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## Kuwait's Interior ministry halts revoking expat driving licenses

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## Local

## Education and travel still facing curbs in Kuwait



KAFEEKLATSCH

By Shaker Reshamwala

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After nearly two years of curfews, lockdowns, closures and shutdowns due to the coronavirus pandemic, things have (mostly) returned to normal in Kuwait. Shops and restaurants are operating as usual (with precautionary measures), staff at private firms and government institutions have fully returned to work and COVID cases have fallen drastically.

While everything seems to be hunky-dory, two aspects of daily life are still mired in uncertainties and restrictions - education and travel. Let's start with education. Schools are still operating on a hybrid model, with students alternating between in-person and remote learning. Many students have decided to remain home and study online due to a variety of reasons, while others are going to school daily because those who chose to study on campus are few in number, thereby negating the need to have two batches of students.

Transport is another issue - initially school buses were not allowed to operate at all. They later got the green light to ferry students, but transport fees have gone up despite students going to school only half the time, due to few students taking the bus. Nevertheless, some schools require all students to come to school for exams, which creates another headache for working parents who haven't opted for school transport. School fees have also returned to pre-COVID levels after a discount of 25 percent during the pandemic, even as home learning continues.

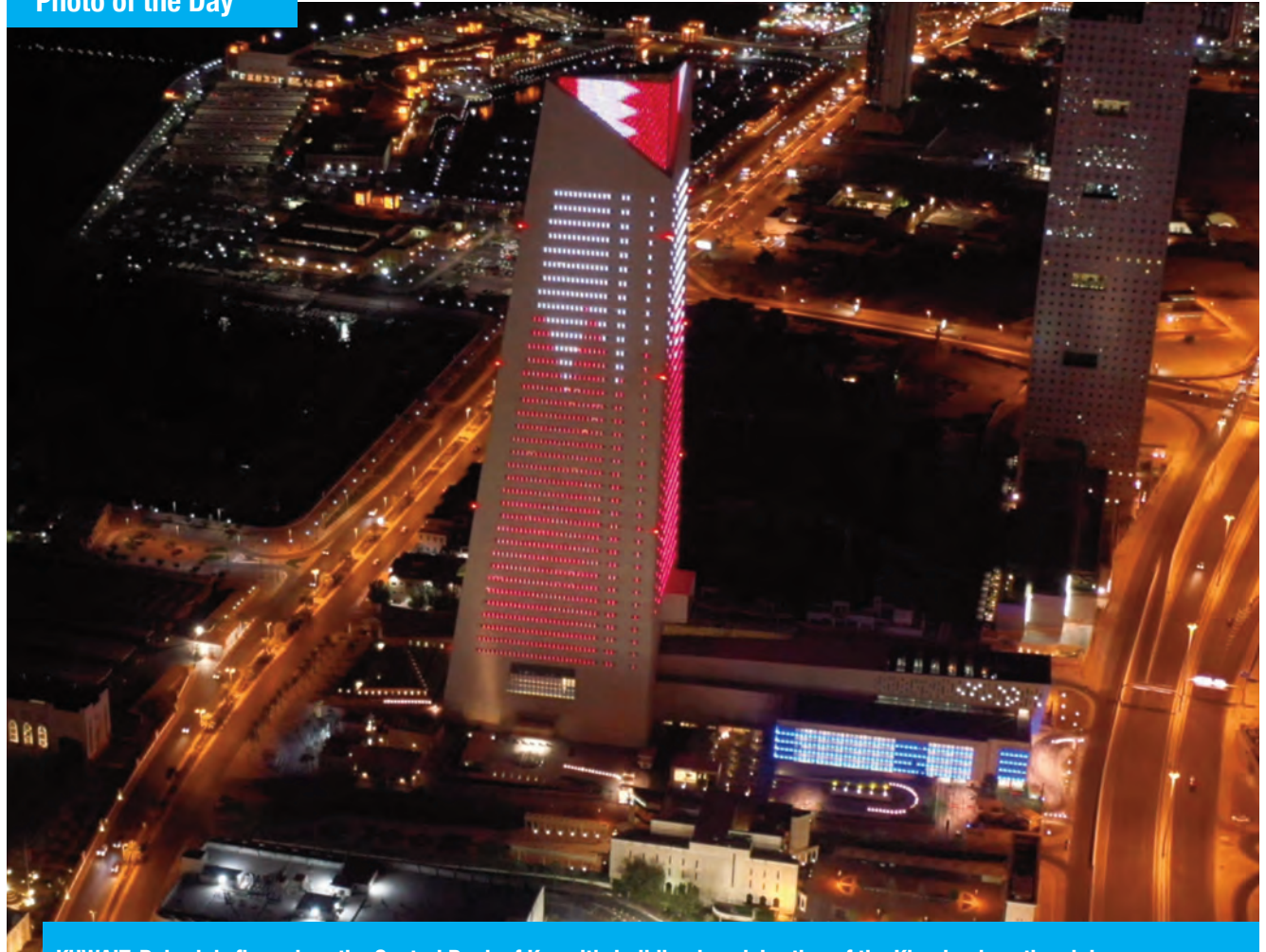
Now to travel. Despite direct arrivals being banned from a few African countries due to the spread of the Omicron variant, the airport has returned to full capacity and people can travel anywhere they want, COVID protocols permitting. But there's this nagging issue of PCR tests, which are expensive and can ruin the best laid travel plans.

Imagine if a family travels abroad, and on their return one member of the family tests positive for COVID - surely the family cannot leave that person behind. The entire family may also have to quarantine - most likely at a hotel for which they will have to pay - due to being in close contact with the infected member. All tickets will have to be postponed or cancelled, leading to further financial losses, not to mention the stress and uncertainty of finding alternate tickets, with the risk of another member of the family testing positive ever-present.

Moreover, any delay in returning from vacation may imperil the jobs of the travelers back in Kuwait, resulting in still more misery. There is also the possibility the airport may be closed abruptly without any notice if coronavirus cases explode, leaving residents stranded across the world, similar to what happened last year and this year. All this makes even the thought of travel for most people a stressful one, and many will prefer to stay put in Kuwait and wait till the air clears - literally and figuratively.

On the bright side, there hasn't been a rush to impose new travel curbs even after the discovery of the Omicron variant in Kuwait, while there are reports that schools will return to full capacity by February. Until then, one can only wait and watch.

### Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Bahrain's flag adorn the Central Bank of Kuwait's building in celebration of the Kingdom's national day.

## We need bigger theatres



IN MY VIEW

By Nawara Fattahova

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Last week, the 21st Kuwait Theatre Festival concluded, with great success for all the shows held over 10 days. After two years of not holding theatrical shows due to the pandemic, cultural activities are being held in Kuwait again. People were excited to attend the festival as they missed such activities for a long time. The festival was organized by the National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters (NCCAL), and the shows were open to the public free of charge. All the shows were held at Dasma Theatre, where festivals have been held for the past 20 years.

These theatre shows are one of the rare activities in Kuwait that start exactly on time. The audience somehow knows this fact, so they arrive early to find a seat. All the shows started at 8:00 pm sharp, and anyone who arrived at 8:01 could not find a place to sit. All the seats of the theatre were completely occupied during all the shows.

In many shows, people were standing in the small space along the sides of the seating area. During the first show, guards didn't even allow people to enter the theatre after it got full and the show started.

Dasma Theatre is a public theatre managed by NCCAL, which is not used for commercial or private shows. Its capacity is less than 1,000 people, which doesn't allow all theatre lovers to attend shows at this venue. Kuwait is a pioneer of arts in the region, and actors from other GCC countries also participate in Kuwaiti shows. We should have bigger theatres in Kuwait to allow all fans to enjoy the show while seated comfortably, instead of standing on the side or having to leave without watching.

Apart from Dasma Theatre, Kaifan, Shamiya, and Abdullhussain Abduredha theaters are public venues that hold events free of charge.



## Local

## Show highlights 'Poetry in Mubarak Kiosk'



KUWAIT: Ali Al-Masoudi stands in front of the Mubarak Kiosk.

**KUWAIT:** Writer and poet Ali Al-Masoudi presented a TV program named 'Poetry in Mubarak Kiosk'. The program, aired on Kuwait TV, presents Kuwait's history and the events it experienced through poetry, while focusing on one certain period and one more precise place.

The time period is the era of Mubarak the Great who founded the modern State of Kuwait during his reign which lasted from 1896 until 1915. Many conflicts, alliances, challenges, social changes, economics and politics marked this period, while Kuwait went through several wars and important battles where poems had an important say.

The place is the Mubarak Kiosk that Sheikh Mubarak the Great, the 'Peninsula Lion,' used as a meeting place in which he received delegations and discussed the country's affairs. The kiosk also hosted literal, cultural and intellectual sessions during which he



Ali Al-Masoudi is seen during the program.

received writers and poets and listened to their pieces either in local dialect or classical Arabic.

Poetry was in the forefront of the cultural scene at that time with encouragement from Sheikh Mubarak as he used it as a media platform during his wars either to silence, intimidate or answer adversaries. His presence in trips and sessions encouraged the documentation of history.

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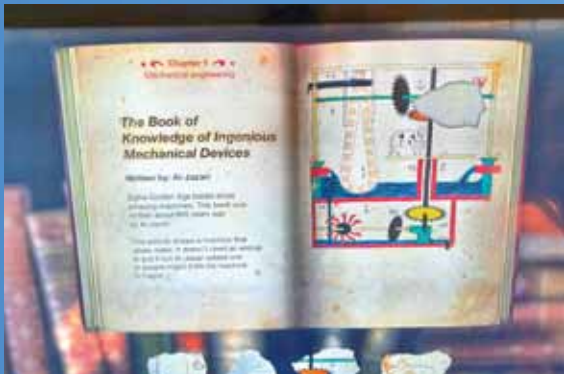
Local

# The splendors of Arab and Islamic sciences

Exploring **ASCC**

Photos by Shakir Reshamwala

**T**he Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Cultural Centre (ASCC) is the largest museum complex in the world. It comprises of six museums related to natural history, science and technology, Arab and Islamic science and space. The center is home to some 22 world-class galleries, with over 3,000 exhibits.





The Arabic Islamic Science museum focuses on the Golden Age of Islam and the innumerable scientific, cultural and artistic contributions of Muslims and Arabs to modern-day science. The museum highlights their groundbreaking work and accomplishments, allowing visitors to reconnect with the inspirational message of Islam, which actively encourages scientific discovery.

The museum recognizes the work of Arab and Islamic scholars in the fields of exploration, medicine, astronomy and engineering. Visitors can see how scientific discoveries contributed to the architectural wonders of the Islamic world. In a unique exhibit, visitors can interact with the holograms of Al-Khwarizmi, Al-Biruni and other ancient polymaths.







KUWAIT: More than 56,000 expats left Kuwait in the first half of 2021, raising total departures to around 190,000 since the start of the pandemic.

# In post-COVID Kuwait, labor shortage hits recovery drive

## As expats leave, small businesses struggle to turn around

By Sajeev K Peter

As the year 2021 comes to a close, businesses in Kuwait continue their faltering journey towards recovery from the pandemic-induced slowdown amid an unprecedented shortage of expat labor. While a labor shortage remained acute in the domestic sector, the lack of experienced workers continues to haunt the hospitality, health, education and retail sectors in post-COVID Kuwait.

"I have a tough time managing my restaurant now with just nine employees, including two chefs and two waiters. Six of my employees went on vacation to their home countries last month after two years," said Justine Anthony, who runs a small Filipino restaurant in Salmiya.

The country's medium- and small-sized restaurants, cafes, fast-food chains, grocery shops (baqalas), private hospitals, clinics, salons and garment shops say they are unable to cater to the growing needs of customers due to the dearth of workers. The healthcare sector in the country is also experiencing the pressure of staff shortage in many departments amid a growing trend among doctors, nurses and paramedics to migrate to Western countries. The shortage of manpower is plaguing the gig economy as well in the country, including home delivery services.

Many people who spoke to Kuwait Times share the predicament of Anthony and admit that the labor crisis is unprecedented. The worker



Nearly 200,000 expats departed Kuwait in one year since March 2020, according to a labor market report.

crunch is affecting several companies in Kuwait, particularly the services sector, derailing their efforts to turn around their businesses, they said.

### Recovery blues

Some businesses were forced to lay off their staff during the lockdown, while many expats who worked in restaurants, salons and grocery shops left the country for good. As the country reopened and the situation returned to near normal, many businesses managed to reopen with available employees. However, they found out that running a business with a skeletal staff is not easy.

"As of now, recruitment of foreign workers has been suspended. And there is a severe scarcity of experienced labor such as nurses, restaurant workers, bakers, barbers, accountants and clerks in the local market," said Mohammad Iqbal, who works at a manpower recruiting agency.

According to official estimates, more than 56,000 expats left Kuwait in the first half of 2021, raising total departures to around 190,000 since the start of the pandemic. A labor market report said nearly 200,000 expats departed Kuwait in one year since March 2020. The country's total population reached roughly 4.628 million at the

end of June 2021, according to the latest demographics and labor force statistics issued by the Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI).

### Picking up pieces

"I could not stop them as they were going to India after two years. Many have had some tragic family issues as well," said Riyaz Khan, a branch manager at a garment shop in Kuwait City. Admitting that their garment business has not fully recovered from the slowdown, Khan said they find it hard to run their shops without enough staff, especially as business is picking up the pieces from the ruins of the crisis.

The COVID-19 lockdowns wrought havoc across the world and businesses in Kuwait, both large and small, were heavily impacted. The pandemic has made many careers and jobs obsolete and new jobs have surfaced, forcing many expats to resort to juggling work. "Many have switched work, creating a vacuum at some organizations and crises at many places," Khan pointed out.

"Small businesses bore the brunt of the pandemic. I personally know many businesses have shuttered permanently in the last two years. Although some have managed to reopen, they are still facing numerous problems. And the labor shortage, particularly the paucity of specialized workers, is probably the most severe problem. Definitely, this will negatively impact the recovery momentum in the post-COVID era," added Iqbal.

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## Local

# Zain shares its leading experience in media and PR with KU students

## Company introduces students to working in private sector

**KUWAIT:** Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, hosted students of media and public relations studies from Kuwait University at its main headquarters in Shuwaikh. The company shared its leading experience in media and public relations with the students, introducing them to its Corporate Communications and Relations Division and the overall experience of working in the Kuwaiti private sector.

This initiative came as part of Zain's belief in the private sector's role in supporting the nation's education sector and embracing the talents of Kuwaiti youth. The company is committed to playing an active role in the investment of the Kuwaiti human capital. By adopting such initiatives, Zain seeks to support students and allow them to apply their skills, achieve their potential, and fully develop their capabilities.

Zain hosted students of media and public relations studies from Kuwait University to share and highlight its leading experience in those fields with them. The company also introduced the various roles of its Corporate Communications and Relations Division, including external and internal relations, media relations and social media, corporate sustainability and social responsibility, as well as innovation and entrepreneurship.

As part of its ongoing and extended partnership with Kuwait University, Zain recently participated in the orientation campaign and exhibition, organized by the Department of Cultural and Arts Activities, where the company showcased its leading experience in the Kuwaiti telecom sector. Zain also presented its latest and most competitive portfolio of promotional offerings to Kuwait University's students, faculty, and administrative staff.



KUWAIT: Zain officials with the students at the company's main headquarters in Shuwaikh.

In July, Zain took part in welcoming freshmen students at Kuwait University's Admission and Registration Hall in Shuwaikh. The initiative, which featured strict health measures, came in line with the start of the admission and registration period of the new academic year, and reflected the company's keenness in offering a comfortable atmosphere for students and staff.

This initiative came in continuation of the company's ongoing support of the hall's various activities and events all year-round. The hall, which serves over 14,000 students annually, is sponsored by Zain for over 11 years.

Last year, Zain supplied the Admission and Registration Hall in Shuwaikh with a number of MOH-approved precautionary health measures

to curb the spread of COVID-19. The move came in line with Zain's commitment to contribute to the health and safety of the university's students, faculty, and staff.

Zain supplied the hall with signs and banners to remind visitors of the necessary health guidelines that must be followed while inside, as well as floor stickers to achieve social distancing. The company also installed see-through dividers to separate students and staff in a safe manner during registration, while enabling sound to pass efficiently. In addition, some seats were made unavailable inside the hall to guarantee a safe space between students while seated.

This initiative comes as an extension of Zain's contributions during the past two years, where

the company fully renovated the hall in an effort to offer a more comfortable atmosphere for students and staff. The company is keen on continuously supporting education by actively partnering with various education bodies from both the public and private sectors, as it is a firm believer in the importance of supporting the youth and preparing them to become tomorrow's leaders.

Zain partnered with Kuwait University's Deanship of Admission and Registration to fully renovate the Admission and Registration Hall and prepare it with the necessary furniture and equipment. The hall receives thousands of students throughout the year during the admission approval and freshmen registration period.

## Children science exhibition helps build Kuwait's future

**KUWAIT:** The fourth children science exhibition helps cultivate talent and contributes to the development of the country's future, the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) said yesterday. In a press statement, KISR's CEO for Marketing and Commercialization Sector Abdulmohsen Al-Haroon revealed that the exhibition witnessed the participation of children aged six to 12. The previous reiterations of the exhibition saw the participation of over 2,000 children who presented several science projects, indicated Haroon, adding that this year's exhibition would feature projects done by special needs children. He noted KISR was keen on implementing its social responsibility projects by the organizing exhibitions and events aimed at igniting talents and scientific curiosity. Haroon thanked all who contributed to the exhibition and hoped that the event would meet its goals. —KUNA





# Kuwait's Interior ministry halts revoking expat driving licenses

## Action would have canceled around 250,000 licenses

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** The interior ministry yesterday halted a decision to scan all driving licenses held by expatriates to ensure that they fulfill the tough conditions imposed by the ministry, a lawmaker said yesterday.

"I was just informed by the interior minister that the random and careless decision to revoke the drivers' licenses of expats has been halted" MP Abdullah Al-Turaiji wrote on his Twitter account. The decision shows "the mismanagement in dealing with the traffic problem" he said.

According to local media, authorities at the interior ministry on Wednesday ordered the activation of a decision to stop the renewal of driving licenses of expatriates until authorities had scanned those licenses to establish if they fulfilled the conditions set by the ministry. The decision means that some 715,000 driving licenses held by expatriates would have been scanned and that some tens of thousands of them would have been revoked for not fulfilling the conditions.

Kuwait imposes tough conditions for legal foreign residents to obtain a driver's license. The main condition is that an expat

must draw a monthly salary of at least KD 600 to be able to apply for a driver's license. Only a few of the 3.3 million expats living in Kuwait qualify for this. In addition, the applicants must be high-placed employees and professionals like judges, doctors, engineers and alike.

