being born in San Antonio - on Sunday in recognition of her local philanthropic efforts. The 26-year-old hip-hop artist said: "I'm so honored. It's my responsibility to take care of the city that took care of me. My grandma always taught me to be kind and giving. I learned that from her." The 'Body' rapper - whose real name is Megan Pete - also acknowledged how her mother and grandmother - who both passed away in 2019 - had inspired her to complete her health administration degree after she recently graduated from Texas Southern University. She said: "I was raised by very giving women so I want to dedicate this award to my grandma because she taught me to be the woman I am today." Megan later admitted to being grateful for the "recognition" but that she was "just happy" to help out the city that raised her.

Armie Hammer leaves his treatment facility



The 'Call Me By Your Name' actor sought help for drug, alcohol and sex issues in May amid a police investigation into allegations of sexual assault made against him, but his lawyer has returned he is no longer at the Florida clinic and is "doing great". His lawyer confirmed to E! News: "I can confirm that Mr Hammer has left the treatment facility and is doing great." It was revealed in June the 'Rebecca' actor had left the Cayman Islands, where he had spent most of the previous year, to check into the treatment facility, and had the support of his estranged wife Elizabeth Chambers and their children Harper, seven, and four-year-old Ford. A family friend explained at the time Armie was "committed to getting healthy and having custody of his kids." The insider added: "This is a clear sign that he is taking back control [of] his life and knows that this [is] a step towards his overall well being."

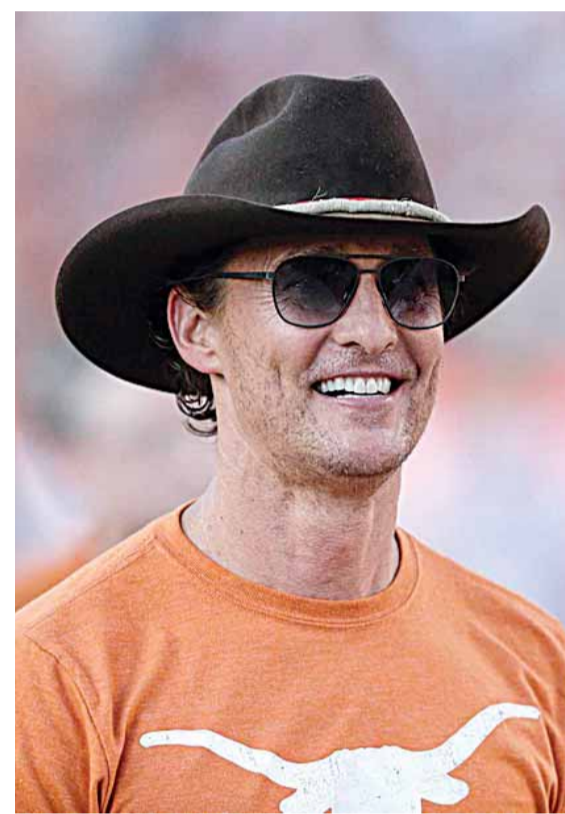
Kim Kardashian West pays pianist to wake her kids up



The 41-year-old reality star has revealed the unique way she is getting her brood - North, eight, Saint, six, Chicago, three, and Psalm, two - in the festive spirit and out of bed each morning. Kim hired piano player Philip Cornish to tinkle the ivories in her household. Alongside a snap of the musician performing in her living room next to her rather large Christmas tree, she wrote on her Instagram Story: "Good morning! "Every morning during the month of December @philthekeys comes to play Christmas music on the piano to wake up the kids." The post came hours after Kim thanked her plastic surgeon for keeping her "looking so young". The mother-of-four admitted on the final episode of her family's show 'Keeping Up with the Kardashians', which aired in June, that she will "get a facelift by the time she is 55".

John Legend's tattoo features his daughter's art work

The 'All of Me' hitmaker's wife Chrissy Teigen called him out last week for not following through with their pact to get five-year-old Luna's drawings permanently inked on their bodies, but he's now gone through with the pledge and had a simple flower design etched onto his forearm. He shared a photo of the tattoo on his Instagram Story and wrote: "New tattoo by @winterstone based on a sketch by Luna. (sic)" In an earlier post, the 42-year-old star had shared a video of the tattoo artist inking the trio of flowers onto his skin, tagging both the artist and his wife Chrissy into the post. The 'Lip Sync Battle' star shared a video on her own Instagram Story, revealing Winter was tattooing John at their house. She excitedly captioned the post: "It's happening!" Chrissy previously revealed she had had a butterfly tattoo inspired by one of Luna's drawings but John - with whom she also has three-year-old son Miles - had failed to go through with a promise to get one too.



Matthew McConaughey never dreamed of a career in politics

The 52-year-old actor recently ruled himself out of the running for Governor of Texas but admitted he thinks "leading and serving" in some way is what the future holds for him. He told 'Extra' of his future in politics: "It's never been a dream on my list... But going forward, leading and serving in the best way I can possible is something that's going to help fulfill whatever dream it is I'm after. Sure, that's part of the dream. Where that will be in what position? I don't know in the future." This isn't the first time Matthew has thought of a career outside of acting as when his career has a slump, he considered becoming a high school football coach. He admitted: "When I took two years off from doing the rom-coms and I didn't get offered a script in Hollywood for over two years, and thought I may have just taken a one-way ticket out of Hollywood. Coaching high school was a thought that I said, 'Maybe, maybe that's my next career.'" The 'Dallas Buyers Club' star hopes when his and wife Camila Alves' three children, Levi, 13, Vida, 11, and eight-year-old Livingston, grow up, they'll still be very close to him.

