



GCC: Attack on any Gulf state is an attack on all



RIYADH: (From left) GCC Secretary-General Nayef Al-Hajraf, Kuwait's Crown Prince HH Sheikh Mishal Al-Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, Oman's Deputy Prime Minister Fahd bin Mahmud Al-Said, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa and the UAE's Vice President, Prime Minister and Dubai Ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum pose for a family photo during the GCC summit yesterday. — AFP

RIYADH: Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said yesterday that the challenges facing the region need further coordination of "our efforts in a manner that boosts our countries' stability". This came during his speech at the 42nd GCC Summit hosted by Riyadh, as he presided over the gathering on behalf of King Salman bin Abdulaziz.

Closing remarks read by GCC Secretary General Nayef Al-Hajraf stressed the importance of joint efforts by Gulf states to face threats and avoid regional and international conflicts. "Member states of the (GCC) consider that any attack on any of them is an attack on them all, and any danger that threatens one of them is threatening them all," he said.

Prince Mohammad stressed the importance of completing the remaining steps and potentials of economic unity and security and defense systems in a way that enhances the GCC's international and regional role through unifying the political positions and developing partnerships with the international community. He extolled keenness of GCC states'

leaders, during his recent Gulf visit, on achieving the unity, abidance and solidarity that led to the success of the Al-Ula summit in January. He said he looks forward to fulfilling this prosperous economic bloc's needs that require a stimulating environment based on diversifying income sources and launching promising economic potentials, as well as coping with technical devel-

opments in all fields. This will lead to finding a balance in achieving stability and security of the international energy market and dealing with climate change through providing the world with clean energy and back innovation, he stated. Therefore, Saudi Arabia launched "the Saudi and Middle East
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Al-Kharafi family

on the sad demise of

Fawzi Mohammed

Abdalmohsen Al-Kharafi

May Allah Almighty bestow His mercy on him

Local

Saudi Crown Prince welcomes Kuwait Amir's representative in Riyadh

RIYADH/KUWAIT: Representative of His Highness the Amir, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, accompanied by an official delegation, arrived yesterday in Saudi Arabia to head the State of Kuwait delegation at the 42nd GCC Summit in Riyadh. Upon arrival, His Highness Sheikh Mishal was received by Saudi Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister, Prince Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, Saudi Ambassador to Kuwait Saudi Prince Sultan bin Saad bin Khaled, and Head of the Honorary Mission Saudi Prince Turki bin Mohammad bin Fahad Al-Saud, Minister of State and Member of the Cabinet and Acting Riyadh Prince Mohammad bin Abdulrahman bin Abdulaziz, GCC Secretary General Dr Nayef Falah Al-Hajraf, Riyadh General Secretariat Saudi Prince Faisal bin Abdulaziz bin Ayyaf, Kuwait Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Sheikh Ali Khaled Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Riyadh Police Director Major General Fahad bin Zaid Al-Mutairi, and Kuwait General Consul in Jeddah Wael Yousif Al-Enezi.

Leaders of Gulf Arab states arrived in the Saudi capital Riyadh yesterday for the bloc's annual summit, all of whom were received upon arrival by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman. In addition to representative of His Highness the Amir, the leaders include, United Arab Emirates Vice President, Prime Minister and Dubai ruler Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, Bahrain's King Hamad bin Issa Al-Khalifa and Oman's Deputy Prime Minister for Cabinet Affairs Fahad bin Mahmoud Al-Saeed.

Upon departure from Kuwait, His Highness Sheikh Mishal and his entourage were seen off at the airport by National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem, His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Head of the Crown Prince Diwan Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad



RIYADH: Kuwait's Crown Prince HH Sheikh Mishal Al-Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah attends the GCC summit yesterday. — AFP

Al-Sabah and senior State officials. His Highness the Crown Prince was accompanied by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al Ali Al-Sabah, Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and ranking officials at the Crown Prince Diwan. The 42nd session of the GCC countries took place amid aspirations to strengthen the process of joint Gulf cooperation, stability, security, interdependence and integration among the Gulf states.

Amir congratulates Bahrain's King

In other news, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah congratulated yesterday Bahrain's King Hamad bin Issa Al-Khalifa on the 22nd anniversary of his accession to the throne. In a cable he sent to the Bahraini monarch, His Highness the Amir praised the development achievements in the Kingdom of

Bahrain, wishing Bahrain and its People more success and prosperity. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables to the Bahraini king. National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem also sent a cable of congratulations to Bahrain's Speaker of the Council of Representatives Fawzia Zainal and President of Shura Council Ali Al-Saleh on the occasion.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday sent two cables of congratulations to the Iraqi President Dr Barham Salih and the Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi on the 100th anniversary of modern Iraq's establishment. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables. — KUNA



Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud meets His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — KUNA



RIYADH: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is welcomed by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud. — KUNA

GCC: Attack on any Gulf state...

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Green Initiatives" and announced the target

of zero carbon neutrality in 2030, the Saudi Crown Prince said.

Saudi Arabia continues making all efforts to boost the region's stability and security, and backing political solutions and dialogue to resolve conflicts, he said. He said he is looking forward that Iraq will complete the measures of forming a government able to continue work for stability, security and development of the coun-

try. The Saudi Crown Prince affirmed continued support to UN efforts to reach a political solution to the Yemeni crisis, in line with the three references and Saudi Arabia's initiative, to end the Yemeni crisis.

He stressed the importance of dealing seriously and effectively with Iran's nuclear and missile program in a way that contributes to achieving international and regional security and stability.

In addition, he affirmed the principles of good neighborliness, respecting UN resolutions and making the region free from all activities that destabilize the stability. He also emphasized that the kingdom is following developments in Afghanistan, calling for intensifying international and regional efforts to assist Afghan people and not to make the country a haven of terrorist organizations. — Agencies

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MoI blocks licenses of 247,000 expats: Report

KUWAIT: The interior ministry has placed a block on around 247,000 driving licenses of expatriate residents as instructed by Interior Ministry Undersecretary Sheikh Faisal Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah and tied their issuance to meeting certain conditions, Al-Jarida daily reported yesterday. Security sources said the block prevents renewal of the license until after updating the applicant's data at the Public Authority for Manpower, especially with regards to salary, academic qualification and job description.

It is also expected the traffic department will ask all residents to replace their licenses at the start of the new year. Sheikh Faisal met senior officials and insisted on filtering the driving licenses of expats and make sure they meet the stipulations for issuance.

Meanwhile, another report raised concerns about whether the interior ministry can face the challenge of renewing an estimated one million driving licenses if all holders of old licenses are asked to replace them with the new one (with the electronic chip). "Replacing this large number of licenses requires huge numbers of employees, in addition to large stocks of magnetic cards," sources quoted by Al-Rai daily said yesterday. The interior ministry refused to comment on the reports when contacted

for confirmation by Kuwait Times yesterday.

These measures come as local authorities scramble to find quick solutions to the country's debilitating traffic jams' problem. On Monday, MP Abdullah Al-Turaiji 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.



Kuwait receives two Eurofighter jets

KUWAIT: Kuwait celebrated the arrival of the first batch of the Eurofighter Typhoon Tranche 3 jets, as the army received two out of a total 28 fighters in a ceremony yesterday. Italian Ambassador to Kuwait Carlo Baldocchi

attended the event, along with Kuwait Army Chief of Staff Lt Gen Khaled Saleh Al-Sabah, Defense Ministry's Acting Undersecretary Sheikh Fahad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah and other ministry officials.

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ADVERTISING : 248356167
FAX : 248356201
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ACCOUNTS : 24833199 Extn. 125
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News in brief

Kuwait lists 49
COVID-19 cases

KUWAIT: The health ministry said on Monday Kuwait's confirmed daily coronavirus cases rose by 49 to 413,760, while no reported deaths left the total unchanged at 2,466. Another 32 people were cured of the virus, raising the total of those to have overcome the disease to 410,930, according to ministry spokesperson Dr Abdallah Al-Sanad in a statement. The number of people hospitalized with the virus at COVID-19 wards stood at 14, two of them have been admitted to intensive care units, he added, revealing that another 364 are receiving regular treatment. Some 23,342 swab tests were conducted over the last 24 hours bringing the total to 5,594,468, mentioned the official.

EU health measures

KUWAIT: Kuwaitis planning to travel to European Union countries should follow health measures put in place by authorities there after the increase in COVID-19 cases due to the emergence of the new Omicron variant, the Foreign Ministry said on Monday. Some countries in the 27-nation bloc require evidence of a third vaccination booster dose as a condition for the entry of tourists, the ministry consulate department explained in a statement. The department said it stood ready to respond to any queries from Kuwaiti citizens and to offer any assistance they may require.

Virtual conference on drugs

KUWAIT: Arab Federation for Drug prevention and its Secretariat General in Kuwait held a virtual conference on smuggling drugs in relation to security, terrorism and development. Secretary General of the Federation Dr Khalid Ahmad Al-Saleh explained risks of drugs on the health sector in any country, adding that there are many illnesses associated with drug use, most dangerous of which are AIDS, hepatic diseases as well as some cancers. Dr Al-Saleh spoke about the statistics issued by WHO on the obstacles of health development with its priorities targeting the youth in societies. He lauded Kuwait's contribution through the interior and health ministries in combating drugs.

Kuwait condemns Houthi attack

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Ministry on Monday condemned in the strongest terms the Houthi militia's continued attempts to threaten the security of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, particularly the firing of a ballistic missile towards the southern Saudi city of Khamis Mushait. In a press statement, the ministry said the continuity of these hostile actions and escalation against civilians and civil areas, which threatens the security of the Kingdom and the stability of the whole region, is a blatant violation of all international and humanitarian laws. It also urged the international community to take swift and decisive actions to stop these hostilities and bring perpetrators to account. The ministry expressed Kuwait's full support to the Kingdom and all the measures it takes to maintain its security, stability and sovereignty.

Kuwait, Sri Lanka
to improve labor
related cooperation

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Dr Mubarak Al-Azmi, Deputy General Director for Manpower Protection at the Public Authority for Manpower (PAM), met the

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Tents scattered at a camp in Khuwaisat, northwest of Kuwait Bay, on the weekend. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

US envoy hosts Kuwaiti creatives
at 'Art in Embassies' event

KUWAIT: US Ambassador to Kuwait Alina L. Romanowski hosted diplomats and a broad range of Kuwaitis at her residence on Monday for an 'Art in Embassies' reception. The guests included ambassadors, government officials, visual artists, curators, and most notably, Sheikh Hanouf Al-Sabah, wife of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Ahmed Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah.

"Tonight, it is my pleasure to share with you a selection of 17 mixed media art pieces by American women artists. The artists featured in this exhibition come from a range of personal and professional backgrounds - immigrants, Native Americans, and both emerging and established artists," Ambassador Romanowski said.

"The works you will see tonight came to Kuwait from galleries across the United States through a US Department of State program called 'Art in Embassies,'" the Ambassador added. "Through this program, I was given the opportunity to select these art pieces by American artists and have them displayed at my residence here in Kuwait."

Ambassador Romanowski highlighted one of the art pieces in the collection by Kuwait-born artist Zahraa Marwan, whose mother and brother were in attendance.

"It is a special honor that one of the artists whose work is exhibited tonight, Zahraa Marwan, has roots in Kuwait," she said. "During my time in



Kuwait, I have been privileged to meet many of the talented Kuwaiti female artists who work across many mediums. I have enjoyed visiting the many local and historically rich museums in Kuwait, including the Sadu House, Beit Al-Othman, the Tareq Rajab Museum, and Al-Qurain museum, among others. The US Embassy stands ready to

support creatives and artists in Kuwait."

The guests spent the rest of the evening viewing the all-female artist collection. The US State Department's Art in Embassies program has installed more than 70 permanent art collections in more than 200 diplomatic facilities in 189 countries.

Ambassador of Sri Lanka to Kuwait Othman Jawhar and his delegation yesterday to discuss bilateral cooperation in recruiting workers to Kuwait. During the meeting, Azmi noted that PAM is improving the recruitment process to meet the development requirements of Kuwait's economy. He added PAM provides legal protection to workers to ensure a suitable work environment and secure the labor rights of all workers, including Sri Lankans in both the private and domestic sectors. Ambassador Jawhar praised the efforts and developments of PAM and assured the strengthening of manpower relations between the two countries.



KUWAIT: Ambassador of India to Kuwait Sibi George met yesterday with Mishal Ibrahim Modhaf, Kuwait's Assistant Foreign Minister for Consular Affairs and discussed bilateral ties, diaspora matters including engineers' issues, nurses' issues, stranded Indians, Covaxin, and issues of mutual interest, the embassy said in a statement.

Local

Islamic arts exhibition marks 60th anniversary of Kuwait-Italy ties



KUWAIT: Officials are seen touring the exhibition. —KUNA photos

KUWAIT: Dar Al-Athar Al-Islamiyyah, affiliated to the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL), organized an Islamic arts exhibition at the American Cultural Center marking the 60th anniversary of the Kuwaiti-Italian relations. Kamel Al-Abduljelil, the council Secretary General, said during the inauguration ceremony yesterday that a slew of carefully selected unique items, known as "Al-Sabah Collection," have been put on display for the public. An eminent Italian expert, Giovanni Cirrottola, is supervising the event, themed "The Islamic Art from the National Museum of Bargello in Florence to Kuwait," showcasing treasures dating back to the golden Islamic ages. The displayed items constitute a testimony to the old relations between Italy and the Arab world, said Abduljelil. Meanwhile, Italian Ambassador to Kuwait Carlo Baldocchi also addressed attendees of the inauguration ceremony, including some renowned experts in antiquities, indicating that the exhibition was held as a result of coordinated efforts by Sheikha Hussa Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah and professor Cortolla. The exhibition is sponsored by Minister of



Information, Minister of Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, in coordination with the Italian embassy in Kuwait. The event, marking the 60th anniversary



of establishing diplomatic relations between the State of Kuwait and Republic of Italy, is scheduled to remain open until January 14. The "Al-Sabah Collection" that started to take form in the 1970s is said to comprise more than 30,000 items depicting various Islamic ages. — KUNA

Kuwaitis 7th among foreigners owning Turkish real estate

ANKARA: Turkish statistical data showed yesterday that Kuwaiti citizens ranked seventh amongst foreigners buying real estate in Turkey last November, as they bought 185 properties. Iranians led the list with 1,406 properties, while Iraqis came second with 1,075 properties, then Russians with 836, Germans with 322, Kazakhstanis with 278 and Afghans with 231 properties, according to data issued by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TURKSTAT). The data indicated that during last November, the total number of real estate sales to foreigners in Turkey reached 7,363 properties, recording an increase of 48.4 percent compared to November 2020. The city of Istanbul had the highest sales in real state last November, as it sold 2,922 properties to foreigners, followed by Antalya with 917 properties, and the capital Ankara with 428 properties, said TURKSTAT. The total number of properties sold to foreigners since the beginning of this year until the end of last November reached to 50,735 properties, recording an increase of 39.4 percent compared to the same period last year. — KUNA



Kuwait pavilion at Expo Dubai welcomes one millionth visitor

DUBAI: Kuwait's pavilion at Expo Dubai 2020 celebrated on Monday the milestone of welcoming its one millionth visitor some 74 days into its official launch. Vambola Varda, an Estonian national, received a commemorative shield on the occasion, handed to him by the pavilion's director Bader Al-Enezi. The figure exceeds the expectations of the booth's organizers, information ministry official Muneera Al-Huwaidi said. The pavilion continues to host visitors throughout the event's duration ending in March 2022, she added, praising the significant turnout of crowds, including varied ethnicities and



DUBAI: Kuwait pavilion's director Bader Al-Enezi (left) presents a commemorative shield to Vambola Varda (center), the pavilion's one millionth visitor. —KUNA

age groups. Kuwait's booth is its biggest at an international exhibition, on an area spanning 5,500 square meters with a height of 24 meters. — KUNA

Kuwait oil price up \$1.40 to \$76.26 pb

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil went up by \$1.40 to \$76.26 per barrel on Monday as opposed to the \$74.86 pb price of last Friday, the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. The price globally for the Brent crude went down by 76 cents to \$74.39 per barrel, the West Texas Intermediate fared the same going down by 38 cents to \$71.29 pb. OPEC's daily basket of crude rose by a dollar and three cents to reach \$75.04 per barrel on Monday, as compared to \$74.07 pb four days earlier, the cartel said. The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) said on its bulletin that the average annual rate of the basket last year hit \$41.47 bpd. The OPEC+ alliance decided, at its 23rd ministerial meeting on December 2, to maintain the current output plan, designed to increase the oil production gradually, with the conferees having decided to pursue increasing oil supplies by some 400,000 bpd. The conferees had also underlined the paramount significance of utter compliance and compensation mechanism for the alliance's member states. The oil-producing countries of OPEC+ are expected to continue changing the production until amending the current level of 5.8 million bpd, pending re-examination of market conditions and performance of the stakeholders at the 24th ministerial meeting, slated for January 2.