According to the earlier ministry decision, ordered by Undersecretary Sheikh Faisal Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, no driving license for expats would be renewed until it has been proven to satisfy the conditions.

Kuwait has repeatedly increased the salary required for a driving license and toughened the conditions, in addition to disqualifying certain categories like students and nurses from the right to obtain a driver's license, citing traffic jams and bottlenecks on roads, many of which have remained without improvement for decades.

The decision to stop renewal of driving licenses of expats had been received with mixed reactions on social media, with some welcoming the decision and others strongly criticizing it.

Yousef, writing on Twitter, said authorities have ignored solutions to traffic jams and resorted to revoking licenses of expats. He said authorities have ignored solving the demographic structure problem, failed to develop public transport including

**Some 715,000 licenses would have been scanned**



**KUWAIT:** Heavy traffic on a main road in Kuwait yesterday. —Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

a metro system and also failed to stop a mafia monopolizing taxi licenses.

Salah Al-Hashem, a lawyer and a former assembly election candidate, said "before asking the interior ministry to revoke licenses of expats, we should ask the government to quickly develop public transport, metro lines and railways." Khaled Khamees said on Twitter that revoking licenses of expats is a grave error. "Just imagine that your son is abroad studying or working and he is being treated the same way".

## Kuwaiti military service for women opens next week

**KUWAIT:** Kuwaiti women will be allowed to register to serve in the military from Sunday,

Kuwait's Defense Ministry announced on Wednesday.

The decision applies to university and diploma alongside high school graduates, the ministry said in a statement, with applications open until January 2. Applicants must be between the ages of 18-26, should be physically fit and of good conduct, and must not have a criminal record. They will also need to pass a personal interview. —KUNA



## Defense Minister visits military personnel



**KUWAIT:** Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah commended his ministry's personnel and civilians prioritizing the public interest and safeguarding public funds. While meeting the ministry's generals and senior executive and financial officials at a northern military base late Wednesday, the Ministry of Defense said in a press state-

ment yesterday.

Sheikh Hamad Jaber highly commended the enduring and untiring efforts of the ministry's staff in serving their own nation and safeguarding its security, stability and territorial integrity. The minister also boasted that administrative, financial and regulatory successes and reforms accomplished during 2021 were beyond all expectations. —KUNA



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## International

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# France bans most UK travel

## Omicron injects urgency into EU summit

**PARIS/BRUSSELS:** France said yesterday it would ban non-essential travel to and from Britain in a bid to curb the lightning spread of the Omicron COVID-19 variant, which is forecast to quickly become the dominant risk for strained hospital systems worldwide.

Countries around the world began urging against foreign travel while ramping up domestic restrictions to battle Omicron, which scientists believe spreads faster than any other variant even if uncertainty remains over how dangerous it is. Britain has seen case levels explode in recent weeks to record levels amid fears the variant could overwhelm the health system during Christmas dinners and parties.

Starting at midnight Saturday (2300 GMT Friday), the French government said, travellers will need “an essential reason to travel to, or come from, the UK, both for the unvaccinated and vaccinated... People cannot travel for touristic or professional reasons.” It added that French citizens and EU nationals could still return to France from the UK, but they will now need a negative COVID test less than 24 hours old, and a blanket quarantine will be enforced upon return to France.

Government spokesman Gabriel Attal told BFM television the new restrictions would be “even more drastic” than the existing regime.

Britain on Wednesday recorded a record 78,610 laboratory-con-

firmed COVID cases, with scientists predicting even higher rates as Omicron is believed to spread much faster than the currently dominant Delta variant. “It’s down to individual countries to decide their approach,” a spokesman for British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said in response to the French restrictions.

### 110,000 fake health passes

Some 110,000 fake health passes are in circulation in France, the interior ministry said yesterday, with hundreds of investigations launched against makers and users of the forged documents. The health pass, showing proof of vaccination, COVID recovery or a recent negative test result, is required for access to public transport, restaurants and cultural events.

As they investigate users and distributors of the fake documents, police have found that medical staff is sometimes complicit in the fraud, said Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin. “The problem with the fake health passes is that they often involve the collusion of real doctors or real nurses,” he told the France 2 broadcaster. This makes offences “very difficult to prove”.

Some 100 people had been arrested as a result of 400 investigations since the health pass became mandatory in parts of public life, Darmanin said. The lightning spread of Omicron in Europe and



**BELPER, UK:** A woman receives a dose of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine at Babington Hospital in Belper yesterday as the UK steps up the country's booster drive to fight a “tidal wave” of Omicron. — AFP

elsewhere added a sense of urgency to an EU summit yesterday, with leaders struggling to present a united, bloc-wide approach. Projections that the highly infectious COVID strain could be dominant in the EU as early as next month have pushed the issue to the top of the agenda and ignited fears of a health crisis.

Arriving at the Brussels meeting, Irish premier Micheal Martin said Omicron was “of significant con-

cern obviously in terms of the capacity of that variant to spread rapidly and create pressure on our societies and our health systems. “So today we’ll be looking for greater coordination on a number of fronts,” he said.

As France imposed drastic new restrictions on arrivals from Britain, which is outside the EU and particularly hard hit by the variant, Greece’s Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said Europe would have

to expect “new measures”.

“The one answer to Omicron right now is the acceleration of our vaccination programs with particular emphasis on the booster shots,” he told reporters, describing the measures as “a battle against time”.

The summit will also tackle other big topics pressing hard on EU capitals, in particular the Russian military build-up that could presage an invasion of Ukraine.— AFP



## International

Friday, December 17, 2021

# UN says hunger on the rise in the Arab world

## Pandemic 'brought another major shock' as undernourished rose by 4.8m

**CAIRO:** A third of people in the 420-million-strong Arab world do not have enough to eat, the United Nations said yesterday, highlighting that 69 million suffered from malnutrition last year.

In a report, the world body's Food and Agriculture Organization said that between 2019 and 2020, the number of malnourished in the Arab world rose by 4.8 million people to 69 million, nearly 16 percent of the population. "The increase in the levels of undernourishment has occurred across all income levels, in conflict-affected as well as non-conflict countries," the FAO said.

"In addition, nearly 141 million people did not have access to adequate food in 2020 — an increase of more than 10 million people since 2019." It said the COVID-19 pandemic "brought another major shock", with the number of undernourished people in the region increasing by 4.8 million compared with 2019.

Conflict-hit Somalia and Yemen remained

the worst-affected countries last year, with nearly 60 percent of Somalis going hungry and more than 45 percent of Yemenis undernourished.

"Yemen had the highest prevalence of anaemia in 2020, affecting 61.5 percent of women of reproductive age," it said. The FAO said hunger has increased by 91.1 percent in the Arab world over the past two decades.

"Rates of stunting (20.5 percent) and overweight (10.7 percent) among children under five years of age were high in 2020," the FAO noted. It said adult obesity, especially in the richer Arab states, was also on the rise. "The latest year estimate for the Arab region shows that 28.8 percent of the adult population was obese, i.e. more than double the global average of 13.1 percent.

"High-income countries exhibited the highest prevalence of adult obesity in the region whereas the low-income countries had the lowest levels." — AFP



**CAIRO:** A third of people in the 420-million-strong Arab world do not have enough to eat, the United Nations said yesterday, highlighting that 69 million suffered from malnutrition last year.

## US Navy rescues Iran drug smugglers after explosion

**DUBAI:** The US Navy has rescued five Iranian sailors injured in an explosion that erupted on their vessel and seized its cargo of illegal drugs, a statement said yesterday. "US Navy personnel rescued five mariners Dec 15 after a fire caused an explosion aboard their vessel, which was smuggling illicit drugs while transiting the Gulf of Oman," the US Naval Forces Central Command, or NAVCENT, said.

"Sailors from Sirocco safely rescued five mariners injured in the explosion. One mariner remains missing." Two of the five sailors, who identified themselves as Iranian, were immediately transported to Oman by helicopter for medical treatment, and the rest were later transported to Oman for repatriation.

"Mariners were observed pouring liquid on cargo and the forward deck prior to the vessel catching fire and exploding," US Navy spokesman Tim Hawkins said.

The statement also said that Sirocco seized more than two tons of drugs worth \$14.7 million. The haul included over 1,745 kilograms of hashish, 500 kilograms of methamphetamine and 30 kilograms of heroin. Sirocco is part of the Bahrain-based Combined Task Force 150, or CTF 150, which works under the



A handout photo released yesterday by the US Defense Visual Information Distribution Service (DVIDS) shows a fire burning after an explosion aboard a fishing vessel in the Gulf of Oman. —AFP

Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) naval partnership.

CTF 150 said earlier this month that it seized more than 67 tons of drugs worth more than \$189 million in operations in wa-

ters around the Gulf in 2021. The CMF includes 34 nations whose vessels patrol 3.2 million square miles of international waters. The New Zealand navy took command of CTF 150 in July. — AFP

## Suspected robbers jump to death in Lebanon army raid

**BEIRUT:** Two suspected bank robbers jumped to their deaths yesterday during a Lebanese army raid on their apartment, state media reported, amid a surge in crime in the crisis-hit country. The raid in Beirut's southern suburbs targeted a three-man "armed robbery gang" that had conducted a heist this week on a bank in the town of Zalka, north of the capital, said the National News Agency.

"The army patrol was hit by live fire, and two members of the gang tried to escape, so they deliberately jumped of the balcony of their fifth-floor apartment which led to their immediate deaths," the NNA said. The third suspect was arrested, the news agency added.

During the operation, the army seized illicit drugs including cocaine as well as weapons and ammunition, according to the report. Troops also confiscated motorbikes, masks, gloves and outfits that the suspects allegedly used to carry out the bank heist, the NNA said.

The robbery on Tuesday targeted a branch of Byblos Bank and left one employee injured, the NNA reported at the time. It comes amid a surge in crime as Lebanon grapples with an unprecedented financial crisis branded by the World Bank as one of the worst in modern times.

The number of robberies in Lebanon has more than doubled in the first 10 months of 2021 compared with last year, according to the Internal Security Forces. — AFP



## International

# Rights groups sound alarm over new wave of violence in Ethiopia

## Ethiopia army rounding up and killing Tigrayan civilians

**NAIROBI:** Security forces allied to Ethiopia's army are rounding up and killing Tigrayan civilians in a fresh wave of ethnic violence in the country's brutal war, two rights groups said yesterday.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch said armed groups from the Amhara region were responsible for a recent surge in horrific abuses in the long-contested western part of Tigray. In November and December, Amnesty and HRW documented Amhara forces systematically detaining, torturing and starving Tigrayan civilians, including teenagers and the elderly, living in the disputed region.

Some of those trying to flee the crackdown in western Tigray were attacked with machetes and axes by Amhara militias and regional security forces, while others were taken away on trucks and remain unaccounted for. "Without urgent international action to prevent further atrocities, Tigrayans, particularly those in detention, are at grave risk," Joanne Mariner, Amnesty's director of crisis response, said in a statement.

The warnings come as the UN Human Rights Council prepares to hold a special session on Friday to consider whether to appoint international investigators to probe widespread violations during Ethiopia's 13-month war. The rights watchdogs said this "new onslaught of abuses... should ring alarm bells"

amid a conflict that has fanned historic grievances between Amharas and Tigrayans, two of Ethiopia's largest ethnic groups.

Both lay claim to western Tigray and when war erupted more than a year ago, Amhara sided with Addis Ababa and sent its regional forces to retake the fertile lands. The United Nations has expressed worry over reports of large-scale displacement from western Tigray, where the US has previously warned of ethnic cleansing.

A spokesman for Amhara's regional government did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

### Atrocities on all sides

Amnesty and HRW said deliberate attacks on civilians and forced expulsions "violate the laws of war" and those responsible should be identified and face accountability.

The conflict has killed thousands of people, displaced more than two million and driven hundreds of thousands into famine-like conditions, according to UN estimates. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed sent troops into Tigray in November 2020 after accusing the region's dissident ruling party of attacks on federal army camps.

The Nobel Peace laureate declared victory over the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) but rebel fighters staged a shock comeback, recapturing most of Tigray and pushing into



Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch said armed groups from the Amhara region were responsible for a recent surge in horrific abuses in the long-contested western part of Tigray.

neighboring Afar and Amhara. The rebels reportedly reached around 200 kilometers (125 miles) of Addis Ababa by road but in recent weeks the battle lines have shifted, as pro-government forces have reclaimed strategic towns.

Fighters on all sides have been accused of

atrocities including sexual violence, extrajudicial murder and ethnically-motivated crimes. This month, HRW accused TPLF rebels of summarily executing dozens of civilians in two Amhara towns they briefly controlled between August and September. — AFP

## Saudi Arabia sends humanitarian aid to Afghanistan

**RIYADH:** Saudi Arabia sent two aircraft carrying humanitarian aid to Afghanistan yesterday, state media reported, its first such initiative since the Taliban took control of the crisis-stricken country in August. The kingdom's state-run King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSRelief) sent more than 65 tons of aid, including 1,647 food baskets, the official Saudi Press Agency said.

The center's supervisor general, Abdullah Al-Rabeeah, said the Saudi humanitarian air bridge would see a total of six planes deliver more than 197 tons of aid to Afghanistan. He said aid would also be delivered overland on 200 trucks from neighboring Pakistan.

The Gulf Arab countries agreed during a summit in Riyadh on Tuesday to "contribute in mobilizing international efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people and to improving their economic conditions". More than half of Afghanistan's 38 million people face "acute" food shortages, according to the United Nations, with the winter forcing millions to choose between migration and starvation.

The previous Taliban government between 1996 and 2001 imposed a very strict interpretation of Islamic law and harsh public punishments. Saudi Arabia was one of three nations, including the United Arab Emirates and Pakistan, which recognized the previous hardline Taliban regime. But, since returning

to power in mid-August after overthrowing the US-backed government, the Taliban has tried to show a more moderate face in its quest for international recognition and an end to sanctions.

Despite the lack of recognition for the Taliban government, the United States allowed some exemptions to its sanctions on Afghanistan to enable humanitarian aid to enter. —AFP



RIYADH: A handout picture provided by the Saudi Press Agency (SPA) yesterday, shows humanitarian aid packages being secured aboard an aircraft in the capital Riyadh before being flown to Afghanistan. —AFP

## Record 488 journalists imprisoned, 46 killed in 2021: RSF

**PARIS:** There are currently 488 media professionals imprisoned around the world, the highest number since Reporters Without Borders began counting more than 25 years ago, the NGO announced yesterday. By contrast, the number killed this year — 46 — was the lowest since it began issuing annual tallies, due to the relative stabilization of conflicts in the Middle East. "The number of journalists detained in connection with their work has never been this high since RSF began publishing its annual round-up in 1995," the NGO, which battles for freedom of the press, said in a statement.

The number has risen by some 20 percent over the past year thanks largely to crackdowns on the media in Myanmar, Belarus and Hong Kong. RSF said it had also never seen so many female journalists detained, with the overall number of 60 representing a third more than 2020. China once again has the highest number of imprisoned journalists at 127, said RSF, which has routinely lambasted Beijing over what it describes as an "unprecedented crackdown" on press freedoms. In Hong Kong, there has also been an uptick in arrests as Beijing's national security law has taken hold. "In this special administrative region, which used to be a regional model of respect for press freedom, and which had no imprisoned journalists, the national security law imposed by Beijing in 2020 has been used as a pretext for arresting and detaining at least 10 journalists as of 1 December," RSF said. — AFP



## International

# Cyprus asylum seekers head for new lives in Italy thanks to pope

## The pontiff to take 50 migrants including Muslims in a gesture of 'solidarity'

**MENOGEIA, Cyprus:** Six asylum seekers Pope Francis is helping relocate from Cyprus expressed gratitude and hope as they left to start their new lives in Italy yesterday barely a week before Christmas. Cypriot authorities had said the pontiff, who visited the divided island earlier this month, would take 50 migrants, who also include Muslims, in a gesture of "solidarity".

Authorities said a dozen people left yesterday. A Vatican source told AFP that the first group would meet the pope today. Hinda Warsame, 25, from Somalia, and her sisters Naima, 22, and Fadoumo, 19, came to Cyprus this year. The trio grew up in Saudi Arabia but said they were caught with expired papers and jailed before being deported to Somalia—an unfamiliar and dangerous country where they had barely any family.

Warsame said the experience was "a nightmare". "I was crying... this is not what's supposed to be happening," she told AFP on Wednesday from the Limnes accommodation center in the island's Menogeia area. She said she faced pressure to get married to help "protect" her sisters, as well as to undergo female genital mutilation, a widespread practice in Somalia. "I said, I'm not gonna do it," she said, adding that if she did, "they will do the exact same to my sisters."

Instead, the trio managed to travel to breakaway north Cyprus on student visas, before crossing the island's buffer zone and claiming asylum in the Republic of Cyprus, which says it has the highest number of first-time asylum applications in the EU per capita.

## Cross-border aid to Syria rebel bastion vital: UN

**THE UNITED NATIONS:** Cross-border humanitarian aid to Syria remains vital, the United Nations Secretary-General said in an internal report yesterday, as a UN authorization allowing aid into rebel-held areas in the country's north-west without approval from Damascus is up for renewal. A rare moment of cooperation between the United States and Russia in July allowed for a six-month extension of activity at Bab Al-Hawa, the only border crossing through which aid reaches the rebel stronghold of Idlib province. That authorization, renewable once, runs until January 10.

"Cross-border assistance remains lifesaving for millions of people in need in north-west Syria," Antonio Guterres said in a confidential document obtained by AFP, adding that over four million people were in need of crucial assistance across the country. The United States and

### 'No future'

Cyprus has been split since 1974 when Turkish forces occupied the island's northern third in response to a military coup sponsored by the junta in power in Greece at the time. Only Ankara recognizes the self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Warsame said she cried the day she heard the pope might take them.

"I didn't sleep for one week," she said. "I am Muslim but I really admire that the pope and the Christian church chose to help us," she said. Also getting ready to leave was Issa Shamma, 37, who fled to Lebanon in 2017 seeking refuge from the war in neighboring Syria.

But there was "no future for my children there", he said. He said his sons, now 12, nine and two, "had no schooling at all. I came here (to Cyprus) for my children to get an education."

He said they were among dozens of Syrians who boarded a boat from northern Lebanon in August.

Cypriot authorities intercepted them and he was taken for medical attention after his health deteriorated, but the boat—and his family—was pushed back, a practice rights groups have criticized.

He said he was looking forward to the prospect of being reunited with his family in Italy. "I don't know anybody" there, he said, but "the most important thing is that we learn and our children learn." Also a Muslim, Shamma thanked the pope and his future host community. "No Arab country has opened their door for us, has accepted us as refugees. Western countries opened their doors for us and our children," he said.

several European nations believe the UN authorization for the crossing between Syria and Turkey should renew automatically for an additional six months, without the need for a new vote. But Russia, a key ally to the Damascus regime, has previously opposed the move, invoking Syrian sovereignty. Moscow has linked any potential extension to Tuesday's report, as well as a possible new vote.

