



2 Zain strategic partner of 40th Engineering Design Exhibition



7 More than 100 dead in Philippines typhoon



13 Could video games bring NFTs to the masses?



16 Chelsea held by Wolves as City top Christmas charts



Muslim nations pledge to help unlock frozen Afghan assets

Kuwait has provided Afghanistan with aid worth \$92m



ISLAMABAD: (From left) Secretary of Organization of Islamic Cooperation Houssein Ibrahim Taha, Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan, his Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi and Saudi Arabia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al-Saud attend the opening of a special meeting of the OIC yesterday. — AFP

ISLAMABAD: Muslim nations resolved yesterday to work with the United Nations to try to unlock hundreds of millions of dollars in frozen Afghan assets in a bid to tackle a growing humanitarian crisis. At a special meeting in Pakistan of the 57-member Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) delegates said they would work "to unlock the financial and banking channels to resume liquidity and flow of financial and humanitarian assistance".

The meeting was the biggest conference on Afghanistan since the US-backed government fell in August and the Taliban returned to power. Since then, billions of dollars in aid and assets have been frozen by the international community, and the nation is in the middle of a bitter winter. An OIC resolution released after the meeting said the Islamic Development Bank would lead the effort to free up assistance by the first quarter of next year. It also urged Afghanistan's rulers to abide by "obligations under international human rights covenants, especially with regards to the rights of women, children, youth, elderly and people with special needs".

Kuwait yesterday said it was imperative that Afghans get access to much needed aid as Kabul copes with a worsening humanitarian crisis. Leading Kuwait's delegation to the OIC talks Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nasser Al-Sabah said the Islamic world is in the throes of a myriad of challenges, chief among them the "humanitarian crisis" unfolding in

Afghanistan. On the talks, the Kuwaiti top diplomat said it was tantamount to a "message of support" to Afghanistan, as some 23 million people stand on the precipice of starvation, in addition to more than a half million others displaced by the crisis.

Sheikh Ahmad reiterated Kuwait's stern rejection of "all forms of violence and terrorism", saying the international community should never allow Afghanistan to turn into a "hotbed of extremism and terrorism", adding that the talks should be a step towards bringing the aspirations of Afghans to fruition. Kuwait has provided Afghanistan with aid worth \$92 million, he said, saying his country will continue to "work diligently" with global aid bodies in order to ensure that Afghans ultimately get access to much needed assistance.

Earlier, Pakistan warned of "grave consequences" for the international community if Afghanistan's economic meltdown continued, and urged world leaders to find ways to engage with the Taliban to help prevent a humanitarian catastrophe. Pakistan foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said the deepening crisis could bring mass hunger, a flood of refugees and a rise in extremism. "We cannot ignore the danger of complete economic meltdown," he told the gathering, which also included Taliban foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi alongside delegates from the United States, China, Russia, the European Union and UN.

Continued on Page 2

News in brief

Smart IDs for domestic helpers

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Civil Information announced yesterday that smart civil IDs will be issued to domestic helpers and other residents holding article 20 visas. Holders of IDs that do not have electronic microchips can still use them until their expiry date, it explained.

Saudi allows Iran envoy evacuation

RIYADH: Iran's ambassador flew out of the rebel-held Yemeni capital to receive COVID treatment Saturday in a rare exemption from an air blockade enforced by a Saudi-led coalition. "The ambassador left on an Iraqi aircraft and is probably now in Baghdad," a senior Saudi official said. He said the flight was organized at the request of Yemen's Houthi rebels and agreed by Saudi authorities following mediation by Iraq and Oman. — AFP

UAE ends cinema censorship

DUBAI: The United Arab Emirates announced yesterday it will no longer censor cinematic releases, introducing a 21 and above age rating for films it classifies for mature audiences. "According to this classification, the international version of movies will be shown in cinemas, with an emphasis on the strict following of age classification standards for audience entry," the Media Regulatory Office said. — AFP

Iran reports first Omicron case

TEHRAN: Iran has detected the first case of the coronavirus Omicron variant, deputy health minister Kamal Heidari told state television yesterday. An Iranian man from Tehran had tested positive after returning from the UAE. An emergency meeting has been held to discuss ways to stop any spread of the variant, including a proposal to temporarily close schools. — AFP

After Arab Cup, Qatar readies for World Cup

DOHA: Qatar passed their first test with a successful hosting of the Arab Cup but bigger challenges lie ahead when 1.2 million fans and 32 international teams arrive for the World Cup one year from now. Algerian rejoicing at Saturday's 2-0 extra-time win over Tunisia in the final - exactly a year before the 2022 World Cup decider, and with FIFA president Gianni Infantino in the stands - will have been accompanied by satisfaction from Qatari officials.

But now comes the hard work as Qatar prepares for the unique task of

hosting a World Cup in and around a single city, Doha. Six of the eight World Cup venues were employed as Qatar took the chance to test its stadiums and training sites, transport, accommodation, volunteers and other areas including security. A fan ID system was dropped midway through the tournament following reports of long queues and complaints from fans, but crowd trouble appeared limited to some damaged seats at the quarterfinal between Tunisia and Oman.

Qatar will "take account of the lessons learned to organize the best World Cup", said Jassim Al-Jassim, the organizing committee's vice-president of operations. The Lusail Stadium, which will host the World Cup final, was notably not used for the tournament. In October, its project manager told AFP that it still needed final checks and tests.

Continued on Page 2



AL-KHOR, Qatar: Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani and FIFA President Gianni Infantino present Algeria's goalkeeper and captain Rais M'Bolhi with the FIFA Arab Cup 2021 trophy at the Al-Bayt stadium on Saturday. — AFP

Sudan police fire tear gas as scores rally

KHARTOUM: Tens of thousands of Sudanese protesters rallied yesterday for a civilian-led transition to democracy, three years since the start of mass demonstrations that led to the ouster of veteran strongman Omar Al-Bashir. Security forces fired tear gas canisters - leaving several wounded, witnesses said - as activists at the presidential palace in Khartoum chanted slogans against military chief General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan, who led a coup on Oct 25.

"The people want the downfall of Burhan," the protesters shouted as additional security forces were deployed to surround the swelling crowd. Sudan's generals in the post-Bashir transition government launched their coup almost two months ago and held civilian leader Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok under effective house arrest for weeks but reinstated him on Nov 21.

The move alienated many of Hamdok's pro-democracy supporters, who dismissed it as provid-



KHARTOUM: A wounded Sudanese protester falls on the pavement after security forces fired tear gas during a rally yesterday to mark three years since the start of mass demonstrations. — AFP

ing a cloak of legitimacy for Burhan's coup. "Any coup, even after the reinstatement of Hamdok, is unacceptable," a protester aged in his twenties told AFP as thousands waving Sudanese flags marched past him. "Our glorious December revolution is seeking civil institutions, not particular individuals."

Hamdok, who has argued he wants to avoid further bloodshed, warned late Saturday

Continued on Page 2

Pentagon files reveal 'deeply flawed' air war

WASHINGTON: Newly obtained Pentagon documents show that the US air wars in the Middle East have been marked by "deeply flawed intelligence" and resulted in thousands of civilian deaths, including many children, the New York Times reported Saturday. It said a trove of confidential documents covering more than 1,300 reports of civilian casualties undercuts the government's portrayal of a war fought with precision bombs.

Pledges of transparency and accountability, it said, had regularly fallen short. "Not a single record provided includes a finding of wrongdoing or disciplinary action," the paper reported in what it said was the first of a two-part series. While several of the cases mentioned by the Times have been previously reported, it said its investigation showed that the number of civilian deaths had been "drastically undercounted," by at least several hundred.

Continued on Page 2

Local

Kuwait's Amir congratulates Qatari counterpart on FIFA Arab Cup's success

Sheikh Nawaf receives top officials at Dar Al-Yamama



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — Amiri Diwan photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a congratulatory cable Saturday to Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani on the success of the 2021 FIFA Arab Cup. In the cable, His Highness the Amir lauded big preparations and arrangements made by Qatar at all stadiums and facilities for the participating teams that contributed to the progress of the event and the achievement of the desired goals. His Highness the Amir also com-

mended the outstanding performance made by the teams and high sportsmanship. Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables to Amir Tamim.

In other news, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at Dar Al-Yamama yes-

terday. Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir, at a session attended by His Highness the Crown Prince, hosted National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. Separately, His Highness the Crown Prince received Speaker Ghanem and His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled at Bayan Palace yesterday.

Separately, His Highness the Amir Sheikh

Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable yesterday to Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte expressing sincere grief toward victims of typhoon Rai. In the cable, His Highness the Amir wished mercy for the deceased and speedy recovery for the injured. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables to the Philippines President. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Dr Mohammad Al-Fares honors Waleed Al-Khashti in recognition of Zain's support with the presence of Dr Rana Al-Fares.



Dr Mohammad Al-Fares and Dr Rana Al Fares with Waleed Al-Khashti along with Zain's team at the company's booth.

Zain strategic partner of 40th Engineering Design Exhibition

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced its strategic partnership with the 40th Engineering Design Exhibition and the annual Zain Award for Engineering Excellence. The event, organized by Kuwait University's College of Engineering and Petroleum (CEP), was held under official support from the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) at Sabah Al Salem University City in Shadadiya under the

patronage of HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

Zain took part in the event's opening ceremony, which witnessed the attendance of HH the Prime Minister's representative, Minister of Oil and Minister of Higher Education Dr Mohammad Al-Fares, Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Communications and Information Technology Dr Rana Al-Fares, Acting Vice President of Kuwait

University for Planning Dr Mohammad Zainal, Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Communications and Relations Officer Waleed Al-Khashti, the Director of the Engineering Training Center and Graduates Dr Duajj Al-Rukaibi, as well as many CEP officials and faculty, parents, and exhibition participants.

Zain continues to support this exhibition and sponsor the annual award as part of its commitment towards supporting and encouraging various student activities, which falls under the company's corporate sustainability and social responsibility strategy. Zain's strategy closely focuses on contributing to the development of the education sector by partnering with many aca-

demical organizations to invest in education, which the company considers an essential element of the further progress of national economy.

The 40th Engineering Design Exhibition is considered the biggest yet since the College of Engineering and Petroleum's inception in 1975. The event witnessed the participation of hundreds of projects from across the college's departments, as well as the presence of hundreds of students, who showcased their final projects to visitors and sponsors. Furthermore, the Zain-sponsored annual Engineering Excellence Award highlights the most creative and innovative projects as per the standards outlined by the College

of Engineering and Petroleum.

Zain's support to the event springs from the company's core corporate sustainability and social responsibility strategy. The company believes that supporting the various educational programs and initiatives provides young people with skills and tools necessary to help them highlight and develop their potential, ultimately contributing to Kuwait's progress.

As a leading national company, Zain firmly believes in the importance of contributing to the progress of the education sector and looks to empower and prepare the nation's youth for the important roles they will play in the further progress of the country.

Muslim nations pledge to help...

Continued from Page 1

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan said the world needed to separate the Taliban from ordinary Afghans. "I speak to the United States specifically that they must delink the Afghanistan government from the 40 million Afghan citizens," he said, "even if they have been in conflict with the Taliban for 20 years." He also urged caution in linking recognition of the new government to Western ideals of human rights. "Every country is different... every society's idea of human rights is different," he said.

The OIC also resolved yesterday to arrange for a team of international Muslim scholars to engage with the Taliban on issues "such as, but not limited to, tolerance and moderation in Islam, equal access to edu-

cation and women's rights in Islam". No nation has yet formally recognized the Taliban government and diplomats face the delicate task of channeling aid to the stricken Afghan economy without propping up the hardline Islamists.

Although the Taliban have promised a lighter version of the headline rule that characterized their first stint in power from 1996 to 2001, women are largely excluded from government employment, and secondary schools for girls have mostly remained shuttered. Asked if the OIC had pressed the Taliban to be more inclusive on issues such as women's rights, Qureshi said "obviously they feel they are moving in that direction". "They are saying 'let us decide in our own time'," he added.

The OIC meeting did not give the new Taliban government the formal international recognition it desperately craves and the new regime's foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi was excluded from the official photograph taken during the event. Muttaqi told reporters, however, that his government "has the right to be officially recognized". — AFP

exceptional," Bougherra added.

Egypt coach Carlos Queiroz, the former Iran, Portugal and Real Madrid boss, said the Qatar World Cup has "all the ingredients to succeed", but called for better communications. "If there is one advice I will give to everybody, we need to talk, because the better we talk the better the harmony between the needs inside and outside the pitch," he said.

Daniel Reyche, a sport policy and politic researcher and visiting associate professor at Qatar's Georgetown University, said he was impressed by the organizers' ability to learn from their mistakes, for example by dropping the fan ID. "Overall, I think the test went well, but it is difficult to compare the FIFA Arab Cup and the FIFA World Cup, since most visitors this time came from within the country and next year they will come from outside the country," he told AFP. — AFP

After Arab Cup, Qatar readies...

Continued from Page 1

Coaches were impressed by the facilities, with Algeria's Majid Bougherra, a World Cup veteran, saying "everything is perfect" - apart, perhaps, from the accommodation. "The stadiums are great, the pitches are great. Perhaps one small downside, but it won't be the case at the World Cup, is that we were in the same hotel as everyone else," he said. "We congratulate (Qatar) on this beautiful Arab Cup and I think the World Cup will be

Sudan police fire tear gas...

Continued from Page 1

of "the country's slide toward the abyss," urging restraint from the protesters. "We're facing today a sizeable regression in the path of our revolution that threatens the security of the nation, its unity and its stability," the premier said. Protest organizers have however vowed, in a key slogan, that they want "no negotiation, no partnership and no legitimacy" for the current leadership.

Another demonstrator, in his early thirties and also draped in a Sudanese flag, said "I came out today in complete refusal of the political agreement!

Pentagon files reveal 'deeply...'

Continued from Page 1

Among three cases cited was a July 19, 2016 bombing by US special forces of what were believed to be three Islamic State group staging areas in northern Syria. Initial reports were of 85 fighters killed. Instead, the dead were 120 farmers and other villagers. Another example was a Nov 2015 attack in Ramadi, Iraq after a man was seen dragging "an unknown heavy object" into an Islamic State position. The "object", a review found, was a child, who died in the strike.

Poor or inadequate surveillance footage often contributed to deadly targeting failures, the report said. More recently, the United States had to retract its claim that a vehicle destroyed by a drone on a Kabul street in August had contained bombs. Victims of the

"This deal doesn't represent the people. We have one demand and that's a civilian government, not one that ends up being under military control." Previous protests against the military takeover have been forcibly dispersed. Nationwide, at least 45 people have been killed and scores more wounded, according to the independent Doctors' Committee.

Yesterday, authorities shut off bridges linking the capital with its twin city Omdurman, but large crowds still gathered. "The numbers are huge and security forces can't control them," said one man who witnessed the protests in Omdurman. The date Dec 19 has a particular resonance in Sudanese history. Not only was it the day in 2018 when thousands launched mass protests that months later ended Bashir's three decades in power, it was also the day in 1955 when Sudanese lawmakers declared independence from British colonial rule. — AFP

strike, it turned out, were 10 members of a family, including children.

Many civilian survivors of US attacks, the report says, were left with disabilities requiring expensive treatment, but condolence payments numbered fewer than a dozen. Asked for comment, Captain Bill Urban, spokesman for the US Central Command, told the Times that "even with the best technology in the world, mistakes do happen, whether based on incomplete information or misinterpretation of the information available. And we try to learn from those mistakes. We work diligently to avoid such harm. We investigate each credible instance. And we regret each loss of innocent life."

The US air campaign in the Middle East grew rapidly in the final years of former president Barack Obama's administration, as public support waned for the seemingly endless ground wars. Obama said the new approach, often using unmanned aircraft controlled from far away, represented "the most precise air campaign in history", able to keep civilian deaths to a minimum. — AFP

Local

Kuwait stresses Afghanistan aid amid pan-Islamic body talks

Afghanistan must not turn into hotbed of extremism: Kuwait's FM



ISLAMABAD: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Nasser Al-Sabah attends the Organization of Islamic Cooperation's talks on Afghanistan. — KUNA photos



Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Nasser Al-Sabah meets his Jordanian counterpart Ayman Safadi.



Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Nasser Al-Sabah meets Minister of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Qureshi.