Tom Hanks, Kristen, Simone Biles salute military families



Gary Sinise - who starred as Lieutenant Dan Taylor in 'Forrest Gump' - once again invited his co-star from the 1994 rom-com classic, plus the 'Frozen' star, and the 24-year-old Olympian respectively, to his virtual Snowball Express fundraiser to send children who have lost parents in battle special messages this festive season to lift their spirits. Usually the youngsters would join A-listers at the Walt Disney World Resort for some Yuletide fun, but the Gary Sinise Foundation - a cognitive health and mental wellness network pro-

viding transformative care to veterans - had to axe the in-person function due to COVID-19. Tom, 65, was joined by his 'Toy Story' co-star Tim Allen, 68, and the Hollywood stars sent the kids a message as their characters Woody and Buzz from the Disney blockbuster franchise. Norman Reedus, Gordon Ramsay, Brett Goldstein also surprised the kids, while Bindi and Robert Irwin - the offspring of the late 'Crocodile Hunter' Steve Irwin - gave the children a behind-the-scenes tour of their Australia Zoo in Queensland's Sunshine Coast.



Doja Cat has tested positive for COVID

The 'Woman' hitmaker has been forced to scrap her performances as part of the iHeartRadio Jingle Ball Tour in December, after catching the virus along with members of her production team. She told fans on Instagram: "As most of you probably heard earlier, a few members on my production team tested positive for COVID 19 and I had to cancel a couple of my upcoming performances as a safety precaution. "Unfortunately, I'm sad to share that I just tested positive as well and will no longer be able to perform on the rest of the iHeartRadio Jingle Ball Tour." The 26-year-old rapper admitted her "spirits are down" because she is missing out on the festive concerts, but she reassured her fans that she is "doing OK". She concluded: "While my spirits are down since I can't be there to celebrate the holiday with my fans in Philly, DC, Atlanta and Miami, I'm doing ok and look forward to recovering and getting back out there as soon as I can! The rest of the tour stops have some really great lineups, wish I could be there. Much love XO. (sic)"

Lifestyle | Features

HONG KONG'S ANNUAL HARBOR SWIM RESUMES AFTER 3 YEARS



Swimmers wait at the starting line during the annual harbour swimming race in Hong Kong. —AFP photos



Swimmers compete during the annual harbour swimming race in Hong Kong.



Swimmers pose for photos at the starting point during the annual harbour swimming race in Hong Kong.



Swimmers swim across Hong Kong's Victoria Harbour during the annual harbour swimming race in Hong Kong.

An annual swim across Hong Kong's Victoria Harbor was held yesterday for the first time in three years, after being cancelled due to the pro-democracy protests and then the pandemic. The one-kilometer race is among the few major sporting events permitted to resume this year in the financial hub. However, under the

government's strict anti-virus restrictions only half of the usual 3,000 swimmers were allowed to compete, and all were required to have received two vaccinations and tested COVID negative prior to the event.

Double Olympic silver medal winner Siobhan Haughey was among a number of professional athletes leading cheers

for the swimmers when they plunged into the cool seawater as Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam's airhorn blared. Leung Yuen-ying, 79, the oldest swimmer this year, joined the race with her daughter. "My father used to race this so I have a special feeling for it," Leung told reporters. "I hope that one generation after another can continue to have

this meaningful event in Hong Kong," she said.

The Harbor Race was scrapped last year thanks to the pandemic, with the massive pro-democracy demonstrations rocking the city causing its cancellation in 2019. First held in 1906, it has been suspended for two periods in history - for five years in the 1940s around the

Japanese occupation, and for three decades thanks to pollution before being reinstated in 2011. The resumption of the race comes as the city reports zero local infections for months as well as maintaining strict quarantine rules for arrivals. Hong Kong has recorded nearly 12,500 infections and 213 deaths from the coronavirus. —AFP



Seihan Mori, master of the ancient Kiyomizu temple writes the Chinese character, known in Japan as 'kanji', for 'gold', which was selected as the single best kanji to symbolize the year of 2021 at the temple in Kyoto. —AFP

'MONSTER' INOUE: JAPAN'S UNBEATEN BOXER WITH DYNAMITE IN HIS FISTS

JAPAN PICKS OLYMPIC 'GOLD' AS KANJI CHARACTER OF THE YEAR

The linguistic symbol for "gold" was voted Japan's character of the year yesterday in honor of the Tokyo Olympics, which went ahead despite virus postponement, sexism scandals and a near-total ban on spectators. Japan won a record 27 gold medals at Tokyo 2020, including three of the four first-ever skateboarding victories. Gymnastics star Daiki Hashimoto and judo siblings Uta and Hifumi Abe were among the champions.

"The Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics became bright news, a ray of light for a society that had been in the dark, suffering from the coronavirus pandemic for a long time," the vote's organizers said. Public sentiment towards the Olympics has not always been celebratory, with media polls before the event showing the vast majority of people in Japan were against it going ahead in summer 2021.

Japanese TV stations broadcasted yesterday's announcement live as Seihan Mori, master of the ancient Kiyomizu temple in Kyoto, painted the character on a large white panel with an ink-soaked calligraphy brush. Unlike last year, when most of the top 10 characters were virus-related, this year's contenders had positive meanings.

"Wa" or "rings" was in second place, followed by others such as "change", "new" and "hope". The top kanji of 2020 was "mitsu" - meaning dense, crowded and close - evoking the three situations people in Japan were urged to avoid to prevent infection. "Kin" or "gold", which also means money, previously won the annual vote in 2016 and 2012, after the Rio and London Olympics. Some people called this year's choice unoriginal, with one person tweeting: "I want 'kin' (to) be banned from use in an Olympic year". —AFP

Naoya Inoue's nickname is "Monster" and with good reason - he is regarded as one of boxing's best pound-for-pound fighters and has won all his 21 bouts, 18 by knockout. The reigning WBA and IBF bantamweight world champion made his Las Vegas debut last year with a typically devastating knockout win and fights back home in Japan for the first time in two years tomorrow.

Thailand's Aran Dipaen is expected to pose few problems at a sumo hall in Tokyo for the ferocious-punching 28-year-old Inoue, who has set his sights on unifying all four major bantamweight belts next year. "I want to win in a way that completely exceeds expectations," Inoue said ahead of the fight with Dipaen, the IBF's sixth-ranked challenger, who has a 12-2 record with 11 knockouts. "I don't want to let him touch me. I don't want to let him even graze me."

Inoue, who comes from a boxing family, burst on to the scene as an amateur and has blitzed his way through opponents since turning professional in 2012. Although he is a star in Japan, his limited exposure in the US means he is still something of an enigma overseas. After knocking out Australia's Jason Moloney in the seventh round of an eye-catching Las Vegas debut in October 2020, he returned there in June this year to dispatch Michael Dasmarias of the Philippines inside three rounds, again by KO.