The cross-border mechanism has been operating since 2020 through Bab Al-Hawa, after the Russian-imposed removal in 2019 of three other access points in Syria. In Tuesday's document, the UN chief refers to another project for humanitarian operations, this time across the front lines, to reach Idlib. "If implemented, this plan will make operations across the front lines more predictable and effective," Guterres noted. However, he insisted upon the importance of the Bab al-Hawa crossing. "At this point such cross-line convoys, even if deployed regularly, could not replicate the size and scope of the cross-border operation," he said.

Guterres said some 4.5 million people in Syria need help this winter, up 12 percent from the previous year, because of the economic crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. Only 2.9 percent of the Syrian population is fully vaccinated, according to the report. —APF



**MENOGEIA, Cyprus:** (Left to right) Somali sisters Hinda, Fadoumo, and Naima Warsame, Cameroonian nationals Grace Enjei and Daniel Ejube, and Syrian national Issa Shamma, pose for a group picture at a camp for refugees in the Limnes area, southwest of the village of Menogia, in Cyprus' southern Larnaca district on Wednesday. —AFP

### 'Be patient'

Also leaving were two Cameroonians who had been stuck in Cyprus's buffer zone for six months after arriving in the north on student visas and trying to cross into the Republic of Cyprus. Grace Enjei, 24, and Daniel Ejube, now 21, said the deadly violence in their country had pushed them to leave.

"The situation back home is really terrible... it wasn't safe," said Enjei. "Since we got the opportunity to travel we had to grab it." Ejube said an-

glophone separatists had wanted him to join their armed campaign to break away from the country's French-speaking majority.

"I told my father and my father said no," and instead helped arrange travel to Cyprus, Ejube said. The pair, who are both Christians, said they were happy and "honored" to be chosen by the pope. Like the others, they said they knew nobody in Italy and had no idea what to expect. Enjei expressed hope of returning to her studies, as did Ejube, who also has aspirations to be a footballer. —AFP

## Syrian soldier killed in Zionist entity's missile raid: Media

**DAMASCUS:** A Syrian soldier was killed yesterday in a missile raid from the occupied Golan Heights by the Zionist entity into southern Syria, state media reported. "At around 12.50 am, the Zionist enemy carried out an air raid with several missiles in the direction of the occupied Syrian Golan and targeting several positions in the south," according to a military source quoted by SANA.

The Syrian air defenses managed to "shoot down most of the missiles", the source added, which specified that "the aggression caused the death of a soldier and material damage".

In early December, Zionist entity carried out strikes on an Iranian arms ship-

ment at the port of Latakia, located in President Bashar Al-Assad's western Syrian heartland, without causing any casualties. In late November, three soldiers and two Syrian fighters affiliated with Lebanese Shiite group Hezbollah were killed in Zionist strikes, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a UK-based monitor with a wide network of sources in Syria.

Since civil war broke out in Syria in 2011, Israel has carried out hundreds of air strikes on Syrian territory, targeting government positions as well as allied Iran-backed forces and Hezbollah fighters. A Zionist military spokesperson refused to comment on the report. But the Zionist entity has repeatedly said it will not allow its archfoe Iran to extend its footprint in the country.

The conflict in Syria has killed nearly 500,000 people since it started in 2011 with the brutal repression of peaceful demonstrations. —AFP



# NATO chief backs Ukraine against Russian demands

## Stoltenberg slams Moscow's 'provocative' military build-up

**BRUSSELS:** NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg yesterday rejected Russian calls for Ukraine to be excluded from future membership in the alliance and denounced Moscow's "provocative" military build-up.

On Wednesday, Russia handed a list of security demands to US assistant secretary of state Karen Donfried, who then came to NATO headquarters in Brussels yesterday to discuss them with Stoltenberg. But the NATO chief yesterday also met Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky, and gave a joint news conference to insist that any decision on membership was a matter for Kiev and the alliance's 30 member states.

"We will not compromise on the right of Ukraine to choose its own path. We will not compromise on the right for NATO to protect and defend all NATO allies," Stoltenberg said. He said there would also be no compromising on NATO's partnership with Ukraine, describing it as important for both sides.

"Democracies of course have the right to work closely with a close partner such as Ukraine and our relation with Ukraine is defensive," he said. "It's not in any way a threat to Russia." On Wednesday, Zelensky attended a summit with EU leaders — most of whose countries are also NATO members — and said that most of them understood and supported

Ukraine's position in the conflict. But he is frustrated that European powers in particular have refused to take preventive action against Russia, preferring to threaten a response in the event of Russian action. "Since 2014, since the start of the war, I believe that basically Russia pushed Ukraine into NATO," he said.

"Basically I believe that today Russia itself is paving the difficult path of Ukraine to NATO." On Wednesday, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov told Donfried that NATO should halt its eastward expansion and withdraw a promise that Ukraine could become a candidate for membership.

Russia's President Vladimir Putin wants to talk directly to the United States over his standoff with Kiev, seeking security guarantees as an implicit condition to defusing the tension. But NATO leaders point to what they say is Russia's massive troop mobilization close to the Ukraine border. The US and EU have threatened "massive" economic sanctions in the event of an invasion. "The aggressor is Russia," Stoltenberg said.

"It is Russia that is using military force against Ukraine, illegally annexing a part of Ukraine, Crimea, back in 2014, and continuing to destabilize eastern Ukraine." —AFP



**BRUSSELS:** NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg talks during a press conference with Ukrainian Foreign minister after their bilateral meeting at the European Union headquarters in Brussels yesterday. —AFP

## German man jailed for life over car attack on carnival

**BERLIN:** A German man received a life sentence yesterday for ramming his car through a carnival procession last year, injuring dozens of bystanders including children. The regional court in Kassel found Maurice P, 31, guilty of tearing through the traditional Shrove Monday parade in the central town of Volkmar in February 2020 without braking.

He was convicted of 89 counts of attempted murder and 88 counts of grievous bodily harm. Maurice P remained silent throughout the trial, leaving his possible motive a mystery.

However a psychological analysis of the defendant based on his court appearances and job center files found evidence of paranoia and schizophrenia. Prosecutors told the court at the start of his trial in May it had been Maurice P's intention to kill a "large number of people" and he had accelerated so quickly that his tyres screeched. They said the rampage was premeditated. Several people were hurtled into the air as the car tore along 42 meters (yards) of the parade at around 50 kilometers (30 miles) per hour. Children as young as three were dragged under the vehicle, they said.

Passers-by eventually managed to stop the rampage by opening the car doors, pulling out Maurice P. and holding him until he was arrested.

He had parked his car in a strategic position the day before the parade, the court found, and had installed a dashcam to film the crime. He was not under the influence of alcohol, medication or drugs, authorities said at the time.

Germany has been on high alert for car ramming attacks since December 2016, when an Islamic State group sympathizer ploughed a truck through a Christmas market leaving 12 dead. —AFP

## Voters head to polls as UK PM faces crucial test in heartland

**LONDON:** Under-fire British Prime Minister Boris Johnson yesterday faced a crucial test of his leadership as polls opened in a by-election in a constituency his party has never lost, where defeat would intensify calls for a new leader. Johnson, 57, is already reeling after roughly 100 of his own MPs on Tuesday voted against government plans to introduce vaccine passes for large events.

The UK leader's authority has been clobbered repeatedly in recent weeks by claims of corruption and reports that he and his staff broke coronavirus restrictions last Christmas.

Weeks of bad headlines have turned what would normally be a routine victory in a safe rural seat into a much more fraught process for Johnson's Conservatives. Ahead of polls opening in North Shropshire at 0700 GMT, Johnson was struggling to convince many to stick with him, prompting predictions of a historic loss in a seat where the previous Conservative MP won a huge 23,000 majority in the last election.

Voting, which closes at 2200 GMT with a result expected hours later, is increasingly seen as a referendum on Johnson's premiership just two years after his landslide general election victory in December 2019. Defeat would probably see more MPs filing letters of no-confidence in their leader, which could trigger an internal party vote to remove him.

The same process saw his predecessor Theresa May ousted in mid-2019 after MPs including Johnson voted against her Brexit deal in parliament. "We are fighting for every vote," Johnson's spokesman told reporters on the eve of the election when asked if the prime minister would quit if the party lost.

The Liberal Democrats have the best chance of overturning the Conservatives' huge majority, helped by supporters of the main national opposition Labour party lending them their votes.

"I'll be voting for the Liberal Democrats because I'm so offended



**WHITCHURCH, UK:** People, wearing face coverings due to COVID-19, wait outside a post office in Whitchurch, central England ahead of a by-election in the North Shropshire constituency yesterday. —AFP

by the performance of Johnson," Martin Hill, 68, who normally votes Labour, told AFP earlier this week. "It'll be a tactical vote—I want to give Johnson a slap in the face."

### Fall from grace

However, others in the small town of Whitchurch were prepared to overlook the former London mayor's transgressions. "I think Boris Johnson's been a bit silly really... like a naughty little schoolboy," said 67-year-old Sue Parkinson, who has voted Conservative for the last two decades. "I don't think it's enough for us to say: 'right, we want a new leader now', because I think Boris has done an excellent job."

The atmosphere is a far cry from May, when the Conservatives swept to an unprecedented by-election victory in the northeast England seat of Hartlepool on the back of a successful vaccine rollout.

But the virus still dominates British life and the arrival of the Omicron variant has again deepened the gloom before Christmas. Nearly 80,000 people tested positive for Covid-19 in a 24-hour period on Wednesday—the highest daily number since the pandemic hit Britain last year. —AFP



## International

# Europe builds up Mali force as France draws down troops

## ‘Takuba’ to pick up the slack from France’s partial disengagement

**MENAKA, Mali:** France’s military camps in Mali are going quiet as Paris winds down its security presence in the restive West African country, but there is one notable exception.

Menaka is bustling with activity, boasting brand-new tents, freshly dug trenches and choppers taking off and landing in a constant ballet in the sky. What was once a quaint army base in France’s Barkhane anti-jihadist operation is rapidly turning into a cornerstone of Takuba, the European force that is to pick up the slack from France’s partial disengagement.

The footprint of the camp in northeast Mali has already grown to 30 hectares (75 acres) from the eight it had before, said Captain Josselin as he navigated his way through the busy construction vehicles.

Takuba, made up of European special forces, is based on an initiative by France, eager to share the burden of looking after Mali’s security with its partners. Takuba’s 900 soldiers are to help Mali’s army acquire the combat skills necessary to become self-reliant, a daunting task given the volatile situation on the ground.

Even after years of a foreign troop presence, jihadists in this border region of the Sahel between Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso continue their incursions and harassment actions.

A week ago, a rocket landed in the camp, though it failed to explode. The day before another multi-national camp, at Gao, became the target of a mortar attack. Menaka, usually flooded during the rainy season, has seen some major renovation work.

The camp is now crossed by long, well-kept paths. Apart from the usual conversations in French, there is now Czech, Danish, Italian and English heard in the camp, a sign of its international status.

At the new air transport zone, heavy Chinook helicopters from Italy and Swedish Blackhawks share the space. A few kilometers away, an abandoned landing strip has been renovated, ready for the army’s air operations.

### ‘Takubar’

Well-equipped fitness rooms, catering areas with TVs and a foyer-cleverly called “Takubar”—are to help make the soldiers’ tour as agreeable as possible in this semi-desert environment.

French President Emmanuel Macron, eager to draw down France’s troops in Mali after nine years of presence here, ordered the evacuation of the three northerly camps, Timbuktu, Kidal and Tessalit, whose tasks are to be taken over by a joint fighting force. Takuba, which after Menaka and Gao may get more bases such as Gossi in the northeast, spearheads French efforts to commit its European partners to the anti-jihadist fight.

The head of Takuba’s operations, a French lieutenant-colonel named Gregory, said it advises, assists and accompanies Malian forces who are hoping to win back areas over which the central government lost control. “All member nations have understood the idea of the mission, although they come from different backgrounds,” he told AFP, giving only his first name as is custom among military personnel. Meanwhile in a neighboring Malian army camp, a group of French special forces was training local soldiers how to carry out checks on a vehicle transporting potential hostiles. “Move! Hands in the air! Turn around!” one soldier shouts at another one who plays the suspect’s part, with a masked instructor advising him on body search procedure and safe distances to be observed.



**MENAKA, Mali:** A French Marine Special Operation Forces officer trains Mali’s FAMA soldiers as new Task Force Takuba a multinationals military mission in sub-Saharan Africa’s troubled region, in the Mali’s Menaka army base. —AFP

Marine Lieutenant Rozen, head of the French-Czech task force operating here, said it accompanied the Malian forces six months at a time. “We train them, and then we accompany them on increasingly complex missions,” he said, such as disarming improvised explosive devices, discreetly patrolling villages and searching potential hideouts.

The troops’ morale is intact despite tensions with the regime in Bamako, which has rejected an offer of additional UN peacekeepers. The government is instead looking to the Wagner Group, a private Russian paramilitary unit that is the target of US and European Union sanctions.—AFP

## Russia rejects calls for domestic violence overhaul

**MOSCOW:** Russia rejected calls to tighten domestic violence legislation yesterday after activists called for stricter rules in the wake of a European court ruling they hoped would influence change. The European Court of Human Rights this week called out Moscow’s “failure” to protect women against violence within the home, which the Strasbourg-based court concluded was happening on a “staggering scale” in the country.

Russia in 2017 decriminalized some forms of domestic vio-

lence, classifying them as an administrative offence and not a crime. Campaigners said the court decision should pave the way for lawmakers to adopt changes, but Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov shot down those hopes yesterday, saying current laws were sufficient. “We believe current legislation provides all necessary tools to combat this evil and law enforcement agencies are making efforts,” Peskov told reporters.

“Of course, unfortunate and tragic incidents do occur,” he said, adding: “I don’t want to comment on the decision of the court.” The Strasbourg-based court ordered Russia to pay compensation on Tuesday to four women who were battered or narrowly escaped being killed by their partners and who had had complaints to police ignored.

One of them, Margarita Gracheva, had her hands cut off by her husband in a case that shook Russia in 2017 and was this week awarded more than 370,000 euros (\$419,000) by the court. —AFP

ing German official, the RTS broadcaster reported.

The ruling, handed down on November 1, came after the man, Daniel Moser, was convicted in a separate spying case in Germany four years ago that sparked outrage there and tested ties between Berlin and Bern. RTS said last month’s ruling showed that Moser between 2014 and 2015 had, at the request of a German journalist, dug up data he believed to pertain to Swiss bank accounts held by the former head of Germany’s secret service August Hanning.

He had hired a security specialist to help obtain Hanning’s banking information. Not knowing that the three documents provided by the specialist were fake, he handed them over to the journalist and was compensated to the tune of 150,000 euros (\$170,000). —AFP

## After German verdict, tax spy fined in Switzerland

**ZURICH:** Prosecutors in Switzerland have handed down fines for attempted economic espionage to a man already hit with penalties in Germany for spying on German tax officials, media reported yesterday. Following a years-long investigation, the Swiss Office of the Attorney General (OAG) found a 58-year-old Swiss national guilty of trying to obtain and sell the banking data of a high-rank-

## Afghan women call for rights and aid in approved march

**KABUL:** Dozens of women protested yesterday in Afghanistan’s capital, demanding the right to education, jobs and political representation from the Taliban government. Although public protests are effectively banned by Afghanistan’s new hardline rulers, authorities gave permission for the march — held in biting cold after the first snowfall of winter in Kabul.

“Food, careers and freedom,” participants chanted, while others held placards demanding women get political posts. Some protesters carried banners echoing Taliban complaints that the international community had frozen billions of dollars in aid and assets.

The Taliban have pledged a softer rule, compared with their first stint in power in the 1990s, but women are still largely excluded from government employment and secondary school education. Despite being permitted to protest, participants said they remained in fear of the country’s new rulers.

At one intersection Taliban fighters cocked and raised their weapons, but the march was allowed to continue. “Fear is always there, but we cannot live in fear — we have to fight against our fear,” said 28-year-old Shahera Kohistan. —AFP



## International

# Extreme weather hits US as Biden vows aid to tornado-hit Kentucky

## As aid reaches Kentucky towns, rural pockets left out

**FULGHAM, US:** Kentuckian Sam Stone pondered the rickety remnants of his modest rural home Wednesday, and while he expressed gratitude to be alive after a monster tornado, recovery has been a test of self-reliance — with no official assistance five days on.

His roof was torn off, walls blown out, and belongings mostly sucked away by the deadliest storm in Kentucky history, leaving him reeling and unsure of the next steps for him and his teenage son. “I don’t have much money, and I don’t have any insurance, so I could use some help,” Stone told AFP as his Labrador pit bull mix Homer — who was whisked two miles (3.2 kilometers) away by the twister but delighted everyone when he was found alive by a friend — welcomed visitors. Severe storms battered the American Midwest, hours after President Joe Biden pledged increased federal assistance to Kentucky, where scores were killed and towns leveled by recent tornadoes.

The National Weather Service (NWS) warned of an “extremely strong” and “potentially record-breaking” storm system producing “a plethora of weather hazards” throughout several states in the central and northern part of the country Wednesday night, including “dangerously high winds,” snow, thunderstorms, tornadoes and fire risks.

“These storms will have the potential to pro-

duce extreme wind gusts as high as 100 mph, as well as a strong tornado or two” in Iowa and Minnesota, the agency forecasted, with local NWS office Twitter accounts urging people to take shelter due to confirmations of rare December tornadoes.

More than 400,000 customers were without power in several states Wednesday evening, including Colorado, Kansas, Missouri and Iowa, according to poweroutage.us.

“Individuals in the community have been helping,” the 55-year-old mechanic said. “But I ain’t seen nobody from the government.” As US President Joe Biden visits tornado-ravaged Kentucky cities and towns pledging the government would foot 100 percent of the bill for emergency relief for the next 30 days, the flow of aid has lagged behind in some more remote pockets of the state. National attention has focused on the two communities the president visited Wednesday: the virtually demolished city of Mayfield and the devastated town of Dawson Springs.

### Amish family killed

But the destruction that raked across six states has triggered lesser-known tragedies too, in several instances out of the reach of a huge rescue and recovery operation. Four members of one family among the Amish, a traditionalist Christian group that separates itself from much



**FULGHAM:** Members of the Amish community repair a destroyed barn in Fulgham, Kentucky, on Wednesday five days after tornadoes hit the area. —AFP

of the modern world, died when their home in the small community of Baltimore, Kentucky was ripped apart in the tornado.

An Amish elder who lost his daughter in the tragedy confirmed to AFP in Baltimore that a mother and father and two children perished. In nearby Cayce, population 119, most buildings appeared to be damaged or destroyed. And

while the community was partially isolated for four days after the storm, a federal emergency team finally arrived Wednesday, as did volunteers and a flood of donations.