ISLAMABAD: Kuwait believes that it is imperative that Afghans get access to much needed aid as Kabul copes with a worsening humanitarian crisis, its foreign minister said yesterday. Leading Kuwait's delegation to the Pakistan-hosted Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) talks on Afghanistan, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Nasser Al-Sabah said the Islamic world is in the throes of a myriad of challenges, chief among them the "humanitarian crisis" unfolding in Afghanistan.

On the talks, the Kuwaiti top diplomat said it was tantamount to a "message of support" to Afghanistan, as some 23 million people stand on the precipice of starvation, he highlighted, in addition to more than a half million others displaced by the crisis. He reiterated his country's stern rejection of "all forms of violence and terrorism," saying the international community should never allow Afghanistan to turn into a "hotbed of extremism and terrorism," adding that the talks should be a step towards bring-

ing the aspirations of Afghans to fruition. Kuwait has provided Afghanistan with aid worth \$92 million, he said, saying his country will continue to "work diligently" with global aid bodies in order to ensure that Afghans ultimately get access to much needed assistance. Islamic countries



OIC talks 'message of support' to Afghanistan

are meeting in Pakistan for extraordinary talks as part of efforts to prevent the situation in neighboring Afghanistan to descend into further bedlam.

Bilateral relations

Meanwhile, Sheikh Dr Ahmad met yesterday with his Jordanian counterpart

Ayman Safadi on the sidelines of the extraordinary session of the OIC's Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM). During the meeting, both sides discussed bilateral relations between Kuwait and Jordan, and ways of enhancing them, in addition to the latest international and regional developments.

On Saturday, Kuwait's Foreign Affairs held a session of bilateral talks with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Qureshi in Islamabad. The meeting dealt with the solid bilateral ties between both countries, as well as ways to enhance and develop the strategic partnership between them in various fields. Topics on the agenda of the OIC extraordinary session were also discussed by the two ministers.

Furthermore, Sheikh Dr Ahmad met on Saturday with the Secretary General of the OIC Hussein Taha. During the meeting, the two sides discussed means of boosting cooperation and coordination between Kuwait and the OIC, within the framework

of the joint Islamic action. They also covered the topics listed on the agenda of the OIC Foreign Ministers' Council session on situation in Afghanistan. The Kuwaiti min-

ister also renewed congratulation to Taha on being OIC chief, wishing him every success in his mission to serve the OIC member states. —KUNA

COVID emergency committee discusses latest on Omicron

KUWAIT: Kuwait's COVID-19 emergency committee met at Bayan Palace yesterday to look into the latest local, regional and international epidemiological developments related to the spread of the Omicron variant. The committee weighed the latest reports from state departments concerned with the health situation in the country and were briefed by Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah on the situation in the country. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah, who doubles as head of the committee, chaired the meeting.

Kuwait's Health Ministry had on Saturday reported 51 new COVID-19 cases registered in the past 24 hours, down from 81 cases reported the previous day. No COVID-related deaths were reported for the 10th straight day. Meanwhile, the number of patients in ICUs stood at four, while 11 patients were at COVID-19 wards as of Saturday, Health Ministry's Spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said, adding that the total number of active cases was 498. —KUNA



KUWAIT: A group picture of the participants in the contest.

Japanese Embassy holds speech contest

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The Japanese Society in Kuwait, Center for Community Service and Continuing Education and Kuwait University recently hosted the 14th Japanese speech contest at the National Library. Japanese Ambassador to Kuwait Takaoka Masato welcomed the guests, including Kuwait University's Assistant Vice President Prof Mohammad Al-Dhafiri. Eleven participants tackled subjects related to Kuwait or Japan. The Japanese envoy conveyed his admiration of Kuwaiti students over their desire to learn Japanese, considered

among the hardest languages to learn. "I am happy to be part of this event, as I wrap up my stay in this beautiful country, Kuwait. I will definitely leave very satisfied as my country's ambassador to the State of Kuwait," Masato said.

"I admire the people studying Japanese. We are happy that some Kuwaitis are into it. It's really an effort to study Japanese, especially if you are a native Arabic speaker. I wish them success. This speech contest has been ongoing for the last 14 years, but last year we were not able to hold the contest because of the pandemic," the ambassador added. He thanked Kuwait University, the Center for Community Service and Continuing Education and the National Library of Kuwait for hosting this year's contest. Participants included Aroua Al-Adhi, Fahad Awad, Fatima Ashkanani, Ibrahim Al-Adwani, Noor Al-Khalyat, Reem Al-Oraibi, Sarah Hesa, Sheikha Al-Hashas, Shayma Al-Hashas and Shaima Al-Faisal.

Doing so will allow IOM to organize a number of activities that benefit migrants, which include psychosocial support sessions, the distribution of essential non-food items and personal protective equipment kits to vulnerable migrants, as well as several awareness raising campaigns.

Mijbil Alayoub, Senior Director, Corporate Communications, Ooredoo Kuwait, said: "Ooredoo has always been a pioneer in humanitarian philanthropy that aims to achieve sustainable and social development, and the development of intellectual enlightenment through efforts and campaigns that promote and strengthen the relationship between members of society. Therefore, we seek to build strong networking relationships with entities and organizations with common visions, and our partnership with the International Organization for Migration is a living proof of our common goals, responsibility and commitment."

From his side, Mazen AboulHosn, IOM Kuwait's Chief of Mission said: "IOM celebrates its 70th anniversary this month. Since its establishment, the IOM has been working closely with governments and partners to tackle migration-related issues at a global, regional, and local level. IOM is always delighted to establish partnerships with the private sector on areas of mutual interest and shared values to reach the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Our collaboration with Ooredoo Kuwait on a video to mark the International Migrants Day, sheds light on the linkage between migration and the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and the importance of migrants in achieving these goals, as well as promoting inclusion and diversity. We look forward to our continuous cooperation with Ooredoo on several joint initiatives."

Ooredoo Kuwait marks International Migrants Day

KUWAIT: In continuation of its successful humanitarian journey, and in line with its commitment public awareness and contribution in various issues that affect the community as a whole, as well as promoting sustainable development, Ooredoo Telecom, the first to launch innovated digital services in Kuwait, highlights its continuous collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the UN migration agency in Kuwait.

The collaboration on an awareness video came in celebration of the International Migrants Day on December 18, 2021, a day dedicated by the United Nations (UN), and is celebrated each year on the 18th of December to highlight the positive contributions that migrants bring to our societies, as well as the challenges that they may face along the way. Hence, Ooredoo Kuwait constantly creates awareness campaigns that promote sustainable development and achieves safer environments for all society members.

Further, Ooredoo Kuwait encourages its customers to be part of this campaign and take serious steps through offering them the opportunity to donate their points - which are collected by purchasing Ooredoo products and services in the Nojoom program- to charitable organizations and the International Organization for Migration.



Mazen AboulHosn



Mijbil Alayoub

On the occasion of the



Subscribe or renew your subscription
KD 20 instead of KD 30 for 1 year

For individuals only

Tel: 24833199 ext.: 163-325-353- 354 or 66500982



kuwaittimes.net

News in brief

Railway to connect
Kuwait with Saudi

KUWAIT: The Cabinet has assigned the Public Authority for Roads and Transportation to implement a railway project that connects Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, the authority's president Dr Hussain Al-Khayyat said yesterday. The railway will connect Saudi Arabia with Shadaddiya through a 115-km-long line, he said, adding that a private company will be assigned to carry out the KD 300 million project through a total of 4.5 years implementation plan.



Navy drill this week

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Navy will carry out a drill with live ammunition tomorrow and Wednesday from 6:00 am to 2:00 pm. The general staff command of the Kuwait Army said in a statement yesterday that the exercise will be carried out at a location some 16.5 nautical miles east of Ras Al-Julaiaa all the way to Garo Island. The shooting spot is also six nautical miles east of Ras Al-Zor all the way to Umm Al-Maradem Island. It called on sea goers to avoid those locations during the drill's timing.

21 held in Farwaniya crackdown

KUWAIT: Police arrested 21 people during a crackdown on violators of residency and labor regulations in Farwaniya Governorate, the Interior Ministry announced yesterday. Authorities are taking legal action against the violators as well as people who harbored or employed them, it added in a statement.

Midterms on Dec 29 - Jan 24

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Education announced yesterday that the midterm exams for public high school students will take place from December 29, 2021 to January 24, 2022.

Child support in private sector

KUWAIT: MP Osama Al-Shaheen yesterday proposed paying child support allowances to Kuwaiti women working in the private sector in case their husbands could no longer spend on the household.

Cooperation on human rights

KUWAIT: Kuwait's National Diwan for Human Rights (NDHR) and the United Nations office in Kuwait signed yesterday a Memorandum of Understanding aimed to enhance cooperation in the fields of human rights. NDHR's Director Ambassador Jassem Al-Mubarki said in a statement that this move aims to create a mechanism to enhance cooperation and coordination between the two sides.

Citizens urged to follow precautions

AMSTERDAM: Kuwait's Embassy in the Netherlands called on its nationals to abide by the new health precautions announced by the Dutch authorities on Saturday to stem the surge of coronavirus cases. Kuwaiti citizens living in the Netherlands and those willing to visit the country are advisedly urged to take seriously the new measures for their safety. They can also contact the embassy in case of emergency via the phone number: +31639374157, the embassy said in a statement.

Kuwait engulfed in fog



KUWAIT: An aerial view showing Kuwait City landmarks enveloped in fog yesterday morning, following a heavy thunderstorm that hit the country the previous night. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

stc visits Cafe 312
to support special
needs community

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, visited Cafe 312, Kuwait's first cafe of its kind run by employees with special needs, in support of the local special needs community and coinciding with the International Day of Persons with Disabilities during the month of December.

stc released a statement highlighting that this step falls in line with the Company's corporate social responsibility strategy and builds on the "Weyak" initiative which was launched earlier this year to support local businesses. The initiative primarily focused on emphasizing stc's stand in supporting the Kuwaiti society through various humanitarian and community-based activities, as well as the successful and long-standing relationships the Company has fostered with local SMEs.

On the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, stc in collaboration with Cafe 312 offered its customers a free coffee drink for the day. stc also hosted founder and partner of Cafe 312, Tarek Abdin, to elaborate more on the first-of-its-kind initiative in support of the special need community in an interview broadcasted on stc's social media channels.

On behalf of stc, Danah Al-Jasem, General Manager of Corporate Communications, said, "This initiative aimed to raise awareness and promote the rights of persons with special needs as they fulfill their roles as active contributors to the community, representing a key and important pillar in our society. We also strive, through this initiative, to support SMEs in their unique and empowering business ventures with access to our around the clock support services to streamline and enhance their operations. One of our primary objectives is to provide our corporate customers with the means to enable their digital transformation strategies effec-



KUWAIT: A group photo taken during stc's visit to Cafe 312.



Danah Al-Jasem

important role the private sector plays in the community. Through our various initiatives we believe that we can contribute in positively impacting the local business, as well as the Kuwaiti society, in line with the Kuwaiti 2035 vision."

Jasem concluded, "In addition to the objective of raising awareness, stc is keen to collaborate and organize community driven events to enhance its pioneering role in the market and back the Kuwaiti society. This approach runs parallel to the

tively to reach their corporate goals."

Jasem added, "This initiative builds on the values that stc holds in implementing its strategy to support SMEs. We were keen to connect with companies while simultaneously implementing our CSR agenda, believing in the

key pillars identified under stc's extensive CSR framework."

The concept behind the campaign was to complement the community-based initiative "Weyak" that was launched by stc to enable the digital transformation journey of local SMEs and start-ups through various offering. "Weyak" also aimed to mitigate the challenges business owners are facing in the gradual return to normal due to the pandemic.

stc said in its statement, "Through the "Weyak" initiative, the Company will grant participating SMEs and start-ups with the opportunity to promote their products and services. This includes showcasing their offerings through a series of organized events and activities, including stc's social media channels."

stc added that it will spare no effort in continuing its various health and awareness campaigns by collaborating with institutions that help spread awareness on important causes that benefit the Kuwaiti society.



Floods in Malaysia displace more than 30,000 people

Five years after Berlin attack, Germany remembers its victims

Page 6

Page 7

Johnson left reeling after Brexit minister quits

David Frost's resignation comes ahead of scheduled January exit

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson was left reeling yesterday after his Brexit minister resigned, ending a difficult week during which his Conservative party suffered a humiliating defeat in a local by-election and his own MPs rebelled over new coronavirus curbs.

David Frost, a trusted ally of the prime minister and former Brexit negotiator, sent his resignation letter late Saturday following reports that he was to leave his cabinet post in January. "It is disappointing that this plan has become public this evening and in the circumstances I think it is right for me to write to step down with immediate effect," he said in the letter, published by Johnson's Downing Street office.

Frost told Johnson he had "concerns about the current direction of travel" regarding coronavirus regulations and tax rises. Johnson responded that he was "very sorry" to receive the resignation, "given everything you have achieved and contributed to this government".

The Mail on Sunday had that Frost handed in his resignation a week ago, but had been persuaded to stay on until the New Year. Johnson is already reeling from a rebellion by 100 of his MPs in a parliamentary vote over coronavirus measures and the stunning loss of a 23,000-majority seat in a by-election. That was partly blamed on a slew of reports that his staff and aides had held parties last Christmas despite virus restrictions in place at the time.

Running out of time

The by-election loss for Johnson's Conservatives intensified speculation of a leadership challenge. Frost recently came second in a poll of most popular ministers held by ConservativeHome, an influential blog read by the grassroots Tories who could end up deciding

Johnson's replacement.

Health Secretary Sajid Javid told Sky News yesterday that Frost was "an outstanding public servant", adding that "I do understand his reasons, he's a principled man, you know, principled people do resign from the government." The deputy leader of the main opposition Labour party Angela Rayner said the resignation demonstrated "a government in total chaos. @BorisJohnson isn't up to the job. We deserve better than this buffoonery," she tweeted.

Conservative MP Andrew Bridgen warned Johnson was "running out of time and out of friends to deliver on the promises and discipline of a true Conservative government." "Lord Frost has made it clear, 100 Conservative backbenchers have made it clear, but most importantly so did the people of North Shropshire," he wrote on Twitter.

And Arlene Foster, who stepped down as Northern Ireland's first minister because of post-Brexit trading arrangements in the UK territory, said it had huge implications. "The resignation of Lord Frost from the Cabinet is a big moment for the Government but enormous for those of us who believed he would deliver for NI," she wrote on Twitter.

Turning point

Frost told Johnson in his resignation letter: "I hope we will move as fast as possible to where we need to get to: a lightly regulated, low-tax, entrepreneurial economy. "We also need to learn to live with COVID and I know that is your instinct too," he said, in apparent reference to the new measures introduced by the government last week. "I hope we can get back on track soon and not be tempted by the kind of coercive measures we have seen elsewhere," he added.

The series of crises engulfing Johnson have



LONDON, UK: In this file photo taken on December 30, 2020 UK chief trade negotiator, David Frost (left) looks on as Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson signs the Trade and Cooperation Agreement between the UK and the EU, the Brexit trade deal, at 10 Downing Street in central London. —AFP

seen him garner increasingly negative coverage in Britain's right-wing press that is usually favorable to his leadership and his party. The Daily Telegraph, the newspaper where Johnson used to work as a correspondent and columnist, called Frost's resignation "courageous" and a "turning point in the history of this administration" in an editorial reacting to his departure.

Frost had been locked in talks for weeks over the so-called Northern Ireland Protocol, which governs trade between the British mainland of England, Scotland and Wales, as well as Northern Ireland, and with the European Union. He was

especially focused on revamping the agreement's governance, objecting that the EU's highest court in Luxembourg has power over its implementation. He seemed to be at odds with Johnson's administration over the issue earlier in the week, when a government spokesman appeared to suggest there could be some softening on its position on the EU's role as arbiter.

Frost, 56, was appointed as Johnson's so-called EU "sherpa" shortly after the British leader took office in July 2019, and became chief trade negotiator after helping to finalize last year's divorce deal. —AFP

German defence minister says Russia cannot 'dictate' to NATO

RUKLA, Lithuania: German Defence Minister Christine Lambrecht yesterday said Russia cannot "dictate" to NATO on regional security, as tensions soar between Moscow and Western capitals over the conflict in Ukraine.

Speaking during a visit to Lithuania, which along with its Baltic neighbours Estonia and Latvia is worried about security after Russia deployed tens of thousands of troops near its border with fellow ex-Soviet Ukraine.