'Generational talent'

Veteran American promoter Bob Arum - who signed Inoue to his Top Rank stable to fight in the US - had no doubts the Japanese fighter is set for global stardom. "Naoya Inoue is a generational talent, the sort of fighter who comes around once a decade," said Arum - who has worked with greats from Muhammad Ali to Manny Pacquiao in a legendary career spanning half a century. "He will be a major star stateside in no time. You are looking at an all-time great who is entering the prime of what will be a historic career."

Inoue took up boxing at an early age. His father Shingo is a former amateur while his younger brother Takuma is a fellow professional with a 15-1



Naoya Inoue of Japan celebrates his win over Nonito Donaire of Philippines after their World Boxing Super Series bantamweight final at Saitama Super Arena in Saitama. —AFP

win-loss record and has held the WBC interim bantamweight title. Naoya Inoue started his career at light flyweight, capturing the WBC crown in only his sixth professional fight. He vacated the title to challenge Argentine WBO super flyweight champion Omar Narvaez, and knocked him out in the second round.

Inoue moved up to bantamweight and claimed the WBA belt in his first title fight, before winning the World Boxing Super Series in November 2019. His epic final victory over Filipino veteran four-weight world champion Nonito Donaire in a brutal contest was voted fight of the year by the Boxing Writers Association of America. It was the first time Inoue had been seriously tested in his professional career. He suffered a fractured right eye socket and double vision early in the fight before battling back to floor Donaire in the 11th round and seal a unanimous points win.

Quiet perfectionist

Dipaen is unlikely to give him a similar workout

in Tokyo, but stronger challenges lie ahead as Inoue eyes a bout against another Filipino, WBO champion John Riel Casimero, next year. Inoue is a perfectionist who regularly proclaims himself unsatisfied with his performances, even after blowing opponents away. He might be a "monster" in the ring, but Inoue is quiet and mild-mannered away from boxing. He married his childhood sweetheart and has three children. Inoue has ambitions of a move up in weight class once he has finished steamrolling the bantamweight division.

Inoue's focus remains solely on a successful defense of his WBA and IBF belts tomorrow. "There are lots of expectations on me for this fight, but if I get caught up in the atmosphere, where everyone wants me to knock him out early, I won't actually be able to box," local media quoted him as saying of the Dipaen contest. Whatever lies ahead, should he win as expected, Inoue will continue to do it his way. "I want to approach each match the same, regardless of who my opponent is," he said. "You have to keep a cool head." —AFP

Lifestyle | Features

Europe's big meat, dairy firms accused of climate 'greenwash'

Greenhouse gas emissions from Europe's biggest meat and dairy firms continue to increase, according to a new report yesterday, which found many firms are polluting "with impunity". The non-profit Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) said many major companies had no climate plans or targets and even among those that do it raised concerns about "greenwashing", calling on governments to step up regulation.

The study looked at 35 of the largest beef, poultry and dairy companies headquartered in the EU, UK and Switzerland, examining their possible climate plans and emissions from their supply chains, in particular livestock, a major emitter of greenhouse gases. According to the analysis, these companies were responsible for seven percent of EU emissions in 2018, while the emissions of the top 20 exceed those of the Netherlands. "The climate footprint of Europe's big meat and dairy companies rival the fossil fuel giants yet they continue to operate with impunity," said IATP European Director Shefali Sharma.

"The handful of companies that have climate plans rely on accounting tricks, greenwash, and dubious offsets to distract from the fundamental changes needed to cut emissions, while off-load-

ing many of the costs and risks onto farmers in their supply chains." Seven out of the 10 companies that the report tracked over time saw their climate footprint grow between 2016 and 2018. The emissions of Irish beef producer ABP surged 45 percent and Germany's Tonnies, which supplies Aldi, 30 percent.

In dairy, French firms Danone and Lactalis saw their emissions climb 15 percent and 30 percent respectively from 2015 to 2017, according to the research. Of the 20 companies analyzed, only four report emissions from their entire supply chain. IATP said, even though livestock production accounts for the lion's share of emissions. And only three - Nestle, FrieslandCampina and ABP - commit to an overall reduction in livestock emissions.

The IATP was particularly critical of those companies that it said were looking to reduce the emissions per kilo of meat or liter of milk - meaning their overall carbon footprint can grow if they expand production. It said some firms touted regenerative farming practices aimed at creating healthier soils, but said companies "invest relatively little and off-load the bulk of the cost and risk onto farmers". Increasing exports also mean consumer behavior within Europe is only part of the picture, it added. —AFP



Photo shows hanged meat carcasses at the Rungis International Market, southern Paris. The world's largest fresh produce market will once again be present during the festive season, despite the fifth wave of COVID. —AFP



New 'West Side Story': The top film in North America

"West Side Story," Steven Spielberg's remake of the hugely popular 1961 movie musical, danced to the top of the North American box office in its opening weekend, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations said Sunday. Spielberg's updated take on the New York-set "Romeo and Juliet" story—complete with music, dance numbers and a storyline that first appeared on Broadway in 1957 in a legendary collaboration of composers Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim—took in an estimated \$10.5 million for the Friday-to-Sunday period.

The square-jawed Ansel Elgort—known for his roles in "The Fault in Our Stars" and the "Divergent" series—plays the handsome Tony, a former member of the Jets, a street gang drawn from recent European immigrants, while Rachel Zegler plays Maria, newly arrived from Puerto Rico and thus closer to rival gang the Sharks.