Not everywhere has been as fortunate. “All the way from here to (Cayce), there’s individuals just like me” who have yet to be checked on or helped by authorities, Stone said. —AFP

## Five children killed in Australia bouncy castle tragedy

**SYDNEY:** Five schoolchildren were killed and several others were seriously injured when a gust of wind blew their bouncy castle into the air at an end-of-term party in Australia yesterday.

Police said the pupils at a primary school in Devonport, northern Tasmania were celebrating the last week of class before the Christmas break when they were thrown from a height of about 10 meters (33 feet). Earlier police confirmed two boys and two girls from grades five and six—typically aged about 10–12 years old—were killed in the incident, with a fifth student later dying in hospital.

Several rescue helicopters and ambulances rushed to the scene after the incident, which occurred around 10 am local time on an otherwise sunny, early summer day. Images from the school showed attending police officers in tears, and a swathe of blue tarpaulin sheets shielding what officers described as “a very confronting and distressing scene”.

A police investigation is under way. Distraught witnesses, friends, family, teachers and first responders are being offered counseling. —AFP

## Indigenous nomads displaced by violence in Colombia

**EL RETORNO, Colombia:** Mauricio points his blowpipe at a monkey high up in the trees, an age-old hunting tradition the Nukak people continue to practice even though they have long been displaced from their ancestral homes. Violence and illnesses inflicted first by settlers and later by armed groups forced the Nukak from their homes and into voluntary isolation decades ago, turning them into displaced people living in poverty in small towns in the southeastern Guaviare department.

Now, the last nomads of the Colombian Amazon still occasionally venture out from their slums to pick fruit and hunt animals, dreaming of a return one day to their ancestral way of life.

After discussions with his 22-year-old daughter Yina in their Indigenous language, the short, broad-shouldered Mauricio expertly manipulates his metal blowgun before firing a dart into a monkey. The poison takes instant effect. Other hunters carry squirrel monkeys they caught after mimicking their sounds. “We come here to look for food,” Yina told AFP during a six hour trek through the jungle.

The hunting party is made up of six men in jeans, caps and replica shirts of European football teams, and three women in shorts and crocs. They’re looking for red-footed tortoises, but also celebrating an unexpected bounty, having extracted honey from a tree they felled. These sights may not last forever, though.

Deforestation to make way for illegal drug crops and agriculture have threatened their way of life. “They displaced us, they threw us out,” sighed



**EL RETORNO, Colombia:** In this file photo, Nukak people (Nukak-Maku) eat near a scarlet macaw (*Ara macao*) at their campsite in El Retorno, near San Jose de Guaviare, in Colombia. —AFP

Over Katua, 28, who has never known the jungle life that lives on in the memories of the community elders.

### Kept out by mines

The first Nukak people appeared in Guaviare towns in 1988, arriving in a sorry state due to picking up “illnesses through contact with settlers,” according to a report by Colombia’s National Indigenous Organization. Fourteen years later, armed conflicts between Marxist rebels and right-wing paramilitaries caused the mass displacement of the Nukak. In 2018 there were 744 Nukak, according to the statistics institute, 336 less than in the 2005 census. —AFP



## International

Friday, December 17, 2021

# Hundreds flee to Thailand as Myanmar junta fights rebels

## Bangkok claims 700 already crossed border

**YANGON:** Hundreds of Myanmar villagers have fled to Thailand after junta troops clashed with an ethnic rebel group, officials told AFP yesterday. Fighting between Karen National Union (KNU) and the military broke out on Wednesday in the town of Lay Kay Kaw near the Thai border—the first such clashes in months. Yesterday, photos by local media showed dozens of people lining up to cross a river that forms part of the border.

A Thai government official in Tak province who spoke on condition of anonymity told AFP 700 people had crossed the border, and would be given food and shelter. Naw K'nyaw Paw, general secretary at the Karen Women's Organization, told AFP that more than 1,000 had been allowed to cross after community leaders negotiated with Thai authorities.

"I heard small arms fire and heavy artillery," said one local from a village near Lay Kay Kaw.

"More people have arrived in our vil-

lage and there are about 3,000 hiding here now." The clashes broke out on Wednesday, a day after state media reported junta troops entered KNU territory and arrested several dissidents, including a former lawmaker from Aung San Suu Kyi's ousted government.

The group's fighters had since injured and killed junta troops, said Padoh Saw Thamin Tun of the KNU, without providing details. AFP could not verify the claims and the junta did not respond to requests for comment.

The KNU has been a vocal opponent of the coup and provided shelter to dissidents working to oust the junta. Its fighters have clashed sporadically with the Myanmar military along the Thai border.

In March, its fighters seized a military post and the army retaliated with air raids, the first in more than 20 years in Karen state. Myanmar has more than 20 ethnic rebel groups, many of whom hold territories in the country's border regions. —AFP



**YANGON:** Hundreds of Myanmar villagers have fled to Thailand after junta troops clashed with an ethnic rebel group, officials told AFP yesterday.

## Firebrand Chinese state newspaper editor retires

**BEIJING:** Chinese state tabloid editor Hu Xijin, who became a leading voice of strident nationalism with millions of social media followers, announced his retirement yesterday. A self-described former pro-democracy protestor turned outspoken newspaper editor, Hu helped usher in a new era of brash, assertive nationalism under President Xi Jinping.

In a social media post, Hu said yesterday he had stepped down as editor-in-chief of the Global Times, which is owned by the ruling Communist Party's flagship newspaper the People's Daily. The 61-year-old wrote to his 24 million followers on Chinese social media platform Weibo that it "is time to retire", but that he will continue to serve as a special commentator for the paper.

"I will continue ... to do everything I can towards the (Communist) Party's news and public opinion work," he said. Hu has regularly invited controversy through inflammatory tweets and strident columns. Last year, he likened Australia to "chewing gum stuck on the sole of China's shoes" after Canberra joined Washington's call for an inquiry into the origins of COVID-19, and

called the UK a "bitch asking for a beating" after British warships sailed through contested waters last summer.

As well as drawing large audiences inside the country, Hu built a substantial social media presence on Twitter—blocked inside China—with over 460,000 followers, making him one of the most prominent pro-state voices on Western social media. He says that he participated in the 1989 pro-democracy protests at Beijing's Tiananmen Square before becoming a reporter—although later his ideological leanings hardened towards wholehearted support of the Communist Party line.

Since Hu took on the top role in 2005, the Global Times acquired a combined 67 million followers on Facebook and Twitter, helping Chinese propaganda reach a wider international audience while domestic restrictions on online debate have tightened. More recently, he tweeted video footage claiming that sources had told him tennis star Peng Shuai was alive and well, after she disappeared from public view in the wake of her sexual assault allegations against a top official.

Hu also denied allegations of extramarital affairs with two female colleagues earlier this month—claiming in a blog post that he was a victim of blackmail by the accuser, a deputy editor at the newspaper. It is widely rumored in Chinese media blogs that Hu will be replaced by People's Daily commentary writer Fan Zhengwei. —AFP

## Bangladesh marks 50 years since liberation victory

**DHAKA:** Huge crowds paid tribute to Bangladesh's war heroes yesterday as the country marked 50 years since its triumphant victory in a devastating independence war. December 16 is celebrated each year as Victory Day for the moment Pakistani soldiers surrendered en masse to Indian and Bangladeshi forces, bringing an end to the nine-month conflict that claimed as many as three million lives.

Veterans who lost their limbs in the war laid wreaths at the National Martyrs' Memorial, a concrete monument near the capital rule before thousands of solemn observers. Women across the country wore saris of green and red, matching the national flag, as they watched local concerts where musicians performed the country's patriotic songs.

Bangladesh has held celebrations throughout the year to mark the golden anniversary of its independence, though some events were called off because of



**DHAKA:** People wave national flags as they gather to pay their respects at the 1971 independence war's martyrs national memorial to celebrate the 50th Victory Day. —AFP

the coronavirus pandemic.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was the guest of honor in March to mark the outbreak of the conflict—a recognition of his country's crucial aid and support at the time. "I recall the great valor and sacrifice by... the Indian Armed Forces," Modi, who laid a wreath in Delhi to mark the anniversary, tweeted yesterday. "Together, we fought and defeated oppressive forces." —AFP



## International

# Tens of thousands flee as super typhoon hits the Philippines

## Storm Rai could hit coastal communities 'like a freight train'

**MANILA:** Thousands of people in the Philippines fled their homes and beachfront resorts as Super Typhoon Rai slammed into the country yesterday, with a charity warning the storm could hit coastal communities "like a freight train".

Rai is the strongest storm to hit the disaster-prone archipelago this year. It was packing maximum sustained winds of 195 kilometers (120 miles) an hour as it made landfall on the southern island of Siargao at 1.30 pm (0530 GMT), the state weather forecaster said.

"This monster storm is frightening and threatens to hit coastal communities like a freight train," said Alberto Bocanegra, head of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in the Philippines. "We are very concerned that climate change is making typhoons more ferocious and unpredictable."

The weather bureau warned "very destructive" winds could cause "heavy to very heavy damage to structures and vegetation", along with widespread flooding and rain-induced landslides. "I'm really afraid," said Nida Delito, 56, a restaurant owner on the central island province of Bohol, where the strong wind tore roofs off houses and uprooted trees.

"Many typhoons have passed here before and it was fine-this one is different," she said. More than 90,000 people sought emergency shelter as the storm charged across the Pacific Ocean, disas-

ter agencies said. Evacuations were still under way in areas in the typhoon's path.

Among the evacuees were domestic tourists visiting the country's famed beaches and dive spots ahead of Christmas.

Foreign travellers are still banned from entering the Philippines under Covid-19 restrictions. Verified video shot by tourists in Siargao showed trees swaying violently as people waited for the full impact of the typhoon. Families slept on the floor of a sports complex turned into a temporary evacuation center in the town of Dapa.

In the city of Cagayan de Oro on the southern island of Mindanao, coast guard officers used an inflatable boat, life rings and a stretcher to rescue residents trapped in their flooded homes near a swollen creek.

### 'Life-threatening flooding'

Scores of flights have been cancelled and dozens of ports temporarily closed as the weather bureau warned several meter-high storm surges could cause "life-threatening flooding" in low-lying coastal areas. So far, there have been no reported deaths or injuries. Communications have been disrupted in some areas.

Weather forecaster Christopher Perez said the winds could "topple electric posts and trees" and damage houses made of light materials.

Rai, locally named "Odette", is hitting the Philip-



This handout photo shows rescue workers evacuating residents from their flooded homes amid heavy rains brought by Super Typhoon Rai in Cagayan de Oro City, on the southern island of Mindanao.—AFP

pinas late in the typhoon season, with most cyclones developing between July and October. It is the second super typhoon to threaten the country since September when Chanthu grazed the north-eastern tip of the main island of Luzon. Scientists have long warned that typhoons are becoming more powerful, and strengthening more rapidly, as the world becomes warmer because of manmade

climate change. A super typhoon is also known as a category five hurricane in the United States.

The Earth tends to experience around five storms of that power a year. Rai is expected to weaken slightly as it moves across the Visayas region, and the Mindanao and Palawan islands, before emerging tomorrow over the South China Sea and heading towards Vietnam.—AFP

## Malaysia boat accident toll rises to 18

**KUALA LUMPUR:** The death toll from a boat accident off Malaysia rose to 18 yesterday after a search and rescue team found the bodies of seven more Indonesian migrants on the shore.

The vessel, which was carrying about 50 Indonesians seeking to enter neighboring Malaysia illegally, capsized Wednesday in stormy weather off the southern state of Johor. Soldiers on patrol found 11 victims on the shore in the hours after the accident, and the bodies of five more men and two women were recovered yesterday, the coastguard said.

Eighteen migrants are believed to still be missing, and authorities have deployed boats and an aircraft to hunt for them. Another 14 people survived the accident, and have been taken into custody.

Indonesians desperate for work sometimes try to enter neighboring Malaysia illegally by making sea crossings in rickety boats, but accidents happen regularly. Relatively affluent Malaysia is home to millions of migrants from poorer parts of Asia, many of them undocumented, and they work in industries including construction and agriculture.—AFP



## Indonesian volcano erupts again, spewing ash cloud

**JAKARTA:** Indonesia's mount Semeru erupted twice yesterday, belching a massive column of ash into the sky followed by a flow of lava that sent hundreds of rescuers fleeing in panic. The highest mountain on the island of Java erupted earlier this month, killing at least 48 and leaving a dozen people missing.

Rescuers were digging through the mud and volcanic debris

when ash—which reached 4.5 kilometers from the peak—and lava flow from the latest twin eruptions forced them to suspend the mission. "It is too dangerous for rescuers to continue," rescuer Saiful Hasan told AFP, explaining rain had sped up the flow of lava to the villages. No casualties or injuries were immediately reported, as rescuers said villages had been evacuated earlier. But the collapse of the lava dome after the earlier eruption may mean that Semeru will spew volcanic materials more frequently, Hasan said.

"Not to mention that we are now in the rainy season that could trigger a spill from the crater," he added. Yesterday was supposed to be the last search day, but the operation might be extended further. The December 4 disaster left entire streets filled with mud and ash, swallowing homes and vehicles, with nearly 10,000 people seeking refuge.—AFP



Friday Times

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2021

# LIFESTYLE

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Santa Claus isn't coming to town: COVID sparks St Nick shortage

See Pages 26-27

A person dressed as Santa Claus offers free hugs at SantaCon 2021 in Times Square in New York. Christmas is just around the corner but you may struggle to spot a Santa spreading joy in the United States this holiday season. — AFP





Newly painted Christmas tree decorations made of from blown glass beads are displayed in a small family factory in Ponikla village, North Bohemia in the Czech Republic. — AFP photos



The handmade production of Christmas tree decorations from blown glass beads.



A worker puts finishing touches on Christmas decorations.

# Czech Christmas glass, from love affair to UNESCO status



The handmade production of Christmas tree decorations.

Sparkling with colourful glitter, the small glassware shop in the Czech mountains lights up a grim, foggy day, as Christmas shoppers stream in to the constant chime of the doorbell. They come to buy blown-glass beaded decorations including stars, angels, snowmen, Santa Clauses or cribs made by a small company in Ponikla, a village in the northern Czech Republic.

The “handmade production of Christmas tree decorations from blown glass beads” earned a place on the UNESCO list of intangible cultural heritage last year. The practice has survived until today only in Ponikla, whose local tradition has roots in a 19th-century love affair. “A certain Hajna fell in love with a local maid, they got married and he brought the very basics of the craft to Ponikla,” says Marek Kulhavy, owner of the local Rautis factory, the only one left.

Hajna came from a nearby region where glass making had already flourished, and the craft spread fast as his neighbours were quick to learn it to make their living in the poor mountainous region. Stanislav Horna opened the current Rautis factory in 1902 to produce fancy

trimmings for clothes and costumes and met with great success, employing as many as 200 glass blowers at one point.

The company managed to stay afloat even after an act of espionage forced it to redirect its focus to Christmas ornaments. “In the 1920s, a group of Japanese industrial spies disguised as tourists copied the process and started to produce the trimmings, taking the eastern markets away,” Kulhavy told AFP. “The warehouses were full of beads and somebody decided to start making Christmas decorations as Christmas trees were a hit at the time.”

## ‘Blessing in disguise’

In 1948, all of the glass factories were nationalised as the Communists took power in the former Czechoslovakia, and Horna’s son was even thrown into prison like many entrepreneurs. But the business benefited from the move as the Communists limited blown-glass bead manufacturing to Ponikla. “It was a blessing in disguise,” says Kulhavy.

“Glass beads were always on the fringe (of glass production) and they lived their own life even during Communism as nobody was really



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interested in them and so the business survived.” Shortly after the Communist regime was toppled in 1989, Kulhavy’s father bought the Ponikla factory which currently employs 50 people.

Production begins with a glass pipe which is heated and shaped by blowing inside a mould. The plant has more than 1,000 patterns, according to Kulhavy. The shaped pipe is silvered from inside with a solution and then dyed from outside, before being cut up, threaded with strings and turned into an ornament. “Some beads are also treated by a painter. For instance angel heads need painted details,” said Kulhavy.

Jurassic Park

The Czech market is crucial, but the Ponikla decorations also head to neighbouring Austria and Germany and other European countries, as well as Japan and the United States. Facebook fan Iren Hellerova was excited to receive the parcel she ordered, calling the Christmas beads “beautiful”. She said the ornaments make for unique gifts as “no one else in the world has this!”.

Some beads still end up on regional costumes in the Czech Republic, Germany, the Baltics, the Balkan countries or Latin America. Standing in front of a rack with glass motorbikes, cars and spiders in cobwebs, Kulhavy said the company had about 300 products to offer.

“We once made Jurassic Park and Wild West collections to attract US buyers in the 1990s, they were pretty ugly,” he chuckled. UNESCO listed the production as a “specialised and technically demanding” craft, hailing the factory for safeguarding the tradition as the sole survivor.

“Glass beads were always a Cinderella. They entered the spotlight thanks to the listing,” Kulhavy said. “When you cast light on a star, it simply shines.” — AFP



A worker handles little stars as Christmas tree decorations made of from blown glass beads.



Various painted Christmas tree decorations.



Newly painted Christmas tree decorations.



Christmas tree decorations made of blown glass beads.





## Al Hamra hosts talented Kuwaiti women artists at Diwan Al Hamra

Showing some of the most talented creative pieces by prominent female Kuwaiti artists, Al Hamra Real Estate Co. recently launched an exhibition at its premise, Diwan Al Hamra, as part of its stand against gender inequality. Championing the rights of women and girls in Kuwait, prominent local female artists were encouraged to use the dynamic platform to call for change and inspire more women to break boundaries through the exhibition titled 'Her'.

The one-week exhibition features the works of four renowned and award-winning female Kuwaiti artists namely Hanouf Al Monaifi, Shaima Ashkanani, Eman Al Musallam and Rawabi Abdal.

Commenting on the exhibition, Ms Bibi Al Hamad, Sr Executive - Communication and Digital Marketing of Al Hamra Real Estate Co. said: 'Her' signifies a movement towards eliminating gender inequality and empowering emerging artists with an innovative space to nurture and explore their artistic abilities, more importantly, deliver the important message of changing stereotypes and enabling free expression. Sharing a mutual vision, we are honored to host some of the most popular female artists in Kuwait as they continue to contribute and transform necessary narratives and motivate others to pursue their dreams in the arts and cultural community."