"We have to resolve the tense situation we are in now both diplomatically and with credible deterrence," Lambrecht told reporters. "We have to talk with each other, which means discussing the proposals that Russia has put forward. That is right and important," she added at Lithuania's Rukla military base. "But it cannot be that Russia dictates to NATO partners how they position themselves."

The trip is Lambrecht's first since being named defence minister, after new German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's Social Democrats formed a coalition government with the Greens and the liberal FDP earlier this month. Lambrecht met with her Lithuanian counterpart Arvydas Anusauskas, who said that "Russia has mobilised forces in the Kaliningrad region that are ten times larger than the battalion deployed in Rukla." "In this situation, Russia's demands that weaken the security of our countries are simply impossible to implement. I think they need to be rejected," he told reporters. Around 550 German troops are stationed at Lithuania's Rukla military base as Germany leads the multinational battalion in the country. Similar military units were sent to other Baltic states and Poland in 2017 to deter Russia after Moscow annexed Crimea and helped separatists take over parts of eastern Ukraine three years earlier.

After amassing some 100,000 troops near Ukraine, Russia on Friday unveiled proposals to contain the role of the United States and NATO in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, calling for urgent negotiations with Washington. The proposals called for the US-led

NATO alliance not to admit new members or establish bases in ex-Soviet countries. The West has threatened Russia with harsh sanctions should its soldiers enter Ukraine. Ahead of her visit, Lambrecht called for harsher sanctions against Russia over its troop deployment. Those

responsible for any aggression had to face "personal consequences", she told German weekly Bild am Sonntag, adding that Germany and its allies should put Russian President Vladimir Putin and his entourage "in our sights". —AFP

لولو للصيرفة
LuLu Exchange

YOUR TRUST IS WHAT HELPS US EXPAND OUR PRESENCE!

LuLu Exchange is opening 27th branch at Qurain, Kuwait.

www.luluexchange.com

BALMAIN PARIS

Pierre Balmain SAS – Paris, the iconic French Fashion House, has discovered that wrongfully-branded BALMAIN PARIS products are currently being sold in some retail stores in the Middle East.

These products illegitimately copy the collections produced by our design team and imitate our labels with the address of our headquarters in Paris.

Such unauthorized products fall short of Balmain's exacting quality standards and may create customer dissatisfaction.

In order to avoid purchasing unauthorized products, we urge customers to only purchase Pierre Balmain Paris products directly from authorized distributors in the region, which are listed on Balmain's website.

We will take appropriate actions to stop the infringement of our products and to protect our customers, who deserve an authentic fashion experience all over the world.

International

Five years after Berlin attack, Germany remembers its victims

Tributes will take place at the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church

BERLIN: Five years after a truck ploughed into a Christmas market in Berlin, Germany will hold a ceremony to honour the victims of the deadliest Islamist attack perpetrated on its soil. Carried out by 24-year-old Tunisian Anis Amri and claimed by the so-called Islamic State (IS) group, the attack on December 19, 2016 killed 12 people and left dozens injured. A 13th victim died this year having suffered serious injuries in the assault.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz said the events were "etched in our collective memory" and shared his condolences with the families of the victims in a statement ahead of the memorial. The anniversary will be marked with a ceremony beginning at 18:45 local time (1745 GMT) with a speech by President Frank-Walter Steinmeier.

The tributes will take place at the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church, whose bell tower, partially destroyed in World War II, overlooks the Breitscheidplatz square where the attack took place. The church's bells will ring at 20:02, the exact time when the truck drove at full speed into the Christmas market. The friends and family of the victims, who are expected to attend the ceremony, this week addressed an open letter to Scholz.

They urged the government to authorise further

investigations into the individuals responsible for ordering and abetting the attack, an element they say has been under-explored. On the run for four days after the attack, Amri was eventually located and shot down by police in Italy. "The Breitscheidplatz attack still raises a number of questions that have not been sufficiently answered in my opinion," Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck said on Friday.

Different inquiries highlighted errors in the surveillance of Amri, who arrived in Germany in 2015 and was quickly identified as a potentially dangerous Islamist and a drug trafficker. The German authorities remain on alert over the threat of further attacks. Since 2000, law enforcement has foiled 23 such attacks, the interior ministry

said in September. There are currently 554 individuals in Germany considered to be dangerous Islamists, according to police.

IS also claimed responsibility in 2016 for a knife attack in Hamburg, a bombing in Ansbach that injured 15 people and an axe attack in Bavaria where five were hurt. None of the assailants came to Europe carrying orders from IS, according to authorities. All of them seem to have organised their actions alone, sometimes under the influence of mental disorders. —AFP



Law enforcement has foiled 23 such attacks



BERLIN: File photo shows the truck that ploughed through the Christmas market in Berlin.

News in brief

Azerbaijan frees PoWs

BAKU: Azerbaijan said yesterday it had freed 10 more Armenian soldiers captured last month during fighting between the Caucasus arch foes. "Azerbaijan, with mediation of the European Union, handed over 10 soldiers of Armenian origin" who had been captured on November 16, the Azeri committee in charge of prisoners of war said in a statement. Baku said that the move was a result of a meeting between Azeri President Ilham Aliyev, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and European Council chief Charles Michel in Brussels on September 14. —AFP

Man beaten to death

NEW DELHI: A man was beaten to death in India for allegedly trying to commit an act of sacrilege at the Golden Temple, the holiest shrine of the Sikh faith. Local media reported that the unidentified man jumped over a railing into the temple's inner sanctum during Saturday evening prayers in the northern city of Amritsar. Broadcaster NDTV said the man tried to grab a sword kept in front of the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh holy book, when he was stopped by worshippers and later beaten to death. Punjab state chief minister Charanjit Singh Channi condemned the man's "most unfortunate and heinous act" in a series of tweets from his office late Saturday. —AFP

13 killed in land dispute

GUATEMALA CITY: At least 13 people were killed in western Guatemala, including women, children and a policeman, in a long-running land dispute between Indigenous villages, police said Saturday. Police said the confrontation began on Friday and lasted until Saturday in an area located about 160 kilometers (100 miles) west of the Guatemalan capital by road. Twelve people "have recently been found dead in the village of Chiquix, located on the side of Nahuala, which is a territorial boundary in the conflict with (the neighboring village) of Santa Catarina Ixtahuacan," the National Civil Police (PNC) said in a statement. It also reported the death of an officer, and added that "among the dead are children, men and women." A "semi-burned" truck was found at the site, as well as a patrol car with bullet holes that is believed to have been attacked, police added. —AFP

Uganda and DRC claim 35 rebels held in fighting

BENI, DR Congo: The Democratic Republic of Congo army and its Ugandan allies said yesterday they had destroyed rebel "strongholds" in the country's restive east this week, in a campaign launched last month against ADF rebels. Troops from the two countries bombarded "new enemy camps identified in the Beni district of North Kivu province and in Ituri province" to the north, the DR Congo armed forces said in a statement posted to Twitter.

Since the joint operation was launched on November 30, soldiers had initially improved the region's roads to make troop movements easier. The army said it had attacked positions of the Allied Democratic Forces-accused of massacres in eastern DR Congo and bomb blasts in Uganda—in the Virunga national park.

Meanwhile in Ituri, the armed forces said they had "captured

Hope vies with fear in Chile election

SANTIAGO: Chile chooses yesterday between far-right and leftist candidates for a president to lead the country through a period of constitutional change amid a clamor for social reform. The country of 19 million people is on edge, fearing renewed mass protests in response to the outcome of the neck-and-neck race between ultra-conservative lawyer Jose Antonio Kast, 55, and former student activist Gabriel Boric, a millennial 20 years his junior.

For a country that has voted centrist since the democratic ousting of brutal dictator Augusto Pinochet 31 years ago, there is a stark choice between two political outsiders — one promising a "social welfare" state, the other a continuation of Chile's neoliberal economic model.

Many fear the socially and fiscally conservative policies of law-and-order candidate Kast — an apologist for Pinochet, anti gay-marriage and abortion, and a proponent of cutting taxes and social spending. Others are put off by Boric's political alliance with the Communist Party, which many in Chile equate with the failure of Venezuela, from where it hosts many migrants widely blamed for a rise in crime.

Socially-liberal Boric, who has taken up the mantle of Chile's 2019 anti-inequality uprising, has vowed to increase social spending in a country with one of the world's largest gaps between rich and poor.

Italy police catch serial fugitive on 'most wanted' list

ROME: Italian police Saturday caught serial jail-breaker Graziano Mesina, who was on the country's top eight most dangerous fugitives list, the interior ministry said. The 79-year old, who is famous in Italy for multiple escapes from prison, has to serve a 24-year sentence for international drug trafficking,

35 ADF terrorists" from several villages in the Irumu district between December 13 and 15. Uganda's army had said Saturday that the allies would "step up the operations in different sectors now that the terrorists are no longer encamped, having been dislodged from their former strongholds".

So far, the armies have not made public a toll of dead or wounded in the anti-ADF push. They said on December 11 that they had arrested 35 rebels, destroyed four camps and freed 31 Congolese hostages. Yesterday, they also asked local people to provide the troops with information on the ADF. Congolese army spokesman in the Beni region, Antony Mualushayi, said soldiers had arrested a civil society figure in the town of Mbau, not far from the fighting, for "passing intelligence to the terrorists".

Several attacks that killed at least eight this week in villages in Ituri have been blamed on ADF fighters "fleeing the joint military operation", one military official said. The ADF was historically a Ugandan rebel coalition whose biggest group comprised Muslims opposed to Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni.

But it established itself in eastern DRC in 1995, becoming the deadliest of scores of outlawed forces in the troubled region. It has been blamed for the killings of thousands of civilians over the past decade in the DRC, as well as for bombings in Uganda. —AFP

'Very nervous'

"I am very nervous, with stomach pain," Boric voter Carol Bravo, a 34-year-old barista, told AFP ahead of the vote, perplexed by Kast's success but nevertheless hopeful that her candidate will prevail.

"I've talked it over with my friends and we've decided that if the other candidate (Kast) wins, we will take to the streets. We are afraid... but it is that or accept our destiny, a destiny of disaster and fascism." Kast voter Fanny Sierra, a 30-year-old who works in human resources, said she would vote against "communism." "I think that communism is very bad for a country," she told AFP.

Kast edged out six other candidates in the first presidential election round in November to end up in the top spot with 27.9 percent of the vote.

Boric came second with 25.8 percent. Both candidates have softened their policy proposals in a bid to appeal to Chileans who were left without an obvious candidate when they split the centrist vote in the first round, leaving only the two antipodes.

"I am going to vote, but I don't know who for," said Amazon employee Javiera Otto, 24, who was planning to do some last-minute research to determine who is "the lesser evil."

Will hope or fear tip the scales? "Fear, to be honest. There is no real hope because I don't like either" candidate. "I don't want that we become a second Venezuela... but neither do I want a far-right government."

There will be 'noise'

Chile has a high abstention rate, with about 50 percent of its 15 million eligible voters regularly giving the ballot box a wide berth. The country is



SANTIAGO: A man arrives to a polling station in Santiago, during the runoff presidential election in Chile, yesterday. —AFP

going through profound change after voting overwhelmingly last year in favor of drawing up a new constitution to replace the one enacted in the Pinochet years.

This was in response to an anti-inequality social uprising in 2019 that left dozens dead. The drafting process, in the hands of a largely left-leaning body elected in May, must yield a constitution for approval next year, on the new president's watch.

The campaign has been polarized, with much antagonistic messaging and fake news offensives. "It is a competition focused on discrediting the competitor," University of Santiago analyst Marcelo Mella told AFP, to the detriment of any real policy discussion.

Closing his campaign on Thursday,

father-of-nine Kast vowed that "Chile is not, and will never be, a Marxist or communist country."

Boric, for his part, said his rival "will only bring instability, more hate and violence." Analyst Patricio Nava of New York University told AFP there is likely to be unrest, or at least unease, ahead.

"There is going to be some noise, be it in the stock markets (if Boric wins) or in the streets (in the case of Kast)." Whoever ends up victorious, governing will not be easy with a Congress split just about 50-50, requiring negotiation on every policy proposal, and compromise.

Polls opened at 8:00 am (1100 GMT) and will close at 6:00 pm. Results are expected within hours. —AFP

according to Italian media reports. Police captured him in a house in the hillside town of Desulo in Sardinia, not far from Orgosolo in the centre of the Italian island, where he grew up, the last of 11 children, born to a Sardinian shepherd.

Mesina had skipped bail last year. He has served over 40 years in jail for attempted murder and a kidnapping spree, and is known in Italy for his escapes-jumping from a moving train during a transfer on one occasion and disguising himself as a priest on another, media reports said. In 1970, he reportedly watched his football team Cagliari play, while dressed as a woman.

Mesina would later "reform", according to the

Repubblica daily, and play a key role in the release of a kidnapped child, Farouk Kassam. That prompted Italy's then-president to grant him a pardon. He worked for a while as a tour guide. But in 2013 he was arrested again on charges of setting up an international drug trafficking network and his pardon was later revoked. Mesina's lawyers told ANSA news agency he had spent "a difficult year" on the run, during which both his sisters had died of coronavirus.

Asked why he escaped last year, he told his lawyers: "I have already spent too long in jail, over 45 years, and the idea of going back in to die scares me". —AFP



GOMA, North Kivu, DR Congo: Major General Camille Bombele (L), coordinator of the Joint Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARD) - Ugandan People's Defence Forces (UPDF) Military Operations, and Major General Kayanja Muhanga (R), commander of the UPDF soldiers talk near the Military Camp of Semuliki on the Mbau-Kamango road section. —AFP

International

Over 100 dead in Philippines Typhoon Rai: Officials

Military, police, coast guard personnel deployed to assist in rescue efforts

MANILA: More than 100 people have been killed in the strongest typhoon to hit the Philippines this year, official tallies showed yesterday, as efforts to deliver water and food to devastated islands ramped up. More than 300,000 people fled their homes and beachfront resorts as Typhoon Rai ravaged the southern and central regions of the archipelago.

The storm knocked out communications and electricity in many areas, ripped off roofs, damaged hospitals, toppled concrete power poles and flooded villages. Arthur Yap, governor of the popular tourist destination Bohol, said on his official Facebook page that mayors on the devastated island had so far reported 72 deaths in their towns.

Ten people also died on the Dinagat Islands, provincial information officer Jeffrey Crisostomo told AFP. That took the overall number of reported deaths to 108, according to the latest official figures, making it one of the deadliest typhoons to hit the country in years.

But the toll was likely to rise as disaster agencies assessed the full extent of the storm's aftermath across the vast archipelago. Rai smashed into the country Thursday as a super typhoon packing wind speeds of 195 kilometres (120 miles) per hour.

Thousands of military, police, coast guard and fire personnel are being deployed to assist in search and rescue efforts in the worst-affected areas.

Coast guard and naval vessels carrying food, water and medical supplies are being dispatched, while heavy machinery — like backhoes and front-

end loaders — are being sent to help clear roads blocked by fallen power poles and trees.

"It's going to be a long, tough road for people to rebuild and get their lives back on track," said Alberto Bocanegra, head of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in the Philippines. The organisation appealed for 20 million Swiss francs (\$21.6 million) to fund urgent relief and recovery efforts.

An aerial survey of damage to parts of Bohol —



Tourists being evacuated from the island

known for its beaches, rolling "Chocolate Hills", and tiny tarsier primates — showed "our people have suffered greatly", Yap said.

'Reminiscent' of Haiyan

There has also been widespread destruction on Siargao, Dinagat and Mindanao islands, which bore the brunt of Rai when it slammed into the Philippines.



SURIGAO CITY, Philippines: Fallen electric pylons block a road while a sign asking for food (L) is displayed along a road in Surigao City, Surigao del norte province, yesterday, days after super Typhoon Rai devastated the city. —AFP

Aerial photos shared by the military showed severe damage in the Siargao town of General Luna, where many surfers and holidaymakers had flocked ahead of Christmas, with buildings stripped of roofs and debris littering the ground. Tourists were being evacuated from the island yesterday by plane and boat.