Critics say the movie has a chance to be the first remake since "The Departed" in 2006 to win an Oscar for best picture. Last week's top film, Disney's animated musical fantasy "Encanto," slipped to second place, earning \$9.4 million, for a three-week total of \$71.3 million. With music composed by Lin-Manuel Miranda, the film recounts the story of a family in rural Colombia endowed with special powers—except for daughter Mirabel, who ends up having to save the others. In third place was Sony's "Ghostbusters: Afterlife," the latest chapter in that supernatural franchise, at \$7.1 million. Paul Rudd, Carrie Coon and McKenna Grace star as the ghostly tale moves from 1980s Manhattan to present-day small-town Oklahoma. Far back in fourth place was Ridley Scott's new crime drama "House of Gucci," at \$4.1 million. The film stars Adam Driver and Lady Gaga in the story of how a Gucci fashion executive was murdered by a hit-man hired by his vengeful ex-wife. —AFP

FROM FLOWER HAWKER TO FILM AUTEUR: INDIA'S NEW CINEMATIC SENSATION

At a bustling Indian market, a child laborer carrying bags of flowers was captivated by cameramen riding huge cranes during film shoots. Two decades later the boy has become his country's latest cinematic sensation. PS Vinodraj's low-budget debut movie "Koozhangal" - internationally known by its translated title "Pebbles" - has been selected as India's entry to the international feature film category at next year's Oscars.

The 32-year-old drew from his family's battle with poverty and his sister's experience of marital abuse to tell the story of an alcoholic father and his young son walking through a barren, unforgiving landscape in his home state of Tamil Nadu. "My real-life experience gave me toughness and has helped in this film. That kind of life has become the film," Vinodraj told AFP. The result is an observational drama Indian critics have described as a "masterpiece" and a "sensational debut... that is evocative, visceral and powerful".

It won the Tiger Award at the International Film Festival Rotterdam, with the jury saying the "seemingly simple and humble" effort was a "lesson in pure cinema". Vinodraj joins an emerging movement of Tamil directors - many from disadvantaged backgrounds like his own - addressing societal inequities through the voices and lives of everyday people. Had it not been picked up by the festival circuit his original plan was to show "Pebbles" in the villages where it was shot - with fewer than 40 actors and crew.

It is the culmination of the young filmmaker's long journey to the big screen. He started selling flowers in Madurai at the age of nine to support his family after his father died. "So much has happened in my life and those things have made me ready for this," he said through a translator. "I don't speak English nor do I have an education. Life's journey has taught me everything. Those are the metaphors in the film - that is life's journey."

Vinodraj worked throughout his childhood and teenage years, moving to different towns and cities. At one point, he was a laborer at a textile company in Tiruppur, where he "witnessed many people's lives being ruined in front of my eyes" over personal and financial woes. "Some got married very young and went through multiple struggles. All of that stayed with me, wanting to express those struggles."



Tamil film director PS Vinodraj (left) poses with actor Chellappandi during the 52nd International Film Festival of India in Panaji. PS Vinodraj's low-budget debut movie 'Koozhangal' - internationally known by its translated title 'Pebbles' - has been selected as India's entry to the international feature film category at next year's Oscars. —AFP

'Simple, honest stories'

Believing that education could help him fulfill his dream of becoming a director, the aspiring auteur tried to go back to school, but was told he was too old. He eventually moved to the state capital Chennai and broadened his cinematic knowledge by watching movies while working at a DVD store, before getting work as an assistant on short films and in theatre. As he sought ideas for his first feature film, Vinodraj's sister walked through the door of the family home, crying, her two-year-old child in her arms.

She had been forced out of her marital home by her husband, and made the 13-kilometre journey back on foot. "I had pain and I wondered why real life is such a struggle. And I realised, I am in cinema

- that's my tool. I can talk about my pain through cinema." The father-and-son journey in "Pebbles" is told through the eyes of the child, while Tamil Nadu's harsh rural environment and the toll it takes on his characters is a central theme of the film.

The title comes from a synonym Tamils use for hills - and the stones country-dwellers put in their mouths to ward off thirst on long journeys. "To know that this film has won the Tiger Award and is being sent as India's entry to the Oscars, I feel very proud," Vinodraj said. "Watching this film with an audience that has been so supportive, it feels like a big celebration for me." His next project is also inspired by a family situation, and he wants to keep making "simple, honest stories about life". —AFP

Elon Musk named the Time magazine person of the year

Time magazine yesterday named Tesla founder and space entrepreneur Elon Musk as its person of the year, capping a roller-coaster 2021 for the technology magnate. The brash South African-born 50-year-old with grand ambition overtook space race rival and Amazon founder Jeff Bezos to become the world's richest person this year.

In October his electric car company's valuation soared above a trillion dollars, and throughout the year his company SpaceX has teamed up with US space agency NASA to launch various missions including smashing a rocket into an asteroid in a test run for redirecting any future Earth-bound space rock. "Person of the Year is a marker of influence, and few individuals have had more influence than @elonmusk on life on Earth, and potentially life off Earth too," tweeted Time editor-in-chief Edward Felsenthal in announcing the



In this file photo, SpaceX founder Elon Musk celebrates after the successful launch of the SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket with the manned Crew Dragon spacecraft at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida. —AFP

winner.

Musk has appeared ever-present in American culture in recent years.

He has amassed 66 million Twitter followers and guest-hosted the famed late-night comedy show

Saturday Night Live in May. He speaks ambitiously about his interest in colonizing Mars, and plans orbital flights next year as part of SpaceX's planned American return to the Moon. And he is known to move markets and the value of cryptocurrencies with a single tweet.

But his main socio-economic influence for now is with his groundbreaking electric vehicles. "Our intent with Tesla was always that we would serve as an example to the car industry, and hope that they also make electric cars so that we can accelerate the transition to sustainable energy," Musk told Time in an interview released with the Person of the Year announcement. But outer space is at the forefront of Musk's ambitions as well. "His goal is to make humanity a multi-planet species," Time contributor and author Jeffrey Kluger said in the video. Time first presented its Person of the Year award in 1927. —AFP



Sports

Inter hammer Cagliari, take charge in Serie A

Napoli's title bid takes hit after crashing to Empoli loss

MILAN: Inter Milan took advantage of their title rivals slipping up with a thumping 4-0 win over Cagliari on Sunday which ensured they moved top of Serie A. Reigning champions Inter moved a point ahead of local rivals AC Milan with a statement performance at the San Siro against the Sardinians who had goalkeeper Alessio Cragno to thank the hosts didn't run up double figures.