The artists relayed the experiences that inspired the collective works:

Artist Eman Al Musallam said: "Sometimes out of extreme affection, one painting may not be enough or does not tell you enough, so I find three narrations develop out of a singular idea often. It is an attempt by me to monitor the state of societal change we are experiencing under the hustle and bustle of social media and its effects on us, our feelings, our actions, and our decision-making process under this momentum combined with media clamour and the continu-

ous documentation of everything as we lose out on the fun of real, raw communication among us, both free and open discussions and dialogues that are good forms of communication. It came as a distraction and a distortion of ideas, and on listening, replacing that with emojis, signs and images that negatively affected even our abilities in linguistic expression."

Artist Shaima Ashkanani said: "Whenever I get the feeling of painting, I go to that space in which I occupy myself to express the state of consciousness, which takes me without feeling to the state of sub consciousness! As

soon as I realize myself, I see that I have accomplished a work of art that was born in unconscious moments!"

Artist Rawabi Abdal said: "I like to express my love of Arabic calligraphy in my paintings because it reflects our heritage in a beautiful way. My paintings depict women wearing the Abaya and waiting on the beach for their loved ones while the Arabic calligraphy is presented as the sea and it's depth of secrets."

Artist Hanouf Al Monaifi said: "Horses with their beautiful appearance have been the symbol of artists' paintings throughout the ages. As she

calmly displays her splendor, it symbolizes a strong woman that is still and reflective, waiting for salvation and liberation."

Representing a positive social and cultural influence, the exhibition is open until 31 December 2021. Al Hamra invites all to visit and enjoy the collection of artworks that are reshaping the society for a better future.

Al Hamra Real Estate Co. has supported a myriad of creative women empowerment programs, most notably Sout Afkari, a contemporary TV-series format that brought together 30 Kuwaiti female role models from all walks of life. Continuing in the field of education, Al Hamra partnered with prominent teachers from elite schools across Kuwait to help level the playing field for girls and boys from underprivileged backgrounds through complimentary private tutoring. Al Hamra had also sponsored the Women's Football Tournament previously, promoting female athletes and FIKRA, empowering a new generation of male and female entrepreneurs in Kuwait. This year witnessed collaborations with Soroptimist Kuwait, the United Nations Development Program, and the United Nations Women, for the heart-warming and touching campaign entitled "What does your mother mean to you?" during which time, Al Hamra also celebrated its female employees and expressed great admiration for each as they tried to weather difficult times and maintain a positive work - family life balance. On 25th November, Al Hamra had joined hands with UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, the United Nations Secretary-General's UNiTE and UN Women, in the global campaign 'Orange the World' to end violence against women by 2030. As one of the first Kuwaiti companies to sign the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPS) on the UN site, Al Hamra honored its part in the world-wide movement by lighting its iconic Business Tower 'orange'.







Senegalese cook Thiane Ngom prepares a traditional "thiebou dieune" at her home in Dakar.



Ceebu jen, a traditional dish made of rice, fish and a variety of vegetables is photographed in a house in the Parcelles Assainies in Dakar.



Picture shows thiebou dieune plates, also known as Ceebu jen (literally "rice with fish" in wolof) in the Almadies area in Dakar. — AFP photos

# 'A source of pride': Senegal fish dish wins UNESCO recognition

In a small restaurant in Senegal's seaside capital Dakar, Thiane Ngom has risen early to cook up a batch of thiebou dieune, the country's most popular dish, before the lunch rush. Meaning "rice with fish" in Senegal's dominant language Wolof, thiebou dieune takes about three hours to prepare, and is commonly served at lunch in the West African nation.

To the sound of Senegal's popular Mbalax music, the 53-year-old restaurant owner washes and prepares onions, garlic, carrots and aubergines to go with the fish and rice. As the onions crackle in oil, Ngom's face lights up when she learns that thiebou dieune has been added to the UNESCO cultural heritage list.

On Wednesday, the United Nations' cultural agency listed the dish to its Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, following an application from the Senegalese government in October. "It's a source of pride for me, for us Senegalese, that it has been recognised worldwide," says Ngom, in Wolof.

"From now on, people will come here to taste our dish, and especially to learn how to cook it," she adds, explaining that her mother taught her how to prepare it. Thiebou dieune is a staple of her restaurant and has never been off the menu in its 25 years of existence—a testament to its widespread popularity.

## Colonial origins

Thiebou dieune is usually eaten with hands, but spoons and forks are also commonly used in Dakar restaurants. According to UNESCO, it is generally forbidden to sit with a raised knee while eating the dish, or to drop a grain of rice. "The recipe and techniques are traditionally passed down from mother to daughter," the agency said in a statement.

The northern Senegalese city of Saint-Louis is believed to be the birthplace of thiebou dieune. The city, whose old centre is itself a UNESCO World Heritage site, borders the Atlantic Ocean and hosts a thriving fishing community. It was also once the capital of the French colony of Senegal, until the country's independence in 1960. Thiebou dieune first emerged because of colonial trading links, according to UNESCO, as rice produced in French Indochina was imported into Senegal. Popular lore casts a woman named Penda Mbaye, a cook from Saint-Louis, as the inventor of the dish.

On Wednesday, social media users in Senegal praised UNESCO for recognising thiebou dieune. Many also commented that Penda Mbaye herself would be proud. — AFP



A woman serves a thiebou dieune.





Moroccan horsemen perform the "tbourida", during the 9th edition of the "Salon du Cheval" in the port city of El Jadida. Inherited from an old warrior tradition, the "tbourida", the Moroccan equestrian art, also known as "fantasia", was added as an intangible cultural heritage by the The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). — AFP photos

# Bahrain, Moroccan performances join UN heritage list

The United Nations cultural agency on Wednesday added performances from Bahrain and Morocco to its list of "intangible" heritage. Bahrain, a Gulf country with a population of about 1.5 million, presented its nomination for Fjiri musical performance, which commemorates the history of pearl diving.

The UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) announced the listing on Twitter, along with that of Morocco's tbourida equestrian performance. They were among 48 nominees from around the world considered for inscription on the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity list at an annual UNESCO-led meeting.

Bahrain's Fjiri dates to the late 19th century when "it was traditionally performed by pearl divers and pearling crews to express the hardships faced at sea," UNESCO said on its website. "The performers sit in a circle, singing and playing different types

of drums, finger chimes and a jahl, a clay pot used as an instrument," it added. "The centre of the circle is occupied by the dancers and the lead singer".

Fjiri "is viewed as a means of expressing the connection between the Bahraini people and the sea," UNESCO said. Tbourida, also known as "fantasia", is even older. It dates from the 16th century and "simulates a succession of military parades, reconstructed according to ancestral Arab-Amazigh conventions and rituals," UNESCO said.

Performances conclude with a round of gunfire. "The riders' customs and costumes represent their tribe or region, and transmission takes place from generation to generation within families, through oral traditions and by observation." Bahrain and Morocco were also among 16 Muslim-majority countries that presented the nomination of Arabic calligraphy, a tradition in the Arab and Islamic worlds, which was earlier added to the heritage list during this week's meeting.

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"Dating back to the late 19th century, it was traditionally performed by pearl divers and pearling crews to express the hardships faced at sea," UNESCO said on its website.

"The performers sit in a circle, singing and playing different types of drums, finger chimes and a jahl, a clay pot used as an instrument," it added.

"The centre of the circle is occupied by the dancers and the lead singer, who is in charge of conducting the performance."

Bahrain was also among 16 Muslim-majority countries that presented the nomination of Arabic calligraphy, a tradition in the Arab and Islamic worlds, which was also added to the heritage list during this week's meeting.

Fjiri, which originated on Bahrain's island of Muharraq, is per-



Palestinian women cross stitch traditional Palestinian dresses known as 'Thobe' in Idna village near the West Bank town of Hebron.

formed in festivals throughout the country.

"It is now well-known across the country and is viewed as a means of expressing the connection between the Bahraini people and the sea," said UNESCO.

"The words, rhythms and instruments are used to convey the values of perseverance, strength and resourcefulness."

Also listed Wednesday was "the art of Palestinian embroidery". In its recognition, the UN agency said the craft of intricate stitching began in villages, where women wear long dresses, trousers, a jacket, a headdress and a veil, each styled with embroidery. "Originally made and worn in rural areas, the practice is now common in all of Palestine and among members of the diaspora," the UN agency wrote. The list of intangible heritage now includes almost 500 inscriptions. — AFP



A Palestinian woman in a traditional tatriz (embroidery) dress sells pickles at a shopping and entertainment bazaar organized by the municipality in the West Bank city of Ramallah.



# Art is one area where France and Russia get along



Visitors look at paintings by French painter Pierre Bonnard during a press visit of the exhibition "The Morozov Collection - Modern art icons" at the Fondation Louis Vuitton in Paris. Art cements Franco-Russian diplomacy despite deep disagreements in other areas. — AFP photos



A man looks at a painting of the Russian collector of French modern art Sergei Shchukin - Chtchoukine collection as part of the exhibition "Icons of modern art" at the Louis Vuitton foundation in Paris.

While relations between Russia and France can often feel as frosty as the Siberian tundra, there is one area where diplomacy is working better than ever: Art. Taking the lead is the Louis Vuitton Foundation in Paris, owned by luxury group LVMH, which has staged two blockbuster shows pulled from Russian collections.

Sergei Shchukin's horde of classic paintings brought a record-breaking 1.3 million visitors to the museum in 2017. And the even more illustrious Morozov Collection—replete with some 200 treasures by the likes of Van Gogh, Gauguin, Renoir, Cézanne, Matisse and Monet—has been another huge hit since opening in September. In a sign of the wider import of the show, the catalogue features prefaces by both Emmanuel Macron and Vladimir Putin.

The Russian leader writes of "the bridges that artists and art-lovers have built between our countries", while Macron says they "underline our traditional special relationship". It is a rare bit of bonhomie between two leaders, more normally seen butting heads over

conflicts in Ukraine and Syria, political interference and cyber-attacks. "Culture and art occupy a special place in the diverse and intense relations between Russia and France, in spite of all the historical twists and turns, and the serious differences between our countries," a spokesman for the foreign ministry in Moscow told AFP.

## Historical ties

Russia and France have long fancied themselves as the twin pillars of European culture. From Enlightenment philosopher Denis Diderot's friendship with Catherine the Great, to Tsar Nicholas II laying the foundation stone for the Alexander III bridge in Paris, today's players like the sense that they are building on a long history of cultural exchanges. Catherine Pegard, who runs the Chateau de Versailles, admits she was well aware of the diplomatic significance when she organised an exhibition around the 300th anniversary of Peter the Great's visit to Paris.

The event ended up being an excuse for Putin to visit France him-

self in 2017, during which a freshly elected Macron took the opportunity to launch a new round of business talks. As ever, it is personal relationships that grease the wheels behind the scenes.

Jean-Paul Claverie, an advisor to LVMH CEO Bernard Arnault, happened to be personal friends with Shchukin's grandson from their days working at the French culture ministry. But vast amounts of money were also a crucial ingredient.

Unlike public institutions, LVMH could afford the vast insurance premiums and restoration costs needed to stage the Shchukin and Morozov shows (the latter's centrepiece Van Gogh, "The Prison Courtyard", had not previously been on general display due to its tattered condition). You also need some very healthy cash reserves to swallow the risk of the shows falling apart at the last minute. "Both projects almost didn't happen," Claverie told AFP. It took a personal meeting between his boss and Putin in 2016 to seal the deal, and win the unprecedented cooperation of the Hermitage and Pushkin museums, and Tretiakov Gallery. — AFP

## Springsteen sells music catalog for \$500 million

Bruce Springsteen has sold his music rights to Sony in an estimated \$500 million deal, US entertainment publication Billboard and the New York Times reported Wednesday. The sale includes the singer's recorded music catalog as well as his body of work as a songwriter—including classic hits such as "Born in the U.S.A."—sources familiar with the deal told by both media outlets.

No public announcement has been made. A spokeswoman for Sony Group declined to comment, and Sony Music did not immediately return AFP's request for comment. Springsteen is the latest star to reportedly sell his catalog, following deals made by Bob Dylan, Stevie Nicks, and Neil Young for part or all of their works.

Song rights are seeing a purchasing boom as financial markets are increasingly drawn to the lu-

crative portfolios as an asset class. Last year, Dylan sold his full publishing catalog for a reported sum of \$300 million to Universal Music Publishing Group, while Fleetwood Mac's Nicks sold a majority stake in her catalog reportedly for \$100 million.

Springsteen, 72, has been with Sony's Columbia Records for the entirety of his 50-year career, selling more than 150 million records. — AFP



## New York's Met Opera demands boosters for musicians, public

New York's Metropolitan Opera said Wednesday it will demand that all musicians and audiences have received a booster dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, as the contagious Omicron variant spreads. With 3,000 people employed every day, from the orchestra to the technical teams, "our population is far larger than any other not-for-profit performing arts organization in the country, which is why we have to be in the vanguard of health and safety," said Peter Gelb, the Met's general manager.

The opera had to close for a year and a half because of the pandemic, which hit New York City hard and early. That set the prestigious institution up for financial difficulties, and it had to engage in protracted negotia-

tions with workers to agree on wage cuts.

The opera house, in Manhattan's Lincoln Center, had already imposed vaccine mandates for workers and the general public for its reopening on September 27. Since then, 160,000 spectators have been attended 59 performances. The booster dose will be required from January 17 for those who are eligible, meaning those who received their second shot of either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine, or one shot of the Johnson & Johnson, at least six months ago. "We want everyone who enters our opera house to feel safe," said Gelb. "Those not yet eligible will be able to continue to enter, but must receive the booster shot shortly after they become eligible," the Met said in a statement. — AFP





A person takes a picture with The New York Santa during a “Toys For Tots” program yesterday in New York City.



Diver Max Bohnel dressed as Santa Claus watches sharks go by from inside the 110,000-gallon tank at the Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk, Connecticut.



Santa Claus is seen during the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York City, New York. — AFP photos

# Santa Claus isn't coming to town: COVID sparks St Nick shortage



The New York Santa stands on the street for a “Toys For Tots” program.

Christmas is just around the corner but you may struggle to spot a Santa spreading joy in the United States this holiday season.

That's because the pandemic has caused a shortage of Father Christmases, according to a booking company and Santa Claus training school.

After festivities were kept to a minimum last year due to Covid-19, parties are back for Christmas 2021 but the supply of plump, white-bearded men in red is way behind demand.

“There's a tremendous shortage of Santa Claus entertainers,” Mitch Allen, founder of Texas-based rental agency Hire Santa, told AFP.

Allen said there has been a 120 percent increase in demand for Santas this season compared to 2020 as businesses, schools and shopping malls host celebrations again.

But the number of Santas on his books has dropped 10 percent compared to 2019, meaning he has a shortfall of “over 1000 positions” this season.

“Unfortunately, we're just not able to meet the huge demand that we're receiving right now,” said Allen, wearing a green elf costume on a video call.

The supply slump is despite many organizations having decided to cancel activities, fearful of the highly transmissible Omicron variant that has once again put the world's health systems



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on high alert.

Contributing to the shortfall have been the deaths from coronavirus of more than 335 of Allen's Santas this year, he said.

Many, given that they are high-risk due to their age, have decided to hang up their red suit and bobble hat for the time being while others have opted to retire.

In a good year, a Santa Claus can earn between \$6,000 and \$10,000 over the course of the early November to Christmas Eve season, said Allen. But the pandemic has meant fewer candidates are aspiring to be Old Saint Nick, according to the Professional Santa Claus School in Denver.

The academy has suffered a 25 percent drop in applications since the pandemic, according to founder Susen Mesco, despite training moving online.

"In the last two years, 28 Santas graduated when the usual number is 120," she said in an email to AFP.

"Age is an important factor," since most of the Santas are over 70 years old, Mesco added. Allen predicts that the shortage will continue "for years to come." "This year, we have people already booking for 2022. We never had that before," he explained.

But Allen's not about to lower standards to boost numbers. "Not everybody can be Santa. You have to have to look like Santa Claus. You gotta have that twinkle in your eye and that love for Christmas." —AFP



A crew member dressed as Santa Claus walks past the cabin of a trailer truck that brought an 84 foot Spruce from California to be placed in the West Lawn of the US Capitol building in Washington.



A person dressed as Santa Claus offers free hugs at SantaCon 2021 in Times Square in New York.



Word Search

Color It

I LOVE Cats  
Word Search

DIRECTIONS: Find and circle the vocabulary words in the grid. Look for them in all directions including backwards and diagonally.