ISO certificate

In other news, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) announced getting the ISO 31000-2018 certificate in risk management, to be the first institution in the Middle East that obtains this prestigious certificate. In a press release issued Monday, the state-owned corporation said it was keen on employing a comprehensive risk management system since 2006. To achieve this objective, the corporation, in collaboration with specialized agencies, worked out new comprehensive risk management policy and framework and applied them in all subsidiaries, it revealed. The KPC pointed out that has also upgraded its risk management policies to help it in taking strategic decisions. ISO 31000 is a family of standards relating to risk management codified by the International Organization for Standardization. It provides principles and generic guidelines on managing risks faced by organizations. — KUNA

Gulf Arab Red Crescents vow to ramp up global aid

MANAMA: Representatives of Gulf Arab Red Crescent Societies, including Kuwait, gathered for talks yesterday focusing to bolster humanitarian aid across some of the world's most impoverished regions. Kuwait is committed to continue delivering "humanitarian and relief" aid to needy people all

over the globe, its Red Crescent public relations chief Khaled Al-Zaid said on the sidelines of the talks, citing the COVID pandemic as among the primary topics during the talks. He listed some of Kuwait Red Crescent Society's most notable acts of benevolence as the COVID pandemic raged on, which ran the gamut from food aid to airport transportation services, in addition to meeting the daily needs of those hardest hit by the outbreak. The talks are tantamount to a "thank you message" to all those who have contributed towards humanitarian work across the Gulf Arab region, according to Bahrain Red Crescent Society secretary general Mubarak Al-Hadi. — KUNA

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'God will take revenge' says Afghan father of US drone strike victim

Belarus opposition leader Tikhonovskiy jailed for 18 years

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60 killed in Haiti gas tanker blast

Authorities still searching for additional victims amid charred debris

PORT-AU-PRINCE: At least 60 people were killed when a gas tanker truck exploded in the Haitian city of Cap-Haitien yesterday morning, a local official said, with overwhelmed medics saying the toll was feared to rise. The blast is the latest disaster to hit the poverty-wracked Caribbean nation, where violent gangs have triggered crippling fuel shortages by choking off supply, and the president's assassination five months ago has yet to be elucidated.

"We have now counted 60 deaths," Deputy Mayor Patrick Almonor said, adding that authorities were still searching for additional victims amid the charred debris in Cap-Haitien, Haiti's second-largest city located on the northern coast. Almonor earlier described a horrific scene at the blast site, saying he had seen more than 50 people "burned alive" and that it was "impossible to identify them."

According to Almonor, the truck is believed to have flipped over after the driver lost control while swerving to avoid a motorcycle taxi. Fuel spilled onto the road and pedestrians apparently rushed to collect the tanker's gas, a precious commodity as Haiti grapples with a severe fuel shortage caused by

the tightening grip of criminal gangs on the capital Port-au-Prince. Almonor said around 20 houses in the area were also set ablaze, but that no details were yet available on possible victim numbers inside the homes.

Nearby Justinien University Hospital was overwhelmed with patients as the injured were transported to the facility. "We don't have the ability to treat the number of seriously burned people," a nurse told AFP. "I'm afraid we won't be able to save them all," she said. A doctor at the hospital told radio station Magik9 that two people had died there and that 40 other patients were seriously injured. "The people are burned on more than 60 percent of their body," she said.

Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry decreed a period of national mourning following the explosion

he said had left dozens of people injured. "I learned with sadness and emotion the terrible news of the explosion of a gas tanker last night in Cap-Haitien," Henry tweeted. "Three days of national mourning will be decreed throughout the land, in memory of the victims of this tragedy which has devastated the whole Haitian nation." Henry promised field hospitals would be rapidly deployed to help care for the blast victims.

blocking access to the country's oil terminals in the capital and its outskirts.

In recent months more than a dozen vehicles transporting fuel have been attacked by gangs demanding ransoms for the drivers' release. Demonstrators took the streets as recently as Monday protesting the resulting rise in gasoline prices. The lack of fuel is also damming up water access, in a country where many people rely on private companies to deliver water by truck to at-home systems.

And with no guarantee of steady power or water supply, healthcare providers have been forced to drastically cut back their services. Chronically-unstable Haiti was also plunged into a new political crisis with the assassination of the late president, Jovenel Moise, in July. Four senior Haitian law enforcement officials have been detained and several dozen arrested in connection with the investigation. But five months after Moise's assassination, doubts remain over who ordered the attack, during which not a single police officer guarding the president was injured. —AFP



Haiti grappling with a severe fuel shortage

Fuel crisis

The Caribbean nation has never produced enough electricity to meet the needs of the whole population. Even in well-off parts of the capital, the state-run Haiti electric utility only provides, at most, a few hours of power a day. Those who can afford it rely on pricey generators, which are no help in the face of the severe fuel shortage caused by gangs

blocking access to the country's oil terminals in the capital and its outskirts.

7.3-magnitude quake strikes Indonesia

MAUMERE, Indonesia: A 7.3-magnitude earthquake struck eastern Indonesia yesterday, the US Geological Survey said, causing panic but no deaths or major damage were reported. The epicentre was in the Flores Sea, north of East Nusa Tenggara province, where the quake sparked terror after hitting in the late morning (0320 GMT).

"I was in the field. People ran in panic. I am still... scared," said Nuraini, a resident of Adonara island in the East Flores regency. No significant damage or fatalities were immediately reported, but Indonesian authorities urged caution with more than a dozen smaller aftershocks detected. One person was injured in Manggarai, East Nusa Tenggara, and a school building was damaged on Selayar island, national disaster agency spokesman Abdul Muhari said in a statement.

The impact of the quake was still being assessed, he added. The intensity of the shaking sparked panic in many areas, with videos from some towns and villages shared on social media showing people running outside, some holding small children.

Streets were seen clogged with traffic as vehicles attempted to leave for safe locations. The USGS placed the epicentre at a depth of 18.5 kilometres (11 miles), around 100 kilometres north of the Flores island town of Maumere, home to more than 80,000 people, where the quake disrupted coronavirus inoculations. "People were receiving vaccines when the quake hit. They ran in panic," said Maumere resident Yulius Tara.

"There were more than 200 people... and the

Vienna-Paris night train is reborn, empty

ON BOARD THE VIENNA-PARIS NIGHT TRAIN: The timing could perhaps have been better. With a resurgence of COVID-19 gripping Europe, there were no paying passengers for the maiden voyage of the reborn night train linking Paris and Vienna. A return of night trains to the Old Continent is seen as symbolic of the efforts to shift travel from the air back to rail as Europe seeks to meet its climate change commitments.

But as the train following the route of the legendary Orient Express pulled out of Vienna's train station on Monday evening, it was empty except for a delegation of officials and media. "There should have been lots of people," said Ibrahim Wade, an attendant in charge of a sleeping cabin car, holding a list of absent passengers. "It's due to the health situation."

The night trains operated by Austria's national rail firm OBB under the Nightjet brand offer regular seats, as well as both simple and more comfortable sleeping cabins. Some of the more luxurious berths even have private showers, while other passengers have to wash at the ends of the train cars.

Towels are provided, as is breakfast, but there is no wi-fi and the heating didn't always work. "We're clearly targeting business travelers with the night train," said Kurt Bauer, chief of long-distance trains at OBB. The service is also aimed at tourists who like to take their time. Salzburg, the city of Mozart, is along the route. As are Strasbourg and Munich.

"Our clients are more and more sensitive to environmental aspects. Particularly the young,



MAUMERE, Indonesia: Villagers stand outside a building in Maumere in East Nusa Tenggara on Flores island yesterday, after a 7.3-magnitude earthquake struck off the coast in eastern Indonesia. —AFP

(vaccination) event stopped because of the quake." Thousands in Maumere sought safety on higher ground, fearing a tsunami. "We will stay here... because we are afraid of aftershocks," said Husri Tamrin.

'It was strong'

The Pacific Tsunami Warning Center said the quake no longer posed a threat of tsunamis after earlier warning that such waves were possible within a 1,000-kilometre radius of the epicentre. Indonesian authorities also lifted their tsunami warning.

"I was checking my phone when the quake hit. I felt it for 30 seconds. It was strong," said Alwan, a resident of Buton in Southeast Sulawesi—one of the areas where the tsunami warning was issued. Indonesia experiences frequent quakes and volcanic eruptions due to its

position on the Pacific "Ring of Fire", an arc of intense seismic activity where tectonic plates collide that stretches from Japan through Southeast Asia and across the Pacific basin.

Among Indonesia's history of deadly quakes is a devastating 9.1-magnitude tremor in 2004 that struck off the coast of Sumatra and triggered a tsunami that killed 220,000 throughout the region, including about 170,000 in Indonesia. The Boxing Day tragedy was one of the deadliest natural disasters in recorded history.

In 2018, a powerful quake shook the island of Lombok and several more tremors followed over the next couple of weeks, killing more than 550 people on the holiday island and neighbouring Sumbawa. Later that year, a 7.5-magnitude quake and a subsequent tsunami in Palu on Sulawesi island left more than 4,300 people dead or missing. —AFP



VIENNA: Passengers arrive to board the first Nightjet train between Vienna and Paris at the Central Station on Monday as part of the expansion of night trains in Europe as a green alternative to flying. —AFP

but not only," said Jean-Baptiste Guenot, an executive with French rail company SNCF. It was low-cost airlines which killed off the Orient Express more than a decade ago, and flying remains the main competitor for long-distance train travel.

The train can be price competitive for those who reserve very early, but it really sets itself apart on environmental grounds. A trip by air emits about 10 times the amount of CO2 as one by rail. Vienna has become the European capital of night trains since OBB began in 2016 to invest in reviving a segment other train operators were abandoning.

Paris, a top tourist destination, was a clear

choice for OBB as there was no direct rail service linking the City of Love and Vienna since the Orient Express stopped serving the two cities in 2007. Three trains weekly will make the 1,400-km run between the two cities for the moment.

Nightjet plans to launch a Paris-Berlin service next, and at the end of 2023 it hopes to have night trains between Berlin, Brussels, Paris and Vienna link up. Nightjet is also looking to create a Zurich-Barcelona route that would serve Geneva and Lyon along the way. The French government would also like to see night trains linking Paris with Barcelona, Copenhagen, Madrid, Rome, and perhaps even Stockholm. —AFP



JAKARTA: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken speaks at a press conference at the Fairmont Hotel in Jakarta, Indonesia yesterday. —AFP

US plan 'alternatives' in case Iran nuclear talks fail: Blinken

JAKARTA: The United States is preparing "alternatives" in case efforts to revive a deal to curb Iran's nuclear ambitions collapse, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said yesterday, as expectations grow that talks will fail. "We continue in this hour, on this day, to pursue diplomacy because it remains at this moment the best option, but we are actively engaging with allies and partners on alternatives," he said during a visit to Indonesia.

Negotiations restarted on Thursday last week to try to revive the 2015 deal between Iran and world powers, which the United States withdrew from under Donald Trump in 2018. Iran claims it only wants to develop a civilian capability but Western powers say its stockpile of enriched uranium goes well beyond that, and could be used to develop a nuclear weapon.

US President Joe Biden has said he is ready to return to the agreement and Iranian officials maintain they are serious about committing to the talks. But Tehran has been accused of backsliding on progress made earlier this year and playing for time. Blinken's remarks came after Biden recently said the United States was preparing "additional measures" against Iran.

In yesterday's comments, the top US diplomat also referred to a recent statement by European countries involved in the talks, which he said noted that "time is running out, that Iran is still not engaged in real negotiations". "Unless there's swift progress... the Iran nuclear agreement will become an empty shell," Blinken said, referring to the statement.

British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss went further at the weekend, warning that the resumed talks were the Islamic Republic's "last chance to come to the negotiating table with a serious resolution". "There is still time for Iran to come and agree this deal," she told a news conference.

The 2015 agreement has been disintegrating since Trump pulled out. The deal ensured sanctions relief for Iran in return for tight curbs on its nuclear programme, which was put under extensive UN monitoring. Trump went on to re-introduce sanctions, prompting Tehran to start disregarding the deal's limits on its nuclear activities in 2019.

Recent rounds of talks have stumbled on which sanctions Washington is prepared to lift and guarantees demanded by Iran to protect against the prospect of a future US withdrawal. —AFP

International

Belarus opposition leader Tikhanovsky jailed for 18 yrs

Hiding political prisoners in closed trials

MOSCOW: A court in Belarus yesterday sentenced opposition leader Sergei Tikhanovsky to 18 years in prison after he galvanised an unprecedented protest movement against strongman leader Alexander Lukashenko last year, state media said.

Following a months-long trial behind closed doors at a detention centre in the southeastern city of Gomel, the court found Tikhanovsky, 43, guilty of organising riots and inciting social hatred, among other charges, state newspaper Sovetskaya Belarus reported.

Tikhanovsky's wife, self-exiled Belarus democracy icon Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, denounced the verdict. "The dictator publicly takes revenge on his strongest opponents," she wrote on Twitter after her husband was handed the sentence.

"While hiding the political prisoners in closed trials, he hopes to continue repressions in silence. But the whole world watches. We won't stop," she added in English. One of Tikhanovsky's five co-defendants in the high-profile case, veteran politician Mikola Statkevich, 65, was sentenced to 14 years.

Statkevich challenged Lukashenko in elections in 2010 but was sentenced to six years in prison. Released early in 2015, he was barred from contesting the 2020 poll.

Both Tikhanovsky and Statkevich have been in custody since May 2020. Little was known about the trial which began in June. In power since 1994, Lukashenko has been cracking down on opponents since unprecedented protests erupted after the

2020 election, deemed unfair by the West.

Lukashenko's government has jailed or forced to flee all of his prominent opponents. Tikhanovsky planned to run against Lukashenko in the August 2020 presidential elections in Belarus but was arrested and jailed before the vote.

His wife Svetlana—a political novice at the time of his arrest—took his place in the polls and was widely believed to have won the elections. She vowed to fight on earlier yesterday.

"I will keep defending the person I love and who became the leader of millions of Belarusians," Tikhanovskaya said in a video address posted to Twitter, sitting in front of a wall featuring children's drawings. "I will try to do something very difficult—maybe impossible—to bring closer the moment when we will see each other in a new Belarus."

She added that any verdict would be "illegal and not something with which one can make peace." Another high-profile co-defendant in the case, 29-year-old Igor Losik, was sentenced to 15 years in prison yesterday.

He had been detained in the summer of 2020 and accused of using his popular channel on messenger

app Telegram to incite riots. The three other co-defendants in the case are blogger Vladimir Tsyganovich as well as two activists linked to Tikhanovsky: Artyom Sakov and Dmitry Popov.

Tsyganovich received 15 years in prison, while Sakov and Popov were handed 16 years apiece.

'Stop the cockroach'

A charismatic activist, Tikhanovsky, coined a new insult for Lukashenko when he called him a "cockroach" and his campaign slogan was "Stop the cockroach." His supporters waved slippers—often used to kill the insects—at protests.

The activist was however detained on charges of violating public order soon after announcing his presidential bid.

His wife Tikhanovskaya, a stay-at-home mother of two children at the time of her husband's arrest, was forced to flee ex-Soviet Belarus to neighbouring European Union member Lithuania after Lukashenko launched a crackdown in the wake of the vote, deemed unfair by the West.

She quickly won recognition from Western governments as Belarus's top opposition leader and has been lobbying for change in the country ever since.



MINSK: File photo shows Belarus' opposition figures Mikola Statkevich (C) and Vladimir Neklyayev (R) meet with people in central Minsk. A court in Belarus yesterday sentenced opposition leader Sergei Tikhanovsky to 18 years in prison. —AFP

In September, a Belarusian court sentenced opposition leader Maria Kolesnikova to 11 years in prison for violating national security and conspiring to seize power.