Dinagat Governor Arlene Bag-ao has said the damage to the island's landscape was "reminiscent if not worse" than that caused by Super Typhoon Haiyan in 2013. Haiyan, called Yolanda in the Philippines, was the deadliest cyclone on record in the country, leaving more than 7,300 people dead or missing. —AFP

HK 'patriots only' polls see muted turnout

HONG KONG: Turnout was looking muted yesterday as Hong Kongers cast ballots for city lawmakers under Beijing's new "patriots only" rules which drastically reduce the number of directly elected seats and control who can run for office.

It is the first legislature poll under the new political blueprint China imposed on Hong Kong in response to massive and often violent pro-democracy protests two years ago. All candidates have been vetted for their patriotism and political loyalty to China and only 20 of the 90 legislative seats are being directly elected.

The largest chunk of seats — 40 — are being picked by a committee of 1,500 staunch Beijing loyalists. The remaining 30 are chosen by reliably pro-Beijing committees that represent special-interest and industry groups. Ten hours after polling stations opened, 1.1 million people had cast a

vote, around 25 percent of the electorate. In 2016, 40 percent had cast votes by the same point.

'Genuine suffrage'

Daniel So, a 65-year-old who works in technology, was among the first queuing at a polling centre in the wealthy Mid-Levels district. "The young people are not so interested in this election because they are misled by foreign politicians and media," he told AFP. "China is doing so great now."

As Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam arrived to cast her vote, three protesters from the pro-democracy League of Social Democrats party chanted: "I want genuine universal suffrage". "(Lam) said this was an improvement of the electoral system, but in reality, it stripped Hong Kongers of their right to vote," activist Chan Po-ying told reporters.

The government bought up newspaper front pages and billboards, sent flyers to every household, pinged mobile phones with reminders to vote and made public transport free for the day. Despite the publicity blitz, the latest polls showed only 48 percent of respondents said they would



HONG KONG: A voter leaves a polling station during the Legislative Council election in Hong Kong's Choi Hung area yesterday. —AFP

vote—a record low—and 52 percent said they found no candidate worthy of support.

Starry Lee, chair of the biggest pro-Beijing party, the DAB, urged people to participate. "The polling stations' feedback showed that not many people are voting," she told reporters. An accountant in her 20s, who gave her name as Loy, said she had no plans to use her ballot. "My

vote won't mean anything because ultimately it's Beijing's people winning," she told AFP.

In North Point, a district known for government support, a 74-year-old man who gave his surname as Lo said he did not know most of the "new faces" on the candidate list but still voted. "I picked those who would voice opposition, not the yes men," he told AFP. —AFP

Hundreds queue for passports in bid to leave Afghanistan

KABUL: Hundreds of people braved sub-zero temperatures in Afghanistan's capital to queue outside the passport office early yesterday, a day after the Taliban government announced it would resume issuing travel documents. Many began their wait the previous night and most stood patiently in single file—some desperate to leave the country for medical treatment, others to escape the Islamists' renewed rule.

Tense Taliban personnel periodically charged crowds that formed at the front of the queue and at a nearby roadblock. "We don't want any suicide attack or explosion to happen," said Taliban security operative Ajmal Toofan, 22, expressing concerns about the dangers of crowding. The local branch of the Islamic State group, the Taliban's principal enemy, killed more than 150 people in late August when citizens massed at Kabul airport in a desperate bid to leave during the early days of the new regime.

"Our responsibility here is to protect people," Toofan added calmly, his gun pointed professionally towards the ground. "But the people are not cooperating." He spoke to AFP as one of his colleagues pushed a man who then fell headlong just short of a coil of barbed wire.

Mohammed Osman Akbari, 60, said he was urgently trying to reach Pakistan, because dilapidated hospitals at home were unable to complete his heart surgery. Medics "put springs in my heart", he said, referring to a stent. "They need to be removed and it's not possible here." Nearby, ambulances containing people too sick to queue were parked at the side of the road.

"The patient has a heart problem," said ambulance driver Muslim Fakhri, 21, referring to a 43-year-old man lying on a stretcher inside his vehicle. An applicant has to be present to ensure the passport is issued, he explained.

'No one cares'

The Taliban initially stopped issuing passports shortly after their return to power, which came as the previous, Western-backed regime imploded in the final stages of a US military withdrawal. In October, authorities reopened the passport office in Kabul only to suspend work days later as a flood of applications caused the biometric equipment to break down.

But the office said Saturday that the issue has been resolved and those whose applications were already in process can now get their documents. Mursal Rasooli, 26, said she was happy to hear the news. "The situation here is not peaceful," she told AFP, hugging her two-year-old daughter Bibi Hawa close for dual relief against the biting cold.

"If the situation gets worse than this, then we have the passport" and can flee, she said. Her husband is in Iran because he could not find work here, she added, before expressing concern about skyrocketing prices and a lack of jobs and education for women and girls. Issuing passports—and allowing people to leave amid a humanitarian crisis the UN has called an "avalanche of hunger"—is seen as a test of the Taliban's commitment to the international community.

The Taliban are meanwhile pressing donors to restore billions of dollars in aid that was suspended when they came to power. Local musician Omid Naseer, sporting a leather jacket, short beard and unkempt hair, was desperate to leave. For "months now, since the Taliban came (to power), we've had no work", he said. "The artists are most vulnerable, but no one cares." —AFP



KUALA LUMPUR: People clean up their house after it was hit by flood in Kuala Lumpur Malaysia yesterday. —AFP

Floods in Malaysia displace more than 30,000 people

KUALA LUMPUR: More than 30,000 people were evacuated from their homes in Malaysia yesterday as the country battles some of its worst flooding in years. The tropical Southeast Asian nation often sees stormy monsoon seasons towards the end of the year, with flooding regularly prompting mass evacuations.

Downpours since Friday have caused rivers to overflow, submerging many urban areas and cutting off major roads, leaving thousands of motorists stranded. More than 30,000 flood victims across eight states and territories were recorded on an official government website, with over 14,000 of them in the central state of Pahang.

Nearly 10,000 people fled their homes in the country's richest state of Selangor—which surrounds the capital Kuala Lumpur—with Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob expressing surprise at the severe flooding there. "The amount of rain that fell in Selangor yesterday, what fell in one day

would usually fall in one month," he told at a press conference.

The premier promised swift aid for the flood victims and initial funding of 100 million ringgit (\$23.7 million) to repair damaged houses and infrastructure. A government website showed water exceeding dangerous levels in six central and northeastern states yesterday afternoon. As floodwaters receded from the capital, business owners went back to their shops to clean up the damage left by the downpours.

Lee Joon Kee, the owner of a tourist information centre and souvenir shop, said he had only reopened a few days ago after closing for nearly two years due to coronavirus restrictions. "It's very sad but we have no choice. The only choice (we have is) to move on and clean out the mess, then we will continue our new chapter."

Dozens of bus routes in and around the capital have been suspended along with train services to the port city of Klang. Operations at three water treatment plants in Selangor were also disrupted, with taps expected to run dry for tens of thousands of people in parts of the state as well as the capital. Malaysia's worst flooding in decades took place in 2014, forcing about 118,000 people to flee their homes. —AFP

Government-aligned bloc wins Malaysian local polls

KUALA LUMPUR: An alliance backing Malaysia's ruling coalition won a landslide victory at state polls on Borneo island Saturday, as the country gears up for a general election, possibly as soon as next year. The Sarawak Parties Alliance (GPS) claimed at least 75 of 82 seats in a contest that saw 349 candidates competing for control of the country's largest state of Sarawak.

The result for one seat remains unresolved, as vote tallies were not completed due to bad weather and roads being cut off as unusually heavy rainfall hits the tropical nation, election officials said. The four-party bloc is aligned with Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob's government at the national level, and their victory could give his coalition a boost.

It follows a win for Ismail Sabri's party in another local poll last month, and may further fuel expectations that a general election could be called next year. The outcome of Saturday's polls means the GPS could play a kingmaker role in the upcoming federal election, offering support to whoever appears to have the best shot of emerging as the victor, one analyst said.

"Any coalition that takes a majority of seats in the next election will not have to worry about GPS's hold over Sarawak," James Chin, a political analyst from the University of Tasmania, told AFP. "They will go with whoever forms the government."

When will national polls happen?

The government and opposition have agreed not to dissolve parliament for national polls until July next year as officials focus on combating the coronavirus pandemic. But speculation is mounting a vote could be called soon after that. A national election must be held by mid-2023 at the latest.

Malaysian politics has been in turmoil since early 2020, when a reformist government headed by Mahathir Mohamad collapsed after less than two years in power due to infighting. It was replaced by a weak coalition, which itself fell apart earlier this year, paving the way for Ismail Sabri to clinch the leadership for his United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) party. —AFP

Business

MONDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2021

Meknes firm transforms waste as Morocco faces trash 'time-bomb'

Production of organic fertilizer boosts sustainable agriculture

MEKNES, Morocco: Recycling in Morocco may be in its infancy, but the North African kingdom is making steady progress, helped by a Swiss firm that specializes in processing organic waste.

"Nothing's thrown away here: everything is transformed," says Mohamed El Kabous proudly, crumpling a fistful of compost produced by Elephant Vert (EV-Green Elephant) in the central city of Meknes. Established in 2012 as EV's largest such plant on the African continent, the factory has an annual turnover of 40,000 tons of compost and organic fertilizer.

Mountains of sawdust, palettes and fruit tree branches cover a storage platform as trucks rumble past loaded with manure, and excavators aerate piles of compost. EV production manager Kabous said no household organic waste is processed at the factory because "it's too costly".

The pre-sorting of residential waste is "almost non-existent", he told AFP. Instead, the waste comes from nearby farms and factories that work with wood, or cooperatives producing essential oils. "After the carbon-rich organic matter and nitrogen-rich manure from non-industrial livestock breeding is mixed, nature then takes over," Kabous said.

Wood is absorbent, so no stench emanates from the open-air fermentation area, where it takes about four months to produce the compost. The odor is actually of fresh earth. Kabous joked that it even smelt like "zammita", a traditional Moroccan cake made with flour, almonds and sesame seeds. The EV plant also produces fertilizer by adding potash or phosphorus to the compost.

Turks hunt for vanishing drugs in currency crisis

ISTANBUL: Fatih Yuksel is one of thousands of Turks rushing from one pharmacy to another in search of imported drugs that are disappearing as quickly as the lira is losing value. "Sometimes I have periods where I don't have the drugs I need and my illness gets worse. I suffer pains," said the 35-year-old, who has been taking pills to relieve a rare autoimmune disorder known as Behcet's syndrome, for the past nine years.

"It can be hard but I have to work," said the shop attendant. Turks have been rattled by a currency collapse that accelerated when President Recep Tayyip Erdogan last month launched a self-declared "economic war of independence" that defies conventional market theory. 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.

The results have been frightening for people such as Yuksel. The Turkish currency has lost more than 40 percent of its value since the start of November alone. A lira could buy 13 US cents in January. It was worth less than half that this month.

The crisis has wiped out the value of people's savings and made basic goods prohibitively expensive, plunging swathes of the population below the official poverty line. It has also made a whole gamut

'Time-bomb'
EV's output is sold mainly on the local market to organic farms and large enterprises whose soil has lost nutrients through the over-use of chemical fertilizers.

Agriculture remains a pillar of the Moroccan economy. "There's increasing demand from farmers keen to make sure their land is sustainable, and who know they need to opt for healthy and sustainable agriculture," Kabous said. Meknes is also home to other organic recycling initiatives, including a waste treatment and recovery plant operated by French giant Suez. But nationwide, it's a different story.

In 2015, official figures supplied to AFP showed that just six percent of household waste was recycled — 420,000 tons out of seven million—while the rest was buried. Instead, up to 12 percent of industrial waste was recycled—mainly plastic, paper, metal and electrical and electronic equipment. Morocco's official recycling target is 20 percent of waste by 2022, a date now pushed back to 2030.

Mustapha Brakez, an expert in urban recycling, was scathing of government efforts to boost the practice. "These strategies the bureaucrats in (the capital) Rabat have come up with lead nowhere as they are based on models from Europe, which are opposite to Moroccan habits," he said.

Nearly 80 percent of household waste in Morocco is organic, he noted, while in Europe the figure is less than 30 percent.

The kingdom has just 26 landfill and sorting centers, while official data shows that 66 illegal rubbish dumps have been regularized or closed.



ANKARA: Turkish pharmacist Berna Yucel Mintas shows boxes of medicines at her pharmacy in Ankara yesterday. — AFP

of imported drugs for a range of illnesses—from diabetes to cancer, heart disease to flu—nearly impossible to find across Turkey's 27,000 pharmacies.

'Pitiless'
Turkish Health Minister Fahrettin Koca has deflected the blame, accusing drugs manufacturers of "trying to sell expensive drugs to Turkey". "News that 'medicines cannot be found in Turkey' is not based on reality," said Koca. Vedat Bulut, the Turkish Medical Association's secretary general, said it was "pitiless" to accuse companies of trying to sell expensive drugs when the lira had lost so much value.

Medical professionals said a long-term solution involved developing Turkey's health industry to wean it off its dependence on imports. But today, pharma-



MEKNES, Morocco: A front loader transports organic waste in the Elephant Vert factory in the "Agropolis" industrial zone in Morocco's northern city of Meknes. — AFP

"Every effort is focused on treatment, without coming up with solutions for collection" of the waste, Brakez said. He called waste management in Morocco "a time bomb".

"We will just create even more landfills, without taking care of the problem at source," he said. "It is essential to come up with a system that starts with sorting at the household level." —AFP

cists describe receiving heart-rending notes from patients on messaging apps with photographs, pleading to know where they can find their medication.

The Turkish Pharmacists' Association said in November that 645 drugs were affected but as the situation grew worse, pharmacist Berna Yucel Mintas told AFP around 1,000 medicines were difficult to find. "The situation deteriorated because of the lira," said Taner Ercanli, head of Ankara Chamber of Pharmacists. "Imagine it like a fire, and gasoline was poured over it."

Set exchange rate
Part of the problem stems from the way Turkey procures medications. The health ministry sets the standard price for drugs every February based on an exchange rate agreed by the government.

It set an exchange rate of 4.57 lira to the euro for this year. But it now takes nearly 20 liras to buy a euro on the market. That meant drug manufacturers had "unfortunately" decided against selling medicines to Turkey, Ercanli said, because they made more money in other markets. Pharmacists want the government to reassess drug prices against the euro at least three times a year.

But there are wider problems. Global supply chain bottlenecks caused by the coronavirus pandemic have resulted in jumps in the price of most raw materials, which make domestically produced medicine more expensive. Turkish drug suppliers are also angry with the government over delayed payments, which are doubly painful as these are settled in liras according to the exchange rate agreed at the time. Employers' associations warn some companies will be forced to close. —AFP

Tunisia recyclers struggle to tackle mountains of waste

TUNIS: "When I see plastic, I see money," says Tarek Masmoudi, owner of one of the few recycling companies in Tunisia, where a waste crisis is threatening widespread social unrest.

Recycling is almost non-existent in the North African country, which produces 2.6 million tons of waste each year. Some 85 percent of that ends up in landfills, while much of the rest winds up in informal dumps, says Tunisian waste management expert Walim Merdaci.

But with many facilities close to overflowing and neighboring communities up in arms, the crisis is already stoking tensions. In November, a man died as security forces fired tear gas to disperse protesters demanding the closure of a stinking landfill they say has spread deadly diseases and health problems to their town of Agareb, near second city Sfax.

That could be a worrying sign of things to come as, according to expert Wassim Chaabane, most of the country's 11 official dumping grounds are due to close by the end of 2022. That has authorities scrambling to find new sites. In the capital Tunis, home to about 2.7 million people, the situation is particularly urgent. The Bordj Chakir dump, Tunisia's biggest, receives more than 3,000 tons of rubbish a day and is close to overflowing.

From waste to wealth

But where others see a crisis, Masmoudi sees an opportunity. Every day, a steady stream of minivans and small trucks bring to his facility in Mghira, near Tunis, bales of plastic waste to be weighed, sorted and cut into fine chips for industrial use. Much is collected by hand from the streets and bins of the capital by "barbechas", informal waste pickers. Masmoudi's firm African Recycling deals with 6,000 tons of waste a year.

The 42-year-old directly employs around 60 people, many of them women, and indirectly provides work to roughly 200 — no small achievement in a country suffering 18 percent unemployment. Between four and seven percent of Tunisia's waste is recycled, according to official figures. But Masmoudi, standing by his sleek white four-wheel-drive, said the waste market was growing fast.