Lautaro Martinez's brace and two more superb goals from Hakan Calhanoglu and Alexis Sanchez extended Inter's domestic unbeaten run to nine matches and allowed Simone Inzaghi's team to take charge in Italy following Milan's draw at Udinese on Saturday. Inter, who racked up 15 shots on target, hit the bar and missed a penalty, are also four points ahead of former leaders Napoli who slipped back to fourth following a shock 1-0 home defeat at the hands of surprise team Empoli.

"We saw a lot of good teams struggle after their European matches so we knew we needed to be focused. The boys were brilliant right from the start," said Inzaghi to DAZN. "We're top of the league and in the Champions League last 16 after 11 years, it's hard to do much better." Cagliari are second-from-bottom and their supine performance,

even with a number of absences, so angered manager Walter Mazzarri that he left his post-match interview with DAZN after answering just one question.

Martinez opened the scoring with a bullet header from Calhanoglu's corner just before the half hour, and Inter were poised to open a two-goal

with his back to the penalty area. Inter put the match to bed with two brilliant goals in two minutes, with Calhanoglu drifting in from the left flank and lashing home a powerful strike before Martinez made it 10 for the season in the 68th minute, collecting Barella's floated pass and dinking home a delicate finish.

Empoli stun Napoli

Patrick Cutrone's bizarre winner with 20 minutes remaining in Naples fired promoted Empoli seventh, above Roma and Lazio who lost 2-1 at Sassuolo, and hit Napoli's bid for a first title since the days of Diego Maradona. Cutrone rose highest for a corner and his flick flew at Andre-Frank Zambo Anguissa, who minutes after his return from injury headed his clearance into the back of Cutrone's head and then watched the ball fly back into his own goal.

It was an unfortunate way to lose for Napoli who had 30 shots, struck the bar through Eljif Elmas in the first half and had a Juan Jesus goal ruled out for offside nine minutes before Cutrone's winner. "The goal was a set-piece play that we've been working on for a long time," joked coach

Aurelio Andreazzoli. Napoli held top spot before last weekend's matches but have now also been overtaken by Atalanta who moved third with their 2-1 win at Verona. Napoli travel to Milan next weekend hoping to not fall further behind the pacesetters with key players either out or only just returning from injury.

Atalanta's warning shot

Atalanta are just three points behind Inter after coming back from Giovanni Simeone's 12th goal of the season with strikes in either half from Aleksei Miranchuk and Teun Koopmeiners at Verona. A sixth straight league win on the road also has Gian Piero Gasperini's side seven points above fifth-placed Fiorentina in the race for the Champions League. "Today we took a step forward, regarding mentality and determination, otherwise you don't win these kinds of matches," said Gasperini. The hard-fought win will be a boost for Atalanta after they missed out on the last 16 of the Champions League. They were in yesterday's draw for the Europa League play-off round after finishing third in Group F behind La Liga outfit Villarreal and Manchester United. — AFP



Lazio lost 2-1 at Sassuolo

half-time lead after Cragno brought down the marauding Denzel Dumfries. Cragno saved Martinez's penalty but four minutes after the break Sanchez doubled Inter's lead with a stunning volley after Nicolò Barella hooked over a flashy cross

ABCK-AmCham Kuwait hosts 19th Annual Golf Tournament

KUWAIT: ABCK-AmCham Kuwait held its 19th Annual Golf Tournament on December 4th at Sahara Kuwait Golf Resort. This Annual Golf Tournament event was sponsored by Platinum Sponsor - Kuwait and Gulf Link Transport Company (KGL); Gold Sponsor - Gas and Oil Field Services Company (GOFSCO), and the event's Exclusive Travel & Tourism Partner - IFA International Travel and Tourism (IFA).

The event began with opening remarks by AmCham Kuwait's Vice-Chair Dr. Arezou Harraf who expressed gratitude to AmCham Kuwait members for their consistent support over the years and thanked all the golfers for coming out to spend the day. Dr. Harraf also

welcomed the new golfers and commended them for their performance.

Dr. Harraf then moved on to recognize and thank the event sponsors - starting with the event's Exclusive Travel and Tourism partner - IFA International Travel & Tourism. Dr. Arezou Harraf recognized the event's sponsors and AmCham Kuwait's Champions - starting with the event's Gold Sponsor - Gas and Oil Field Services Company (GOFSCO) - represented by Partha Chaudhury, Vice president of commercial and contracts.

Dr. Harraf then recognized the event's Platinum Sponsor - KGL, as she highlighted that KGL also sponsored the Thanksgiving dinner

and stated that AmCham Kuwait was truly grateful for their constant support. KGL was represented by Jeffrey Wilder, Project Manager.

Next, AmCham Kuwait held its award ceremony which was presented by Dr. Harraf. Starting with the category awards, Longest Drive - won by Michaela Abey and Closest to the Pin - won by Johan du Toit. Consequently, the tournament winning teams were announced. The third place was earned by the team of Tobin Wait, Paul Pallister, Michaela Abey and Eoin Fitzgerald.

The second place was earned by the team of Adel Antabli, Dr. Scott Pezanowski, Partha Chaudhury and Gino Alvarez. The first place and winner of the Annual Golf Tournament was earned by the team of Philip Kotsis, Dan Leritz, Les Moskaliuk and Gabe DiMauro.

To finalize the event, the AmCham Kuwait team held a raffle. The raffle gifts included: special dinner invitations from 300 Fahrenheit Steakhouse; Dinner invitations and spa entries from Jumeirah Messilah Beach Hotel & Spa; Gym memberships, dinner vouchers and spa entries from the Crowne Plaza Kuwait Al-Thuraya City.

Other raffle prizes such as physiotherapy assessments were provided by DISC, in-store vouchers from Alshaya Company's - Footlocker, and introductory golf lessons from Sahara Kuwait Golf Course. The highlight of the event was the raffle prize of one Business class ticket to anywhere in Europe from IFA International Travel & Tourism. There was a photo session with the winners, the raffle gift sponsor representatives, and AmCham Kuwait's Vice-Chair. Dr. Harraf thanked AmCham Kuwait's team and the volunteers for organizing the event.