The former flute player, who refused to go into exile, was part of a female trio of protest leaders along with Tikhanovskaya and Veronika Tsepikalo, who fled to Greece. In July, another opposition leader and former banker, Viktor Babaryko, was sentenced to 14 years in prison on fraud charges. —AFP

“But the whole world watches. We won't stop”

Ukraine accuses Germany of blocking NATO weapons supply

KIEV: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky accused Germany of blocking the supply of NATO weapons to Kiev in an interview with Italian newspaper La Repubblica published by his office yesterday. Zelensky's comments come as the West has said Russia could be planning an invasion of Ukraine, with the US warning Moscow of serious economic sanctions if it launches an attack.

"Germany has recently prevented us from getting anti-drone rifles and anti-sniper systems from NATO, which are exclusively defence tools," Zelensky said in the interview. "Don't we have the right to have them in the eighth year of the war? Obviously, we do," he added.

A spokesperson for the German foreign ministry said Monday that it could not comment "on the confidential decisions at the heart of the (NATO) alliance at this stage." Ukraine last month said it was seeking more military aid from its Western allies to deter Russia from an attack.

Kiev has been fighting pro-Russia separatists in its eastern regions since 2014. The conflict erupted shortly after Moscow seized Ukraine's Crimea peninsula. Fears have grown in recent weeks that Moscow—which has massed around 100,000 troops near Ukraine's border—could launch a large-scale attack.

In a video call last week, US President Joe Biden warned Russian President Vladimir Putin of "sanctions like he's never seen" should Moscow launch an attack. Zelensky said the call did not lead to a scaling down of troops on the Russian side of the border. —AFP

Armed groups clash in south Libya week ahead of polls

TRIPOLI: Gunmen linked to Libyan military chief Khalifa Haftar exchanged artillery and gun fire overnight in the country's south, authorities and local media said yesterday, with medics reporting one person dead. The clashes come a week before the war-torn North African country is due to hold a presidential election that observers fear could trigger a return to conflict after a year-long ceasefire.

"A militia armed with heavy weaponry and armoured vehicles... stole 11 four-wheel-drive vehicles from Sebha in an armed robbery," Sebha's police force said. It identified the attackers as members of a group commanded by Mabruk Sahban and affiliated with Haftar, who is a candidate in the December 24 polls and whose forces control much of Libya's south.

The stolen vehicles had been sent to Sabha by the interior ministry in Tripoli to help secure the election, the police statement said. Sahban's forces attacked a police convoy and forced officers to drive the vehicles to Brak airbase, south of Sebha, it added. Sebha security forces and pro-Haftar gunmen later clashed in central Sabha, local media reported.

Footage online apparently showed night-time clashes with small arms in the city centre. Sebha Medical Center said in a Facebook post that "last night due to events in the city we received two wounded people and one dead". Local media said schools and public services were closed across the city yesterday. Haftar had in 2019 seized much of southern Libya including oil infrastructure, military sites and the southwestern city of Sebha, before launching a blistering assault on capital Tripoli, 650 kilometres (400 miles) to the north. —AFP

Scandal-hit UK PM faces tricky vote in party heartland

WHITCHURCH: In less turbulent times, returning a Conservative MP at a by-election in a rural English constituency that has never voted for any other party would be straightforward.

North Shropshire, with slightly more than 80,000 voters, returned its last lawmaker from Prime Minister Boris Johnson's party with a whopping 23,000 majority.

But ahead of polls opening tomorrow, Johnson is struggling to convince many to stick with him after weeks of political scandal, prompting predictions of a historic defeat.

For a leader long seen as defying political gravity, the loss of the traditionally safe seat could see his hold on power come crashing down.

In the market town of Whitchurch, north of Shrewsbury in central England, Martin Price, 51, said he voted Conservative at the last general election in December 2019.

But he is adamant he will not do so tomorrow. "They're a bunch of liars — it's a disgrace. They're all in it for themselves," he told AFP.

Outside a local supermarket, school worker Gale Groom, 55, agreed. "Boris is a waste of time," she said. "I thought he'd be good — because obviously I voted for him before — but I think over the pandemic and everything he's been just not the best."

Unfit for office

Johnson — Britain's Brexit champion who won a landslide election victory in 2019 dominated by the issue — has been dogged by controversies since early last month.

It began with his unsuccessful attempt to change parliament's disciplinary rules after North Shropshire MP Owen Paterson was found guilty of illegal lobbying.

Paterson, who had held the seat since 1997, then quit, forcing the by-election. The crisis, though, was soon eclipsed by reports that Johnson and his staff



WHITCHURCH, United Kingdom: A pedestrian walks past Christmas decorations in a shop in Whitchurch, central England, ahead of a by-election in the North Shropshire constituency tomorrow. —AFP

broke COVID rules last year by holding several parties around Christmas when the public were told to cancel their festive plans.

The UK leader's efforts to contain the outcry were undercut by a video showing staff joking about the events and then a photo of Johnson taking part in a festive online quiz.

"It just confirms what I, and my family, and many others have been thinking for a long time: that this man is not fit to be prime minister," said Garry Churchill, 71.

"I can't imagine why people would vote for the Conservative candidate in this by-election. I think he should resign, go home and look after his new baby and keep out of politics."

Tactical voting

North Shropshire has voted Conservative since the seat was created in its modern form in 1983. Ordinarily, local issues such as jobs, farming and

transport would typically score high among its residents' electoral concerns.

But Thursday's poll is increasingly seen as a referendum on Johnson's premiership.

The Liberal Democrats are touted as having the best chance of overturning the huge majority, helped by tactical Labour voting to maximise Johnson's political pain.

"I'll be voting for the Liberal Democrats because I'm so offended by the performance of Johnson," said self-declared socialist Martin Hill, 68, who usually votes Labour.

"It'll be a tactical vote — I want to give Johnson a slap in the face," the retired chemical engineer added, calling him "a dishonest man".

"He wouldn't recognise honesty or integrity if it jumped up and down in front of him dressed as Peppa Pig," Hill said, referring to the cartoon character the prime minister spoke of at length in a recent rambling speech. —AFP

Tunisia opposition condemns extension of parliament freeze

TUNIS: Opponents of Tunisian President Kais Saied yesterday slammed his decision to extend a months-long suspension of parliament, accusing him of dealing another blow to the country's nascent democracy. Saied had on Monday evening ruled out walking back his move in the summer to sack the government, freeze the legislature and seize wide-ranging executive powers.

Speaking on television, the former constitutional law professor announced an 11-week "popular consultation" with the Tunisian people to produce "draft constitutional and other reforms" to be put to referendum on July 25 next year. That will mark a year since his power grab, which came as the North African country wallowed in political and economic crises compounded by the coronavirus pandemic.

Saied had in October moved to rule by decree, escalating fears for the only democracy to have emerged from the 2011 Arab uprisings. The president said Monday that parliament would remain suspended until new elections on December 17 next year, the anniversary of the start of the revolution that chased dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali from power. That effectively dissolved the current assembly dominated by his nemesis, the Islamist-inspired Ennahdha party which had played a central role in Tunisian politics since Ben Ali's fall. While many

Tunisians, tired of a parliament and political parties seen as dysfunctional and corrupt, welcomed Saied's moves, he has also faced growing opposition in the form of street demonstrations and pressure from abroad.

The envoys of the G7 democratic, developed economies plus the European Union had urged Tunisia on Friday to respect "fundamental freedoms" and set a timeline for a return to democratic institutions. Political analyst Slaheddine Jourchi said Saied had "tried to pull the rug from under his rivals' feet by laying out a timeline". But he was "determined to push through his political project to the end" despite bitter opposition from political parties and pressure from world powers, Jourchi added. Yesterday, opponents lashed out at Saied, accusing him of seeking to extend his one-man rule and remake the political system without involving other actors. Former MP Hichem Ajbouni wrote on Facebook that Saied's speech boiled down to: "I am the state, I am the president, I am the government, I am the parliament, I am the judiciary — and everyone who opposes me is either hungry for power, a liar, a traitor, a thief, an agent, or ignorant."

Saied had announced a nationwide consultation on constitutional reforms would be launched on January 1, via electronic platforms created for the purpose. The proposals would then be examined by a committee of experts appointed by the president, before being put to referendum.

Former Ennahdha MP Samir Dilou said the idea would "make Tunisia an object of ridicule". "Saied's speech reflects the state of denial in which he lives and his refusal to listen to any



TUNIS: A Tunisian man reads a newspaper on Habib Bourguiba Avenue in the capital Tunis yesterday, one day after Tunisia's president extended his months-long suspension of parliament. —AFP

one, neither his supporters nor his opponents," he added in an interview with the daily Assabah.

But Jourchi said developments would depend on how the Tunisian public reacts. "The street isn't reassured. The economic situation is what concerns the Tunisian public," he said. Tunisia faces mounting public debt, inflation, 18 percent unemployment and stalled negotiations with the International Monetary Fund for its fourth bailout since the revolution.

But the 63-year-old president's focus has remained firmly on remaking the political system and tackling opponents—primarily Ennahdha—whom he accuses of corruption. Saied, who seized control of the judiciary in July, has pushed judges to investigate allegations of foreign financing for parliamentary campaigns during 2019 elections. —AFP

International

'God will take revenge,' says Afghan father of US drone strike victim

'What if the US had lost a child? What would the reaction have been?'

KABUL: An Afghan whose daughter was among 10 relatives killed by a wrongly directed US drone strike expressed anger yesterday at Washington's decision not to punish anyone for the deadly mishit. "God will take revenge," said Aimal Ahmadi, 32, who lost his three-year-old daughter Malika and nine other relatives in the August 29 strike, which came as the United States military scrambled to complete its withdrawal from Afghanistan.

The Pentagon said Monday that no US service member would face disciplinary action for what it called an "honest mistake" in wrongly identifying the family's white Toyota as an Islamic State target. "There was not a strong enough case to be made for personal accountability," said spokesman John Kirby.

The drone hit came three days after an IS suicide bomb attack at Kabul airport killed more than 150 people—including 13 US troops—significantly raising tensions in the evacuating force. Asked by AFP if he felt angry, Ahmadi said: "Definitely... What if the US had lost a child? What would the reaction have been?"

The Pentagon has promised to pay compensation and help relocate surviving family members but Ahmadi said the family had heard nothing directly from the US government or military. "We have only heard through the media... that they were sorry," he said.

Relatives of the family had previously said they wanted a face-to-face apology from US officials. Ahmadi, standing metres away from where the

drone struck, said some women in the family were so traumatised that they had to move house. "Since the day of the explosion, they said 'we don't want to go to this house again. We saw our kids being martyred there'."

'Punish the culprits'

Ahmadi said his surviving daughter, seven-year-old Adda, misses her little sister Malika. His last memory of her was when she told him 'I love you' in



Relatives wanted a face-to-face apology from US officials

the days before the strike, he said, adding that Malika's favourite game was hide-and-seek. Afghanistan's Taliban government yesterday urged the US to reverse the decision not to punish anyone.

"If there is any justice and regard for human rights and respect for human dignity, then it's their responsibility to punish the culprits and compensate the victims," said Taliban spokesman Bilal Karimi. Ahmadi's brother Zemari, who also died in



KABUL: Aimal Ahmadi, whose daughter Malika and his elder brother Zimarai Ahmadi was among 10 relatives killed by a wrongly directed US drone strike on August 29, stands near a car, which was damaged during the strike, outside his house in Kabul yesterday. —AFP

the drone strike, had been an employee of US aid group Nutrition and Education International (NEI) at the time. Last month, NEI founder and

president Steve Kwon called the Pentagon's investigation into the incident "deeply disappointing and inadequate". —AFP

Philippine's Duterte withdraws from 2022 Senate race

MANILA: Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte yesterday withdrew his candidacy for the 2022 Senate race, the government elections monitor said, a month after he made a last-minute entry into the contest. Duterte, 76, is constitutionally barred from seeking re-election, and his decision to run for the Senate had been seen as a way of staying in politics while facing an international probe into his deadly drug war.



Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte.

"The President has filed his withdrawal from the Senatorial elections," James Jimenez, spokesman for the Commission on Elections office, said on Twitter. Duterte decided to withdraw from the May elections to "better focus" on the government's pandemic response and ensure "orderly and peaceful elections", his spokesman Karlo Nograles said.

"After over four decades in public service, the President plans to retire from government to spend more time with his family when his term ends in June 2022," Nograles added, without specifying if Duterte was quitting politics altogether.

The elections will see thousands of candidates contest more than 18,000 posts from president to

town councillor. Duterte said previously he would run for the country's second-highest office, before changing his mind and announcing plans to retire from politics—which was met with deep scepticism among analysts.

His latest withdrawal does not necessarily mean he will exit politics. Under election rules, he has until midday on election day to substitute in for another candidate sharing his surname if they are disqualified or die. Duterte's daughter Sara is running for vice president while his son Sebastian is contesting the mayoral race in the family's southern stronghold of Davao City.

"It's very dizzying," said Antonio Contreras, a political science professor at De La Salle University

in Manila. Contreras said Duterte may have "made a deal" to ensure the next president would protect him from criminal charges in the Philippines, or the International Criminal Court.

"They've probably already made sure that somebody is going to act on their behalf to protect their interests," he said. ICC judges authorised a full-blown investigation into Duterte's anti-narcotics campaign in September, saying it resembled an illegitimate and systematic attack on civilians. Rights groups estimate the drug war has killed tens of thousands of people.

'He'd probably be bored'

Duterte's exit from the race came hours after his close aide and chosen successor Senator Christopher Go formally withdrew his candidacy for president. "He'd probably be bored in the Senate because he's used to being in command," said Jean Franco, a political science professor at the University of the Philippines. The current leader in the presidential race is the son and namesake of former dictator Ferdinand Marcos, according to a recent survey by respected polling outfit Social Weather Stations.

Marcos Jr was followed by incumbent vice president and Duterte critic Leni Robredo, celebrity mayor Francisco Domagoso and boxing great Manny Pacquiao. Sara Duterte, who had been widely expected to run for the top job, has formed an alliance with Marcos Jr. — AFP

88,000 Hong Kongers apply for new British resettlement visa

HONG KONG: Nearly 90,000 Hong Kongers have applied for resettlement in Britain under a new visa scheme offering a pathway to citizenship, London said yesterday as it issued a report condemning China's crackdown on dissent in the former colony. Britain rolled out the visa scheme in January for more than five million Hong Kongers in response to Beijing's imposition of a sweeping national security law last year.

The law has been used to snuff out dissent in a crackdown that Britain has labelled a breach of Beijing's promise to maintain Hong Kong's freedoms and autonomy. "By the end of September, 88,000 people had applied for visas under this scheme. On behalf of the government, I welcome them warmly to the UK," British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss wrote in a report on Hong Kong published every six

months. Britain previously predicted about 154,000 Hong Kongers would arrive in the first year, and as many as 322,000 over five years.

Applicants must hold a British National (Overseas) passport, which are available to Hong Kongers born before the city's return to Chinese rule in 1997, along with their dependants. China has condemned Britain's resettlement offer and announced it would no longer recognise BN(O) passports as a legitimate document.

Relations between Britain and China have soured over Beijing's response to massive democracy protests that swept Hong Kong two years ago as well as alleged human rights abuses in China's far-western region of Xinjiang.

Yesterday's report said China was "in a state of ongoing non-compliance with its international obligations" on Hong Kong. The national security law had been used against "all opposition, free press and civil society", it added. "Just over a year since the imposition of the National Security Law, the damage that this far-reaching law is doing to the way of life of the people of Hong Kong is clear," the report said.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has faced

25 times since 2015, and said she had been "terrorised" by security forces.

She walked with a limp due to a leg injury sustained when police broke up an environmental protest she attended six years ago. In 2016, as a freelancer, she wrote extensively on the country's worst environmental disaster, a toxic spill that killed tonnes of fish in central Vietnam and prompted rare protests across the country. That same year she was detained by police on her way to a meeting with then-US President Barack Obama in Hanoi, who had invited her to join a gathering of activists during his visit. Trang was detained again in November 2017 after meeting with a European Union delegation, which was preparing for the annual bilateral human rights dialogue between the EU and Vietnam.

In her book "Politics of a Police State", she recounted the continual harassment she endured during these years. It included police pouring glue over her apartment's door lock to prevent her from leaving and posting intimate photos taken from her computer.