V	H	O	Q	N	C	M	E	W	Y	K	V	P	O	U	N	C	E	L
W	A	P	I	L	E	H	K	G	U	Y	M	M	N	I	K	S	W	Y
Y	M	C	N	W	H	B	E	L	A	D	M	I	Q	E	Z	B	O	N
V	K	K	A	T	C	E	Z	E	L	W	R	I	D	P	V	F	E	X
P	L	B	I	X	U	L	E	T	L	V	I	W	L	E	T	M	T	
C	U	Z	I	N	D	I	L	F	A	S	S	I	H	T	A	C	V	
M	H	R	W	L	O	B	T	H	T	H	S	F	E	L	I	N	E	
W	D	C	R	I	U	P	C	J	F	A	F	N	B	Z	L	W	T	
M	G	F	I	T	V	K	D	C	I	V	E	T	F	J	E			
M	S	W	H	V	N	E	K	E	I	R	Q	M	V	I	G	Q	F	T
O	L	V	O	T	R	K	C	L	T	A	N	R	G	P	U	M	A	O
T	E	J	A	T	W	W	I	P	T	P	Y	E	A	U	D	G	R	M
E	C	S	T	E	T	L	P	E	O	R	K	H	U	E	H	I	C	
P	F	E	F	T	U	X	K	N	E	G	J	Y	U	G	O	E	A	
P	Y	K	B	E	C	S	M	F	U	L	D	N	F	A	N	A	X	T
H	C	S	R	Z	X	E	P	K	L	I	M	N	B	U	S	T	J	N
Z	G	Y	M	I	C	E	J	H	H	F	L	H	J	I	R	B	W	V
R	I	Q	A	V	Z	Z	A	N	B	G	E	I	O	I	A	T	X	
Y	S	H	C	T	A	R	C	S	K	S	F	Q	N	H	V	Y	L	T

- CATNIP

CHEETAH

CIVET

CLAW

FELINE

FUR

HISS

HUNT

JAGUAR

KITTEN
- LEOPARD

LICK

LION

LITTER

LYNX

MEOW

MEW

MICE

MILK

PAW
- POUNCE

PUMA

PURR

SCRATCH

SLEEP

STRETCH

TAIL

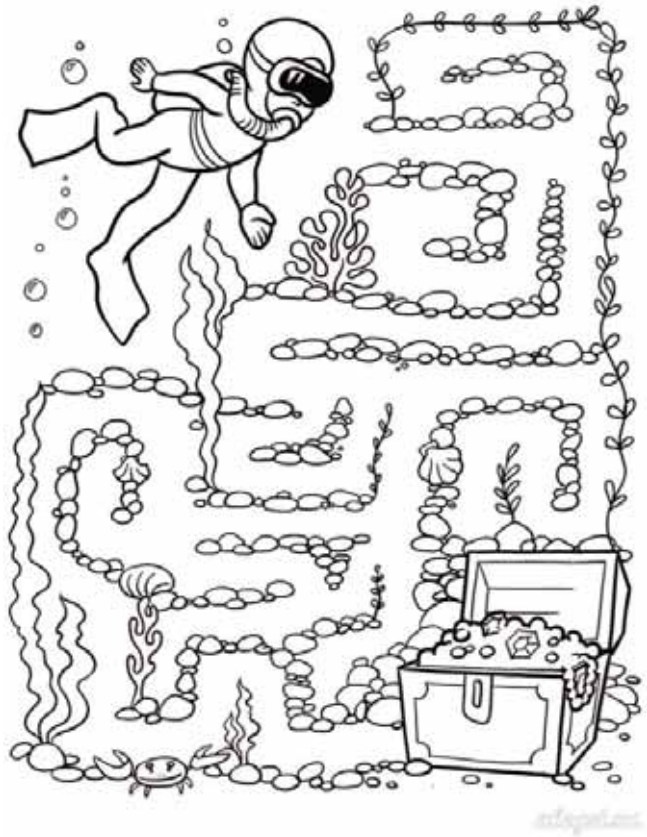
TIGER

TOMCAT

VET



Kids Mazes





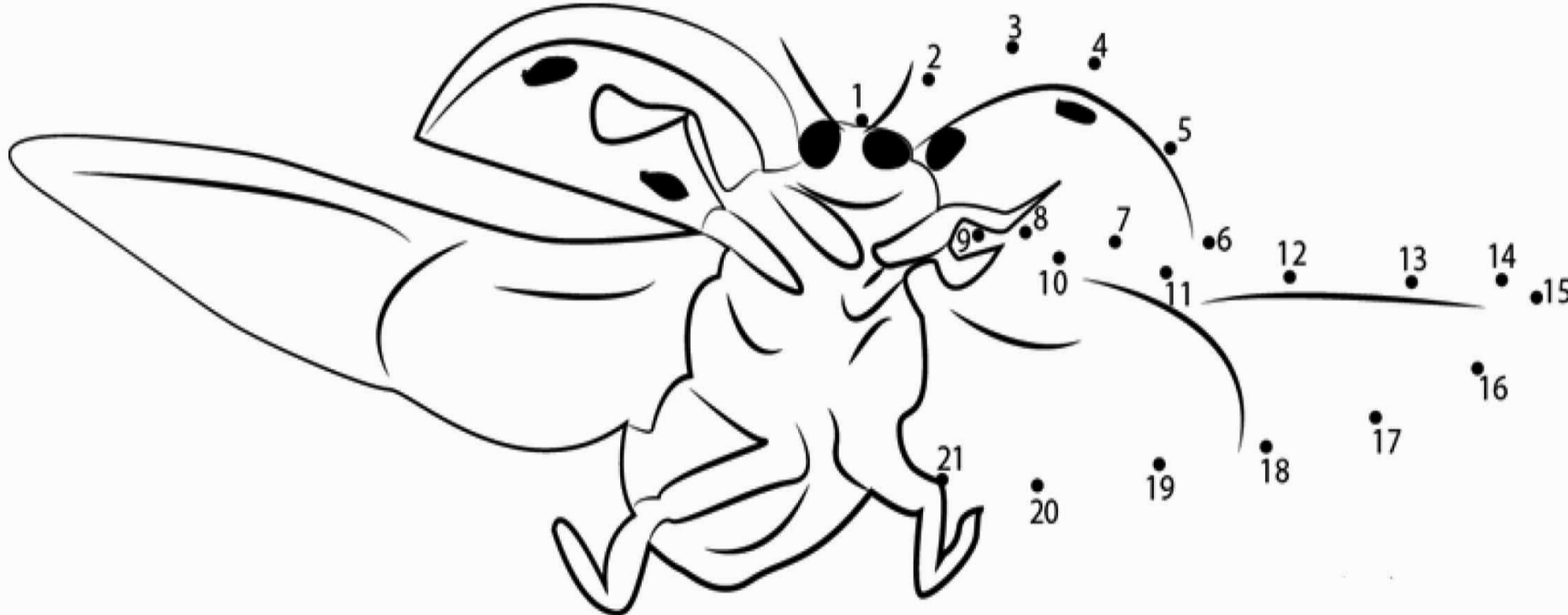
## Word Scramble



This spring Peony is going on a field trip with her class to the state park. Her teacher gave the class a list of things to look for in the woods and meadows, but the words got all mixed up. Can you help Peony unscramble her list?

- |              |                     |
|--------------|---------------------|
| 1. OFGR      | — — — —             |
| 2. FEUYRBTLT | — — — — — — — —     |
| 3. SRSGA     | — — — — —           |
| 4. ORMHTARWE | — — — — — — — — — — |
| 5. SNTGLHUI  | — — — — — — — —     |
| 6. UDB       | — — —               |
| 7. DDNLIAENO | — — — — — — — — — — |
| 8. ORELWF    | — — — — — — —       |
| 9. EBE       | — — —               |
| 10. GLBDYAU  | — — — — — — — —     |
| 11. OMLOB    | — — — — —           |
| 12. ERGEN    | — — — — —           |

## Join the dots





FRIDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2021

## Business

**32** Better Together 2022: Huawei Watch GT 3 launch event**33** Lira plunges as Turkey cuts interest rate again**34** Nissan ends production at historic Barcelona plant**34** In a bold move, BoE hikes rate to fight hot inflation

# ECB cuts 2022 growth forecast to 4.2%

## Central bank dials back pandemic stimulus as inflation looms

**FRANKFURT:** The European Central Bank yesterday lowered its growth forecast for economic growth in 2022 to 4.2 percent from 4.6 percent previously, as supply bottlenecks hamper the economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic. The ECB now expects the eurozone to grow 5.1 percent this year, up from 5 percent in the previous forecast, President Christine Lagarde said. Growth in 2023 would be 2.9 percent, up from the previous forecast of 2.1, after which the pace would fall to 1.6 in 2024.

The ECB said yesterday it will end its 1.85-trillion-euro (\$2.1 trillion) pandemic-era bond purchasing programme (PEPP) in March but ramp up a pre-crisis asset buying scheme to soften the transition and bolster the eurozone economy.

The ECB will wind down the pace of PEPP purchases in the first quarter of 2022 and “will discontinue net asset purchases under the PEPP at the end of March 2022”, it said in a statement. The pandemic emergency bond-buying program, currently hovering up around 70 billion euros worth of assets every month, is the ECB’s main crisis-fighting tool, aimed at keeping borrowing costs low to stoke economic growth.

To avoid an abrupt drop in its bond buying in March, the ECB raised the pace of purchases under its pre-pandemic asset purchase

programme (APP).

This would be increased in the second quarter from April 2022 to 40 billion euros, and reduced to 30 billion euros in the third quarter, the ECB said in a statement. The ECB underlined the importance of “flexibility” in its monetary response and said that PEPP purchases could be resumed “to counter negative shocks related to the pandemic.” The bank also left its interest rates at historic lows, including a negative deposit rate that means lenders pay to park excess cash at the central bank. The Bank of England earlier surprised markets with an unexpected rate hike to tame soaring inflation.

### 2024 in focus

While the ECB has up to now described the spike as “transitory”, attributing it to one-off pandemic related factors, inflation in the 19-nation euro region has progressed at a rate that has exceeded observers’ expectations. In November, prices rose 4.9 percent year on year in the eurozone, a record in the history of the single currency. The emergence of the more contagious Omicron variant has raised fears of more pandemic-related disruption, aggravating supply bottlenecks that have pushed prices up faster and hampered economic growth. ECB President Christine Lagarde will share the bank’s latest economic forecasts in her press conference



**FRANKFURT:** European Central Bank (ECB) President Christine Lagarde (left) arrives to address a press conference following a meeting of the governing council of the ECB on the eurozone monetary policy in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany. — AFP

at 1330 GMT, including the first predictions for 2024. Last updated in September, the bank expected the economy to grow by five percent in 2021, 4.6 percent in 2022 and 2.1 percent in 2023.

On the inflation side, price rises were expected to be 2.2 percent in 2021 for the whole year, before dropping under the ECB’s two-

percent target for the next two years at 1.7 and 1.5 percent. Recent pressure on prices could lead to “the largest ever upward revision to inflation in 2022, from 1.7 to 2.7 percent”, according to Frederik Ducrozet, strategist at Pictet Wealth Management.

The focus will be on the new number for 2024, said Andrew

Kenningham of Capital Economics, “the nearer this is to two percent, the closer the bank will be to raising rates”.

But a lower figure would allow Lagarde to continue to argue that the spike was a passing phenomenon, paving the way for a more gradual easing of economic support. —AFP





شركة الصفاة للاستثمار  
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

# PREMIER MARKET WEEKLY TECHNICAL BULLETIN

WEEK ENDED ON 16 DECEMBER 2021

No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance											Valuation Multiples *			
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	992	970	993	970	23	41,198,729	-20	-2.02%	15.48%	966	990	21.0	2.03	1.9%	1.26
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	267	269	270	261	9	24,861,575	3	1.13%	22.83%	261	270	21.6	1.25	1.8%	1.13
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	211	211	213	211	2	8,675,359	1	0.48%	1.44%	209	212	74.2	0.92	0.0%	1.01
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	225	224	225	222	3	5,632,399	0	0.00%	5.16%	222	227	17.0	1.02	1.9%	1.05
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	837	826	841	826	15	30,279,192	-9	-1.08%	22.01%	825	833	32.4	3.61	1.1%	1.40
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	793	782	803	782	21	4,074,427	-10	-1.26%	37.68%	781	787	57.7	4.51	0.0%	1.05
204	National Investments	Financial Services	236	228	237	218	19	73,092,389	-7	-2.98%	68.89%	224	237	7.2	0.96	4.4%	1.25
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	138	136	140	134	6	11,519,769	0	0.00%	-14.47%	132	140	31.0	1.68	2.7%	0.59
252	Al Imtiaz Investment	Financial Services	122	121	122	119	3	5,807,052	-1	-0.82%	8.04%	112	123	NM	0.74	0.0%	1.00
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	176	179	180	176	4	30,199,870	2	1.13%	64.22%	178	181	27.6	1.30	0.0%	0.98
413	Mabane	Real Estate	815	809	817	808	9	2,519,856	-4	-0.49%	23.14%	809	814	18.0	1.84	0.7%	1.10
501	National Industries	Financial Services	276	274	278	274	14	6,215,749	-2	-0.72%	55.68%	272	281	5.4	0.99	0.0%	1.45
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	921	903	921	895	26	938,736	-19	-2.06%	19.60%	900	914	31.9	0.92	5.5%	0.94
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	880	867	898	865	33	818,589	-1	-0.12%	35.47%	860	877	24.6	2.04	6.2%	0.73
526	Al Qurain	Basic Materials	351	341	357	339	18	1,813,645	-11	-3.13%	0.89%	333	357	NM	0.93	4.4%	0.75
603	Agility	Industrials	947	954	954	940	14	6,892,450	8	0.85%	41.12%	935	955	2.2	1.03	0.9%	1.48
605	Zain	Telecommunications	600	595	601	592	9	18,798,312	-4	-0.67%	-1.82%	593	599	13.6	2.17	3.4%	1.35
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,275	3,218	3,276	3,197	79	1,244,794	-57	-1.74%	-15.29%	3200	3275	7.0	3.51	12.4%	0.49
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	230	225	230	223	7	1,775,122	-3	-1.32%	4.17%	224	229	NM	0.72	0.0%	0.88
818	Ahli United Bank	Banking	281	277	282	276	6	85,872,564	-5	-1.77%	22.03%	277	282	19.0	2.14	1.3%	1.15
821	Warba Bank	Banking	275	272	276	270	6	3,995,115	-2	-0.73%	15.25%	268	275	20.7	2.69	0.0%	1.00
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	597	596	601	595	6	2,307,020	-4	-0.67%	-1.97%	593	601	18.6	1.68	2.9%	0.44
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	375	376	379	373	6	1,731,059	-1	-0.27%	2.73%	375	380	NM	1.57	0.0%	0.47
826	Shamal Az-Zour	Utilities	232	229	232	227	5	3,188,056	-3	-1.29%	-17.33%	227	233	19.5	4.06	3.9%	0.64
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	2,048	2,020	2,052	1,990	62	737,620	-8	-0.39%	83.64%	2000	2030	25.9	7.18	2.0%	0.65

\* As of end of week closing

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## Business

# Better Together 2022: Huawei Watch GT 3 launch event

## Strengthening the bond between Huawei and the media & partners



**KUWAIT:** 'Better Together 2022' aims to bring together and strengthen the bond between Huawei and the media & partners. The idea of Better Together 2022 is acknowledging the fact that unity and togetherness can lead to success. Therefore, Huawei will take this opportunity to announce the continuation of presenting and promoting its sustainable and high-efficiency innovations with the continuous support of the media & Partners to achieve the Slogan for 2022 i.e. Better Together 2022 and it's an occasion that encourages the same perception. At the event held in Jumeirah Messilah Beach Hotel & Spa, Huawei had everyone looking forward for this concept together with the launch of new Huawei Watch GT 3 Moon Phase Collection II.

There is more than enough to be thrilled about this smartwatch. It brings elegance and luxury to smartwatches with the new Moon Phase Collection II and innovative design. The unbelievable battery life of up to 14 days made us very excited. Then there are the all-day health and the disciplined fitness features as well as the convenient life assistant. And, it can connect with Huawei devices as well as other Android and iOS devices.

Jason Jiang, General Manager of CBG Kuwait Representative Office said: "Huawei will continue its commitment to develop meaningful innovative products and services that truly impact people's lives in a positive way. This is our promise to our customers, and we will continue to have the same drive and energy to innovate and engineer the market with leading products and services. Now we will also focus and do huge investments on Consumer Business Group B2B. We believe that there is enormous potential of revenue growth and we will make it a big success with our partners. We will work together to achieve it."

### The Huawei Watch GT 3

Huawei launched its next generation smartwatch, Huawei Watch GT 3 Moonphase Collection II 46mm and 42mm. Delivering an upgraded, more powerful, and convenient user experience, the new Huawei Watch GT 3 is



Jason Jiang, General Manager of CBG Kuwait representative office

more dynamic and intelligent. On top of its fashionable appearance, comprehensive upgrades, and new interface design, it also comes with accurate health and fitness monitoring with TruSeen 5.0+, 14-day battery life with new design, and an Intelligent Dynamic Adjustment Plan. The brand-new Huawei Watch GT 3 is another breakthrough in health monitoring and scientific training. It is designed to make life easier and more convenient for consumers, as well as help them to achieve fitness goals using scientific data. Health and fitness monitoring has always been one of our wearables' core strengths and this time, Huawei is providing a comprehensive upgrade to the GT series, with the addition of the new TruSeen 5.0+.





## Business

Friday, December 17, 2021

# Lira plunges as Turkey cuts interest rate again

## CB fires latest salvo in Erdogan's 'economic war of independence'

**ANKARA:** The Turkish lira yesterday hit fresh lows after the central bank fired the latest salvo in President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's "economic war of independence" by cutting interest rates for the fourth successive month. The reduction of the main rate to 14 from 15 percent comes in the face of an annual inflation rate that has surged past 20 percent and is expected to climb even higher over the next few weeks.

The lira was trading down nearly four percent immediately after the announcement. "The accompanying statement suggests that the easing cycle will be on pause early next year but, even so, the lira will remain under pressure and capital controls are likely," the Capital Economics consultancy said in a research note.

The lira has shed more than half its value since the start of the year-and 30 percent in the last month alone-as policymakers bow to Erdogan's wishes to bring down borrowing costs despite soaring inflation. This unorthodox approach has wiped out the value of people's saving and thrown swaths of Turkish society below the official poverty line.

A dollar could buy three liras in 2016 and 7.43 liras on January 1. It was worth 15.35 liras on Thursday after opening the week at around the 13.80 mark. But Erdogan has called for "patience" and argued that his approach will ultimately make Turkey less dependent on outside factors such as the scale of foreign investment and the price of commodity goods. He has also promised to significantly raise the minimum wage.

### Possible pause?

Analysts and diplomats believe Erdogan unleashed his pro-growth policy in a bid to revive sagging approval numbers ahead of a general election due within the next 18 months. The veteran Turkish leader is trying to fight spiraling inflation by bringing down borrowing costs-the exact opposite of what countries usually do in similar situations. Central banks around the world are currently raising or winding down their cheap money policies to combat consumer price jumps caused by factors related to the coronavirus pandemic. The Turkish central bank blamed most of last month's consumer price increases on "supply side factors such as the rise in global food and agricultural commodity prices, supply constraints, and demand developments." It said it would reassess "all aspects of the policy framework" over the first three months of 2022.

### 'Unchained'

Erdogan has cited China as an example as he pushes for economic growth at all costs. China brought down the value of its currency to boost exports and achieve spectacular rates of economic expansion over much of the past two decades. This created a new middle class that helped China achieve more sustainable consumer-driven growth. Turkey's economy also expanded at an annual rate of 7.4 percent between July and September.

But most analysts believe Erdogan's attempts to boost jobs and propel economic expansion through cheap exports are

vides tailored investment advice and plans based on the individual's risk appetite, financial goals, and aspirations.

The simple and user-friendly registration process for this service enables customers to have a globally-diversified investment plan across multiple asset classes (global equities, fixed income, commodities, and real estate - via ETFs). NBK is keen to extend all sorts of support for the initiatives of the Central Bank of Kuwait, which always have a tangible positive impact on the economy and society, by harnessing its huge capabilities and all digital channels, which are the most popular among all the digital channels of Kuwaiti banks.

NBK is also committed to educate customers on their rights and protecting the security of their information and accounts, focusing on pursuing the campaign's goals for raising customers' awareness of their rights and ways to protect their information, as well as achieving financial inclusion and introducing safe and appropriate savings and investment channels for all segments, in addition to the bank's commitment to provide designated, fully equipped branches to service special needs customers. "Let's Be Aware" is a banking awareness campaign launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait, in cooperation with Kuwaiti banks, as part of the efforts to spread financial culture and raise awareness among banks' customers of their rights and responsibilities, as well as the best ways to benefit from banking services and to promote savings and investment culture, and other related topics, by publishing a variety of awareness material and information related to financial culture.