Arab Masters Tennis Tournament end in style

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The Arab Masters Tennis Tournament came to an end Sunday evening with Lebanon's players grabbing the lion's share in this first event that was held at the main stadium of Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah International Tennis Complex. Hadi Habib defeated Malik Jazairi from Tunis 4-6, 7-6, 11-9. In the doubles, Hassan Ibrahim and Hadi Habib defeated Egypt's Sherif Makhoul and Amr Mohamed 6-3, 6-2.

The closing ceremony was the climax of the Arab Masters Tournament. The closing ceremony was attended by the President of Kuwait Olympic Committee Sheikh Fahad Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad, Public Authority for Sport Director General Dr. Humoud Fulaiteh and his deputies, Tunisian World No 10 player Ons Jabeur was the guest of honor.

President of Kuwait and Arab Tennis Federations Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah welcomed Kuwait's guests. "On behalf of the organizing committee members, I celebrate the success of this event as we continue to strengthen contacts and maintain the spirit of love, while exchanging expertise. We are very proud that the tournament was witnessed by distinguished guests and we



had clean competitions." Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber said as he thanked those who participated in the tournament for their efforts.

Director General of Public Authority for Sport Dr. Humoud Fulaiteh thanked Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber and KTF board members for organizing the Masters tournament and lauded the exciting final singles match and the excellent atmosphere. He said an important factor that ensured the success of the tournament was the facilities at the Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah International Tennis Complex.

On her part, WTA's No 10 Ons Jabeur commended KTF interest in women's sport, adding she expects to see more women as world champions in coming years. She also spoke about the high level of the players who participated in the Arab Masters. Spanish Ambassador to Kuwait Miguel Dose Maro Aguilar said "Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdallah Tennis Complex is a model for the specialized facilities - besides being the host of Rafa Nadal Kuwait Academy."



Durant delivers monster night as Giannis, James post triple doubles

LOS ANGELES: Kevin Durant used all the weapons in his arsenal on Sunday, exploding for an NBA season-high 51 points and dishing out nine assists as the Brooklyn Nets clobbered the struggling Detroit Pistons 116-104. The 11-time all-star and the league's current leading scorer recorded his seventh 50-point game of his career and equaled the fifth highest scoring performance in Nets' franchise history.

Deron Williams holds the record with 57 points against Charlotte in 2012. Durant knew he had to take on a bigger role Sunday because the Nets were missing 2018 MVP James Harden and power forward Paul Millsap. Kyrie Irving, who is refusing to get vaccinated against the coronavirus, has yet to play a game this season. "I knew I probably needed to pick up a little more of the scoring tonight," said Durant, who took 31 shots.

"We were turning the ball over more than we should, and I was doing as much of that as anyone, so I figured I better just keep shooting." Durant added seven rebounds as the Nets won for the third time in their last four games. Patty Mills added 18 points and five assists for the Nets, while LaMarcus Aldridge had 15 points and Cam Thomas scored 13 for Brooklyn, who held the Pistons to just 13 points in the fourth quarter. "It was a good fourth quarter for us," said Durant. "We got some easy baskets off our defense. With guys out, other guys were stepping up, doing more and playing different roles for us." Cade Cunningham had 26 points, eight rebounds and six assists for the Pistons, who are last in the Eastern Conference with just four wins on the season. Frank Jackson had 25 points and Saben Lee finished with 17 points. Earlier Sunday, the league slapped Durant with a \$25,000 fine for cursing at an Atlanta Hawks fan in Atlanta on Friday. — AFP

Mobil 1 along with Red Bull Racing close the gap

KUWAIT: Mobil 1 along with Red Bull Racing is one of the most successful teams in recent Formula One history, winning 62 Formula One Grand Prix races, four Drivers' and four Constructors' World Championships during the last 15 years. The vast knowledge and expertise needed to succeed in Grand Prix Racing fits perfectly with the Mobil 1(tm) team's approach: It's about clear thinking, extensive research, and a combined effort of technology and creativity.

Commenting on the upgraded fuel, Red Bull Racing Honda Team Principal, Christian Horner, said: "Winning in Formula One comes as a result of an incredibly intricate process whereby competitive advantage is assembled from a huge variety of elements, all the way from aerodynamics through to horsepower and creating the optimum fuel for the power unit".

22 November 2021, Qatar:

Max Verstappen shrugged off a five-place grid penalty to claim second place and the point for fastest lap at the Qatar Grand Prix, limiting the damage to his championship lead over Lewis Hamilton, as the driver won F1's first race at the Losail International Circuit from pole position. Sergio Perez, meanwhile, recovered from a Q2 exit in qualifying and an 11th-place start to surge through the pack and claim a hard won and well-deserved fourth place at the flag. With no fuel development permitted in 2020 and just one fuel specification allowed for this



year, ExxonMobil's diverse group of technicians focused their attention on the creation of a new formula for 2021, designing the new fuel in order to extract maximum performance from Honda's RA621H power unit in the RB16B.

About Mobil 1 in Motorsports

Racing provides the Mobil brand the ultimate testing ground to improve the technology in our range of oils and lubricants. Through each race season, our advanced products are utilized in the racing vehicles to help improve their performance and efficiency. Mobil 1(tm) motor oils serve as the lubricant of choice for many of the world's top race teams who compete in the most demanding and popular motorsports series in the world. The knowledge we gain through these partnerships is integral to how our scientists and engineers develop technologies and constantly push the boundaries.

About Mobil 1

The world's leading synthetic motor oil brand, Mobil 1 features anti-wear technology that provides performance beyond our conventional motor oils. This technology allows Mobil 1 to meet or exceed the toughest standards of car builders and to provide exceptional protection against engine wear, under normal or even some of the most extreme conditions. Mobil 1 flows quickly in extreme temperatures to protect critical engine parts and is designed to maximize engine performance and help extend engine life.

KAICO (Kuwait Automotive Imports Co WLL- Alshaya & AlSagar), the only authorized distributors of Mobil 1(tm) Oil since 75 years in Kuwait, has always been proactive in providing the best facilities in the Kuwait market, which is a component in the company's strategy that the customer's satisfaction always comes first.