In a letter she wrote in 2019 entitled "Just in case I am imprisoned", Trang urged the public to focus on fighting for free and fair elections in Vietnam, rather than her freedom. "I don't want freedom for just myself; that's too easy," she wrote. "I want something greater: Freedom for Vietnam." — AFP

Prominent dissident journalist jailed in Vietnam

HANOI: A Hanoi court yesterday sentenced one of its most prominent dissident journalists to nine years behind bars on anti-state charges, the latest jailing of a press worker in Vietnam. Pham Doan Trang—a campaigner for press freedom and civil rights—has long been a thorn in the side of authorities, writing on a host of controversial issues from land grabs to police violence.

Arrested in Ho Chi Minh City in October 2020, the 43-year-old appeared in a Hanoi court yesterday for a one-day trial—observed by journalists and diplomats via a video that had its audio signal frequently cut. The former state media reporter was accused of "spreading propaganda against the socialist republic of Vietnam", said judge Chu Phuong Ngoc.

"Her behaviour was dangerous for society... implemented with the intention of violating the socialist regime... and (she) must be seriously punished". During the hearing, Trang testified to being detained



HONG KONG: Activist Alexandra Wong, also known as Grandma Wong, waves a flag outside the Wanchai district court in Hong Kong, where jailed media mogul Jimmy Lai was among eight democracy campaigners sentenced for taking part in a banned Tiananmen vigil in 2020. — AFP

pressure to extend the visa scheme to cover younger Hong Kongers who do not qualify for a BN(O) passport. Many of the demonstrators who took to the streets in 2019 were from the city's younger generation. — AFP

Uganda opposition leader 'under house arrest'

KAMPALA: Ugandan opposition leader Bobi Wine said yesterday that police had surrounded his residence and put him under house arrest ahead of a planned campaign rally for a local by-election. Wine, whose real name is Robert Kyagulanyi, said police and military officers, deployed overnight, had barred him from leaving his home in Magere, north of the capital Kampala.

"The military has increased deployment around my home. No one is allowed to leave or enter," Wine said on Twitter, accusing President Yoweri Museveni of placing him "under house arrest". The popstar-turned-politician came second in a tense January election that returned Museveni to power for a sixth term.

Yesterday, Wine was set to campaign for an opposition candidate in the central district of Kayunga where Museveni is also expected to hold a rally. "Our security guard and gardener have been

violently arrested and beaten," Wine said, adding that they had been "bundled" into a police vehicle outside his gate and their phones confiscated.

Following the January vote, which was marked by a crackdown on opposition figures, soldiers and police surrounded Wine's property, stopping members of his household including his wife from leaving. A court ordered his release after 11 days.

Wine's National Unity Platform party has alleged that hundreds of his supporters were abducted by security forces in the run-up to the election—some were killed while others re-emerged weeks later showing signs of torture.

Last week, two members of the armed forces were handed lengthy jail terms for their part in violence against protesters last year that left more than 50 dead. The United States had announced days earlier sanctions against the military intelligence chief Major General Abel Kandiho, citing his involvement in serious human rights abuses including beatings, sexual assault and electrocution.

In March, Wine was arrested for leading a protest in Kampala demanding the release of his supporters. Museveni has ruled Uganda without pause since seizing control in 1986, when he helped to end years of tyranny under Idi Amin and Milton Obote. — AFP

Police probe Mother Teresa charity for forced conversion

AHMEDABAD: Indian police are probing a charity started by Mother Teresa, officials said yesterday, in the latest example of growing pressure on Christians under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist government.

Authorities in the western state of Gujarat told AFP they were investigating whether the Missionaries of Charity forced girls in its shelter home there to wear a cross and read the Bible. Modi's home state is one of several in Hindu-majority India where vaguely worded rules against "forceful conversion" have been put in place, or more strictly enforced, in recent years.

District social officer Mayank Trivedi told AFP that his complaint to the police was based on a report by child welfare authorities and other district officials. According to the complaint, 13 Bibles were found in the library of the institute and girls staying there were forced to read the religious text.

The Missionaries of Charity, founded in 1950 by the late Mother Teresa—a Roman Catholic nun who lived and worked in Kolkata for most of her life and won the Nobel Peace Prize—denied the allegations. Activists say that religious minorities in India have faced increased levels of discrimination and violence since Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power in 2014.

In 2020, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom listed India as a "country of particular concern" for the first time since 2004. Modi's government rejects having a radical "Hindutva" (Hindu hegemony) agenda and insists that people of all religions have equal rights.

Activists say there have been more than 300 anti-Christian incidents this year alone. Last week, a Hindu mob of 200 to 300 people barged into a Christian school in Madhya Pradesh while students were taking their exams and pelted stones at the building, the school's principal said. "We moved the children from the auditorium to another wing of the school. We kept them on the first floor and gave them extra time to finish the exam. But the students couldn't write, they were crying and shivering," Brother Anthony Tynumkal, principal of St Joseph School, told AFP. — AFP

Business

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2021

Zain Jordan agrees to sell and leaseback 2,607 towers to TASC Towers for \$88m

Bader Al-Kharafi: Transaction gives Zain Jordan greater flexibility to invest in cutting-edge technologies

AMMAN/KUWAIT: Zain Group announced that its operation in Jordan has entered into a definite 15-year agreement to sell and leaseback the passive physical infrastructure of its 2,607 tower portfolio in Jordan to TASC Towers for \$88 million. The transaction includes an additional 223 sites transferring to TASC Towers on a managed basis. Zain Group holds a 25 percent minority stake in TASC Towers.

The deal also includes TASC Towers managing Zain Jordan's supporting facilities such as power generators, fuel tanks and protection kiosks as well as a build-to-suit agreement allowing for a minimum of 525 network sites to be built over the next five years.

Zain Jordan will retain its active infrastructure, including wireless communication antennas, intelligent software, and intellectual property with respect to managing its telecom network.

TASC Towers (www.tasctowers.com), headquartered in Dubai, is an international tower operator focused on sale and leaseback, build-to-suit and growth capital investments in the MENEASA market (Middle East, North & East Africa and South Asia).

Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO Bader Al-Kharafi said: "This transaction is consistent with Zain's '4Sight' strategy to create significant value for shareholders through the unlocking of capital and optimization of infrastruc-



Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO Bader Al-Kharafi

"This transaction is consistent with Zain's '4Sight' strategy to create significant value for shareholders through the unlocking of capital and optimization of infrastructure assets which will flourish under the management of an independent team. As a strategic shareholder, we are committed on supporting TASC Towers' regional expansion in making it a leading operator of telecom infrastructure."

- The transaction involves only the physical infrastructure of towers on a 15-year sale and leaseback basis
- An additional 223 sites to be transferred to TASC Towers on a managed basis

ture assets which will flourish under the management of an independent team. As a strategic shareholder, we are committed on supporting TASC Towers' regional expansion in making it a leading operator of telecom infrastructure."

Al-Kharafi added, "The deal gives Zain Jordan greater flexibility to invest in network upgrades and cutting-edge ICT technologies to meet the ever-increasing demand for reliable broadband access and data consumption. It will also enhance operational efficiencies and enable a laser focus on the operator's core business and customers to offer them the best mobile and data experience in the Kingdom of Jordan."

This transaction follows similar pio-

neering deals with respect to 1,620 towers in Zain Kuwait and a recent announcement in Zain Saudi Arabia to sell its 8,100 tower infrastructure. FTI Capital Advisors acted as exclusive financial advisor to Zain Group on this transaction.

Zain is a leading telecommunications operator across the Middle East and Africa, providing mobile voice and data services to over 48.4 million active customers as of 30 September 2021. With a commercial presence in 7 countries, Zain operates in: Kuwait, Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and South Sudan. In Morocco, Zain has a 15.5 percent stake in 'INWI', through a joint venture. Zain is listed on the Bursa Kuwait (stock ticker: ZAIN).



IEA predicts 'more comfortable' year for oil market in 2022

PARIS: The Omicron coronavirus variant will slow the recovery in global demand for oil but the market will be "more comfortable" in 2022, the International Energy Agency said yesterday. The oil market "appears to stand on a better footing than it has for some time," the IEA wrote in its latest monthly report.

The emergence of Omicron at the end of November "sparked a steep sell-off in oil, but initial pessimism has now given way to a more measured response," it said. "The surge in new Covid-19 cases is expected to temporarily slow, but not upend, the recovery in oil demand," the IEA wrote.

It said "new containment measures put in place to halt the spread of the virus are likely to have a more muted impact on the economy versus previous COVID waves, not least because of widespread vaccination campaigns." The IEA, which unites oil-consuming countries and advises governments on energy

policy, said it had revised downwards its forecast for global oil demand by an average 100,000 barrels per day for both this year and next year due to new restrictions on international travel.

The agency said it is now penciling in an increase in global oil demand of 5.4 million barrels per day in 2021 and by 3.3 million in 2022, when it will return to pre-pandemic levels at 99.5 million bpd.

On the output side, global oil production was poised to outpace demand from December, the IEA predicted, driven by higher production in the United States and the countries that make up the so-called OPEC+ group of oil producers. Earlier this month, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and their allies agreed to stick to planned increases in output in January, despite the economic uncertainties linked to Omicron.

"As the upward supply trend extends into 2022, the US, Canada and Brazil are set to pump at their highest-ever annual levels," IEA said. "Saudi Arabia and Russia could also set records, if remaining OPEC+ cuts are fully unwound." This could lead to surplus supply of 1.7 million bpd in the first quarter of 2022 and 2.0 million bpd in the second quarter. "If that were to happen, 2022 could indeed shape up to be more comfortable," the IEA said. — AFP



EU and UK fail to agree post-Brexit fishing quotas

LONDON: The EU and Britain failed to reach agreement on how to divvy up post-Brexit fish quotas in shared waters from next year, officials said yesterday, meaning provisional quotas will apply.

"Unfortunately, and despite our best efforts to conclude in a timely manner, consultations with the UK on fishing opportunities for 2022 are still ongoing," EU fishing commissioner Virginijus Sinkevicius told a news conference. European Union fishing ministers had approved quotas from January 1, 2022 in EU waters extending into the Mediterranean, the Atlantic, the North Sea and the Black Sea, he announced.

But Brussels and London still remain apart on how to share fish stocks in areas plied by both EU and British trawlers, reflecting broader EU-UK tensions that have festered since Britain left the bloc nearly two years ago. "We haven't reached an agreement with the UK. We're remaining optimistic and we do hope it will be possible to reach it by the 20th of December," Slovenian Fishing Minister Jozse Podgorsek said. He said that "provisional quotas" with the UK on shared fishing stocks would remain in force until a new agreement was hammered out.

Sinkevicius said the "contingency proposal" being applied would last for three months on the pro-rata basis of 2021 catch limits, with allowances for seasonal catches.

Podgorsek was speaking on behalf of



LONDON: The EU and Britain failed to reach agreement on how to divvy up post-Brexit fish quotas in shared waters from next year, officials said yesterday, meaning provisional quotas will apply. — AFP

Slovenia's role as outgoing holder of the EU presidency—a rotating status that from January 1 will be held by France, which has taken a robust position against Britain over fishing and other post-Brexit disputes. Britain, under pressure from the EU and threats from French fishermen to block British imports, has been progressively issuing dozens of licenses for French fishing boats to work in its waters and those of its Jersey and Guernsey dependencies in the Channel. That issue, along with the separate one of quotas, was addressed but not fully resolved in a Trade and Cooperation Agreement signed by Brussels and London that was meant to outline post-Brexit relations.

France's Europe minister, Clement Beaune, said as he arrived for another Brussels meeting with EU counterparts that "we have now

obtained 1,000 licenses out of a little more than 1,100 that were applied for in total". That, he said, was thanks to "the pressure we exerted—we, France, and collectively with the European Union". He added there remained 80 license applications outstanding.

Every year, the EU works out fishing quotas to balance economic livelihoods and fair distribution against the sustainability of fish stocks. The talks include non-EU member Norway and, now, Britain, as fish populations straddle those waters.

Last Friday, the EU, Norway and Britain reached agreement on catch limits for six fish stocks exploited in the North Sea, but not those in other areas fished by EU and British boats. On the intra-EU catch limits agreed, NGOs campaigning against overfishing lamented the quotas that were fixed, viewing them as unsustainable. — AFP

UK jobless rate dips despite end of virus jobs scheme

LONDON: Unemployment in Britain has fallen again, despite the end of a government scheme to keep millions of private-sector workers in their roles during the coronavirus pandemic, official data showed yesterday. The jobless rate—which measures the number of people out of work as a proportion of the working population as a whole—slipped to 4.2 percent in the three months to the end of October, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement.

That compared with a rate of 4.3 percent in the three months to the end of September. Nevertheless, the rate was still 0.2 percentage point higher than the level before the COVID crisis struck. The government ended its costly scheme to furlough workers in September. Meanwhile, the number of UK workers on payrolls rose by 0.9 percent between October and November to 29.4 million, the ONS calculated.

"With still no sign of the end of the furlough scheme hitting the number of jobs, the total of employees on payroll continued to grow strongly in November, although it could include people recently made redundant but still working out their notice," said ONS economic statistics director Darren Morgan.

"The number on payroll is now above pre-pandemic levels right across

the country." The ONS said that job vacancies in the three months to the end of November hit a new all-time high at 1.22 million.

"While job vacancies continue at record levels, the number is not growing as fast as it did earlier this year," Morgan cautioned. The news comes amid ongoing fears over the impact of the infectious Omicron coronavirus variant which surfaced in late November.

The data also came ahead of the Bank of England's latest interest rate decision tomorrow. Britain has tightened virus restrictions in England as Omicron cases surge, including guidance to work from home and mandatory COVID passes. Prime Minister Boris Johnson has 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 government also recently rolled out new travel curbs to try and prevent transmission of the variant. The BoE had previously been expected to hike record-low interest rates to combat surging inflation—but Omicron has darkened the outlook. "Today's labor market report probably would have been strong enough to convince the (BoE) to raise bank rate at this week's meeting, if Omicron had not emerged," noted Pantheon Macro economist Samuel Tombs. — AFP

Business

ADB trims Asia growth forecasts as Omicron threatens economy

Growth forecast for 2021 put at 7.0% and 2022 at 5.3%

MANILA: The Asian Development Bank warned yesterday that the highly mutated Omicron coronavirus variant could have a "substantial" economic impact, as it trimmed its 2021 and 2022 growth forecasts for developing Asia.

Despite a sharp drop in infections and increased vaccination across the region stretching from the Cook Islands in the Pacific to Kazakhstan in Central Asia, the global surge in COVID-19 cases suggested "the pandemic will take time to play out", it said.

The Philippines-based lender forecast growth of 7.0 percent in 2021 — compared with its previous prediction in September of 7.1 percent and 5.3 percent in 2022, down from its earlier forecast of 5.4 percent. While the region was expected to sustain a "strong rebound" and keep inflation at manageable levels, the emergence of Omicron had brought "additional uncertainty", the ADB said.

"Recent developments in Europe show that extensive virus outbreaks can occur even in highly vaccinated countries and force governments to retighten mobility restrictions," it said.

"As it (Omicron) appears to be significantly more transmissible than earlier variants, its economic impact could be substantial." Vaccination rates have increased across developing Asia in recent months,

with nearly half of the population fully protected against Covid-19 at the end of November, compared with less than a third at the end of August, the lender said.

That has enabled many economies to start reopening, boosting manufacturing activity and trade in the region. But coverage remained uneven — 20 economies still have less than 40 percent of their populations fully vaccinated, "leaving them susceptible to renewed outbreaks".

And the region still lagged the nearly 60 percent coverage in the United States and more than 67 percent in the European Union. "New pandemic waves could reverse the current reopening trend in many economies owing to still-insufficient vaccination coverage," the ADB warned.

While a resurgence in COVID-19 infections was the main threat, the ADB also flagged a prolonged downturn in China's housing market, rising inflation and global supply disruptions as risks to the outlook. China—where several real estate companies have been plunged into financial crisis following a debt crackdown by Beijing—was expected to grow 8.0 percent this year and 5.3 percent in 2022.

The ADB said the growth rates were slightly slower than its previous predictions. —AFP



MANILA: The Omicron coronavirus variant is spreading around the world, fueling worries about the global economic recovery. — AFP

Waheedi wins ABK Alfouz weekly prize KD 10,000

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) announced Mohammad Abdulsamad Waheedi as the winner of KD 10,000 in the Alfouz weekly draw. The draw was held under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and announced live on Q8 Pulse Station FM88.8 on 13th December 2021.