"Recycling is a sector where a lot remains to be done, but which could create jobs and wealth in Tunisia." The situation is similar in neighboring Algeria, where experts say as much as 60 percent of household waste from the country's 43 million population goes to unregulated dumps. Samira Hamidi, a member of Algeria's semi-independent advisory body CNESE, says "less than seven percent of waste is recycled". Just 5,000 people are employed in Algeria's recycling sector, according to official figures. —AFP

Omicron scrambles anew US firms' in-person aspirations

NEW YORK: Major US companies are having to reassess their return-to-office plans and getting tough on vaccine or mask requirements as the Omicron COVID variant looks set to extend pandemic-induced work-from-home culture.

A resumption of pre-virus workplace norms was only partially moving forward in the United States when the fast-spreading new variant arrived and provoked fresh concern. Legal challenges have made the future of President Joe Biden's vaccine mandate for companies with over 100 workers uncertain, and firms have been pursuing their own requirements.

Tech giant Google has been notably uncompromising in warning employees of lost pay or even dismissal if they do not report their vaccination status by a particular deadline, according to an internal document viewed by CNBC. "We firmly believe that our vaccination requirements are one of the most important ways we can keep our workforce safe and keep our services running," Google told AFP.

The search engine giant has also

postponed indefinitely the return to the office of its engineers and developers, originally scheduled for January.

For its part, Facebook parent Meta was offering its employees the opportunity to choose between home and office work. Amazon, which had suggested a return of its face-to-face office workers at least three days a week in early 2022, was expected to make further announcements in January, the company said. Warehouse employees and drivers are not affected by these arrangements.

Apple has reinstated the mandatory wearing of masks in all its US stores after making it optional in November at some 100 points of sale. The iPhone maker also temporarily closed stores this week in Florida and Maryland as well as in the Canadian province of Ontario.

Slow return to office

Wall Street has also been forced to adjust to the rising number of COVID cases in New York City and other financial centers. As of Tuesday, JPMorgan was restricting access to nine of its buildings in Manhattan to



PHOENIX, US: A sign advertises COVID testing in downtown Phoenix where new COVID-19 cases are down but health experts warn cases may rise with the introduction of the Omicron strain on Saturday. —AFP

vaccinated people, who are not required to wear masks once inside.

"We are taking this step because we have very high rates of vaccination amongst our employees," the bank said in an internal memo seen by AFP. "With rates well above 90 percent, it seems unfair to require our vaccinated employees to wear masks all day at their desks."

Unvaccinated employees must work from home. Despite the desire for a return to normalcy, JPMorgan had to back out of a health conference in California the bank plans to host in January that was originally scheduled

to be held face-to-face. Under pressure from several attendees concerned about the risk of infection and "out of an abundance of caution," the bank moved the event to a virtual format.

Other big names in American finance, such as Citigroup and Morgan Stanley, were encouraging their employees to work from home as much as possible over the next few weeks. In the retail sector, companies were also getting tough on COVID shots. For example, the Kroger supermarket chain will suspend COVID sick leave for unvaccinated employees, according to several US media reports. —AFP

Business

Gulf Bank's 'Let's Talk Business' podcast highlights origin story of Local Flavour

New podcast tells the story of how two young entrepreneurs left their jobs to seize multiple opportunities born of times of crisis

KUWAIT: In the fourth installment of Gulf Bank's new podcast, "Let's Talk Business," Gulf Bank interviewed Khaled Al-Sayer, managing partner at Local Flavour, a local marketing, production and event planning company. The program, hosted by Tareq Al-Saleh, Deputy General Manager of the Economic Research Unit at Gulf Bank, presents entrepreneurial stories within a simplified economic framework, targeting budding entrepreneurs who are considering starting businesses of their own. The Bank's new podcast is part of its overarching strategy of fostering economic and community sustainability in Kuwait.

Realizing & seizing opportunities

Local Flavour was founded in 2012 by Khaled Al-Sayer and Abdullah Bofain. When they first founded the company, Al-Sayer and Bofain ran every aspect of the business. Almost ten years and plenty of successes later, the company has over 20 employees, and is well-renowned in the local market for their creativity in planning and excellence in execution.

At the beginning of their discussion, Al-Sayer touched on what makes Local Flavour especially unique, saying "Most of the people who work at Local Flavour, including our partners and founders, had previously worked on the other side of the equation (working on the client's side). That is, a lot of us have spent over 25 years of our careers working in marketing fields at a variety of local and regional companies, so we understand the market very well."

The beginning

Al-Sayer also commented on how he and his partner had calculated just how much capital they needed to raise to sustain their first year of business. He says, "In the beginning, we had no idea whether the company was going to survive, so we knew we had to have a very clear business model. Our primary focus was to insure our salaries for at least a year, and so we set our goals accordingly, using that to determine how many employees we wanted to hire during that first year. Therefore, our initial capital needed to cover the costs of our salaries for one year, and any other expenses that could arise."

The key to success: Adding the 'Local' in Local Flavour

Local Flavour also set itself apart with its unique focus on providing a "local touch," an incredibly important characteristic for companies looking to

implement powerful and effective marketing strategies. Al-Sayer says, "The 'local' in Local Flavour means that we know and understand the needs of the local market. As Kuwaitis and as people who grew up in this country, we know what the local population wants. Even the non-Kuwaitis who work at our company were born in Kuwait, or graduated from Kuwait, so they also understand the needs of the local population."

Furthermore, Al-Sayer noticed how companies were increasingly outsourcing services after the 2008 financial crisis. More specifically, Al-Sayer noticed how outsourcing marketing services also provided companies with more room to focus on other aspects of their businesses. Al-Sayer continues, "After the 2008 financial crisis, we noticed that companies no longer had the capability to hire a large team, so Local Flavour had to be a one-stop shop that provided companies with a variety of services. In the same way that companies outsource other services (like legal services, for example), they can also outsource their marketing. This saves them a lot of resources by freeing up the costs associated with hiring and rent - all of these costs can be alleviated by partnering with us."

Pandemic challenges & opportunities

The pandemic was an incredibly critical time for businesses everywhere, and Local Flavour was no exception. For Al-Sayer, navigating the pandemic required the team to make some strategic choices very early on. One such choice was the decision to shift to remote work in early 2020. Al-Sayer says, "Because we did not know how long the pandemic was going to wage on for, we decided to shift to remote work very early on. We told our team to stay home, and to get used to working remotely. Because we were so early in encouraging our team to work remotely, we were able to run the company remotely in a much smoother fashion than we would have if we had delayed the shift to remote work. This resulted in a smoother transition for both our clients, and our internal team."

Other decisions included lowering overhead costs by moving to less expensive office and storage spaces, and also lowering wages while retaining their employees. Al-Sayer says, "Our primary focus in 2021 was to keep the company going, and to do that, we knew we had to retain our team, who make up the core of our company."



Tareq Al-Saleh interviews Khaled Al-Sayer

Al-Sayer also touched on the importance of recognizing the unique opportunities that emerged as a result of the pandemic. For example, Local Flavour has started focusing on the children's event space, having recently put on two successful children's events with local partners, Dabdoob and LEGO.

Forming local partnerships

Al-Sayer also elaborated on the importance of forming local partnerships, and how partnering with other companies can allow companies to build on each other's strengths. He says, "Partnership is a common theme in our industry, and it guides everything we do. Even if everything is available in-house, we do sometimes opt to collaborate with other companies. When partnering with other companies, the goal is to unify our efforts and complement one another."

Advice to young entrepreneurs

As business owners, Al-Sayer highlighted the importance of knowing when to keep a business going and when to shut it down. He says, "Don't be arrogant; its consequences are difficult. If you see that your business has potential for growth, make sure you shower it with attention and allow it to grow. However, if your business is not growing, or is severely hurting your profits, it might be time to shut down."

Al-Sayer also touched on the importance of

becoming an expert in one's field. He says, "During the 2008 financial crisis, we saw some companies shut down, while others thrived as a result of the crisis. Similarly, during the pandemic, we witnessed the closures of some companies, while others thrived. The companies that survive are the ones that truly know their fields inside and out."

"Let's Talk Business" is Gulf Bank's newest podcast, created in collaboration with Belmokhba, a local creative content creation and production house. Episodes air on Gulf Bank's digital and social media channels. Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti bank of the future. The bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience. Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining a robust sustainability program at the community, economic, and environmental levels through sustainability initiatives that are strategically selected to benefit both the country and the Bank. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with the different relevant parties to achieve it.



شركة الصفاء للاستثمار
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 16 DECEMBER 2021

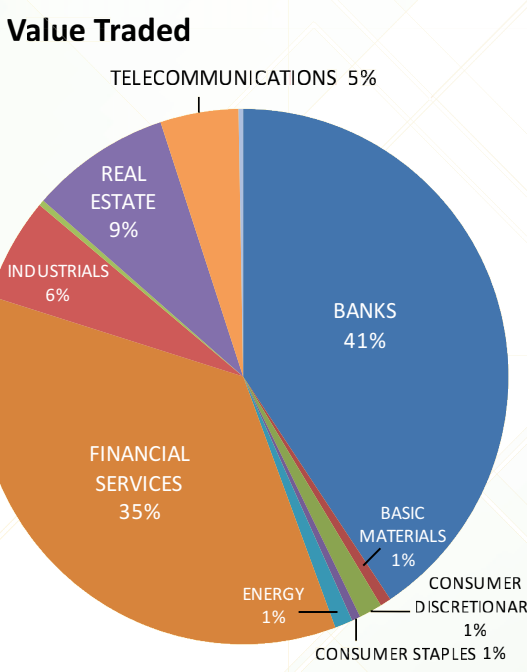
(965) 22 675 140
Al-Safat Tower, Hawalli, Beirut St.
alsafatinvest.com
research@alsafatinvest.com
alsafatinvestment
al-safat-investment-company

Market	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
Premier Market	30,757	7,548.90	-1.1%	2.8%	24.8%	374,190,042	159,867,059	19,056	29.8	2.2	75.0%
Main Market	10,245	5,870.81	-0.4%	2.7%	29.0%	978,014,174	102,026,309	27,718	24.1	1.6	25.0%
All Share	41,002	6,976.04	-0.9%	2.7%	25.8%	1,352,204,216	261,893,368	46,774	29.2	2.1	100%

Sector	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
BANKS	23,696	1,592.51	-1.3%	2.2%	26.1%	212,957,470	106,442,530	9,431	29.8	2.3	57.15%
BASIC MATERIALS	916	1,028.44	-1.0%	4.3%	14.5%	3,688,545	1,753,165	790	24.4	1.5	2.21%
CONSUMER DISCRETIONARY	696	1,357.41	0.8%	11.6%	81.9%	13,170,819	3,716,696	1,578	17.0	5.8	1.68%
CONSUMER STAPLES	224	736.89	-0.6%	0.6%	-10.0%	2,307,020	1,380,057	191	14.9	1.6	0.54%
ENERGY	305	1,470.13	-0.4%	6.0%	15.1%	63,036,844	2,866,187	2,046	12.6	1.5	0.74%
FINANCIAL SERVICES	4,043	1,415.82	-0.3%	4.9%	52.3%	798,328,287	93,001,774	18,888	9.2	1.8	9.75%
HEALTH CARE	400	806.10	-0.1%	-0.4%	-2.5%	16,682	7,357	23	29.5	5.3	0.96%
INDUSTRIALS	4,088	1,152.36	0.0%	3.0%	29.3%	35,573,087	16,248,580	4,324	35.7	1.3	9.86%
INSURANCE	616	1,476.10	-6.3%	-7.2%	27.7%	5,936,563	901,375	395	7.2	1.1	1.49%
REAL ESTATE	2,879	1,339.60	-0.4%	3.6%	40.6%	174,065,295	22,374,857	6,269	19.0	1.2	6.94%
TECHNOLOGY	10	749.33	3.0%	1.0%	49.1%	9,990	1,029	2	n.a	0.9	0.02%
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	3,339	1,089.49	-0.4%	3.2%	-1.2%	39,925,558	12,466,923	2,504	20.2	1.4	8.05%
UTILITIES	252	602.63	-1.3%	-1.3%	-17.3%	3,188,056	732,838	333	19.5	4.1	0.61%

Top Gainers						Top Losers					
Stock	last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades	Stock	last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
KFOUC	389	10.51	1,056,311	413,991	151	KUWAITRE	275	-20.29	272	86	6
KHOT	773	9.96	150	11	2	FTI	48.7	-13.96	17,002	897	12
ALDEERA	178	6.59	9,835	1,614	12	TAHSSILAT	43.8	-10.25	1,490,500	68,706	118
ALOLA	82.9	5.61	65,228,578	5,515,102	1,874	SANAM	82.2	-8.16	307,945	24,883	89
ABAR	152	5.56	2,562,685	385,669	251	OSOUL	83.0	-7.78	2,129,025	184,370	131

Top Volume						Top Value					
Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades	Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
GFH	103	4.04	438,524,865	46,005,735	6,072	GFH	103	4.04	438,524,865	46,005,735	6,072
AUB	277	-1.77	85,872,564	23,923,236	1,01	NBK	970	-2.02	41,198,729	40,370,925	3,068
NINV	228	-2.98	73,092,389	16,381,057	1,695	KFH	826	-1.08	30,279,192	25,185,131	2,678
ALOLA	82.9	5.61	65,228,578	5,515,102	1,874	AUB	277	-1.77	85,872,564	23,923,236	1,010
NBK	970	-2.02	41,198,729	40,370,925	3,068	NINV	228	-2.98	73,092,389	16,381,057	1,695



Market Summary:

- Premier market volume and value decreased 31% and 25%, respectively. Main market volume and value increased 22% and 21%, respectively.
- All indices failed last week to overcome the resistance and they retreated to previous support levels due to weak trading which caused a significant drop in quantity and value. Unless we witness a major increase in quantity, the index might drop further to lower levels.
- Technically, the All-Share index closed at 6976, support levels at 6959, 6918, and 6890, while resistance at 7000 and 7042. Premier index closed at 7548, support levels at 7540, 7498, and 7455, while resistance at 7581 and 7606, and 7641. The Main index closed at 5870, support levels at 5865, 5845, and 5813, while resistance at 5880, 5902, and 5925.

Business

KFH crowns achievements with 15 prestigious awards in 2021

Awards in recognition of bank's remarkable efforts in various banking fields

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) continued its outstanding performance in 2021 in all indicators and won 15 prestigious awards at the group level from well-known international and local providers, in recognition of its achievements in various fields. These include business and product development, the ability to meet diverse customer needs in all sectors, as well as technological innovation in service delivery and product quality, reputation, customer satisfaction, geographical reach, strategic relationships, and adherence to ethical standards.

Moreover, the awards are in recognition of KFH excellence and its pioneering role in adopting the best and latest digital technologies, keeping pace with the increasing demand for Islamic banking services, especially in the digital field, its outstanding performance in several core banking activities in the local sector as well as its contribution to the growth of the Islamic finance industry in Kuwait.

KFH's role in adapting to market and technology shifts in the post-COVID-19 economy, and its socially responsible investment strategies, along with its ability to grow its revenues during the pandemic, also received a global recognition through winning the "Best Private Bank for Islamic Services Award".

Acting Group Chief Executive Officer at KFH AbdulWahab Al-Rushood said that global awards KFH won this year add to the series of awards, honors and recognitions that it had received, and confirm the main strengths it enjoys, in addition to being a testament and recognition of the leading position it enjoys in local and international markets.

He added that KFH is well-healed in strong Shariah-compliance activities and has high levels of liquidity and diversified investment and banking services that adopt the latest technologies and international financial standards. With KFH enjoying a leading position in Sukuk market and Islamic financial services market, Al-Rushood pointed out that it has also made qualitative leaps in implementing the digital transformation strategy quickly, by adopting the latest fintech innovations.

He emphasized that confidence of KFH shareholders and customers and the dedicated efforts and efficiency of its employees, which have always distinguished KFH and established its brand and its leading position at the local and global levels, contributed to achieving these achievements and recognitions and global awards.

Al-Rushood added that the awards are not just an achievement and appreciation, but rather a motivation to achieve more successes and achievements in the future. They are also evidence of KFH's ability to provide innovative products and services to meet customer's needs, advance the banking industry and strengthen the Kuwaiti economy.