Sports

PSG to face Real in Champions League last 16 after draw farce

Barcelona to play Napoli in Europa League knockout play-offs

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain will play Real Madrid while Liverpool take on Inter Milan in two of the standout ties in the last 16 of the Champions League after an embarrassed UEFA was forced to redo yesterday's draw following a "technical problem". PSG had initially been paired together with Manchester United in a tie that would have seen old rivals Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo come up against one another. However, the reworked draw sees them play record 13-time European champions Real while the Old Trafford side will face Spanish champions Atletico Madrid.

UEFA had earlier blamed a "material error" due to a "technical problem with the software of an external service provider" as it announced that the draw for the first knockout round of its flagship competition would have to be redone three hours later. With the draw being streamed live from UEFA's headquarters in Nyon, Switzerland, the problem was made evident when Manchester United's name was drawn to face Villarreal, despite the fact the two clubs could not have played one another having been in the same group.

The ball containing United's name did not then appear to be replaced correctly and so they were not included as possible opponents for the next team to come out of the pot. With the whole draw compromised, a red-faced UEFA was left with little choice but to start again. Qatar-owned PSG, with their array of attacking stars in Messi, Neymar, Kylian Mbappe and Angel Di Maria, now face a Real side currently top of La Liga, managed by former Paris coach Carlo Ancelotti.

The Spaniards knocked PSG out at the same stage of the competition in 2017/18 and relations between the clubs have recently been at a low ebb with Real openly courting the signature of Mbappe, whose contract expires at the end of this season.

Madrid are unlikely to be happy with the new draw as they had initially been given an easier tie on paper against Benfica in the very first match-up before the problems occurred.

Holders Chelsea face Lille

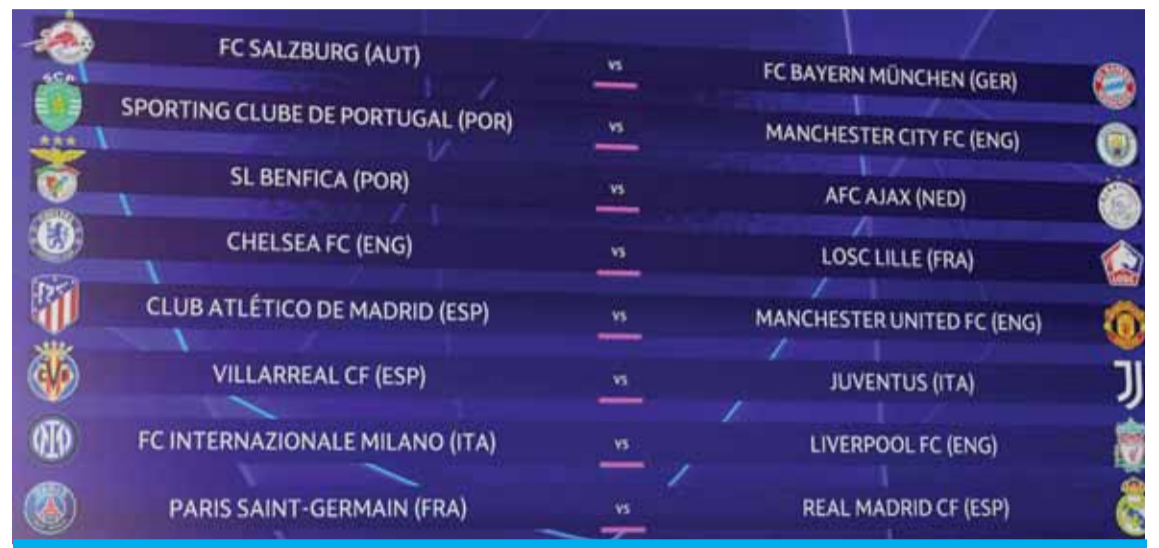
Liverpool face a similar situation. Having initially been drawn against knockout-phase debutants Red Bull Salzburg of Austria, they now face three-time former winners Inter, the Serie A champions and current Italian league leaders. Jurgen Klopp's side beat Inter's city rivals AC Milan twice in the group stage.

Salzburg instead got six-time winners Bayern Munich, while last season's beaten finalists Manchester City take on Sporting Lisbon and Benfica will play Ajax. City had initially been paired with Villarreal but coach Pep Guardiola accepted that a new draw was the only fair solution. "I think it is fair. It was a mistake but sometimes these things can happen. If there was a mistake you have to repeat so it is not suspicious," he said. Villarreal now face Juventus, while the one tie in the original, botched draw that was repeated later sees reigning champions Chelsea face French title-holders Lille.

Barcelona face Napoli

In another development, Barcelona will face Napoli in the Europa League knockout round play-off stage after the Catalan giants crashed out in the Champions League group stage for the first time since the 2000-01 season. Xavi Hernandez's Barca will continue their European campaign in the second-tier competition, with the winner of their tie with Napoli advancing to the last 16.

The draw for the play-off round, introduced this season as part of a slimmed-down Europa League format, includes the eight runners-up from the



NYON: This handout picture shows the final result of the Champions League round of 16 draw at the UEFA headquarters in Nyon yesterday. —AFP



Leicester to battle Randers in Europa

group stage and the eight third-placed teams from the Champions League. Borussia Dortmund were paired together with Rangers in yesterday's draw, while record six-time winners Sevilla take on Dinamo Zagreb. Porto will play Lazio and RB Leipzig were drawn alongside Real Sociedad. The first legs will take place on February 17 and the return matches on February 24.

The eight Europa League group winners qualified directly for the round of 16. West Ham United, Monaco, Lyon and Bayer Leverkusen are among those teams. "I'd say that our glass is completely full: Barcelona v Napoli and then Napoli v Barcelona will be two great matches at Champions League level!" tweeted Napoli president Aurelio De Laurentiis. Napoli and Barca met in the last 16 of the 2019-20 Champions League, with Barca advancing 4-2 on aggregate. The away goals rule has been removed from this season's European competitions, so ties level after 180 minutes will go to extra time, and then penalties if needed.

Leicester draw Randers

Also, Leicester City will meet Danish club Randers in the Europa Conference League knockout round play-offs, while Celtic were pitted against Norwegian Bodo/Glimt in the draw. Tottenham Hotspur could play Rapid Vienna depending on the outcome of their final group-stage game against Rennes, which was cancelled last week after a coronavirus outbreak in the Spurs squad.