The Alfouz draw account offers ABK customers the chance to win life-changing rewards. With Alfouz, ABK customers will get a chance to win KD 10,000 in Kuwait's highest single weekly draw and the ultimate grand prize of KD 5,000 monthly additional income for 10 years. Both new and existing ABK customers can benefit from this opportunity, with a minimum account balance of K D100 only. The next draw winner announcement will be on 20th December 2021.

Farah Al-Mohammad wins Gulf Bank's Salary Package draw

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank conducted its eleventh monthly Salary Package draw of the year to announce the winner for November 2021. The lucky winner, Farah Jumaah Mohammad Al-Mohammad, will claim a cash prize worth 12 times her salary.

The draw was held yesterday at Gulf Bank's main branch, in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce & Industry.

Mohammad Al-Qattan, the General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank, said: "We would like to congratulate Farah Al-Mohammad, this year's eleventh Salary Package draw winner. The next draw will be on our annual grand prize of 100 times the winner's salary. We encourage everyone to seize this opportunity and gain a chance to win. Gulf Bank's Salary Account is the only account in Kuwait that offers cash prizes to reward its clients, in addition to exclusive offers that are specifically tailored to meet our clients' needs."

Throughout 2021, Gulf Bank's Salary Package offers clients a wide range of exclusive offers,



Mohammad Al-Qattan

including the ability to choose between an interest-free loan or a cash prize of up to KD 300, and a free credit card, with these offers being valid for workers in both the public and private sectors. Gulf Bank is also providing special offers for frontline workers in appreciation of their continuous efforts in combating the pandemic.

customer segment upgrade. The new frontline offer is open to Kuwaiti employees working in the Fire Brigade, National Guard, Civil Aviation (including Kuwait Airways) and in the following Ministries: Health, Defense, Information and Interior.

Salary package - exclusive offer

As part of the vast range of services and benefits available to Salary Account customers, Gulf Bank offers its clients the opportunity to choose the most appropriate benefits from a wide selection of attractive options. With the 2021 Kuwaiti salary offer, new customers who transfer their salaries to Gulf Bank are automatically enrolled in the monthly draws, giving them the chance to win cash prizes of up to 12 times their salary. Customers are also enrolled in a yearly draw of Kuwait's largest salary prize, a cash prize of up to 100 times the winner's salary.

Gulf Bank's Salary Account also gives new customers the opportunity to receive either a cash gift of up to KD 300 upon transferring their salaries to Gulf Bank, or an interest-free loan of up to KD 25,000. Customers must have a minimum salary of KD 500 and are eligible for the offer following their first salary transfer to Gulf Bank. Customers can also enjoy additional benefits like a Visa or MasterCard credit card free of charge for a year. They can also apply for a loan of up to KD 70,000 with a repayment period of 15 years, or a consumer loan of up to KD 25,000.

KIB special offer on Requeue app for Black segment customers

KUWAIT: As part of its ongoing efforts to strengthen the bank's bundle of banking services with innovative offers that meet the aspirations of all segments customers, Kuwait International Bank (KIB) recently launched a special offer for its Black segment customers on the Requeue app: the platform designed to automate the queuing process by introducing field-tested technology. Through this new offer, Black segment customers can now get free KIB tickets by using the Requeue app and enjoy additional exclusive features that facilitate the queuing process and allow access to more than 90 brands of restaurants and coffee houses from amongst the Requeue extensive list of partners.



Faisal Al-Shuwaired

Some of the exclusive features of the KIB ticket on the app include giving customers access to fully booked lists, priority access to enable them to skip waiting queues, choosing food from the menu and completing requests prior to entry. All that is required to activate the service is that Black segment customers enter the activation code sent to them via SMS, whereby they become eligible to win 10 free electronic tickets from KIB on Requeue, with tickets remaining valid until customers use up all earned tickets.

On his part, Assistant General Manager of the Retail Banking Department at KIB, Head of Premier Banking, Faisal Al-Shuwaired stated: "In light of the highly competitive nature of the Kuwait banking sector and the race amongst banks to develop their services and products to elevate their offerings, KIB continues to succeed in creating new ways to cater to all segments of its clients and add value to their way of life. At the same time, we remain committed to our "Bank for Life" philosophy, looking to continuously engage with our customers and offer them a next-level banking experience that takes into account every little detail of their day-to-day lives, catering to them as a partner and not just as a bank or a financial institution."

On the other hand, Al-Shuwaired stressed on KIB's dedication to cooperate with and support Kuwaiti initiatives and inventions such as Requeue and its founders. The home-bred Requeue app was launched in 2020 to offer modern day solutions, automating the queuing process by introducing field-tested technology, saving its users the trouble of finding available places and speeding up the receipt of orders, especially during the pandemic. The app has proven to be a huge success among its users, which led KIB to join the list of its associates.



KUWAIT: UK Minister of Exports, MP Michael Freer, British Ambassador and members from the British Embassy, Kuwait along with Lulu Hypermarket's top management, pose for a group photo at Al-Qurain branch.

LuLu Hypermarket welcomes UK Minister of Exports

KUWAIT: LuLu Hypermarket, the regional leader in retailing, welcomed the UK Minister of Exports, MP Michael Freer at the Al-Qurain branch. The Minister, British Ambassador and members from the British Embassy, Kuwait, along with Lulu Hypermarket top management, toured the market and viewed a wide range of displayed British Products.

In view of the ongoing pandemic, the reception was organized in full adherence to all health and safety guidelines issued by the authorities. However, the festive atmosphere of the promotion was maintained by special decorations in all the hypermarket's outlets. That includes large cut-outs and images of historic monuments and iconic structures of the

United Kingdom, which provided an exciting backdrop to the campaign.

During the tour, LuLu Hypermarket's management showcased the finest food products from the United Kingdom, with special prices offered on all UK products. More than three dozen leading British food companies, including popular brands such as Actiph Water, Aunt Bessie's, Baxters, Bespoke London, Bisto, Delamere Dairy, Doves Farm and Encona, Goodfella's, Ice King, Kettle, Mars UK, Meridian, Mornflake, Morrisons, Onken, Patak's, Robinsons, Rowntrees, Rowse, Sea Magik, So Delicious, Surcare, Tate Lyle, Unilever, Vimto, Walkers, Whole Earth, Wing Yip, Young's and others, were on offer at very special prices



during the festival.

The LuLu Hypermarket's ongoing endeavor to bring high-quality food products from around the world to

shoppers in Kuwait, and to offer customers with the widest selection of best of the world products at competitive prices.

Al-Tijari winners of Al-Najma weekly and salary draws

KUWAIT: Commercial Bank of Kuwait conducted the weekly draws on Al-Najma Account and Salary Transfer Campaign on December 12, 2021. The draws were conducted in the presence of Ministry of Commerce and Industry representative Abdulaziz Ashkanani.

The results of the draws were as follows:

- 1) Al-Najma weekly account - the prize of KD 5,000 went to the winner Aishah Mohammed Ben Ali
- 2) Salary account campaign - the prize of up to KD 1,000 went to the winner Salah Abdulraheem Naser Hafedh

The bank stated that the salary campaign is aimed at customers who transfer their salaries of KD 500 or more to the bank, especially Kuwaiti employees and residents working in the government, oil sectors and companies listed with the Bank as well as retirees, and take advantage of the benefits of this campaign and get an instant cash

gift from KD 400 to KD 500 or an interest-free loan for a period of up to four years and up to KD 70,000, Kuwaiti pensioner, along with expatriate customers who transfer their debt to the Bank will receive an instant cash gift of 2 percent from their transferred debt up to KD 1,000.

The bank stated that Al-Najma Account prizes are distinguished by the highest cash prize and diversity of prizes throughout the year clarifying that the account offers weekly prize of KD 5,000, monthly prize of KD 20,000 and a semi-annual prize of KD 500,000 in addition to the largest prize - linked bank account payout of KD 1,500,000.

Business

Omicron hangs over Bank of England's rate decision

BoE to weigh runaway inflation against possible virus impact

LONDON: The Bank of England will likely hold its interest rates at their current record lows tomorrow as it weighs runaway inflation against the possible economic impact of the Omicron coronavirus variant. Initially, analysts had expected the BoE to raise its key rate from the current level of 0.1 percent in a bid to rein in inflation, which surging energy costs have pushed well above target.

However, Omicron, which emerged last month, has forced the UK government to re-impose coronavirus restrictions and sparked fresh economic turmoil which most analysts believe will persuade the BoE to hold its fire. UK inflation rocketed to a near decade-high of 4.2 percent in October, and is set to top 5.0 percent in April according to a BoE official.

Central banks normally raise borrowing costs to dampen inflation, which is running beyond the BoE's target of 2.0 percent. Prime Minister Boris Johnson has, however, warned of a looming "tidal wave" of Omicron that could overwhelm the state-run National Health Service (NHS).

Policymakers will also be mindful of upbeat UK unemployment data and

upcoming inflation numbers for November today. Unemployment has fallen again, despite the end of a government scheme to keep millions of private-sector workers in their roles during the pandemic.

'Significant degree' of uncertainty
"Without the Omicron variant, today's strong labor market report could easily have been enough to rubber stamp a December rate increase," said Martin Beck, economic adviser to financial researchers the EY ITEM Club. "But the... significant degree of uncertainty around Omicron suggests the Bank of England won't move on Thursday."

Beck also noted that Omicron had sent oil and other commodity prices plunging, taking the sting out of fears about elevated global inflation. The UK economy was already struggling prior to the arrival of Omicron, growing by an anemic 0.1 percent in October from 0.6 percent in September.

"The government's recently-imposed 'Plan B' COVID-19 restrictions mean there is a good chance that the economy contracted in December," said Capital

Economics economist, Ruth Gregory. "If the pressure on the NHS increases, restrictions might be tightened further, implying substantial downside risks to the first quarter of next year, too. "Against this backdrop, we no longer expect the Bank of England to raise interest rates from 0.1 percent."

However, other analysts disagree. "News of the Omicron variant has changed little on the medium-term economic outlook," said Deutsche Bank's Sanjay Raja, who is forecasting a hike to 0.25 percent.

"The labor market remains as tight as it has been in recent memory, in spite of the furlough scheme ending on September 30. And inflation continues to outpace staff forecasts." Britain this week tightened virus restrictions in England as Omicron cases surge, and issued guidance to work from home and mandatory COVID passes. Johnson has also brought forward a target to give over-18s a booster jab by one month to the end of December. The government also recently rolled out new travel curbs to try and prevent transmission of the variant. —AFP



LONDON: The Bank of England will likely hold its interest rates at their current record lows tomorrow as it weighs runaway inflation against the possible economic impact of the Omicron coronavirus variant.



NBK celebrates graduation of Moody's program

KUWAIT: In line with its strategy to develop employees professionally in cooperation with specialized international institutions, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) celebrated the graduation of a new batch of trainees from the "Moody's Credit Curriculum Program - Intermediate Level" organized in partnership with the international credit rating agency, Moody's Analytics, for the 5th year in a row.

The ceremony was attended by Salah Al-Fulaij, CEO of NBK - Kuwait, Sulaiman Al-Marzouq, Deputy CEO of NBK - Kuwait, Emad Al-Ablani, GM - Group Human Resources, Mohammed Al-Othman, GM-Consumer Banking Group, Parkson Cheong - Group Chief Risk Officer, Pradeep Handa, GM - Foreign Corporate, Oil and Trade Finance Group, Ahmed Bourisly, GM - Corporate Banking Group, as well as other executives from the bank.

The program was held remotely and through Moody's E-Learning platform over a period of four

months, covering various topics such as: Intermediate Credit Analysis, Credit Structuring & Documentation, Relationship Excellence & Negotiation Skills, as well as Effective Planning & Execution Skills. A total of 45 participants (Both male and female) from various departments including Consumer Banking Group, Corporate Banking Group, Risk Management Group, International Banking Group, and Foreign Corporate, Oil and Trade Finance Group. The participants were divided across 2 cohorts.

On the occasion of graduating the newest batch, Emad Al-Ablani, GM - Group Human Resources commented, "Moody's Credit Curriculum Program embodies NBK's belief that growth is only attainable through developing the skills of its human resources. Therefore, we encourage our employees to boost their capabilities and help them develop their career by providing training and development programs in cooperation with the most prestigious global institutions."

Al-Ablani added: "NBK invests heavily in its employees, regarding them as its most valuable resource, by providing the best training programs and workshops to enhance their skills in the areas of leadership, implementation of strategies, change management and innovation to keep pace with the

rapid developments in the banking industry." Thanks to its diversified environment and remarkable opportunities, NBK is the favorite private sector employer for experienced and competent talents, as reflected in the quality of products and services provided by the bank to its customers, he emphasized.

"In line with our comprehensive strategy to improve the employee's learning experience, Training and Development Department of Group Human Resources strives to utilize advanced technology to make E-Learning more appealing and effective for all employees, Al-Ablani explained. "We live in a continuously changing environment that is full of challenges, which requires our employees to be more flexible and capable of continuous development. Therefore, a long time ago, we changed the traditional idea of training and focused more on the concept of "Accelerated Learning" with the aim of enhancing the skills of our employees throughout their career," he concluded.



Emad Al-Ablani

stc launches the 'FULL 5G' technology

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling digital transformation in Kuwait, introduced the latest 5G Standalone technology dubbed 'FULL 5G' that elevates the 5G experience to a new level, providing better speeds, lower latency, and improved coverage. The new 'FULL 5G' technology, is exclusive to stc's network, whereas customers with compatible routers will be able to enjoy the redefined experience through a free upgrade.

stc released a statement mentioning that it is the only telecom company in Kuwait and the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) offering the 'FULL 5G' technology, further building on its current strong 5G network and infrastructure. The FULL 5G technology is set to enhance stc's network, upgrading the customer experience to a new exceptional level with a spectrum of 'FULL' capabilities. stc highlighted that routers compatible with the technology will allow stc customers to enjoy the full gaming experience with lower pings and better latency. stc takes streaming further with improved indoor coverage, so stc customers can watch their favorite movies or tv shows from wherever they are with download and upload speeds synced to perfection.

Customers wanting to benefit from stc's exclusive new FULL 5G technology can do so by purchasing a compatible router. As for stc customers who have



Engineer Maziad Al-Harbi during the launch event at stc's headquarters.

already purchased one of the compatible routers from stc, FULL 5G technology will be activated automatically. Providing this one-of-a-kind connectivity solution builds on stc's longstanding commitment to progressively enhance and develop its range of offerings while enabling digital transformation, an approach that aligns with the objectives under Kuwait's 2035 vision.

Commenting on FULL 5G technology, engineer Maziad Al-Harbi, Chief Executive Officer at stc said, "When it comes to enriching the customer experience, stc spares no effort in exploring and adopting new-to-market solutions that aim to enrich the digital lifestyle of its valued customers. With our primary focus set on offering innovative solutions and exceptional telecom services, we are releasing this upgrade to all stc customers that currently use a compatible router."

Al-Harbi said, "The 5G revolution has redefined the way we connect to the world and has set the bar on a higher level in terms of the types of solutions



stc Chief Consumer Officer (CCO) Engineer Amer Atoui during the launch.

we can offer our customers. Prior to the pandemic, stc focused on strengthening its 5G infrastructure and expanding its network coverage to 98 percent of the populated areas in Kuwait. We have now taken our investment in 5G to the next level which will in return aid in implementing our strategy to enabling digital transformation in Kuwait. To provide our individual and corporate customers with exceptional services, we have also enhanced our digital touchpoints including our newly re-engineered mobile application, website, and digital kiosks to provide a streamlined and seamless journey all around."

He added, "The FULL 5G technology upgrade takes it one step further by enhancing indoor coverage through the FULL 5G technology, as well as improving internet speeds along with a better latency. In accordance with our 5G development strategy, stc will continue to explore and introduce innovative solutions that customers can take advantage of to engage with the online world."

Chinese developer Shimao share plunge adds to property woes

BEIJING: Chinese real estate firm Shimao Group's share price plunged to its lowest level in a decade yesterday, adding to concerns over the country's heavily indebted property sector. Chinese property firms have struggled in the wake of Beijing's drive last year to curb excessive debt in the real estate sector as well as rampant consumer speculation.

Last week property giant Evergrande defaulted on bond debts worth more than \$1.2 billion, while smaller firm Kaisa followed suit on bonds worth \$400 million. Property developer Shimao is the latest firm dragged down by those woes, with its shares falling nearly 34 percent over the last five days.