Best Islamic financial institution

KFH won World's Best Islamic Financial Institution 2021 Award from Global Magazine in its 14th annual awards for the World's Best Islamic Financial Institutions for this year. KFH has been named as World's Best Islamic Project Finance Provider, while KFH-Turkey as World's Best Islamic Financial Institution 2021 in Turkey, KT Bank AG-Germany as World's Best Islamic Financial Institution in Europe, and KFH Takaful as World's Best Islamic Takaful by Global Finance.

All selections were made by the highly professional team of Global Finance, after extensive consultations with bankers, corporate finance executives and analysts throughout the world. The stringent criteria for giving the awards included new business development and product innovation, meeting all customer's requirements, geographic reach, and strategic relationships. Also, among the criteria considered were reputation, customer satisfaction and the adherence to ethical standards.

Al-Rushood said that the awards confirm the leading position KFH enjoys in Islamic financial services in the world and reflects the successful efforts by the bank to provide the highest standards of Shariah-compliant services. He added that the awards KFH receives are clear acknowledgements of its contributions to the Islamic finance industry through meeting the customers' needs of Sharia-compliant products, establishing sustainable future growth with high efficiency for the Islamic finance industry and keeping up with the latest financial and banking technology.

Moreover, Global Finance Magazine named KFH as the Safest Islamic Bank in the GCC for 2021 as part of its annual ranking of the World's Safest Banks.

KFH was selected through an evaluation of size of assets, financial indicators and long-term credit ratings from Global rating agencies- Moody's,



KFH AbdulWahab Al-Rushood (right) with the awards

Standard & Poor's and Fitch- of the 500 largest banks worldwide.

Best Bank in Kuwait and Middle East

KFH won "Best Islamic Bank in Middle East" and "Best Islamic Bank in Kuwait" 2021 Awards from the prestigious "The Banker Magazine" owned by The Financial Times. The Banker named KFH best Islamic bank in the Middle East and Kuwait due to the bank's leading role in adopting digital technologies in areas like cross-border remittances and cardless withdrawals, keeping pace with the growing sophistication and increasing demands of Islamic banking cus-

- **Al-Rushood:** The awards are a testament and recognition of KFH's leading position locally and internationally
- A prominent role for the bank in adapting to market and technology shifts in the post-COVID-19 economy
- KFH has made qualitative leaps in implementing the digital transformation strategy quickly
- Keeping pace with the rapid development and the increasing demand from digital Islamic banking customers
- The awards confirm KFH's leading position in the banking services industry in the world
- The success of the bank's efforts in providing the highest level of Islamic financial services
- The awards were based on the evaluation of well-known and specialized bodies and accurate and professional international standards
- KFH has succeeded in developing the best innovative banking and financial solutions
- KFH is a leader in offering many pioneering digital services in 2021
- Awards are not only an achievement and appreciation, but a motivation to achieve more successes in the future
- KFH concluded its achievements in 2021 by winning awards in creativity and excellence
- KFH's efforts in humanitarian initiatives and fields win the "Best Volunteer Team" award

tomers around the world, particularly within the digital realm.

Al-Rushood said that the awards confirm KFH's efficient performance and excellence in delivering high-quality innovative products through developed digital infrastructure. They also reflect KFH's successful digital transformation strategy which has been a milestone during COVID-19 crisis".

He confirmed that KFH Group is keen on maintaining its proactive approach in embracing technology and innovation and focusing on reshaping customer experience by delivering best developed banking solutions.



KFH headquarters

Best domestic bank

KFH won the prestigious Best Domestic Bank in Kuwait 2021 award from Asiamoney Magazine, a renowned global financial publication. The award was made to KFH for its outstanding performance across a range of core banking activities in the domestic sector over the past 12 months. The award is also a recognition of the bank's contribution to the growth of the Islamic finance industry in Kuwait.

"Winning this Award provides a global recognition of KFH's pioneering role in banking sector through harnessing its capabilities and expertise and the latest technology to deliver accessible, convenient and inno-



AbdulWahab Al-Rushood

International Global Wealth Awards 2021.

The award recognizes how reputed banks are adapting to market and technological shifts in a post-COVID-19 economy, their socially responsible investment strategies, and how industry participants have differentiated their proposition to protect and grow revenues to offset the immediate losses caused by the unprecedented economic downturn resulting from COVID-19. Other main areas of evaluation for banks included digital innovation and adoption of technology to improve client experience. An independent panel of judges evaluates each submission and ranks each entry. The total of all the scores is then combined and compared to other submissions to determine the winner.

Al-Rushood said that KFH succeeded in developing best innovative banking solutions, confirmed its leadership as a global Islamic institution and its ability to enhance its financial performance as well as high flexibility during the pandemic. He added that KFH was unique in launching several digital services in 2020 and 2021. For example, KFH was the first bank to implement the E- signature service for personal finance transactions and to offer instant card issuance using a hybrid solution where customers can print their cards within 3 minutes. Moreover, KFH introduces integrated digital services through different channels: KFHonline app, KFH Go and the website, among other alternative channels.

Creativity and distinction awards

KFH received five awards in the creativity and distinction category for the seventh consecutive year in the 9th edition of the Kuwait Creativity Award event for the year 2021. KFH won the Public Relations Creativity Award and Social Media Creativity Award for its distinction in KFH Talk program, Advertising Creativity Award TVC for "Your Financing is Easier with KFH" campaign, Content Creativity Award TVC for the "Smile Again" and Influencing Creativity Award TVC for "Gergean" commercial.

The five awards, received by KFH, affirm its creativity regarding the diversification and inclusiveness of the public relations, media, marketing and promotional campaigns and the innovative contents thereof. These campaigns had a tremendous impact and produced a remarkable professional performance in enhancing the brand for the last 12 months and in the appreciation and interest it received by all society categories.

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

KFH volunteer team

KFH volunteer team won with the "Best Volunteer Team" award in Kuwait, during the 2021 Kuwait Youth Voluntary and Humanitarian Initiatives Awards organized by the Arab Media Forum. KFH's voluntary team was honored in recognition of its various contributions and efforts in volunteer work, and as a crowning of its efforts to serve the community and promote the values and concepts of volunteering. As a top priority, KFH continues to support Kuwaiti youth in different fields and initiatives, empowering them while emphasizing the importance of volunteering and humanitarian initiatives.

Stringent international criteria

All the awards KFH won in 2021 from prestigious global bodies specialized in business and finance were based on stringent and professional international criteria that measure factors such as quality, the bank's position, its contributions and financial indicators.

Among the criteria were excellence, initiative and innovation in products and services, performance efficiency, geographical reach, shareholder rights indicators, strength of capital adequacy and total assets, customer satisfaction, strategic relationships, and adherence to ethical standards.

All recommendations were made by juries composed of experts and analysts specialized in the Islamic banking sector from all over the world. These criteria indicate that KFH is based on a solid foundation, and is characterized by high-level professional performance, systematic work, diversity, ability to compete, leadership in the Islamic finance industry globally, and excellence in providing an integrated system of banking and financing services which helped established its leading position globally.



KFH volunteer team with the "Best Volunteer Team" award in Kuwait during the 2021 Kuwait Youth Voluntary and Humanitarian Initiatives Awards organized by the Arab Media Forum



Your Trust.. First Award



**Best Islamic Financial
Institution in Europe**
KFH Germany

**World's Best Islamic
Project Finance Provider**
KFH Kuwait

**Best Islamic Financial
Institution in Turkey**
KFH Turkey

World's Best Islamic Financial Institution
KFH Kuwait

World's Best Islamic Takaful
KFH Takaful Kuwait



Bahrain Best Islamic Bank
KFH Bahrain

Kuwait Best Islamic Bank
KFH Kuwait

Kuwait Best Bank
KFH Kuwait

Middle East Best Islamic Bank
KFH Kuwait

Middle East Corporate Social Responsibility
KFH Kuwait



**Best Private Bank
for Islamic Services**



**Best Domestic Bank
in Kuwait**



**Best Islamic Bank
in the Middle East**

**Best Islamic Bank
in Kuwait**

Business

Laos opens scenic railway built on a mountain of Chinese debt

Sisoulith hails a 'new era of modern infrastructure development'

VIENTIANE, Laos: Laos opened a new \$6 billion rail link with China to much fanfare this month, but analysts warn the party could be short-lived as the government grapples with a potential debt crisis. The line will connect the capital Vientiane with the southern Chinese city of Kunming, and there are grand plans for a high-speed rail network running to Singapore through Thailand and Malaysia.

Laos President Thongloun Sisoulith at the opening heralded a "new era of modern infrastructure development" for the impoverished country, adding that "the dreams of Lao people have come true".

The government is hopeful the railway will turn a profit by 2027, but analysts are concerned about the unsustainable Chinese loans to pay for this and other projects. With a tiny domestic market, there is "limited commercial logic for an expensive railway" to connect the country of seven million to Kunming, said Jonathan Andrew Lane in an Asian Development Bank Institute report.

His analysis found that potential benefits to Laos do not appear to outweigh the risks.

"That debt service will put further strain on the limited tax-raising abilities

of the government," Lane wrote. Laos faces having to stump up vast sums of cash to pay for the rail line, which was set up as a Laos-China joint venture under Beijing's vast, trillion-dollar Belt and Road infrastructure initiative (BRI).

As the reclusive Southeast Asian country's overall debt climbs to a dizzying \$13.3 billion-making up almost three-quarters of gross domestic product-experts fear Laos could be at risk of default. That could bind it further to China, having already attracted the moniker "Chinese satellite state"-Beijing accounts for 47 percent of its borrowings.

'Hidden debt'

Besides a \$1.06 billion debt liability, Laos has exposed itself to so-called "hidden debt" in the formation of the joint venture to finance the railway, according to AidData, a research lab at American university William & Mary. The tie-up comprises three Chinese state-owned companies and a Lao enterprise, with Beijing staking 70 percent of the \$3.54 billion debt.

Considered "too big to fail", researchers said there is some uncertainty over which country would feel compelled to bail out the joint venture if

it defaulted. If "insufficiently profitable, anywhere between 0-100 percent of the total \$3.54 billion debt could become a repayment obligation of the Government of Laos", AidData warned. Another hidden debt is Laos' equity stake in the joint venture: a separate \$480 million loan also financed by the Chinese-which suggests the tiny nation's asset "may be worthless", the lab added.

Laos' communist leaders have long tied the nation's economic development to its huge neighbor. Between 2008-2019, it signed a total of \$5 billion in Chinese loans for more than a dozen infrastructure projects-the lion's share spent on dams and hydroelectricity generation. By August 2020, global credit agency Moody's downgraded the country's credit rating to junk status. Fitch Ratings followed soon after.

'What is the alternative?'

Laos Prime Minister Phankham Viphavanh-installed in March-hopes to reduce debt from 72 percent to 64.5 percent of GDP by the end of 2023. But in the meantime, Laos owes \$1.16 billion per year between 2022 and 2025, Fitch Ratings says. Its public debt is higher than most regional counterparts-including Cambodia, Vietnam and the



VIENTIANE, Laos: Two women pose for photos with the bullet train at the China-Laos railway Vientiane station in the Laos capital Vientiane. — Xinhua

Philippines-which also have Chinese-financed infrastructure projects, according to the International Monetary Fund.

As of early 2021, Laos was "on the brink of sovereign default and urgently seeking debt relief from their Chinese creditors", AidData said. But China is often reluctant to cancel BRI debts,

instead offering deferrals-sometimes with higher interest rates-or rescheduled payment plans.

In September, Laos sold its electricity transmission grid to a Chinese state-owned enterprise for \$600 million, an apparent debt-for-equity swap, according to researchers. —AFP

NBK named best foreign exchange provider in Kuwait for 2022

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) won the "Best Foreign Exchange Provider in Kuwait for 2022" award for the 10th year in a row. An annual survey by the reputable international magazine Global Finance, based on the input of industry analysts, corporate executives and technology experts around the world. Global Finance magazine has named its 22nd annual survey for World's Best Foreign Exchange Providers in 113 countries including 7 different global regions, as well as the winning providers for FX research, analysis and FX trading technology.

Criteria for choosing the Foreign Exchange Providers Award winners for 2022 includes transaction volume, market share, scope of global coverage,

customer service, competitive pricing and innovative technologies. Global Finance also considered input from industry analysts, corporate executives and technology specialists.

NBK was listed among the World's Best Foreign Exchange Providers, and the best bank in the Middle East in terms of providing FX market services along major international financial institutions such as Citibank, HSBC, BBVA and Societe Generale. Holding this prestigious award for the 10th year in a row is a reaffirmation of NBK's leadership both locally and regionally, as the best provider of innovative banking solutions to its clients.

The bank is reaping the fruits of its huge investments in developing its infrastructure in line with its strides to provide high-quality services to its clients. Additionally, the significance of human capital investments, including the best banking cadres who enabled it to hold the award for 10 consecutive years.

It is worth mentioning that the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic over the last two years impacted cross-border trade and supply chains around the world. NBK's stature reasserted the importance of having a reliable banking partner, which boasts a broad geographical footprint enabling it to provide support to its clients and offer wide-spectrum solutions to help them weather these disruptions. NBK Group Treasury strives to grow its global customer base, and works continuously to develop FX electronic trading platforms to meet all the needs of its clientele. It also works to provide investment products and hedging solution to serve the customized requirements of its clients and to expand the breadth of its investment products.

Global Finance, founded in 1987 and headquartered in New York, is one of the most reputable magazines specialized in finance and economics. It has a circulation of 50,000 readers in 193 countries around the world, including senior corporate and financial officers responsible for making investment and strategic decisions at multinational companies and financial institutions.

The magazine conducts various surveys annually about innovation and profitability for banks and financial institutions all over the world, based on which it selects top performers on the regional and international levels.

to succeed year after year in achieving the title of the best Islamic bank in Kuwait. This comes as a result of our solid strategy that is based on the well-proven foundations of adoption and adaptation, through which we were able to keep pace with the ever-changing developments of the sector and meet its needs - as well as seize the diverse and numerous opportunities it has to offer. Also, our successful risk management policies have enabled us to overcome the various market challenges and ensure the continuity of our business and the stability and upwards trajectory of our financial performance."

Bukhamseen also mentioned that the WF awards are a great recognition of KIB's constant pursuit of innovating and diversifying its suite of products and services in ways that suit the requirements of the local banking sector and meet the aspirations of the Bank's customers. This includes both KIB's retail services, as well as investment opportunities which involved a series of successful and prominent financial transactions and sukuk issuances. Noting the Bank's expertise in leading and organizing such large financing operations on a bilateral basis and providing leading Islamic advisory and financing products and services has led to its robust financial footing, with the quality of its assets giving it the competitive edge in the world of Islamic banking on the local and regional level.

Concluding his statement, Bukhamseen dedicated this award once again to the entire KIB team, reiterating that every award that the Bank acquires over the course of the year is a clear reflection of their success and outstanding performance at work. He also extended his appreciation for their cooperation and perseverance over the past two years amid the unprecedented and challenging circumstances, stressing that they are the main frontliners in overcoming them.



Salma Al-Hajjaj and Gulf Bank team



Salma Al-Hajjaj, executive management and Gulf Bank team during the honoring ceremony

Gulf Bank celebrates its employees at annual ceremony

KUWAIT: Towards the end of the year, Gulf Bank held its annual end of year bank-wide recognition ceremony as part of its performance reward and recognition program.

The ceremony, which lasted for several pleasant hours, included staff from various Bank departments. It was also attended by some members of Gulf Bank executive management, who offered certificates of appreciation to the employees. Throughout the course of the event, the Bank recognized various team accomplishments in the fields of job performance, outstanding customer service, distinct commitment to high standards, and job integrity.

In this regard, General Manager of Human Resources at Gulf Bank, Salma Al-Hajjaj, commented: "Our employees are at the core of our success at Gulf Bank. In 2021, we launched several strategic

initiatives that required extraordinary attention from the bank's various teams. It's been a year of great achievements and productivity across all the business groups. And for that, I would like to thank my dear colleagues for their dedication throughout the year, and I look forward to another successful year together".

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience.

Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining a robust sustainability program at the community, economic, and environmental levels through sustainability initiatives that are strategically selected to benefit both the country and the Bank. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with the different relevant parties to achieve it.

Burgan Bank reveals winners of Yawmi draw

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced yesterday the names of the daily draw winners of its Yawmi account draw, each taking home a cash-prize of KD 5,000.