ISTANBUL: The lira traded down nearly four percent immediately after the central bank's announcement.

likely to end in social turmoil. One senior Western official said Erdogan feels "unchained" after stacking the central bank with allies and ousting ministers who refused to subscribe to his unorthodox views. "There is nobody around him anymore who can rein in this fundamental belief of his, whether it stems from his Islamic principles, or shopkeeper mentality, or combination of the two-he genuinely thinks this is going to work," the Western official said. —AFP

## NBK provides leading savings and investment services

**KUWAIT:** National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) is keen to promote financial culture among different segments of society, and raise the awareness of banks' customers on the best ways to protect their rights and to keep their banking accounts and information secure. In this context, the bank continues to extend all sorts of support to "Let's Be Aware" campaign launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait in co-operation with banks in Kuwait.

As one of its key objectives, the campaign focuses on achieving financial inclusion by introducing appropriate savings solutions for individuals, as well as investment services for all segments.

In this regard, NBK offers a variety of savings solutions that motivate customers to save, as well as win various rewards and prizes, which mainly include the savings account and Al-Jawhara Account, which is the best way to save while also getting chances to win. As the bank's investment arm, NBK Capital provides global, regional, and local investment solutions such as investment funds and other opportunities for secure investing.

Amongst these services is NBK Capital SmartWealth, a seamless, convenient digital investment solution in Kuwait for long-term investors. NBK Capital SmartWealth pro-

## AUB congratulates winners of Al-Hassad draw

**KUWAIT:** Ahli United Bank (AUB) held the weekly draw of 15 December 2021 of Al-Hassad Islamic account, the first Islamic prizes account in Kuwait which offers over 750 prizes over a 12 month period and provides numerous features. Such features include the simplest and easiest savings program, loyalty multipliers, and unique account opening feature online with all ease with instant deposit option.

The Bank announced 20 winners of KD 1,000 as follows: Mohammad Al-Subaiei, Nada Al-Sadek, Intesar Abdulla Al-Bannay, Wadhha Traiheeb Al-Mutairi, Ahmad Humoud Al-Azmi, Mona Najem Al-Yaseen, Huda Wasmi Al-Dhafari, Manal Abdullah Al-Hajri, Mohammad Abdulmohsen Al-Mousa, Ali Hussain Abdulrazzaq, Anwar Mohammad Al-Kandari, Baqer Akbar Abaas, Ibrahim Fahad Al-Duwailah, Ahlam Omran Abed, Ali Soliman Awad, Al-Fahdah Abdulraheem Al-Zaabi, Rajaa Mohammad Al-Behaisi, Mohammad Mahmoud Subhi, Faisal Mohammad Al-Khudhair and Adel Mohammad Alazmi.

The draws of Al-Hassad include several cash prizes, such as KD 100,000 each Eid and the grand quarterly draw of KD 250,000 prize which continues to be a key aspiration for customers who are wishing to fulfill their dreams. Al-Hassad offers also 20 weekly prizes of KD 1,000 for each winner. Furthermore, for the first time in Kuwait, the AUB Al-Hassad presents the "Privilege Draw", which is a quarterly draw of KD 25,000 exclusively for Al-Hassad customers who maintained their balances for more than one year and have not won a prize in the past five years. For all draws, the clients are eligible for one draw chance for each KD 50 deposited in their Al-Hassad account.



## Business

# In a bold move, BoE hikes rate to fight hot inflation

## Pound jumps higher versus the dollar and euro after decision

**LONDON:** The Bank of England yesterday unexpectedly lifted interest rates to 0.25 percent from a record-low 0.10 percent, and flagged more hikes to combat decade-high inflation despite Omicron fears.

The BoE's monetary policy committee voted 8-1 in favor of the first interest rate hike in more than three years, but unanimously maintained quantitative easing stimulus, it said in a statement after a regular meeting. Britain has now become the first central bank of the G7 nations to lift borrowing costs since the coronavirus pandemic first erupted. In reaction, the pound jumped higher versus the dollar and euro after the modest hike which confounded expectations of no change.

The news comes after the Federal Reserve laid out inflation-fighting plans overnight and paved the way for US rate hikes next year, while the European Central Bank has held record-low eurozone borrowing costs.

### 'Finely balanced' due to COVID

The BoE decision followed official data which showed Wednesday that UK inflation rocketed in November to 5.1 percent, more than double its 2.0-percent target. Policymakers argued "it would be necessary over coming months to increase Bank Rate in order to return inflation sustainably to the 2.0-percent target", according to minutes from the meeting. They noted also that consumer price inflation in advanced economies "had risen by more than expected". "Most members of the committee judged that an immediate, small increase in Bank Rate was warranted," read the minutes.

"Although the conditions for tightening set out in November had been met, the decision at this meeting was finely balanced because of

the uncertainty around COVID developments."

They cautioned that the Omicron coronavirus variant, which has spread rapidly over the last month, posed downside risks to activity. The UK economy also continues to suffer from the ongoing supply crunch. "Growth in many sectors has continued to be restrained by disruption in supply chains and shortages of labor," the minutes read.

"The impact of the Omicron variant, associated additional measures introduced by the UK government and devolved administrations, and voluntary social distancing will push down on GDP in December and in" the first quarter of 2022. Rates had been slashed to a record-low 0.1 percent at the start of the pandemic in order to boost Britain's lockdown-hit economy.

However, global inflation has since accelerated sharply after the world emerged from lockdowns earlier this year, with prices soaring as companies struggled to meet demand for goods, energy and services. The BoE forecast yesterday that inflation would hold around 5.0 percent "for the majority of the winter period"—and would peak at about 6.0 percent in April 2022 due to surging domestic energy prices.

### 'Bold move'

Commentators said that rampant inflation had eclipsed potential economic fallout from the latest COVID variant. "The Bank of England opts for a bold move to fend off inflationary pressures," said KPMG chief economist Yael Sefin.

"The MPC had to strike a delicate balance between above-target inflation and tight labour market on the one hand, and a weaker short-



LONDON: A pedestrian and a London bus go past the Bank of England in London yesterday. —AFP

term outlook and increased Covid uncertainty on the other."

The UK economy was already struggling prior to Omicron, growing by an anaemic 0.1 percent in October from 0.6 percent in September. Omicron, which emerged late last month, forced Britain to re-impose coronavirus restrictions—including guidance to work from home and mandatory COVID passes. —AFP

## Nissan ends production at historic Barcelona plant

**BARCELONA:** The last vehicle was expected to roll off the production line at the historic Barcelona factory of Japanese carmaker Nissan later yesterday ahead of its closure on December 31. In the meantime, discussions continue as to the future of the site's 3,000-strong work force.

Before the pandemic struck the global economy amidships the Barcelona facility specializing in all-terrain vehicles was churning out some 200,000 cars a year. Amid reports that Belgian manufacturer Punch could take over the site and use it to house some 2,000 jobs for a hydrogen car project, UGT union secretary general Pepe Alvarez said the closure "makes me very sad."

"Now we have to find a project to continue activity at the site," Alvarez insisted.

Nissan announced in spring last year it was mothballing the site as it sought to contain the fallout of COVID-19, sparking union anger. After talks, the manufacturer agreed to delay closure to the end of this year from an initially proposed summer 2020 to allow more time for potential rescues for the three-factory complex at Zona Franca, Sant Andreu and Montcada abutting Barcelona's port area.

As the clock ticks down to December 31, uncertainty remains after one potential investor, China's Great Wall Motors (GMW) on Monday shelved a bid first tabled in September to take over the main plant. "It's bad news," the reindustrialisation commission member admitted. But "there are other projects," notably Punch's hydrogen plan.

The commission will meet today to discuss options and a way forward. —AFP

## US Fed will move quicker to face down inflation

**WASHINGTON:** The Federal Reserve on Wednesday announced a more aggressive stance to quell the wave of price increases that has affected cars, housing, food and other goods in the United States and become a political liability for President Joe Biden. The central bank's policy-setting Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) announced it will accelerate the phase out of its stimulus measures to end them in March, which would then allow it to as soon as May deploy its most powerful weapon against inflation by raising lending rates.

While acknowledging the risk that the price increases could continue, Fed Chair Jerome Powell nonetheless maintained a steadfastly upbeat picture of the US economy, which he said was poised to continue its strong recovery and ready to be weaned off the central bank's easy money policies. "Economic activity is on track to expand at a robust pace this year, reflecting progress on vaccinations and the reopening of the economy. Aggregate demand remains very strong," Powell told reporters following the two-day FOMC meeting. Powell admitted recently that he and his colleagues miscalculated how far prices would rebound in the wake of the pandemic crisis, and pledged to fight back.

### Ready for rate hikes

But on Wednesday, he also stressed that any actions taken will depend on the economy's performance, which still faces risks from the COVID-19 pandemic. "We need to see how the inflation data and all the data evolve in coming months, but we are prepared to use our tools to make sure that higher inflation doesn't get entrenched," Powell said.

The committee in early November made the first step to taper its bond purchases, lowering the total by \$15 billion a month, which would have ended the program around June. Now, it will cut by \$30 billion a month, ending the program two months earlier and putting the Fed in a position to raise the benchmark interest rate off zero, where it has been since the start of the pandemic in March 2020.

Powell said "the economy no longer needs increasing amounts of policy support" and painted a picture of a strong economy "in which it's appropriate for interest rate hikes." The Fed said it will keep interest rates low until labor market conditions improve further, but in forecasts published alongside the FOMC statement, central bankers signaled they expect as many as three rate hikes next year. Stock markets cheered the news, closing the day with solid gains.

Hoping to avoid negative political fallout, Biden's team and Fed officials—who are independent from the White House—for months have tried to reassure nervous consumers that the price jumps were mostly due to temporary knock-on effects of the pandemic, such as semiconductor shortages and shipping snafus. But the increases have yet to subside. Annual consumer prices saw their biggest jump in nearly four decades in November, producer prices rose sharply last month and retail sales data released Wednesday showed price hikes are starting to tamp down spending.

In its quarterly economic projections, the FOMC's closely-watched "dot plot" showed all committee members expect at least one rate hike next year, and 12 of the 18 members see three or more. The latest release shows the median forecast inflation rising to 5.3 percent this year—well above the central bank's two percent goal—but falling to 2.6 percent by the end of 2022. "The December FOMC policy statement crystallized the Fed's hawkish pivot," said Gregory Daco of Oxford Economics. While raising borrowing rates is an effective inflation-fighting weapon, it is also a blunt tool that could short-circuit the US economy's recovery, which remains beset by supply chain snags and new variants of the virus. Powell acknowledged the risk from the spread of the Omicron variant, but said officials see growth continuing. "Notwithstanding the effects of the virus and supply constraints." —AFP



# Kuwait Times Classifieds

Friday, December 17, 2021

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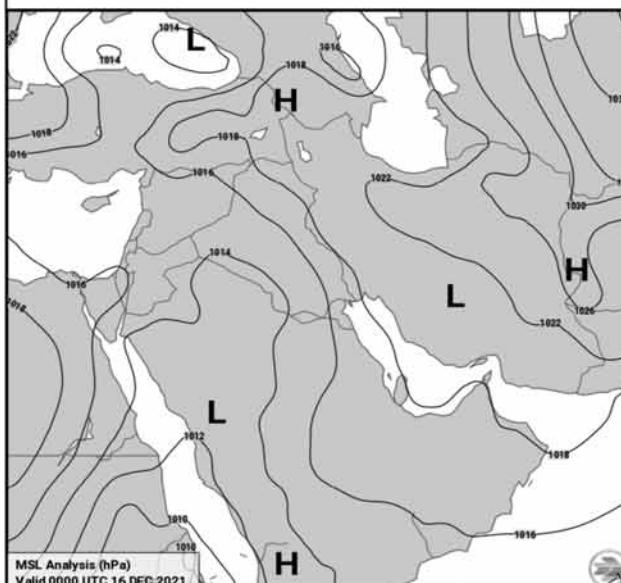


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### Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

**BY DAY:** Warm and partly cloudy to cloudy with light to moderate south easterly wind to light variable wind with speed of 08 - 35 km/h with a chance for scattered rain.

**BY NIGHT:** Rather cold and cloudy with light to moderate south easterly wind with speed of 10 - 35 km/h with a chance for scattered rain with a chance for fog forming over some areas.

WEATHER WARNING			No Current Warnings	
STATION	MAX EXP	MIN REC	SFC. CHART	
KUWAIT CITY	26 °C	19 °C		
KUWAIT AIRPORT	26 °C	16 °C		
ABDALY	27 °C	14 °C		
JAHRRA	26 °C	15 °C		
SALMIYAH	23 °C	19 °C		
AHMADI	23 °C	20 °C		
NUWAISIB	27 °C	16 °C		
WAFRA	26 °C	14 °C		
SALMY	24 °C	13 °C		
JAL ALIYAH	25 °C	14 °C		

4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Friday	12/17	Warm and partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times	27 °C	15 °C	SE	12 - 45 km/h
Saturday	12/18	Warm and partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times	27 °C	18 °C	SE	12 - 42 km/h
Sunday	12/19	Warm and Cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thundery later on	27 °C	18 °C	SE	12 - 42 km/h
Monday	12/20	Warm and partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times	25 °C	16 °C	SE-SW	15 - 45 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	05:11
Sunrise	06:36
Zuhr	11:43
Asr	14:34
Sunset	16:52
Isha	18:14

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	24 °C
MIN. Temp.	11 °C
MAX. RH	84 %
MIN. RH	26 %
MAX. Wind	S 39 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

All times are local time unless otherwise stated.

UP:0



## Sports

# Arsenal thrive despite Aubameyang row as Premier League's COVID crisis deepens

**LONDON:** Arsenal showed they can thrive without axed star Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang as the Gunners moved into fourth place in the Premier League with a 2-0 win against West Ham, while the top-flight's coronavirus crisis deepened on Wednesday.

Gabriel Martinelli and Emile Smith Rowe netted in the second half of a fiery London derby at the Emirates Stadium that saw West Ham's Vladimir Coufal sent off. Arsenal are one point above fifth-placed West Ham after a second successive victory eased the drama surrounding Mikel Arteta's decision to strip Gabon forward Aubameyang of the club captaincy.

Arteta's side are in the top four at this stage of a season for the first time in two-and-a-half years. It is a remarkable reversal of fortune after Arsenal lost their opening three league games for the first time in 67 years. "It was a statement result. The performance, attitude and commitment the players showed is exactly what we are about," Arteta said. "We have a leadership group and I expect every player to stick to our values."

Calls for Arteta to be sacked were widespread after an embarrassing 5-0 thrashing at Manchester City in August, but the Spaniard has steadied the ship impressively, with even the Aubameyang drama unable to derail him. Aubameyang was absent from the squad after being removed from the captaincy due to a disciplinary breach on Tuesday. He returned late and missed training last week after travelling to France to see his ill mother.

It was not Aubameyang's first transgression, having previously been dropped for the north London derby against Tottenham in March after what was described as a breach of the club's pre-match protocol. Asked if there was a way back from exile for Aubameyang, Arteta said: "We will talk about that another day. "He was not eligible

for this game, that's it and this game is gone now. We will discuss it in the near future."

Martinelli broke West Ham's resistance in the 48th minute when the Brazilian ran onto Alexandre Lacazette's defence-splitting pass and stroked a fine finish into the far corner for his second goal this term.

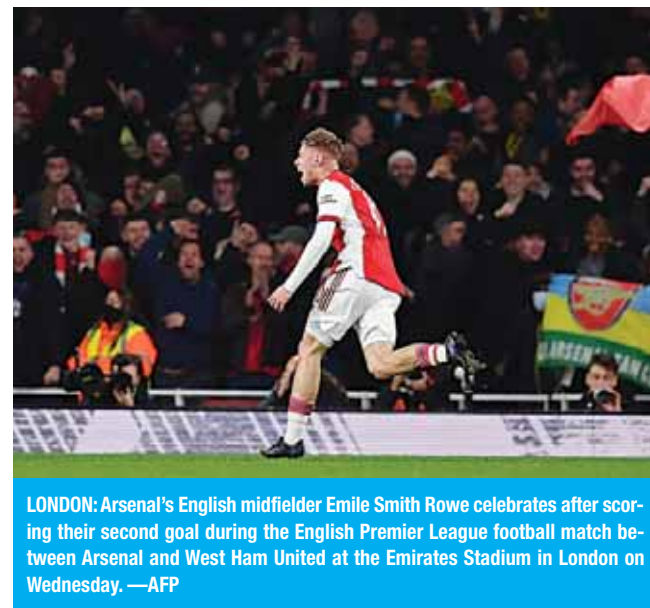
West Ham were reduced to 10 men in the 66th minute after Coufal's tackle on stand-in skipper Lacazette conceded a penalty and earned the defender a second yellow card. Lukasz Fabianski plunged to his left to save Lacazette's spot-kick, but Smith Rowe capped Arsenal's dominant display when he finished a flowing move with a clinical strike from the edge of the area in the 87th minute.

## COVID chaos

While Arsenal were hit by the coronavirus before their opening game of the season at Brentford, they have so far avoided the recent positive test plunging the league into turmoil. Watford's match at Burnley was postponed less than three hours before kick-off on Wednesday after "an ongoing COVID outbreak" left the Hornets with insufficient players to fulfil the fixture. It was the third Premier League game to be postponed due to COVID in four days as the new Omicron variant causes havoc in England's top-flight.

Tottenham's trip to Brighton last Sunday was called off due to an outbreak at the north London club, while Manchester United's match at Brentford on Tuesday was cancelled after the Old Trafford club's positive tests. United, Tottenham, Brighton, Leicester, Norwich and Aston Villa had already been hit by the virus over the last week.

The Premier League announced a record 42 positive tests across two testing cycles last week. Also on Wednesday, Leicester manager Brendan Rodgers said the



**LONDON:** Arsenal's English midfielder Emile Smith Rowe celebrates after scoring their second goal during the English Premier League football match between Arsenal and West Ham United at the Emirates Stadium in London on Wednesday. —AFP

Premier League had rejected an appeal from both clubs to postpone their match against Tottenham yesterday. Leicester are currently without nine players because of COVID-related issues and injuries.

Brighton boss Graham Potter had dealt with several COVID cases in his squad this week and his problems mounted as Wolves won 1-0 at the Amex Stadium. Potter's side are without a win in 12 games in all competitions after Romain Saiss volleyed home in first half stoppage-time. Jordan Ayew ended his 47-game goal drought to give Crystal Palace a 2-2 draw against Southampton at Selhurst Park. —AFP

## Kuwait equestrian league starts today

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** The third round of the Kuwait Equestrian Federation League starts today morning with the participation of riders from local clubs in the beginners, intermediate and advanced categories. Competition will continue until tomorrow evening when the main run for the 130, 135 and 140 cm heights will be contested. The previous two rounds were carried out at Kuwait Equestrian club where riders Ahmad Al-Madhahka and Ali Al-Kharafi came out winners.

KEF Board Member rider Sheikh Yousuf Mishal Al-Sabah said the previous two rounds witnessed heated competition especially in the 130, 135 and 140 cm heights, as many riders were aiming for first place. Sheikh Yousuf said there are many who wish to participate in the competitions particularly in the beginner category of 60, 70 and 90cm heights. He said the board of directors extends all support to riders of both genders to help advance the sport locally and abroad.