China's 13th largest property developer by contracted sales, the company has around \$10.1 billion in outstanding local and offshore bonds. Shimao and its subsidiaries will need to refinance or repay \$2.5 billion in bond maturities through 2022, according to Bloomberg data, with a 30 million yuan (\$4.7 million) repayment due on Friday and a two billion yuan note due next month.

In a statement to Bloomberg, Shimao on Monday blamed unspecified market rumors for the sell-off in its stocks and bonds. Weighed down by Shimao's losses, Chinese property stocks are on track to fall to their lowest level since March 2017, according to an index by the financial news agency.

JP Morgan Chase analysts yesterday downgraded the firm to "underweight", citing "heightened concerns on liquidity" and recommending a bearish stance. —AFP

Natural calamities in 2021 caused \$250bn in damage: Swiss Re

ZURICH: Natural catastrophes and extreme weather events caused around \$250 billion in damage this year, an increase of 24 percent over the previous year, the world's biggest reinsurer Swiss Re, estimated yesterday. For the insurance industry alone, "extreme weather events... including a deep winter freeze, floods, severe thunderstorms, heatwaves and a major hurricane, resulted in annual insured losses from natural catastrophes estimated at \$105 billion, the fourth highest since 1970," Swiss Re said in a statement.

In fact, insured losses from natural disasters this year "again exceeded the previous 10-year average, continuing the trend of an annual 5-6-percent rise in losses seen in recent decades," the reinsurance giant said. The two costliest natural disasters of the year were both recorded in the United States, Swiss Re said.

Hurricane Ida wreaked \$30-32 billion in estimated insured damages, including flooding in New York.

And winter storm Uri-which brought extreme cold and heavy snowfall that caused power grid failures in Texas-caused \$15 billion in insured losses. The costliest event in Europe was the flooding in Germany, Belgium and nearby countries in July, which caused \$40 billion in economic losses and \$13 billion in insured losses, Swiss Re calculated. In addition to natural catastrophes, man-made disasters caused \$9.0 billion in economic losses, a decline of 38 percent from the previous year, and \$7.0 billion in insured losses, down 24 percent year-on-year, Swiss Re said. —AFP

CURTAIN FALLS ON SAUDI'S FIRST MAJOR FILM FESTIVAL



A handout picture shows Red Sea Film Festival chairman Mohamed Turki walking with British model Naomi Campbell on the red carpet of the closing ceremony of the first edition of the festival in Saudi Arabia's Red Sea coastal city of Jeddah on December 13, 2021.



Saudi actress Fay Fouad poses on the red carpet prior to the screening of the film 'Daughters of Abdulrahman' during the first edition of the Red Sea Film Festival in Jeddah.



Indonesian actress Ara Winda Kirana poses with her 'Best Actress' award for her role in the film 'Yuni' after the closing ceremony.



Red Sea Film Festival chairman Mohamed Turki embraces British model Naomi Campbell.

The curtain closed Monday on Saudi Arabia's first major film festival, four years after the kingdom lifted a decades-old ban on cinemas in a push to soften its ultra-conservative image. Arab and foreign celebrities descended on the week-long Red Sea International Film Festival in the western coastal city of Jeddah, where 138 films were screened from 67 countries in more than 30 languages.

On December 6, actors and actresses walked the red carpet in evening wear—a far cry from the traditional black abaya that until recently was the officially mandated dress code for women. The festival opened a day after Jeddah hosted its first Formula One Grand Prix, also an attempt to portray Saudi Arabia in a different light. But calls to boycott from critics and



Saudi actress Fay Fouad arrives on the red carpet during the closing ceremony of the first edition of the Red Sea Film Festival in Saudi Arabia's Red Sea coastal city of Jeddah.

activists had threatened to overshadow both events.

Critics said the kingdom is using major sports and entertainment events to whitewash its poor human rights record—especially after the 2018 murder and dismemberment of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the kingdom's Istanbul consulate. Saudi opposition figure Waleed Al-Hathloul said events such as the film festival divert people's attention from such abuses. "When we think about Saudi, we don't think about Khashoggi any more but about all these events," he told AFP, adding: "A film festival without freedom of expression is propaganda."

Sami Khan, a Canadian Oscar-nominated film director, was among those calling for a boycott of the festival from when it was first announced. But others in the film industry steered clear of commenting directly on Saudi Arabia's rights record. "I mean, look, I'm just here to support my friend and be here as a member of the film industry and that's it," British actor Ed Westwick told AFP. "I think the country is doing some great things, and this is one of them."

Canadian musician and actor Rob Raco refused to comment on Riyadh's rights record, saying: "I think right now, they (Saudis) are in a place of creating a better tomorrow, so I can't really comment on that, just saying that right now is an incredible time for this country." The rise of Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, in 2017 has ushered in a number of reforms. A social shift in the conservative Gulf state has included the lifting of a ban on women driving and allowing mixed-gender concerts and other events, even as a strict crackdown on dissent remains. —AFP



Picture released by the Red Sea Festival shows Tunisian actress Henda Sabry posing for a picture prior to the closing ceremony of the first edition of the Red Sea Film Festival in Saudi Arabia's Red Sea coastal city of Jeddah. —AFP photos

'Belfast' and 'Power of the Dog' top nominations for troubled Globes

Kenneth Branagh's childhood-inspired "Belfast" and Jane Campion's dark Western "The Power of the Dog" topped Monday's Golden Globes nominations, as the troubled awards seek to shrug off a Hollywood boycott over ethical lapses. The Hollywood Foreign Press Association — which votes on the Globes — has been under fire over allegations of racism, sexism, bullying and corruption.

Studios including Warner Bros, Netflix and Amazon are refusing to work with the HFPA, and television network NBC has dropped its Globes broadcast next month, meaning A-listers are unlikely to attend whatever form of ceremony is held. "It's certainly not going to be the celebrity-driven event that we've had in the past," HFPA president Helen Hoehne told AFP at the Globes nominations announcement in Los Angeles. "We have a long history of handing out the award and we just wanted to continue to do it like we always have," she added.

"Belfast" and "Power of the Dog" collected seven nominations apiece for the 79th Golden Globe awards. Deaf family drama "Coda," sci-fi epic "Dune" and Will Smith's tennis biopic "King Richard," about the father of Venus and Serena Williams, rounded out the best drama category — the Globes' biggest prize. Steven Spielberg's acclaimed remake of "West Side Story" was among the best comedy or musical contenders, while HBO drama "Succession" topped the

Globes' television section, with five nominations.

Rival ceremony

The Golden Globes have traditionally been second in importance only to the Oscars in Hollywood's film award season, but their future has been plunged into doubt. With the January 9 broadcast of the Globes cancelled, and doubts over whether winners will even accept their prizes, the rival Critics Choice Awards has swooped in to hold its own star-studded gala across town on the same day. The HFPA diversity row was triggered by a Los Angeles Times investigation earlier this year showing that the organization did not have a single Black member.

More than 100 Tinseltown publicists also wrote to the HFPA demanding an end to "discriminatory behavior, unprofessionalism, ethical impropriety and alleged financial corruption." The organization has rushed through reforms, including admitting its biggest ever annual intake of new members earlier this year. But actors such as Scarlett Johansson and Mark Ruffalo have slammed the changes as inadequate, while Tom Cruise returned his three Golden Globes to the HFPA in protest.

Globes voters have been frequently criticized for omitting strong performances from actors and directors of color from their nominations. This year, three of the best drama actor nominees were Black, including Smith, Denzel Washington in "Tragedy of Macbeth" and — arguably the category's biggest surprise — Mahershala Ali for low-key sci-fi "Swan Song." Campion and Maggie Gyllenhaal ("The Lost Daughter") landed rare female best director nods.

'Collective silence'

Rapper Snoop Dogg was the surprise guest at Monday's early morning Globes nomination unveiling



Helen Hoehne, president of the Hollywood Foreign Press Association (HFPA), and Snoop Dogg attend the nominations announcement for the 79th Golden Globe Awards, December 13, 2021. —AFP

at a Beverly Hills hotel, reading out multiple categories. The announcement, usually broadcast on major US television morning shows but this time streamed on the Globes' YouTube page, was criticized as lackluster. "(I)n the hour after the nominations were unveiled," wrote the Los Angeles Times, "the reaction from Hollywood was collective silence."

The rival Critics Choice Awards also unveiled nominees Monday, with "Belfast" and "West Side Story" leading on 11 nods, ahead of "Dune" and "The Power of the Dog" on 10. Studios including Disney's Pixar issued congratulations on both sets of nominations. "Congratulations to the cast and crew of #PixarLuca for their #CriticsChoice and #GoldenGlobe nominations for Best Animated Feature Film," wrote its official account. —AFP

Row as foie gras comes off menu in some French cities

Politicians in France's Perigord region, known for its foie gras, have denounced a decision by the mayors of several cities across the country to ban the delicacy from official functions. "At a time when the detractors of foie gras are multiplying, let's be proud of our gastronomic identity and our products," says a petition signed by 56 politicians from the southern region. The production of foie gras, which is made from the livers of force-fed ducks and geese, is regularly condemned by animal rights activists.

They have welcomed the decisions by green or socialist mayors in several cities, including Strasbourg, Grenoble and Lyon, to ban it from official tables. But the petition dismissed the bans as "political opportunism". This latest petition follows a statement by animal rights group Peta last week praising one such ban imposed by the mayor of Lyon — a city renowned for its gastronomic tradition. But the petition said the decisions were based on an out-of-date understanding of how foie gras is produced.

Most foie gras, it argued is "produced on French territory on small, ethical farms that comply with strict quality standards," the elected officials argue in the petition. And the mayor of Pau, Francois Bayrou insisted on the excellence of the product during a television interview Sunday. "Today's force-feeding has nothing to do with yesterday's force-feeding," said Bayrou, a well-known national figure for his leadership of the centrist MoDem party. "I can assure you today that this force-feeding is gentle, it was not in the past," he told BFM-TV. —AFP

DIPLOMATIC WOMEN'S COMMITTEE CELEBRATES RETURN TO NORMAL LIFE



The Diplomatic Women's Committee celebrated the return to normal life by holding a grand ceremony of the year 2021 and welcoming the new year 2022 in the presence of the Honorary Chairperson of Diplomatic Women's Committee Sheikhah Halah Bader Mohamed Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah and a group of lady ambassadors and Spouse of the ambassa-



dors accredited to the State of Kuwait, among the attendees were lady diplomats, friends of the committee and representatives of companies who sponsored the event.

A group of Embassies including Republic of Cuba, Kyrgyz Republic, Republic of Indonesia, and Republic of Sierra Leone presented very special performances inspired by the Art and cul-



tures of their countries. At the end of the ceremony, the committee presented big gifts from Ethiopian Airlines and IFA tourism company with travel tickets.

The character of Santa Claus presented gifts to all the participants in the ceremony. In the closing remarks, the committee's advisor, Madame Nargis Al-Shatti, expressed her grati-



tude and thanks for this wonderful evening, praised the performers and appreciated everyone who contributed to the success of this event, she congratulated and wished all for a happy new year wishing that the new year 2022 would be filled with happiness, joy, health, wellness and success, and that God would lift the affliction of pandemic from the world.

Lifestyle | Features



Japanese chef Tsuyoshi Hachisuka grills eel at his restaurant in Hamamatsu, Shizuoka prefecture. —AFP photos



Seafood wholesaler employees prepare skewers of eels in Hamamatsu, Shizuoka prefecture.



Eels are seen at a sorting station in Hamamatsu, Shizuoka prefecture.

ADORED AND ENDANGERED: THE COMPLEX WORLD OF JAPANESE EEL

Tsuyoshi Hachisuka gently places skewered eel on a grill, preparing a much-loved Japanese delicacy that is now so endangered it commands eyewatering prices and the attention of international traffickers. Consumed worldwide, eel is particularly popular in Asia, and perhaps nowhere more so than Japan, where remains found in tombs show it has been eaten on the archipelago for thousands of years. Despite its enduring popularity, much about the eel remains a mystery.

Precisely how it reproduces is unclear, and coaxing it to do so in captivity without intervention has proved unsuccessful so far. Pressures on wild stocks ranging from pollution to overfishing mean supplies have dwindled dramatically in recent decades. While the writhing snake-like creature is repellent to some, it is a mainstay of Japanese cuisine, and since the 17th century has most often been prepared "kabayaki"-style: skewered, grilled and basted in a mixture of soy sauce and mirin rice wine.

In central Japan's Shizuoka, 66-year-old Hachisuka's restaurant in Hamamatsu city has used the same basting sauce base for four decades. "I adjust it as I go. It mustn't be too sweet or too salty," he told AFP. But while his recipe has stayed the same, his product has not. The annual catch in Japan of young known as glass eels has fallen to 10 percent of 1960 levels.

That has driven prices sky-high, even in a country that has battled for years to

achieve inflation. "A dish of unaju (eel on rice) is today nearly three times more expensive than when I started," said Hachisuka. There are 19 species and subspecies of eel, many of them now threatened. In 2014, the Japanese eel was listed as endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, which cited factors including habitat loss, overfishing, pollution and migration barriers.

Enduring mysteries

Protecting the animal is complicated by their complex life cycle, which unfolds over a vast area, and the many unknowns about how they reproduce. The mystery of eel reproduction has fascinated scientists for thousands of years, with even ancient Greek philosopher and naturalist Aristotle puzzling over it. He theorized eels must simply emerge spontaneously in mud because he could find no traces of their larvae. "We think that the eel emerged approximately 60 million years ago, near the island of Borneo," explains Mari Kuroki, assistant professor at Tokyo University's aquatic biosciences department.

"As continental drift affected marine currents and the distance grew between the areas where eels lived and laid eggs, the creature has adapted," she told AFP. It is now present in every ocean except the Antarctic. But despite their ubiquity, it wasn't until the early 20th century that European scientists discovered that

European and American eels are born somewhere in the Sargasso Sea near Cuba, with their larvae then carried by currents to different regions.

And the precise location of eel spawning sites remained an enigma until 2009, when a scientific mission pinpointed the breeding grounds of the Japanese eel, west of the Mariana Islands, some 2,000-3,000 kilometers from Japan's coasts. Evidence suggests the species mates and lays its eggs at the spot, but the process has still never been observed. Once they hatch into larvae, the creatures drift towards coastlines, growing on the way into glass eels. They swim into estuaries and rivers in Japan, Taiwan, China and South Korea, and live in freshwater habitats for between five and 15 years before swimming back out to sea to spawn, and then die.

'White gold'

Eels are vulnerable to a wide range of catastrophic human behaviors, and climate change-linked phenomenon like El Nino have affected the ocean currents that carry them, as well as their spawning sites. The deterioration of their freshwater habitats, including by river development, also plays a significant role, along with pollution. Dams can block migratory routes and eels are sometimes caught in hydroelectric turbines, a leading cause of death for the species. Since 2012, scientists in the four territories where the Japanese eel is most commonly

found have worked together on conservation, setting aquaculture quotas in 2015.

But restrictions, including an EU ban on exports in 2010, have created a flourishing black market, with poaching and international trafficking. Over 99 percent of the supply in Japan consists of caught or imported glass eels raised to maturity on farms. In 2020, declared catches and legal imports of glass eels for farms in Japan amounted to 14 tons, according to Japan's Fisheries Agency (JFA).

But the country's farms reported buying over 20 tons of glass eels, a gap indicating the role of illicit trade. Environmental group WWF Japan believes the true scale of the problem is even larger, estimating between 40 to 60 percent of eels raised in Japan come from illegal sources. In Hamamatsu, the brackish waters of Lake Hamana near the sea are an ideal habitat for eels, and the hunt for the creatures takes place there each year between December and April, under a cloak of secrecy.

"The eel is the most valuable fish in this lake," says Kunihiro Kako, a 66-year-old fisherman, holding a long net with a conical end that he uses for his catch. "So we have to be careful." The creature is so precious it is sometimes dubbed "white gold," with prices fluctuating wildly depending on the catch size. Farms paid an average of 1.32 million yen (\$11,680 at today's rates) in 2020 for a kilo of glass eel, according to the JFA, after a record of 2.99 million yen in 2018.

'Appreciate each eel'

With stocks falling and prices rising, eel consumption in Japan has changed, and the dish is now seen as a treat rather than a regular meal. A record 160,000 tons was consumed across the country in 2000, but that figure has fallen by two-thirds. "In the past, all the meals sold at grill places and local hotel restaurants had eel in them," says Senichiro Kamo, a seafood wholesaler on Lake Hamana.