The lucky winners are:

- Fatemah Jaafar Maarafi
- Talal Zaid Al-Naqf

CBK announces winners of Al-Najma draws

KUWAIT: Commercial Bank of Kuwait conducted the weekly draws on Al-Najma Account and Salary Transfer campaign yesterday. The draws were conducted in the presence of Ministry of Commerce and Industry representative Ahmed Al-Basman.

The results of the draws were as follows:

1) Al-Najma weekly account - the prize of KD 5,000 went to the winner Badreyah Mollaq Al-Mutairi

2) Salary account campaign - the prize of up to KD 1,000 went to the winner Meshal Mohammad Al-Azmi

The bank stated that the salary campaign is aimed at customers who transfer their salaries of KD 500 or more to the Bank, especially Kuwaiti employees and residents working in the government, oil sectors and companies listed with the Bank as well as retirees, and take advantage of the benefits of this campaign and get an instant cash gift from KD 400 to KD 500 or an interest-free loan for a period of up to four years and up to KD 70,000, Kuwaiti pensioner, along with expatriate customers who transfer their debt to the bank will receive an instant cash gift of 2 percent from their transferred debt up to KD 1,000.



World Finance crowns KIB as 'Best Islamic Bank in Kuwait'

KUWAIT: In recognition of its endless contributions to the development and growth of the Islamic finance sector in Kuwait, World Finance (WF) magazine has once again, and for the eighth year, named Kuwait International Bank (KIB) as the "Best Islamic Bank in Kuwait" in 2021. As part of its annual awards program, WF also honored KIB with the "Best Customer-Focused Islamic Banking Products and Services in Kuwait 2021" award, for its provision of a cluster of integrated and exclusive Islamic Sharia-compliant banking and finance services in the market.

Since 2007, WF has been holding its annual Islamic Finance awards program to recognize and honor some of the most prominent financial and banking institutions around the globe, including KIB. Upon its nomination, the Bank was successfully able to meet the set of criteria set by WF's jury and nab both awards on the local level. That included: diversity and excellence of Islamic banking services and products, including Islamic financing, commitment to Islamic governance and transparency, strength of the digital infrastructure, technological efficiency of data security, protection, and privacy, and lastly, the inclusion and impact of its community engagement programs.

Commenting on this win, KIB's Vice Chairman and CEO, Raed Jawad Bukhamseen, said: "Despite all the different challenges we have been facing, KIB contin-



Raed Bukhamseen

RICHARD ROGERS: SHAPER OF CITY SKYLINES



Photo shows the Pompidou Centre, designed by British architect Richard Rogers. —AFP photos



Construction cranes stand near skyscrapers in the City of London, including the Heron Tower, Tower 42, 30 St Mary Axe commonly called the 'Gherkin', the Leadenhall Building, designed by Richard Rogers and commonly called the 'Cheesegrater', and 20 Fenchurch Street, commonly called the 'Walkie-Talkie' building, as they are pictured from Waterloo Bridge in London. —AFP

British architect Richard Rogers designed a series of landmark buildings around the world, including London's "Cheesegrater" and the famous multi-colored, pipe-covered Pompidou arts centre in Paris. Rogers died Saturday night aged 88, according to Britain's Press Association, which cited his spokesperson. One of his sons also confirmed his death to the New York Times, but did not give the cause.

An Italian immigrant and winner of the prestigious Pritzker prize in 2007, Rogers was a leading member of the "High Tech" school of architecture that also included Norman Foster and Renzo Piano. Together they pioneered a hyper-modern style that showcased machines and technology, overturning aesthetic principles to expose the functional elements of buildings.

Among his other notable buildings are the three-towered Lloyd's of London headquarters - which also reflected his inside-out style - and the Millennium Dome, also in London. In a 2014 BBC television series "The Brits Who Built the Modern World", Foster and Rogers were presented as the leaders in a generation of 1930s-born architects who helped shape the modern landscapes of London, Paris, Hong Kong, New York and elsewhere.

Slow start

Born in Florence in 1933, his father was a doctor, his mother a former pupil of the famed Irish writer James Joyce. The family fled the dictatorship of Mussolini, settling in England in 1938. London was miserable. The family had been comfortably middle-class in Italy but the relocation had reduced them to a single-room flat that ran on a coin meter for heating. "Life had switched from color to black-and-white," Rogers recalled in his 2017 autobiography "A Place for all People". School was no easier either. Rogers was dyslexic at a time when there was no diagnosis for the condition that "was called stupidity", he told the Guardian newspaper in 2017. He was miserable, he said in his autobiography, "crying myself to sleep every night - years of unhappiness".

'Notre Dame of the Pipes'

He left school in 1951 with no qualifications and, after his army national service, managed to gain entry into London's Architectural Association School, known for its modernism. He completed his architecture studies at Yale in the United States in 1962, where he met fellow Brit Norman Foster. They returned to England in 1964 and with their wives founded the architecture firm "Team 4", which became known for its technology-inspired designs. In



British architect Lord Richard Rogers

1968, Rogers met the Italian architect Renzo Piano with whom he shared an interest in developing a flexible and anti-monumental architecture.

"He is my closest friend, practically my brother," Rogers said of Piano - the designer of London's Shard tower - he told The Guardian. "We were the bad boys." The same year they met, they won a competition to design a new art gallery in Paris, which became the Pompidou Centre. Today a landmark of the city, its facade is covered by thick pipes painted in bold colors, with stairways and escalators on the outside of the

building. It quickly attracted a range of nicknames, not all of them complimentary: "The Gasworks", "The 'Pompidolium'", "Notre-Dame of the Pipes".

All about the space

Rogers completed some 400 commissions in a career punctuated by big-statement, skyline-defining buildings characterized by light structures, prefabricated materials and use of cutting-edge technology. He designed the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, Potsdamer Platz offices in Berlin, an airport terminal in Madrid and Three World Trade Center in New York. He was also behind London's vast white marquee with yellow crane supports known as the Millennium Dome and then the O2 Centre, a popular venue for events from pop concerts to tennis competitions. The "Cheesegrater", as the 225-metre-tall (738 feet) Leadenhall office building in central London is known because of its sleek wedge shape, opened in 2014. Although buildings were Rogers' world, he insisted it was the space around them that was the key in defining those that worked. "The two can't be judged apart," he told The Guardian in 2017. "The Twin Towers in New York, for instance. They weren't great buildings, but the space between them was." He has been married twice. One of his five sons died in 2011. —AFP



Mosaic floor with peacocks



The church's interior architecture.



San Marco Basilica: Venice symbol with Byzantine design and Eastern features

ROME: San Marco Basilica, or Basilica di San Marco in Italy, is a renowned church situated in the Italian city of Venice that has a Byzantine design and Eastern features, marking a symbol of magnificence and power. The 8,000-sq-m church, with its five domes and interior architectures, looks like Hagia Sophia Mosque in Istanbul. Standing for six centuries, the building has a distinctly Roman and Byzantine design. The church is home to many invaluable pieces in gold, silver, glass and other precious materials from various sources. —KUNA



Could video games bring NFTs to the masses?

A year ago, NFTs were obscure virtual assets known only to tech geeks-but as video game companies enter the growing market, industry players hope they're poised to go mainstream. Short for "non-fungible tokens", NFTs are digital items whose certificates of authenticity and ownership are registered on blockchains, the technology behind cryptocurrencies. From art to fashion, the creative industries have been quick to experiment with an innovation that has sparked excitement and scepticism alike in the tech sector.

Auction houses like Sotheby's now sell NFTs alongside oil paintings, while film director Quentin Tarantino is embroiled in a legal feud over NFTs from his cult movie "Pulp Fiction". And now that they're being introduced to video games, proponents hope millions of players could become familiar with an idea that remains tricky to get one's head around. "NFTs are still a niche market, but we're a really mainstream industry," Nicolas Pouard, head of blockchain initiatives at the gaming giant Ubisoft, told AFP.

Ubisoft this month launched Quartz, a platform where players can acquire NFTs called "Digits"-items within games that might take the form of weapons or vehicles. Other gaming heavyweights such as Electronic Arts-the company behind The Sims and FIFA-as well as Take-Two and Atari have also signaled an interest in NFTs. Investors have meanwhile poured \$680 million this year into French start-up Sorare, whose platform allows sports fans to trade NFT versions of old-fashioned football cards.

Three billion gamers

NFTs are collectable by nature, which makes them easy to integrate into games where the fun comes from amassing objects or points. But it's the sheer heft of the global video game industry-now estimated to be more valuable than the movie sector-that makes it ripe for introducing NFTs to a wider public.

A report by DFC Intelligence estimates that more than three billion people play video games, representing some 40 percent of the world population. Crypto evangelists argue that concepts like blockchains-digital ledgers that record all transactions publicly-are already familiar to millions of people. Some 221 million people worldwide owned cryptocurren-

cies by June, according to a study by trading site Crypto.com, a figure that had more than doubled since January.

Because of their broad-based popularity, analysts predict that games could significantly widen access to blockchain-based assets like NFTs and cryptocurrencies. Supporters say NFT games like Axie Infinity, which allow players to "play-to-earn" crypto and are popular in developing countries, are allowing ordinary people to profit from the technology. Such games have generated a "positive social and economic impact for Asian and Latin American countries", insisted Franklin Ovalles, a 40-year-old NFT collector based in Miami.

Market crash coming?

A whopping \$26.9 billion changed hands in NFT sales in 2021, according to blockchain research firm Chainalysis. Some individual NFTs have sold for staggering sums, such as a work by digital artist Beeple for \$69.3 million. Most traders, however, lose money. Only 28.5 percent of NFTs that are immediately sold after production turn a profit, said Chainalysis, although in the thriving resale market, 65.1 percent of sales are profitable. Investors also need to take into account the severe volatility of the cryptocurrencies used to trade them.

Jonathan Teplitzky of blockchain firm Horizon Labs said investors are taking risks in the NFT market as interest rates remain low. "That being said, the market crash for high-priced NFTs is coming," he predicted. But he sees this, too, as a factor that could further democratise a market that remains the preserve of a select few. "In addition to providing revenue streams from creators all over the world and eliminating barriers to access, we'll also see the NFT industry change shape to drive mass adoption," he said.

But Teplitzky suspects it will take more than the gaming industry for NFTs to become a household name. "I think NFTs will be more 'non-geeky' when non-gaming companies begin to use them," he said, suggesting that brands like McDonald's could eventually give away collectable digital items. "Once NFTs become part of everyday life, and give users perks in non-geeky establishments like a food chain or a clothing store, then they will become more mainstream," he added. "Let's be honest," he said, "most gamers are nerds." —AFP

NFTs: Much hyped, but how do they work?

NFTs have sometimes sold online for astronomical sums, with major companies now joining the craze as the tokens find their way into everything from the art market to video games. But what exactly are these digital assets, and how are they traded?

What is an NFT?

NFT stands for Non-Fungible Token. Something that is "fungible" can be exchanged with an equivalent item-for example, a \$5 bill with another \$5 bill. Cryptocurrencies, which use a digital public record of transactions called a blockchain, are fungible. NFTs are digital items that can be bought and sold using this blockchain technology. But they are not fungible, making them a different type of asset.

Some have sold for millions, including an NFT by digital artist Beeple which went under the hammer at Christie's in March for an eye-watering

\$69.3 million. Some of the most coveted NFTs are released via collections of thousands of unique individual cartoons, such as the Bored Ape Yacht Club. They are seen as intrinsically cool by their owners, who enjoy boasting of their purchases by displaying them as their social media avatars.

The tokens aren't necessarily images, though: on several websites, such as Decentraland and The Sandbox, you can buy virtual land in NFT form. Critics say investors are spending money on meaningless items, but supporters insist that NFTs are much more than digital trinkets. Some predict that using the blockchain to record the ownership history of an item will eventually become much more widespread, revolutionizing how we think about property.

How are NFTs traded?

Like cryptocurrencies, NFTs are bought and sold on specialised platforms. OpenSea is the best-

known NFT marketplace. A sale does not necessarily involve the transfer of the object depicted by the token. NFTs of famous paintings have been sold, for example, but the buyer does not receive the painting. What changes hands is a certificate of ownership of the NFT, registered on the blockchain. The certificate must be kept safe in a digital wallet, which can take various forms.

The wallet might be accessed via Metamask, a free internet browser extension, or a secure physical device. It might also take the simple form of a code printed on a piece of paper. To purchase an NFT, the wallet must contain enough of the relevant cryptocurrency-for example, ether (ETH) if the person is buying a token on the Ethereum blockchain. With a little technical know-how, it is also possible to make, or "mint", your own NFT. Ultimately, NFTs are digital contracts, with certain rules embedded such as the number of copies available for sale. —AFP

Sports

England on brink of second Test defeat

Root falls in final over of the fourth day

ADELAIDE: Joe Root fell in the final over of the fourth day yesterday to leave England in deep trouble at 82 for four chasing a massive 468 to win the second Ashes Test and needing a history-making miracle to avoid slumping 2-0 down in the series. No team has ever posted such a big score in a fourth innings to win in the history of Test cricket - with the West Indies' 418 for seven in beating Steve Waugh's Australia at St John's in 2003 the highest.

It is an even harder task at the Adelaide Oval, where Australia's 315 for six to defeat England in 1902 remains the best fourth-innings run chase. England's problems stem from losing seven wickets for 86 runs as they collapsed to 236 all out on Saturday in reply to Australia's 473 for nine declared. They reached the close with ailing skipper Root out in the last over of the day, leaving Ben Stokes unbeaten on three.

England are still 386 runs adrift, facing the near impossible task of batting three sessions on the final day to salvage a draw with only six wickets left and the world's number one ranked Test batsman, Root, back in the pavilion. "Any time one of your best players is out the team takes a knock but what you have to understand and believe is that the rest of the guys are going to fight as hard as he would," England bowling coach Jon Lewis said of Root.

"They will try to survive the day tomorrow to get ourselves out of this game with a draw. It's a big ask, I know." The hosts resumed their second innings at 45 for one and declared on 230 for nine before tea, giving their bowlers a crack at England with the pink ball as twilight loomed. They immedi-

ately made inroads with Jhye Richardson steaming in to Haseeb Hameed and the ball flying off his glove to wicketkeeper Alex Carey without scoring.

Malan trapped

Then Dawid Malan, who hit 80 in the first innings, was trapped lbw by Michael Neser for 20. Opener Rory Burns was desperate for a big score after a lean spell and managed 34, but was then beaten by Richardson's sheer pace, edging to Smith at slip. Root hurt his abdomen during a warm-up and missed the opening 85 minutes while he went for a scan. He appeared mostly untroubled while batting but late in the day took a nasty blow in the same, sensitive, area from Mitchell Starc to leave him writhing in agony. Root gingerly got up, but in a huge blow was out for 24 in the final over, caught by Carey off Starc.

With England crashing by nine wickets in the first

Test at Brisbane, their hopes are all but over of going into the Boxing Day Test at Melbourne in a week's time only 1-0 down. A 2-0 deficit in the five-match series will mean the Ashes are as good as gone. The only instance of a team coming from 2-0 down to win the urn was by Australia in the 1936-37 series. "Fantastic to get out of the night session with four wickets down and a big day tomorrow," said Australia vice-captain Travis Head. "They've still got some quality players ... I think Nathan Lyon will play a massive part, the ball is turning."

Hero and villain Buttler

Earlier, Marnus Labuschagne and Travis Head both made 51 for Australia, steadying the innings



ADELAIDE: England batsman Joe Root rolls in pain after he was struck by a delivery from Australia's Mitchell Starc on the fourth day of the second Ashes cricket Test match in Adelaide yesterday. —AFP

after England took three wickets for seven runs to start the day. Marcus Harris resumed not out 21 with nightwatchman Neser on two after they lost David Warner to an amateurish run-out the previous evening. Neser only survived seven balls before Jimmy Anderson rattled his middle stump, and Harris departed to a blinding catch from wicketkeeper Jos Buttler.