## Mercedes withdraw appeal against Verstappen's win

**LONDON:** Lewis Hamilton's Mercedes team yesterday withdrew their appeal against Max Verstappen's controversial title-winning victory in the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. Red Bull's Verstappen overtook the British driver on the last lap on Sunday to clinch his first drivers' title and deny his rival a record eighth crown. The deployment of the safety car after a late crash at the Yas Marina Circuit had wiped out Hamilton's seemingly unassailable lead and Verstappen had the advantage as he was using fresher tires.

The furious Mercedes team had an immediate double appeal dismissed by the stewards, then lodged an intention to appeal against that decision, which they were required to trigger by yesterday evening. But Mercedes issued a lengthy statement announcing they were drawing a line under the issue. The team said they had made the decision following "constructive dialogue" with governing body FIA

over establishing clarity for future racing scenarios.

"We welcome the decision by the FIA to install a commission to thoroughly analyze what happened in Abu Dhabi and to improve the robustness of rules, governance and decision-making in Formula 1," Mercedes said in a statement. "We also welcome that they have invited the teams and drivers to take part. The Mercedes-AMG Petronas team will actively work with this commission to build a better Formula 1 — for every team and every fan who loves this sport as much as we do. We will hold the FIA accountable for this process and we hereby withdraw our appeal."

Mercedes, who won the constructors' title, said they had initially appealed against the result in the interests of "sporting fairness". The team also offered congratulations to Verstappen and Red Bull, saying the F1 championship title fight had been "truly epic". "Though this drivers' championship did not end the way we hoped, we could not be prouder of our team," the statement added. "Lewis, you are the greatest racer in the history of Formula 1 and you drove your heart out for every lap of this incredible season. You're a flawless sportsman on and off the track and you delivered a faultless performance." —AF



## Sports

# Buoyant Bayern out to extend Wolfsburg's losing-streak misery

**BERLIN:** Bayern Munich striker Robert Lewandowski can claim another goal record today in his club's last game of 2021 as the Bundesliga leaders look to extend Wolfsburg's miserable six-match losing streak. "We have one game before Christmas to try to collect three more points," said Bayern coach Julian Nagelsmann, whose side start the final weekend before the two-week winter break six points clear.

Bayern are buoyed by winning the last six games in all competitions, including beating second-placed Bundesliga rivals Dortmund, then Barcelona to seal a perfect six wins from six Champions League group stage games.

The Bavarian giants also thrashed Stuttgart 5-0 on Tuesday with Serge Gnabry claiming the second Bundesliga hat-trick of his career. In contrast, Wolfsburg have slid down the table to 11th after losing their last four league defeats.

Their head coach Florian Kohfeldt, who took over when Mark van Bommel was sacked in late October, won his first three games, but now finds himself under pressure after Tuesday's latest setback, a 3-2 home loss to Cologne. To compound Wolfsburg's problems, joint top-scorer Lukas Nmecha is out with an ankle injury.

In contrast, Lewandowski can claim a new record for most goals scored in German league football during a calendar year. He scored twice in Tuesday's rout of Stuttgart to draw level with Gerd Mueller, who scored a record 42 goals over

12 months back in 1972.

Lewandowski loves to score against Wolfsburg, netting 23 goals in 15 games against Wolves, the most he has scored against any club in Germany's top flight. That tally includes the five Lewandowski hit in nine jaw-dropping minutes when he came off the bench to steer Bayern to a 5-1 victory and claim a host of records in September 2015. Bayern will be without winger Kingsley Coman, who tore a thigh muscle in the win over Stuttgart.

## One to watch: Marc Roca

A year since his transfer from Espanyol, the 25-year-old has seized his chance to finally show what he can do. With his other defensive midfielders Joshua Kimmich, Leon Goretzka, Corentin Tolisso and Marcel Sabitzer all sidelined, Bayern boss Nagelsmann gave Roca, who had only played 25 minutes of Bundesliga football this season, his first league start this season at Stuttgart. Roca seized his chance, turning in a superb performance, which Nagelsmann singled out for praise in the Bayern dressing room. "I rarely do that, but Marc really deserved it. I love players like that," enthused Nagelsmann after Roca showed "that it was a mistake to use him so rarely." "To come in and give it his all - that was an outstanding performance," said Nagelsmann as Roca's smooth passing helped create goals for Gnabry and Lewandowski. — AFP



**STUTTGART:** Bayern Munich's Polish forward Robert Lewandowski (left) fights for the ball with Stuttgart's German defender Waldemar Anton before scoring the 3-0 goal during the two teams' German first division Bundesliga football in Stuttgart, southwestern Germany on Tuesday. — AFP

## Haaland brace sinks Fuerth as Dortmund trim Bayern's lead

**BERLIN:** Erling Haaland scored twice Wednesday as Borussia Dortmund trimmed Bayern Munich's lead at the top of the Bundesliga table to six points with a 3-0 win over bottom side Greuther Fuerth. Haaland struck either side of half-time before Dutch striker Donyell Malen grabbed Dortmund's late third goal.

The home victory allows Dortmund to peg back the points gap behind Bayern, who remain on course for a 10th straight league title after thumping Stuttgart 5-0 on Tuesday. Haaland has scored 19 goals in 15 games for Dortmund this season and the towering Norwegian again shone at Signal Iduna Park. His early well-timed pass in the box saw Thorgan Hazard hit the net, but the goal was ruled offside.

Haaland then converted a first-half penalty and headed in a Julian Brandt free-kick eight minutes from time before replacement Malen fired in Dortmund's third goal, also from Brandt's final pass. Dortmund are also six points ahead of third-placed Leverkusen, who were held to a 2-2 draw at home by Hoffenheim on Wednesday.



**DORTMUND:** Dortmund's Norwegian forward Erling Haaland celebrates scoring the 2-0 goal during the German first division Bundesliga football match against Greuther Fuerth in Dortmund on Wednesday. — AFP

Czech striker Patrik Schick scored twice to put Leverkusen 2-0 up with an hour gone, but Hoffenheim scored late goals from Angelo Stiller and Munas Dabbur to claim a point. Leverkusen finished with ten men after Moussa Diaby was shown a second yellow card for lashing out at

Hoffenheim defender Florian Grillitsch in stoppage time.

Earlier, Japan forward Daichi Kamada scored his first Bundesliga goal this season to give Eintracht Frankfurt a 3-2 win at Borussia Moenchengladbach following a flurry of sec-

ond-half goals. The attacking midfielder hit the superb winner, beating the back-tracking Gladbach defense with his first touch and tucking his finish into the corner under pressure.

The goal, his first in Germany's top flight this campaign after scoring three times in six Europa League group-stage games, came after a frantic start to the second-half with three goals in five minutes. Frankfurt then played the last 20 minutes a man down at Borussia Park after Brazilian defender Tuta was sent off for a second booking for fouling Marcus Thuram.

Frankfurt are seventh, but just three points from a top four place after backing up Sunday's 5-2 home drubbing of Leverkusen with another impressive victory. In contrast, Gladbach have lost their last four league games and are just a point from the bottom three. They took an early lead when midfielder Florian Neuhaus hit the back of the net.

Frankfurt equalised out of nothing just before half-time when their Colombia forward Rafael Borre finished off a lightning counter-attack. The game burst into life just after the break when Frankfurt's Danish midfielder Jesper Lindstrom, who also scored against Leverkusen last Sunday, put Frankfurt 2-1 up, crashing in his shot off the underside of the crossbar.

Four minutes later, Gladbach defender Ramy Bensebaini converted a penalty after Kouadio Kone was brought down in the area, only for Frankfurt to immediately retake the lead when Kamada hit the winner after exchanging passes with Borre. — AFP



## Sports

# No postponement planned despite Browns COVID surge: Goodell

**LOS ANGELES:** NFL commissioner Roger Goodell said there had been no talk of postponing tomorrow's Raiders-Browns clash despite a COVID-19 outbreak among the Browns that includes quarterback Baker Mayfield.

"There has not been any discussion about that," Goodell said in Texas, where league meetings concluded on Wednesday. "We feel confident that with continuing changes and adaptations through our protocols that we can (play)."

Browns quarterback Mayfield and head coach Kevin Stefanski entered the NFL's COVID-19 protocols on Wednesday as a surge in coronavirus cases continued. The Browns said in a statement Mayfield was among five players placed on the COVID-19/reserve list, a day after eight Cleveland players were put on the list.

Under NFL confidentiality rules, teams are not allowed to say whether players placed on the list have tested positive for COVID-19 or have been in contact with someone infected with the virus. However US media reports said that Mayfield had recorded a positive test.

Mayfield, who is vaccinated, must test negative twice within 24 hours in order to be able to return for the Browns clash with the Las Vegas Raiders tomorrow. In a separate announcement, the Browns said Stefanski has tested positive for COVID-19.

If Stefanski is unable to provide two negative results by tomorrow, special teams coordinator Mike Priefer will work the sideline against the Raiders. It is the second time this year that Stefanski has been sidelined by COVID-19. In January, he was forced to miss the Browns' wild card game against the Pittsburgh Steelers after testing positive for the virus.

The cases in Cleveland are part of a sharp uptick in cases that has swept through sport in North America this week, with basketball and ice hockey both forced to postpone games because of rising cases. The Los Angeles Rams, who closed their practice facility on Tuesday after nine players were placed on the COVID-19 list, said Wednesday three more players had entered the protocols.

## New phase of pandemic

The Kansas City Chiefs, Washington Football Team and New York Giants also put players on the COVID-19 list on Wednesday. Goodell said the league expected rules allowing roster flexibility to allow teams to field competitive teams.

"We've given our clubs a lot more flexibility with respect to the ability to remove players off that practice squad and also off the injured reserve," he said. "Those things have allowed clubs to be sure they're maintaining the best competi-



**CLEVELAND:** Baker Mayfield #6 of the Cleveland Browns looks to make a pass play against the Baltimore Ravens in the first half at FirstEnergy Stadium on December 12, 2021 in Cleveland, Ohio. — AFP

tive product out there."

However, with some 100 players testing positive in the past three days, many of them fully vaccinated and two-thirds of them, according to the league, asymptomatic, the league is pondering how to tweak its health and safety protocols to prevent spread in team facilities. "We're entering

a new phase of the pandemic, different than we've seen before," the NFL's chief medical officer, Dr. Allen Sills, said. Sills said the league could return to stricter rules on masking, social distancing and virtual meetings in team facilities for all teams. Some of those measures had been relaxed after the advent of vaccines. — AFP

## NFL's Jaguars sack scandal-plagued coach Meyer

**MIAMI:** Urban Meyer was sacked as coach of the NFL's Jacksonville Jaguars after less than a year, his tenure marred by a string of scandals and on-field mediocrity. The Jags have won just two games this season under Meyer, 57, who was a star coach in US college gridiron but has presided over a period of turmoil.

"After deliberation over many weeks and a thorough analysis of the entirety of Urban's tenure with our team, I am bitterly disappointed to arrive at the conclusion that an immediate change is imperative for everyone," Jacksonville owner Shahid Khan said in a statement on the team's website shortly after midnight Wednesday night. "I informed Urban of the change this evening. As I stated in October, regaining our trust and respect was essential. Regrettably, it did not happen."

On Wednesday, the Tampa Bay Times carried a story in which former Jaguars kicker Josh Lambo described Meyer kicking him as he performed a stretching drill alongside teammates in the pre-season. Lambo, who told the newspaper that Meyer didn't call specialist players by their names but instead called them "Kicker", "Punter" or "Long Snapper", said the incident occurred after he had missed field goal attempts in each of the team's first two pre-season games. Meyer, who joined the team in January, denied the incident happened. Khan didn't address it in his statement, but clearly the Jaguars' billionaire owner had had enough.

After the team opened the season 0-4, Meyer drew widespread criticism in October when viral social media posts showed him cavorting with women in a bar after one of those defeats. Meyer issued an apology but Khan issued a stinging public reprimand, accusing the coach of "inexcusable conduct." Meyer's



**NASHVILLE:** Head coach Urban Meyer of the Jacksonville Jaguars reacts after the game against the Tennessee Titans at Nissan Stadium on December 12, 2021 in Nashville, Tennessee. — AFP

tenure in Jacksonville had opened with controversy over his recruitment of a former University of Iowa strength coach who had previously been accused of racism and bullying.

NFL.com reported last week that Meyer had called his assistant coaches losers, and that receiver Marvin Jones had become so angry with Meyer's public and private criticism of the team's receivers that he left the team facility and had to be convinced to return. The Jaguars lost their fifth straight game on Sunday when they were shut out 20-0 by the Tennessee Titans to fall to 2-11. Khan said that offensive coordinator Darrell Bevell will serve as interim head coach for the balance of the 2021 season.

"Trent Baalke continues as our general manager and will work with Darrell to ensure that our team will be inspired and competitive while representing Jacksonville proudly over our final four games of the season," Khan said. "In the spirit of closure and recharging our players, staff and fan base, I will not comment further until some point following the conclusion of the NFL season." — AFP

## NHL's Blackhawks reach settlement with Beach in lawsuit

**LOS ANGELES:** The Chicago Blackhawks have reached a settlement with Kyle Beach in the former first-round draft pick's negligence lawsuit over alleged sexual assault by the team's video coach in 2010. The parties said Wednesday they had agreed to a settlement, but no monetary amount was disclosed.

"The parties are pleased to announce that today's mediation resulted in a confidential settlement between the Blackhawks and Kyle Beach," said a statement issued by Hawks chairman Rocky Wirtz and chief executive Danny Wirtz and Beach's lawyer Susan Loggans. "The Blackhawks hope that this resolution will bring some measure of peace and closure for Mr Beach." Beach sued the Blackhawks in May over their handling of his sexual assault allegations in 2010 against then-video coach Brad Aldrich. Beach said Aldrich threatened physical and financial harm if Beach didn't engage in sex acts, which Beach said he carried out.

The Blackhawks initially dismissed the claims as lacking merit, but commissioned an independent investigation that found the original six NHL club largely ignored the allegations. In the wake of that probe general manager Stan Bowman resigned. Florida Panthers coach Joel Quenneville, who coached the team in 2010, also resigned. Last month, NHL commissioner Gary Bettman issued a public apology to Beach, saying the league "could not be more sorry for the trauma that Kyle has had to endure ... our goal is to do what is necessary to continue to move forward." — AFP



## Sports

Friday, December 17, 2021

# Rookie Reaves rescues Lakers in overtime win over Mavs

**LOS ANGELES:** The Los Angeles Lakers had their star trio on court on Wednesday, but it was rookie Austin Reaves who was the unlikely hero in their 107-104 NBA overtime victory over the Dallas Mavericks.

Reaves, an undrafted first-year pro who impressed enough in the off-season to gain a two-year contract with the Lakers, drained a game-winning three-pointer as time expired to give Los Angeles a third straight win.

The 23-year-old was mobbed by teammates, and superstar LeBron James said the team had no hesitation in handing the ball to the relative unknown. "Listen, we've got a lot of trust in whoever is on the floor, including the rook," James said. "And, obviously, it showed on that last possession."

Reaves's fifth three-pointer of the night saved the day after a late string of misses endangered the Lakers' chances in a game that featured 19 lead changes and was a battle all the way. "There was about two seconds left, so I didn't really have anything else to do but shoot it," Reaves said.

The rest of the Lakers' 14 points in overtime came from their big three of James, Westbrook and Anthony Davis. James finished with 24 points. Westbrook scored 23 with 10 rebounds and nine assists and Davis added 20 points and 12 rebounds in his first game back after missing two with a sore left knee.

Jalen Brunson scored 25 points and Kristaps Porzingis scored 23 points and pulled down 12 rebounds for Dallas, whose star guard Luka Doncic missed a third straight game with left ankle trouble. The Lakers were without three players who were in COVID-19 health protocols in a week in which coronavirus again became a major factor in the NBA as well as other US sports.

## COVID concerns

Multiple teams saw players sidelined. The Chicago Bulls had two games postponed because they couldn't field a minimum eight players. The Nets had won with the minimum on Tuesday. "I'm worried," Philadelphia 76ers coach Doc Rivers said before his team's 101-96 home loss to the Miami Heat. "I'm just worried in general. I see football and hockey and us — there's just a lot of it right now. There's a lot of it nationwide, outside of sports as well."

Philadelphia were buoyed by the return from injury of center Joel Embiid, who had 17 points and 14 rebounds, but the short-handed Heat put them away in large part thanks to a barrage of 18 three-pointers. The Heat had only 10 available players thanks to injuries, illness and COVID-19 absences. Those missing included their three top scorers in Jimmy Butler, Tyler Herro and Bam Adebayo.

But Gabe Vincent stepped up with a career-high 26 points, draining a clutch three-pointer that put Miami up 99-96 with 39.4 seconds left in the fourth quarter. He made seven three-pointers and Duncan Robinson made four on the way to 21 points as Miami seized control early, leading by as many as 10 points in the first half and pulling ahead by 23 in the third.

The Milwaukee Bucks were without two-time NBA Most Valuable Player Giannis Antetokoun-



DALLAS: Austin Reaves #15 of the Los Angeles Lakers shoots the game-winning shot against Tim Hardaway Jr #11 of the Dallas Mavericks in overtime at American Airlines Center on Wednesday in Dallas, Texas. —AFP

mpo because of COVID protocols and without Khris Middleton because of injury. But the reigning NBA champions had 26 points from Jrue Holiday and put together a 21-0 fourth-quarter scoring run to break open a close game and beat the Indiana Pacers 114-99. Pacers coach Rick Carlisle missed his third game since he tested positive for COVID-19.

In Denver, Anthony Edwards hit a career-high 10 three-pointers on the way to 38 points to lead the Minnesota Timberwolves to a 124-107 victory over the Nuggets. Charlotte's Gordon Hayward scored a season-high 41 points in leading the Hornets to a 131-115 wire-to-wire victory over the San Antonio Spurs. It was a wild finish in Oklahoma City, where New Orleans' Devonte' Graham's desperate heave from 61 feet dropped to give the Pelicans a 113-110 victory over the Thunder at the buzzer. The Utah Jazz won their eighth straight, downing the Los Angeles Clippers 124-103. Donovan Mitchell scored 27 points, Rudy Gobert scored 20 points and grabbed 17 rebounds and Bojan Bogdanovic connected on six of seven three-point attempts on the way to 20 points as the Jazz pushed their record to 20-7. —AFP



OKLAHOMA CITY: Devonte' Graham #4 of the New Orleans Pelicans reacts to his game winning three point basket during the game against the Oklahoma City Thunder on December 15, 2021 at Paycom Arena in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. —AFP





## Rookie Reaves rescues Lakers in overtime win

See Page 39