UEFA has said the match will not be rescheduled. Its disciplinary body will determine a result for the scrapped fixture. Tottenham trail second-placed Vitesse Arnhem by three points in Group G but have the head-to-head advantage over the Dutch club. Marseille face Qarabag of Azerbaijan and PSV Eindhoven will play Maccabi Tel-Aviv in other ties, which feature the group runners-up of the new competition against the eight third-placed teams dropping down from the Europa League. —AFP

COVID-19 rocks Premier League

LONDON: Manchester United are in talks with the Premier League over the potential postponement of today's match at Brentford after the Old Trafford club became the latest top-flight team to be hit by a coronavirus outbreak. United halted first-team operations at their Carrington training complex for 24 hours yesterday after several players and staff tested positive for the virus. Ralf Rangnick's squad will not travel to London for the match until the outcome of the discussions with the Premier League was known.

Aston Villa and Brighton also revealed positive tests yesterday as the virus threatened to wreak havoc on the fixture list. "Manchester United can confirm that following PCR test confirmation of yesterday's positive LFT COVID-19 cases among the first-team staff and players, the decision has been taken to close down first-team operations at the Carrington Training Complex for 24 hours, to minimize risk of any further infection," a United statement said.

"Individuals who tested positive are isolating per Premier League protocols. "Given cancellation of training and disruption to the squad, and with the health of players and staff the priority, the club is in discussion with the Premier League whether it is safe for today's fixture against Brentford to continue, both from a COVID infection and player preparation perspective. "Team and staff travel to London will be deferred pending the result of that discussion."

It was reported positive lateral flow tests were returned by a small group of United players and staff on Sunday, with those individuals sent home before the training session began. With the Omicron variant sweep-

ing across Britain - forcing the government to reintroduce stricter COVID protocols - United's outbreak comes against a backdrop of growing virus issues at Premier League clubs. Tottenham's Premier League fixture against Brighton on Sunday was postponed after an outbreak at the north London club left boss Antonio Conte admitting he and his players were "scared".

'Common sense'

Conte said last Wednesday that eight players and five members of staff had tested positive, forcing the Europa Conference League match against Rennes to be postponed. Just moments before United's statement yesterday, Villa manager Steven Gerrard said his team had a virus outbreak, although their game against Norwich today is not believed to be in doubt.

Gerrard confirmed "a couple of staff members and a couple of players" had tested positive for COVID-19, which led to Villa cancelling training on Sunday. However, the squad trained as normal yesterday ahead of their trip to Carrow Road, where United won 1-0 on Saturday prior to their positive tests. "I made the decision yesterday. On the back of receiving a couple of positive cases, I thought it was just common sense to just cancel the session," Gerrard said.

"We re-tested this morning and we have got a couple of staff and a couple of players missing for the foreseeable future but the vast majority have come through the test this morning and we look forward to competing against Norwich." Brighton manager Graham Potter said there were "three or four" positive tests among his squad, but their match against Wolves on Wednesday is not currently under threat. "We've got a combination of injuries and a bit of COVID ourselves," Potter said. "We've got three or four, I would say, at the moment. And obviously that's something we have to deal with, like everybody else. —AFP

Brady sets another NFL record

LOS ANGELES: Tampa Bay's superstar quarterback Tom Brady nabbed yet another NFL passing record Sunday, but he saved his best for last in the Buccaneers' 33-27 overtime triumph over the Buffalo Bills. Brady broke former New Orleans Saints quarterback Drew Brees's record for career pass completions in the second quarter, with a 20-yard toss to wide receiver Mike Evans that took his total to 7,143.

But the individual achievement was in danger of being overshadowed by a furious Bills fightback as

Buffalo erased a 21-point second-half deficit to force overtime. As he has so often, Brady came through, finding wide receiver Breshad Perriman for a 58-yard game-winning touchdown - the 700th TD pass of his career.

"It was pretty cool. I'd rather it not come down to that, but in the end they all count the same," Brady said. "We've got to learn from it and move on. Next week we're playing for a division championship and that's pretty exciting." Brady, a 22-year veteran and three-time NFL Most Valuable Player, completed 31 of 46 passes for 363 yards and two touchdowns as the Bucs extended their lead over Buffalo atop the AFC East division. The Bucs looked headed to a comfortable win when they took a 24-3 lead into halftime. —AFP

Mbappe hits landmark

PARIS: Kylian Mbappe reached a century of Ligue 1 goals for Paris Saint-Germain with a brace in Sunday's 2-0 win over his old club Monaco at the Parc des Princes. Mbappe opened the scoring with an early penalty and then grabbed a second just before half-time after being set up by Lionel Messi to get his 100th goal in France's top flight since moving to PSG in 2017. The France striker, who also scored 16 league goals for Monaco at the beginning of his career, does not turn 23 until later this month.

The victory allowed PSG to extend their lead at the top of Ligue 1 to 13 points from Marseille, who won 2-0 at Strasbourg earlier on Sunday and have

a game in hand. Mauricio Pochettino's side ultimately eased to victory in a subdued atmosphere at the Parc des Princes, with one end of the stadium closed as a punishment after the club's ultras let off flares en masse during a recent game.

"It was a professional performance and we deserved to win. Kylian was extraordinary once again," Pochettino, who has been criticized for his team's performances this season, told broadcaster Amazon Prime. "We are very pleased with our results, but we can improve our performances," he admitted later. Monaco had lost just twice in their previous 12 visits to Paris in Ligue 1 and were the better side in the first half, but Mbappe's second goal right on the stroke of half-time was a hammer-blow from which they did not recover. Niko Kovac's team are eighth, five points adrift of the top three, with just one more round of games to come before France's short winter break. —AFP

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صَدَقَ اللَّهُ الْعَظِيمُ

Al-Kharafi Family

With great sadness
and sorrow mourns
the death of

**Fawzi Mohammed
Abdulmohsen Al-Kharafi**

Condolences will be accepted over the phone or by text
messages due to the current health situation

Men: Hossam Al-Kharafi: 99999077, Women: 99999066

إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