"It was also in the bento boxes sold at stations. But since the price has tripled, that's no longer possible," adds Kamo, half of whose sales are of eel. Eels of all types are notoriously resistant to breeding in captivity, and since the 1960s, Japanese researchers have worked to coax them into the mood, but without success. In 2010, experts bred two consecutive generations of Japanese eels in a lab for the first time, a major advance.

But these "artificial" eels aren't likely to hit the market anytime soon, says Ryusuke Sudo of the Japan Fisheries Research and Education Agency in the Izu region, southwest of Tokyo. "The biggest problem now is that the method is very expensive," he told AFP. Each eel requires individual human intervention, the reproduction rate is low, and creatures produced in captivity also grow slower than their wild counterparts, he said. Researcher Kuroki believes the best way to protect the species is to make consumers more mindful. "We need to appreciate each eel we eat," she said, "keeping in mind that this is a precious natural resource." —AFP



Seafood wholesaler employees prepare eels for grilling in Hamamatsu, Shizuoka prefecture.



Japanese chef Tsuyoshi Hachisuka dips grilled eel into sauce at his restaurant in Hamamatsu, Shizuoka prefecture.



Photo shows an eel in an aquarium at the Japan Fisheries Research and Education Agency in a suburb of Minamiizu, Shizuoka prefecture.

Nigeria celebrates as return of looted Benin treasures nears

Nigeria's traditional ruler in southern Benin city hosted a day of celebrations on Monday in anticipation of the long-awaited return of two bronze treasures looted during colonial times. Dancers and musicians performed in King Uku Akpolokpolor Ewuare II's palace, which was decorated with banners of the artefacts: a bronze cockerel and a king's bust. "Today marks a watershed in our efforts to retrieve the bronzes, ivories and other works of arts which were removed from this palace," said the Oba, or king of Benin, whose ancestors reigned over the region when it was ransacked by British soldiers in 1897.

In a formal ceremony attended by royal guests and traditional chiefs, the king signed the official document transferring full possession of the works from the UK's Aberdeen and Cambridge universities - even though the pieces themselves were not to be seen. "At the appropriate time, the bronzes... will be delivered to us here in the palace," the king said, without giving further details. Thousands of Nigeria's so-called Benin Bronzes - 16th to 18th century metal plaques and sculptures - were looted from the palace of the ancient Benin Kingdom and ended up in museums across the US and Europe.

Nigeria has been negotiating their return and plans to build a museum in Benin City in southern Edo state, where it hopes to house the bronzes, some of the most highly regarded works of African art. Apart from Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany have also received requests from African countries to return lost treasures. Experts estimate that 85 to 90 percent of African cultural artefacts were taken from the continent. Last month, neighboring West African country Benin welcomed back nearly 30 royal treasures looted by colonial France more than 130 years ago. —AFP

4th time lucky: Kim Kardashian passes 'baby bar' law exam

Reality TV star Kim Kardashian has passed a law exam in California that puts her one step closer to becoming a lawyer, she said Monday. The billionaire businesswoman has long cherished a dream of qualifying to practice law, and notched her test success on her fourth attempt. "OMG I PASSED THE BABY BAR EXAM!!!!!!," she tweeted, referring to the First Year Law Students' Examination, usually taken after a year of study. "For anyone who doesn't know my law school journey, know this wasn't easy or handed to me."

"I failed this exam 3 times in 2 years, but I got back up each time and studied harder and tried again until I did it!!! (I did have COVID on the 3rd try w a 104 fever but I'm not making excuses." Only law students who do not follow a traditional route - including those who do not have the requisite years at college - need to take the "Baby Bar," according to the State Bar of California. The exam consists of four essays and 100 multiple choice questions on contracts, criminal law and torts, the bar said. Only around a fifth to a quarter of test-takers pass the exam, state bar figures show.

"I was told by top lawyers that this was a close to impossible journey and harder than the traditional law school route," Kardashian said. "But it was my only option and it feels so soooooo good to be here and on my way to achieving my goals." Kardashian will need to sit two further exams - and be determined to be of good moral character - to be allowed to practice law. The TV star has previously lobbied for criminal justice reform, and for clemency in individual cases. She visited the White House to meet with former president Donald Trump in 2019.

She is not the first member of the family to go into law; her late father Robert Kardashian was part of



US socialite Kim Kardashian arrives for the 2021 Met Gala at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on September 13, 2021 in New York. —AFP

the legal team that successfully defended athlete-turned-movie-star OJ Simpson against a double murder charge, in one of the most notorious US trials of the 20th century. "My dad would be so proud & he would actually be so shocked to know that this is my path now but he would've been my best study partner," Kim Kardashian tweeted Monday.

"I am told he was notorious for making fun of people who didn't pass on their first attempt like him, but he would've been my best cheerleader!" Kardashian is currently divorcing her estranged husband, musician Kanye West. US media reported last week that she had applied to a judge to be declared "officially single" and to remove her husband's surname from her current official name, Kim Kardashian-West. The pair have four children, two of whom were in the audience with their mother last week when West reportedly admitted a plea mid-song for Kardashian to reconcile with him. —AFP

Refugee Afghan musicians arrive in Portugal

Portugal on Monday welcomed 273 Afghan refugees including students and teachers from a national music school who had fled Afghanistan to escape Taliban reprisals. The Taliban banned music under their strict interpretation of Islamic law during their first stint in power between 1996 and 2001 and there are fears they will reinstate similarly draconian rules after they regained power in August.

The musicians fled Afghanistan's capital Kabul for Qatar in October before being resettled in Portugal. Ahmad Naser Sarmast, director of the Afghanistan National Institute of Music, said reopening his school was a key objective. "The commitment is to reopen this school. We have a mission (for the) music of Afghanistan to continue," he said. "Thank you to (the) international community. You all save our lives," music student Shogula Safi said as she arrived at a military airport in the Portuguese capital Lisbon.

Prime Minister Antonio Costa welcomed the news on Twitter, saying the "students, young women, young men and their relatives will have the opportunity to live and resume their studies in Portugal." "I'm very happy because I see my friends smiling. We can continue playing music. It makes me really happy," added Murtaza Mohammadi, a musician from the Afghanistan National Institute of Music. Portugal has so far taken 764 mostly young Afghan refugees, according to government figures. The southern European country welcomed dozens of players from Afghanistan's national women's football team and their families in October. —AFP

Sports

Wounded England face pink-ball challenge in second Ashes Test

England under pressure; an ominous task

ADELAIDE: England head into the day-night second Ashes Test in Adelaide today under pressure and facing an ominous task against an Australian team who have won all of their eight pink-ball matches. The tourists' capitulation by nine wickets in the opening Test in Brisbane exposed their batting and fielding frailties, exacerbated by rain-hit preparations and lack of match practice. It wasn't helped by poor decision-making - notably captain Joe Root choosing to bat after winning the toss on a juicy Gabba pitch and the widely criticized omission of pace veterans Jimmy Anderson and Stuart Broad.

Root knows his team must find a way to improve, and fast, to stand a chance at a ground where Australia have hosted five of their eight Test wins under lights. "We have got to be better in the field and with the bat," he said, but added: "We're game-hardened now, we're in the series." Seamers Broad and Anderson are tipped to return given the extra

movement found with a pink ball, something coach Chris Silverwood hinted at this week.

"Jimmy will be fit and ready to go for the second Test, as will Stuart," he told British media. "We have talent and we still have two of the best (bowlers) up our sleeve as well." That would likely mean one of Ollie Robinson, Mark Wood or Chris Woakes missing out, and England must also decide what to do with spinner Jack Leach, who was hammered for 1-102 off 13 overs at the Gabba. While losing by nine wickets was bad enough, they were also fined all of their match fees and docked Test Championship points for a slow over rate.

'Confidence is there'

There are also concerns over Ben Stokes, who failed to fire in his first competitive match in six months after a break to deal with a finger injury and mental health issues. Root insisted England's star all-rounder would bounce back and warned

Australia: "You write Ben Stokes off at your own peril." Silverwood said the team was looking ahead, rather than dwelling on defeat. "Obviously they were hurting, but there is belief they can win this series," he said, despite England losing three of the four day-night Tests they have played so far.

"We have the players here that can match the Australians. The confidence is there that we can compete with Australia, and that's exactly what we intend to do." Australia have their own headaches, with Josh Hazlewood ruled out with a side strain. It is a big blow with the fast bowler boasting a pink-ball record of 32 wickets at just 19.90. He was the major destroyer in Adelaide a year ago, taking an incredible 5-8 when India were rolled for just 36 in their second innings.

Australian captain Pat Cummins said after Brisbane that Hazlewood's injury was "nothing too serious", but selectors opted not to risk him with the Boxing Day Test in Melbourne coming hot on

the heels of Adelaide. Jhye Richardson is the frontrunner to add to his two Tests and spearhead the attack alongside Cummins, Mitchell Starc and Nathan Lyon, although Michael Neser is also an option. There is also a worry over explosive opener David Warner, who scored 94 in Brisbane. He has been nursing bruised ribs and didn't bat in Australia's second innings when just 20 runs were needed to win.

The experienced Usman Khawaja is a likely replacement to open alongside Marcus Harris should Australia choose to rest Warner. Despite this, Cummins is confident of his team taking a 2-0 Ashes lead given Australia's unblemished pink-ball record at Adelaide and the thumping they handed England last week. "We're going to Adelaide, a place we love playing and the pink ball's a little bit different... there's a few more unknowns," he said. "But it's a format we really enjoy and Adelaide Oval's a great place to play cricket." — AFP



TOKYO: Japan's Naoya Inoue (left) fights against Thailand's Aran Dipaen during their WBA and IBF bantamweight title fight boxing match at the Kokugikan Arena in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

Japan's 'Monster' Inoue defends title against Dipaen

TOKYO: Japan's unbeaten "Monster" Naoya Inoue defended his WBA and IBF bantamweight titles yesterday with an eighth-round technical knockout win over unheralded Thai challenger Aran Dipaen in Tokyo. Fighting at Ryogoku Kokugikan - the home of sumo - Inoue wore Dipaen down with a series of punishing shots before dispatching him with a vicious left hand.

The bout, Inoue's first in Japan for around two years, was widely seen as a stepping-stone toward an attempt at unifying all four bantamweight belts next year. The 28-year-old took his unbeaten record to 22-0, with 19 wins by knockout. Inoue unleashed his ferocious punching power to outclass

Dipaen, the IBF's sixth-ranked challenger.

Dipaen, who entered the fight with a 12-2 record, absorbed Inoue's early blows but could do nothing when the champion hit him with a big left that sent him down to the canvas. Inoue has set his sights on unifying the bantamweight belts next year, with WBA champion Nonito Donaire and WBO title-holder John Riel Casimero standing in his way. Inoue beat Donaire in the final of the World Boxing Super Series in 2019, claiming a unanimous points win over the veteran Filipino after an epic contest.

But Donaire went on to win the WBC belt earlier this year, and defended it in style at the age of 39 against countryman Reynard Gaballo on Saturday. Casimero, meanwhile, pulled out of his WBO title fight against Britain's Paul Butler in Dubai on Saturday after missing the weigh-in. Reports said the Filipino was admitted to hospital with viral gastritis, and the WBO has ordered him to present his medical documents before December 20 or face being stripped of his title. — AFP



SANAA: Yemeni fans gather at a stadium to watch on a screen during the football match between Yemen and Saudi Arabia, in the Houthi-held Yemeni capital Sanaa on December 13, 2021. — AFP

Yemeni kid killed by celebratory gunfire after football win

SANAA: A child was killed and dozens of people injured by celebratory gunfire in Yemen's capital after a youth team defeated Saudi Arabia in a football tournament, an official said yesterday. Supporters across the war-torn country, including in rebel- and government-held areas, took to the streets on Monday night after Yemen's under-15 side secured the West Asian Football Championship with victory in the Saudi city of Dammam.

In Sanaa, which is under the control of the Houthi rebels, heavy celebratory gunfire killed one child, a medic at hospital said. "A four-year-old girl was

killed and 36 people were injured," said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity. An AFP correspondent in Sanaa said that shooting and celebrations lasted well into the night, with many on the streets honking their cars and letting off fireworks. UN special envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg offered a "warm congratulations" on the win. "Heartwarming to see the unity, joy and celebrations across the country," he tweeted.

Since 2014, the Iran-backed Houthis have been at war with the internationally recognized government of Yemen, which is supported by a Saudi-led military coalition. Millions of people have been displaced since the fighting erupted and more than 80 percent of the population of around 30 million requires humanitarian assistance. A UN Development Program report last month said 377,000 people will have died by the end of 2021 through direct and indirect impacts of the Yemen war. — AFP



Kuwait's female boxer wins gold

KUWAIT: Kuwait's female boxer Noura Qushaia Al-Mutairi won the first place and the gold medal of the 66kg category during the Saudi Arabian women boxing tournament. Noura defeated Ahlam Mustafa (from Tunis). The tournament is organized by Saudi Boxing Federation and 42 boxers participated. Noura lauded the organization of the tournament, adding that the competition was tough. She said that she wishes to have more tournaments for female boxers.



Hamilton fuelled to make history in 2022

ABU DHABI: After the chaos and confusion of that now infamous last lap in Abu Dhabi on Sunday which saw Max Verstappen claim his first world title, what of the vanquished Lewis Hamilton, the man who led the race for so long and was so agonizingly close to an unprecedented eighth world title? At 36, the Briton is in the latter part of his career, the opportunities to add to his record 103 race victories likely to become more scarce with every passing season. No one would blame him for packing his bags and leaving the stage.

And yet it looks certain that Hamilton will return next season more determined than ever to claim that eighth title. Any prospect of the seven-time champion walking away, having already committed himself to another two years with Mercedes, receded on Monday as sources close to him and his family made clear they expect him to extend his career into a 16th season.

His near-flawless display at the Yas Marina Circuit where he held a comfortable 11-second lead until a series of events, including decisions by Race Director Michael Masi, left him facing a fateful 'manipulated' last lap sprint on worn tyres, proved he remains a supreme racing driver. His vast sporting and technical experience, his value to Mercedes as both driver and marketing commodity, his global value to Formula One as the burgeoning sport-business expands rapidly in America and other new markets, attracting a diverse new demographic audience, make him virtually irreplaceable.

'Manipulated'

But all that and the attraction of another year's salary will be of less importance to the man himself than his ambition and desire to compete again

against his nemesis Verstappen by being on the grid in Bahrain in March for the opening race of 2022. Verstappen said he had "felt" for Hamilton. "He did everything right throughout the race, but F1 can be very unpredictable... Lewis is a great sportsman — he will be back again, very strong, because he is an amazing driver," said the 24-year-old, the first Dutchman to win the title.

That sense of fighting against the odds has been a constant feature not just of Hamilton's career but of his life, as his brother Nicolas Hamilton expressed in a social media post on Monday. Taking to Instagram, he declared his brother "the true champion" and said the sport's ruling body, the FIA, had broken its own rules, which was "a disgrace to our whole sport". He added that "proving people wrong is in our DNA, which Lewis does on a daily basis".

Hamilton's sense of injustice, seen more openly earlier in his career when he was often a victim of racist abuse, was only revealed briefly on Sunday. Four corners from the end of the race, after being passed by Verstappen who was running on new soft tyres, he responded on team radio: "This has been manipulated man". The message was not broadcast on the worldwide television feed, but it was aired on the FITV channel. That he controlled his disappointment and congratulated Verstappen and his family and the Red Bull team was evidence of his sporting integrity, according to 2001 title runner-up David Coulthard.

"He showed why he is a seven-time world champion," he told BBC Radio. "He is a phenomenon and he's an incredible sportsperson." He is a fantastic example to sportsmen and women out there on how to handle defeat." Hamilton will turn 37 on January 7 but he will not be the oldest driver in the field as two-time champion Fernando Alonso, his former McLaren team-mate, will be 41 next July. If Hamilton wins the title, however, he will be the oldest champion in 29 years since Alain Prost secured his fourth title at 38 in 1993 a year after Nigel Mansell won his sole title in 1992, aged 39. — AFP



YAS ISLAND: Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton 2021 (Front) is followed by Red Bull's Dutch driver Max Verstappen at the Yas Marina Circuit during the Abu Dhabi Formula One Grand Prix. — AFP

Sports

Premier League battles COVID-19 wave; Fans face vaccine checks

Tottenham and Man United trips postponed

LIVERPOOL: Premier League fans were subject to vaccine passport checks to enter stadiums from yesterday, but fears are rising over how long the English top flight can continue in front of capacity crowds as the Omicron variant sweeps across Britain. Tottenham's trip to Brighton and Manchester United's visit to Brentford have been postponed due to outbreaks in the Spurs and United camps in recent days.

Aston Villa, Leicester and Norwich have also reported positives as part of a record 42 cases of Covid-19 among Premier League players and staff in the past week. That figure is the highest since testing began in May 2020 when top-flight football in England returned after a three-month delay caused by the pandemic. For over a year the action continued on the field in front of empty stands until a loosening of restrictions allowed the Premier League to return to capacity crowds in August.

There were no restrictions for supporters at most stadiums, although Brighton, Chelsea and Tottenham did introduce the mandatory checks for vaccination or proof of a negative test that will now be deployed across England for crowds of over 10,000. The spectre of COVID loomed in the background even as tens of thousands of unmasked fans mixed in close quarters to watch Steven Gerrard's return to Liverpool as Aston Villa manager on Saturday.

A pop-up testing centre offered free lateral flow tests to the passing crowds. Newly deployed "COVID stewards" were positioned around Anfield to offer advice on how to download vaccination status onto a smartphone in preparation for today's first

match under the new rules against Newcastle. Liverpool fans have already been affected by problems with the club's new e-ticketing system that saw long queues to get into the stadium in the early weeks of the season.

Premier League clubs are scrambling to get extra staff for checks, but delays are expected. "It is going to be another shambles," said Richard Walker, a 55-year-old Liverpool fan. "A lot of older people don't have the latest phone or know how to work it. "It's the middle of winter and now we'll be standing in queues for ages waiting to get in."

'Small sacrifice'

Many other fans were more supportive of the measure as long as it keeps the doors open during a busy festive calendar of games. "It's a small sacrifice compared to being shut out," said Lucas Brownley, 33, who regularly travels from London to Liverpool for home games. "Older people might struggle with the technology, but they are the ones that need most protecting. It is for their sake."

Omicron sweeps across Britain



The Football Supporters Association (FSA) has backed the vaccine passport in a bid to avoid the return to sport behind closed doors as has already happened for major matches in Austria, Germany and the Netherlands. "From the earliest days of the pandemic we have always said that supporters should follow the expert advice of medical professionals and scientists," FSA chair Malcolm Clarke told AFP. "If those experts feel that public health is best-served by the introduction of vaccine pass-



MANCHESTER: Members of the public wait for a dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, as they queue outside Manchester Town Hall, which is being used as a COVID-19 walk-in vaccination centre, in Manchester, north west England yesterday. —AFP

ports or lateral flow tests for all large outdoor events, then we accept that requirement."

In announcing the strengthening of measures against the virus last week, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the vaccine passport would "keep these events and venues open at full capacity". It would also give those who attend confidence they have minimized the risk to others and

themselves, he added. But Johnson is facing anger from his own MPs - and a significant rebellion - about their introduction, with many seeing them as an unnecessary curb on public freedoms. For now the show goes on with nine of the 10 Premier League matches scheduled for Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday still going ahead in front of full crowds. —AFP



Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang

Aubameyang stripped of Arsenal captaincy

LONDON: Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang has been stripped of the Arsenal captaincy following a breach of discipline, the club confirmed yesterday. The 32-year-old forward was left out for Saturday's 3-0 win over Southampton and will also not feature for West Ham's visit to the Emirates today. "Following his latest disciplinary breach last week, Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang will no longer be our club captain, and will not be considered for selection for today's match against West Ham United," Arsenal said in a statement.

"We expect all our players, particularly our captain, to work to the rules and standards we have all set and agreed." According to The Athletic, Aubameyang returned later than agreed from a per-

sonal trip to France last week, which subsequently forced him to miss training due to the need to pass coronavirus protocols.

Aubameyang was also left out by manager Mikel Arteta for a victory over north London rivals Tottenham in March over a disciplinary issue when he arrived late for a pre-match meeting. "It's not an easy situation or a situation we want, to have our club captain in that situation," Arteta said on Saturday. Aubameyang was named Arsenal captain in 2019 after Granit Xhaka was also stripped of the role for his tirade towards supporters after being substituted in a Premier League match against Crystal Palace.

The Gabon international led Arsenal to their only trophy under Arteta, scoring twice in the semi-final and final of the FA Cup in 2020. However, Aubameyang's form has dipped since signing a three-year deal that made him one of the highest earners in the Premier League worth a reported £18 million (\$24 million) a year. He scored just 10 Premier League goals as Arsenal finished eighth last season and has four in 14 league appearances this campaign. —AFP

Only united front can eradicate global sports corruption

PARIS: Former European Justice Commissioner Franco Frattini says having international global standards would be the most effective method of fighting corruption in sport, a sector he said was increasingly attracting the mafia. The 64-year-old Italian, who now chairs Sport Integrity Global Alliance (SIGA), said organized crime was highly interested in sport because it was "a very profitable field" for them.

Frattini told a SIGA special session on global leadership against corruption to tie in with International Anti-Corruption Day last Thursday that it was necessary to bring together law enforcement, the public and private sectors as well as public institutions dealing with sport to succeed in "destroying" the problem. "Criminal organizations in some cases want, for example, to buy a small-size football team just to clean the picture in their given territory," the leading Italian judge said. "They do it also to continue activity as a mafia gang or they want relations with sport entities and sport teams just to launder money."

"Money laundering in the field of sport and dirty money in the field of sport is an international phenomenon as well as corruption," the former Italian foreign minister added. Ian Smith, Commissioner of the eSports Integrity Commission (ESIC), was also in favor of a single regulatory body and said betting on sport was one of two major threats. "The two principal threats are a lack of global sports betting regulation and a lack of understanding of crypto currencies," said Smith, who for over a decade was legal director to the Professional Cricketers' Association (PCA).

"These two factors combined are very dangerous for sports as payments cannot be tracked and poor enforcement of poor regulation means the chances of getting away with betting fraud and sportsmen creating match manipulation are quite high and increas-

ing." He said all sides, ranging from civil society to broadcasters, needed to come together to ensure a "lack of integrity in sports betting is addressed by everybody with joined-up standards and thinking."

'A war'

Former England rugby sevens captain Ben Golling said he believes the financial problems caused by the coronavirus pandemic had exacerbated the problem of corruption in sport. "Obviously the pandemic may have opened up that door further," he said. "Sport has been really affected on a financial basis and (corruption) presents an opportunity for sport to get itself out of a hole. "It could allow the wrong type of people to get involved and corruption to evolve. "It could affect any sport club, whether it be rugby, tennis, football or hockey."

"They start to gain control and that can put a lot of pressure on athletes and other stakeholders to go against their beliefs," Viktoria Slavkova, a member of the World Anti-Doping Agency's Finance and Administration Committee, believes sport is engaged in "a war" with organized crime over its soul. "The main threat is the Covid pandemic as it is preventing us being able to meet in person to fight corruption and promote a brighter future for sport," she said.

"We should not forget this recovery (from the pandemic) is going to be a long process but we shall continue our mutual efforts to help athletes and organizations to come out of the crisis stronger and more resilient." Slavkova says putting in place an educational program for athletes, coaches and referees can be a pivotal weapon in the fight against corruption and that "strict rules and high standards will support the process."

The experienced Bulgarian administrator, though, was far from all doom and gloom. "I am always positive and a great optimist and I believe many new opportunities can emerge from this recovery," she said. "Change can bring transparency and will give assurance to sports organisations and leaders with an honest and fair approach. "From another side it will engender sponsors' trust and make them feel comfortable to be associated with the sport sector." —AFP

Classifieds

CHANGE OF NAME

IKHADER BASHA NAGURU S/O NAGURU IBRAHIM
HOLDER OF INDIAN PASSPORT NO. R8278894 ISSUED
AT KUWAIT ON 20/09/2017 & CIVIL ID NO.
279031105914 HAS CHANGED MY NAME FROM KHAD-
ER BASHA NAGURU TO KAMAL GAGGUTURU IN ALL MY
DEALINGS AND DOCUMENTS, I WILL BE KNOWN BY
NAME OF KAMAL (GIVEN NAME) AND GAGGUTURU
(SURNAME). (C 0853) 14-12-2021

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The offer must be delivered at the Embassy on
or before 1200 on 27th December 2021

Warriors edge Pacers 102-100

Curry keys Warriors' win, comes up short of record



INDIANAPOLIS: Caris LeVert #22 of the Indiana Pacers against the Golden State Warriors at Gainbridge Fieldhouse on December 13, 2021 in Indianapolis. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: Two-time league MVP Stephen Curry is just two three-point baskets away from breaking Ray Allen's all-time NBA record after his Golden State Warriors rallied late to edge the Indiana Pacers 102-100 on Monday. Curry came into the game needing seven three-pointers but could manage only five, leaving him one short of tying Allen's record of 2,973.

"I'm enjoying the moment, knocking on the doorstep. It's pretty surreal," Curry said after scoring 26 points with six rebounds and six assists. "You just keep playing basketball, taking shots you think you can make and enjoy the experience." In 35 minutes of playing time, he shot five of 15 from beyond the arc in front of a crowd of 17,018 at Gainbridge Fieldhouse arena in Indianapolis that were eager to see him break the record.

Curry and the Warriors got off to a slow start, trailed for most of the game and were 55-47 behind at the half. The 33-year-old Curry didn't hit his first

three-pointer until the second quarter and committed four of his seven turnovers in the first half as he was smothered by the Pacers' stifling defense. "I wasn't going to let him do it on our court," said Indiana's Malcolm Brogdon, who had 23 points and eight assists.

Curry made some clutch baskets down the stretch, scoring five of the Warriors' final seven points, including his fifth and final three-pointer - a 24-foot effort with 84 seconds left on the clock to pull the Warriors to within two points at 100-98. He then sank two free throws to tie it 100-100 before Kevon Looney got the winning basket with 13 seconds to go. "It was a grind-it-out kind of win," said Curry, who missed a potential record-tying three-pointer in the final seconds.

'A lot of hype'

"We had a competitive spirit down the stretch and we got enough stops." The three-time NBA

champion Curry admitted that the record had become a distraction for the team. "Let's be honest," Curry said. "There is a lot of hype around this record. Sometimes it gets everybody rushing, playing out of our skin. We had to remind ourselves how we play offense." Curry doesn't have to wait long to get his next shot at the record, against the New York Knicks on Tuesday. "It will happen when it happens. I have respect for all great shooters that have come through the league," Curry said.

"I just want to enjoy the moment because it has been a long time coming." Andrew Wiggins contributed 15 points for the Warriors, while Draymond Green gathered a team-high nine rebounds to go with 15 points. Domantas Sabonis led all scorers with 30 for the Pacers, who saw a three-game winning streak ended. The Warriors are now 22-5 on the season and among the favorites, along with the Phoenix Suns and Brooklyn Nets, to win the NBA title.

In Los Angeles, Marcus Morris scored a season-high 24 points as the Los Angeles Clippers beat the Devin Booker-less Phoenix Suns 111-95 in the first game between the rivals since last season's playoffs. Reggie Jackson added 19 points and Terance Mann had 17 points and nine rebounds for the red-hot Clippers, who have won four straight. The Suns, who lead the Western Conference this season with a 21-5 record, were missing stars Booker and Deandre Ayton.

The Clippers were also short-handed, playing without all-stars Kawhi Leonard and Paul George. The Suns beat the Clippers in six games last season in the Western Conference final before losing to the Milwaukee Bucks in the NBA finals. In Boston, Jayson Tatum had 42 points on 16-of-25 shooting as the Celtics beat the Bucks to snap their three-game losing streak. In Toronto, Scottie Barnes scored 14 of his 16 points in the first half as the Raptors defeated the Sacramento Kings 124-101. — AFP

Roma stun Spezia, halt mini-slump

ROME: Roma put an end to their worrying recent run of form in Serie A by beating struggling Spezia 2-0 on Monday and gaining ground in the race for European football. Goals from corners in each half from Chris Smalling and Roger Ibanez put Jose Mourinho's side back on track following defeat at Bologna and a home hammering at the hands of champions Inter Milan last weekend.

Roma are up to sixth on 28 points, two points behind Fiorentina who hold the Europa League qualification spot and level with Juventus, in seventh after drawing at Venezia on Saturday. However they are some way from their true objective of Champions League football as they sit eight points behind fourth-placed Napoli, and missing some key players failed to convince at the Stadio Olimpico in Rome.

"I was pleased with the goals because we spent 25 minutes working on corners yesterday," Mourinho told Sky Sport Italia. "I'm also pleased with the result but I didn't like the way we played... even when we were two goals ahead I didn't feel like the match was over." An 11th defeat for Spezia leaves Thiago Motta's team just two points and one place above the relegation zone, despite a spirited display which probably deserved at least a goal.

Smalling put Roma ahead with his first league goal of the season in the sixth minute when, completely unmarked at a corner, he casually met countryman Tammy



ROME: Spezia's Polish defender Jakub Kiwior (center) and Roma's Ghanaian forward Felix Afena (right) go for a header during the Italian Serie A football match between AS Roma and Spezia on December 13, 2021. — AFP

Abraham's headed effort from a corner with a header of his own that Ivan Provedel had no chance of saving. Abraham was also involved when the hosts were unlucky to not double their lead in the 25th minute, the England international cleverly flicking a pass to Matias Vina who then watched his goal-bound effort well tipped away by Provedel. And after Rui Patricio stopped Arkadiusz Reca from drawing the away side level Abraham was denied his fifth league goal of the season by the bar in first-half stoppage time.

The former Chelsea striker met Henrikh Mkhitaryan's fizzing cross with his chest and hit the woodwork for the seventh time this season before Jordan Veretout's rebound drive was kept out by a combination of

Provedel and Martin Erlic. However Roma did have their second 10 minutes after the break, following a brief burst of Spezia dominance, when Ibanez met Veretout's corner with a thumping header amid more sloppy set-piece defending from Spezia.

Roma were more or less assured of the points by VAR shortly afterwards, with Rey Manaj's clearly offside goal ruled out after the on-field officials had initially allowed the Albanian's close-range strike to stand. There was time for one more incident though, as talented teen Felix Afenagyan rattled home what he thought was Roma's third in added time after obviously handling in the build up and received a second booking while still celebrating with the crowd. — AFP

Rams move step closer to knocking Cardinals off lofty perch

LOS ANGELES: Matthew Stafford completed 23 of 30 passes and threw three touchdowns as the Los Angeles Rams moved within a game of first-place Arizona with a 30-23 upset win over the Cardinals. Cooper Kupp, Van Jefferson and Odell Beckham caught touchdown passes and the Rams' stifling defense blunted the attack of the Cardinals, who failed to become the first NFL team to clinch a postseason berth.

Sony Michel carried the ball 20 times for 79 yards as the short-handed Rams improved to 9-4 and moved to within striking distance of first place in the NFC West. The Rams went 0-3 in November to fall off the pace in the division but opened December with a 37-7 victory over the Jacksonville Jaguars last week and followed it up with Monday's stunning win.

"Our guys answered the bell," said coach Sean McVay of the Rams, who have won two straight games for the first time since October. "Now we ask ourselves how do we build on this? "We want to enjoy this but let's keep improving. We want to make sure we are improving so if we do play after the 17-game regular season, then we are playing our best ball." Kupp, who is nursing a sore toe, caught 13 passes for 123 yards.

Quarterback Matthew Stafford has been much improved after a shaky three games during the losing skid. The Los Angeles media has been filled with reports that Stafford is playing hurt but the club has not said anything about problems with his health. The Rams were missing several players due to COVID-19. Defensive back Jalen Ramsey, running back Darrell Henderson, right tackle Rob Havenstein and tight end Tyler Higbee were all out due to health protocols. Quarterback Kyle Murray was 32 of 49 for 383 yards for the Cardinals, who dropped to 10-3.

The Cardinals are now 3-3 since starting the season with seven consecutive wins and no losses. James Conner had 31 yards rushing with two touchdowns, while also catching nine passes for 94 yards. Arizona wide receiver AJ Green had seven catches for 102 yards, passing 10,000 career receiving yards. The teams are now 1-1 on the season after the Cardinals beat the Rams earlier this season. The Rams have not lost to the Cardinals since 2014. "That was adverse conditions," said Cardinals coach Kliff Kingsbury. "That defensive line is tremendous." Both teams have four games left in the season. — AFP