Buttler's celebrations were short-lived when he incredibly missed a regulation catch off Smith the

very next ball, in a blunder reminiscent of the two sitters he put down from Labuschagne in the first innings. But he made amends by taking another fine diving catch to remove Smith for six off Ollie Robinson. Head raced to an eighth Test half-century from 49 balls, but then pulled Robinson to Ben Stokes in the deep. Labuschagne took 96 balls to reach his 50 but also holed out to Stokes, becoming part-time spinner Malan's first Test wicket, before late cameos ahead of the declaration. —AFP

Shooting Sport Club to organize tournament

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Shooting Sport Club will organize the annual Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Shooting Tournament on 23-25 December 2021. Shooters from the Club and the National Guard will compete in the Air Pistol and Rifle besides Olympic archery for both men and women. The organizing committee has prepared the ranges at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex and registration for participation will continue until tomorrow evening when the draw to form the groups will be made. President of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations Engineer Duaij Al-Otaibi said the tournament is yet another opportunity for shooters to prepare very well ahead of the Gulf Games.



Engineer Duaij Khalaf Al-Otaibi

Salwa Sports Club Futsal team cruise to top four



By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Salwa Sports Club Futsal team cruise to the top four of the URC Women's League after defeating Al-Fatat Club 4-3 during the 10th round - taking the fourth place with 9 points. Fatat

remained in third with 19 points. The same round saw Al-Arabi beat Fatayat Al-Oyoun 11-1 to take second place with 22 points while Fatayat Al-Oyoun remained with 6 points in the fifth place.

Kuwait, the current champions, defeated Salmiya 10-5. They remained at the top with 27

points as Salmiya stay last with 6 points. The semi-final of URC Futsal League will be in the play-off format with the best two (out of three matches). The first round will be held January 8th, 2022 when Kuwait will meet Salwa followed by Arabi against Fatat.



Why is FIFA proposing a biennial World Cup?

PARIS: FIFA will hold an online summit on December 20 to discuss the feasibility of a biennial World Cup, rather than staging the competition every four years. The proposal has drawn widespread opposition from leagues, players and supporters groups, but has notably received the backing of the Confederation of African Football (CAF), which accounts for 54 of FIFA's 211 member associations. AFP Sport examines the rationale behind FIFA's plans:

Reasons for FIFA's proposal

FIFA's central argument is that a biennial World Cup would create more profits that could be distributed to federations in Africa, Asia and South America, who have a greater reliance on FIFA funds than the wealthy European leagues. President Gianni Infantino also wants to "make football truly global" and open up the tournament to smaller countries, which will partially be addressed by the expansion to 48 teams from 2026.

"When we scratch beneath the surface, we see that top football is very much confined to a small group of countries," Infantino said this week in Doha. "It is our job to narrow this gap." No team outside Europe or South America has ever reached the World Cup final. Next year's tournament will be the first held in the Middle East, with 16 of 21 previous editions organized by UEFA or CONMEBOL members. Infantino not only wants more World Cups, but more joint hosts too. "Right now, the World Cup doesn't come back to a continent for 24

years and that's more than a generation."

Who has spoken up in support?

CAF last month gave its support to FIFA's proposal, while both CONCACAF—which covers North and Central America and the Caribbean—and the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) have said they are open to the idea. It is likely to appeal to the Oceania region as well. Only five African nations will go to Qatar, prompting Ivory Coast coach Patrice Beaumelle to recently accuse FIFA of "killing African football" after his side were eliminated from qualifying. CONCACAF said in September it would consider proposals to overhaul the international calendars for men's, women's and youth football if it were to create a more balanced structure for the sport globally.

FIFA has also enlisted a host of former players and coaches, so-called "legends" who are paid as ambassadors, to promote the project, including former Manchester United and Denmark goalkeeper Peter Schmeichel. After a gathering in Doha, Schmeichel said "we all were in agreement". Brazilian World Cup winner Ronaldo insisted that if you asked the world's two best current players, Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo, "I'm sure they will all say yes."

How will it affect others?

Arsene Wenger, FIFA's head of global development, has suggested having a major international tournament every year, alternating between World

Cups and continental events like the European Championship and the Copa America. Space would be created, he claims, by staging all qualifying matches in October, or October and March, rather than spacing them out across the year.

The prospect of more men's international competitions risks diverting attention away from the women's game, but two-time Women's World Cup-winning coach Jill Ellis says the potential to spur growth cannot be ignored. "World championships are just massive focus points in terms of elevating our game, not just in terms of the economic driver of sponsors coming to the table, but I think participation probably increases too after these events," said Ellis, who led the United States to World Cup titles in 2015 and 2019. "There are a lot of reasons for us to dig into it."

What about concerns?

Wenger refutes the argument that the players would face increased strain, contending that they would have to make fewer long journeys and would have a minimum of 25 days rest after playing in summer tournaments for their countries. No timeline has been given for the implementation of FIFA's proposal, but there is a broad consensus the international match calendar—for which there is an agreement in place until 2024 — needs reforming. Manchester City and Belgium star Kevin De Bruyne has claimed a biennial competition is "not a bad idea", so long as players are granted more time to rest at the end of the season. —AFP

Upsets, further crowd trouble in French Cup

PARIS: The French Cup produced several upsets as well as more crowd trouble as the round of 64 continued on Saturday. The day after the match between Paris FC and Lyon was halted at half-time following incidents in the stands, the tie between the amateurs of JSCBA Nîmes and Ligue 1 Clermont was briefly interrupted.

The game was halted because of crowd problems in the 76th minute, but after a six-minute delay during which the riot police were deployed, Clermont completed a 4-0 victory. At Troyes, the bad behavior came from the visiting players. Nancy, bottom of the second division, collected three red cards but still hung on to beat Ligue 1 Troyes on penalties. Maxime Nonnenmacher, a 19-year-old midfielder, collected his second yellow card in the 32nd minute when he was late in a tackle on Brandon Domingues.

Nancy conceded just before half-time after Edmond Aikichi brought down Suk Hyun-Jun at a corner. Domingues sent the goalkeeper the wrong way from the spot. But the 10 men hit back when Andrew Jung deflected home a free-kick in the 75th minute. A minute later Nancy's Saliou Ciss was shown a straight red card. Souleymane Karamoko then collected a second yellow card deep into added time, leaving Nancy to play a few seconds three men down before the game ended 1-1. They won the shootout 4-2 to advance. The amateurs of AS Cannes upset visiting Ligue 2 Dijon, also on penalties after a 1-1 draw. The visitors took the lead just after half-time but Cannes leveled in the 73rd minute. Nantes, 10th in Ligue 1, were pushed to penalties by Sochaux of Ligue 2 but kept their nerve to advance. Angel Gomes and Jonathan David both scored as Lille beat second-tier Auxerre 3-1, while 2019 winners Rennes overcame Lorient 1-0. Paris Saint-Germain, who have lifted the cup six of the past seven years, take on fifth-tier Feignies Aulnoy yesterday. —AFP

Sports

Barcelona in sight of La Liga's top 4 again

Barca's young guns deliver late win over Elche

MADRID: Barcelona are in sight of La Liga's top four again after 19-year-old Nico Gonzalez scored a late winner to seal a much-needed victory over Elche before Atletico Madrid were beaten by Sevilla. Nico's strike came after the 22-year-old Ferran Jugla, making his full debut, and the 17-year-old Gavi had earlier given Barca a two-goal lead at Camp Nou.

But Elche scored twice in 96 seconds shortly after the hour as Tete Morente and Pere Milla pulled the visitors level, only for Nico to drag Barcelona to a 3-2 victory. And the result got even better for Barca's top-four chase after Atletico lost 2-1 away at Sevilla, Lucas Ocampos smashing home in the 88th minute at the Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan to consign Atleti to a third consecutive league defeat.

"It's a difficult moment but I'm calm," said Diego Simeone. "I trust in the squad we have." Barcelona are now seventh, two points behind Atletico and three behind Rayo Vallecano in fourth, yet having played one game fewer than Rayo. Sevilla are second, five points behind Real Madrid, who play at home to Cadiz on Sunday. Gavi's goal made him Barcelona's third youngest ever scorer in La Liga at 17 years and 135 days, younger even than Lionel Messi when he opened his account aged 17 years and 331 days.

Jugla also registered his first professional goal, after coming off the bench last weekend against Osasuna and then scoring against Boca Juniors on Tuesday in the Maradona Cup, an exhibition match held in honor of Diego Maradona. Nico's goal completed another exciting night for Barca's young guns, less than a week after Xavi said his veterans needed to do more, insisting they could not rely on the next generation to deliver every week. "Gavi, Nico, Abde, (Ronald) Araujo, (Alex) Balde, they are the future of the club," Xavi said. "I played here

when I was 18 and I was scared but they let their personality show."

Impressive Gavi

Gavi, though, was particularly impressive, the teenager scoring a superb individual goal in the first half, before then assisting Nico's winner late in the second. "What's surprising is his age, he's 17 and look how he competes," said Xavi. "Today he made the difference with a goal and an assist. More than anything his work is spectacular. We're happy to have him and I don't want to compare him to anyone. There's no ceiling for him." Barcelona were cruising after they scored twice in three minutes. Jugla had already shown a sharp finish early on but was offside before he headed in Ousmane Dembele's swinging corner at the front post in the 16th minute.

And in the 19th, it was two, Gavi with a spectacular goal to put his team in control. He spotted Omar Mascarell approaching behind him when Clement Lenglet played the ball and he flicked it with his right foot away from his marker, his body spinning away into the space. Gavi drove forward and when he reached the edge of the box, fired the ball low into the corner. But Elche had openings on the break and it was two substitutes that dragged them back into the game just after the hour.

First, a superb counter-attack began down the left as Dembele's press was beaten too easily and Lucas Boye did well to keep the ball in off the line. He switched it right to Morente, who smashed in. Only 96 seconds had passed before they were celebrating again. Morente freed again down the right and this time crossing to the back post where Milla's header could only be palmed in off the post by Marc-Andre ter Stegen. Frenkie de Jong, linked with an exit in the



BARCELONA: Elche's Chilean defender Enzo Roco (left) vies with Barcelona's Moroccan forward Abde Ezzalzouli during the Spanish league football match between FC Barcelona and Elche CF at the Camp Nou stadium on December 18, 2021. —AFP

January transfer window, departed to whistles in the 76th minute but a tense atmosphere turned joyous in the 85th.

Gavi was at the heart of it again, a neat one-two with Dembele sending the teenager to the line, where he had the composure to pull back for Nico who

poked in on the stretch. Atletico almost took a point from Sevilla after Felipe cancelled out a stunning goal from Ivan Rakitic before half-time. But Sevilla snatched victory at the end, Jules Kounde keeping the ball alive at the back post after a scramble in the box, which allowed Ocampos to slam in from close range. —AFP

Arsenal consolidate their EPL's position, crush Leeds

LEEDS: Arsenal consolidated their position in the Premier League's top four with a 4-1 rout of Leeds in the only Premier League match on Saturday to survive a wave of coronavirus postponements. Two goals from Gabriel Martinelli and Bukayo Saka's deflected strike put the Gunners 3-0 up before half-time.

Raphinha's penalty pulled a goal back, but Emile Smith Rowe rounded off a miserable week for Leeds after their 7-0 thrashing at Manchester City on Tuesday. "We were really lucky to play today with everything that's happening," said Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta. "I told the players to enjoy the game and give everything because I don't know how this will develop."

Arteta's own positive case back in March 2020 accelerated the Premier League's shutdown for three months at the start of the coronavirus pandemic. Six of the 10

matches in the English top-flight scheduled for this weekend have been called off due to a surge in cases due to the new Omicron variant of the virus. A meeting of the 20 Premier League clubs will take place today to decide whether to go ahead with the Boxing Day fixtures next weekend or to halt the season temporarily.

Arteta has called for more consistency in the decision making over when matches are called off after the Gunners were forced to play their season-opening game against Brentford in August despite an outbreak. "Now it's play as you can and we'll play as we can," said Arteta. "The Premier League will make the best decision for everybody, but we want to play all under the same rules. That's where I think they have to come forward. Whatever they decide is best for the competition has to be explained."

Leeds boss Marcelo Bielsa described his side's performance at the Etihad in midweek as the worst in his four years in charge and there was no sign of any improvement from his injury-hit squad. However, the Elland Road crowd remained behind the Argentine as they chanted his name in the closing stages. Bielsa was without England internationals Kalvin Phillips and Patrick Bamford, captain Liam Cooper and Spain forward Rodrigo amid an injury crisis that saw 15-



LEEDS: Arsenal's Brazilian striker Gabriel Martinelli (left) jumps up as Leeds United's French goalkeeper Illan Meslier (right) clears the ball during the English Premier League football match between Leeds United and Arsenal on December 18, 2021. —AFP

year-old Archie Gray earn a spot on the bench. "The first half we could have lost it by more goals," admitted Bielsa. —AFP

Kazma beat Arabi to remain on top

By Ahmad Jabr

KUWAIT: Kazma emerged victorious from its showdown with titleholders Al-Arabi on Saturday to remain on top of the Kuwait Premier League standings with 13 points. Meanwhile, the 1-0 loss adds to Al-Arabi's woes as they suffered their second defeat this season and sit in sixth place with seven points from five matches. Shubaib Al-Khaldi scored the visitors' goal in the match held at Al-Arabi's Sabah Al-Salem Stadium.

Kazma's ambitions will be put to test when they host second-place Kuwait. Kuwait had beaten ninth-place Al-Fahaheel 2-0 on Wednesday to raise its total points to 12, level

with Qadisiya who remain in third place on goal difference following their 3-1 win against last-place Al-Yarmouk. Meanwhile, Al-Nasr's title hopes were dealt a major blow when they lost to eighth-place Al-Shabab 2-1 on Friday. They dropped to fifth place following the loss, leaving the fourth spot to Salmiya who went up one spot in the standings after their 2-2 draw with seventh-place Al-Tadhamon.

Qadisiya could climb to the top of the league if they beat Salmiya and the Kazma vs Kuwait matchup ends in a draw. Meanwhile, Al-Nasr host Al-Arabi on Friday in a match that could help boost or end title hopes for either team.



KUWAIT: Kazma's goalkeeper Hussain Kankoune reaches for the ball during the Kuwait Premier League match against Al-Arabi on Saturday. —KUNA

Premier League's schedule decimated by COVID-19 chaos

LONDON: Arsenal's 4-1 win at Leeds was the only action of a Premier League Saturday decimated by coronavirus call-offs with five games postponed due to outbreaks. Aston Villa's home match with Burnley became the latest casualty of surging infection rates across Britain due to the Omicron strain of COVID-19 following a worsening outbreak among the Villa squad.

Just four games are now due to be played in total this weekend out of the original 10, with the growing crisis causing chaos during the busiest time in the English football calendar. Three games are still listed for Sunday-Manchester City's clash with Newcastle, Wolves v Chelsea and Tottenham v Liverpool.

Tottenham revealed they will be missing just two players after an outbreak affecting at least 13 players and staff saw their last three matches postponed. However, the justification for that match going ahead in front of a 62,000 crowd was called into question after London's mayor Sadiq Khan declared a "major incident" in the capital due to the spiking case numbers. The British government on Friday reported 93,045 new coronavirus cases, a third consecutive record daily tally, as the new variant fuels a surge in infections across the country. A meeting of Premier League clubs today is set to decide whether to continue with the intention of playing games where safe to do so or to temporarily halt the campaign as a firebreak for the infection rate. In the three divisions below the Premier League, 19 of the 36 games in the English Football League (EFL) were called off this weekend.

But EFL chairman Rick Parry said there was no scientific evidence a short break would help. "If we think a circuit breaker will help we will do it but, at the moment, there's no scientific evidence to suggest that it will help," Parry told the BBC. "We've got to stick together, stay calm and keep making balanced decisions on the basis of the latest information." —AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000	Khaldiya	24848075
Amiri Hospital	22450005	Kaifan	24849807
Maternity Hospital	24843100	Shamiya	24848913
Mubarak Al-Kabir		Shuwaikh	24814507
Hospital	25312700	Abdullah Salem	22549134
Chest Hospital	24849400	Nuzha	22526804
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010	Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Adan Hospital	23940620	Qadisiya	22515088
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300	Dasmah	22532265
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000	Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9	Shaab	22518752
		Qibla	22459381
		Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
		Mirqab	22456536
		Sharq	22465401

Clinics

Kalzen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144

CHANGE OF NAME

I, RIZWAN AHMED (Old Name) H.No. 41-356, Kothapeta, Kurnool Dist. A.P. have changed my name as SHAIK RIZWAN AHMED. (C 0855) 19-12-2021

For labor-related inquiries and complaints:
Call **MSALHOTLINE 128**

Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is **1889988**

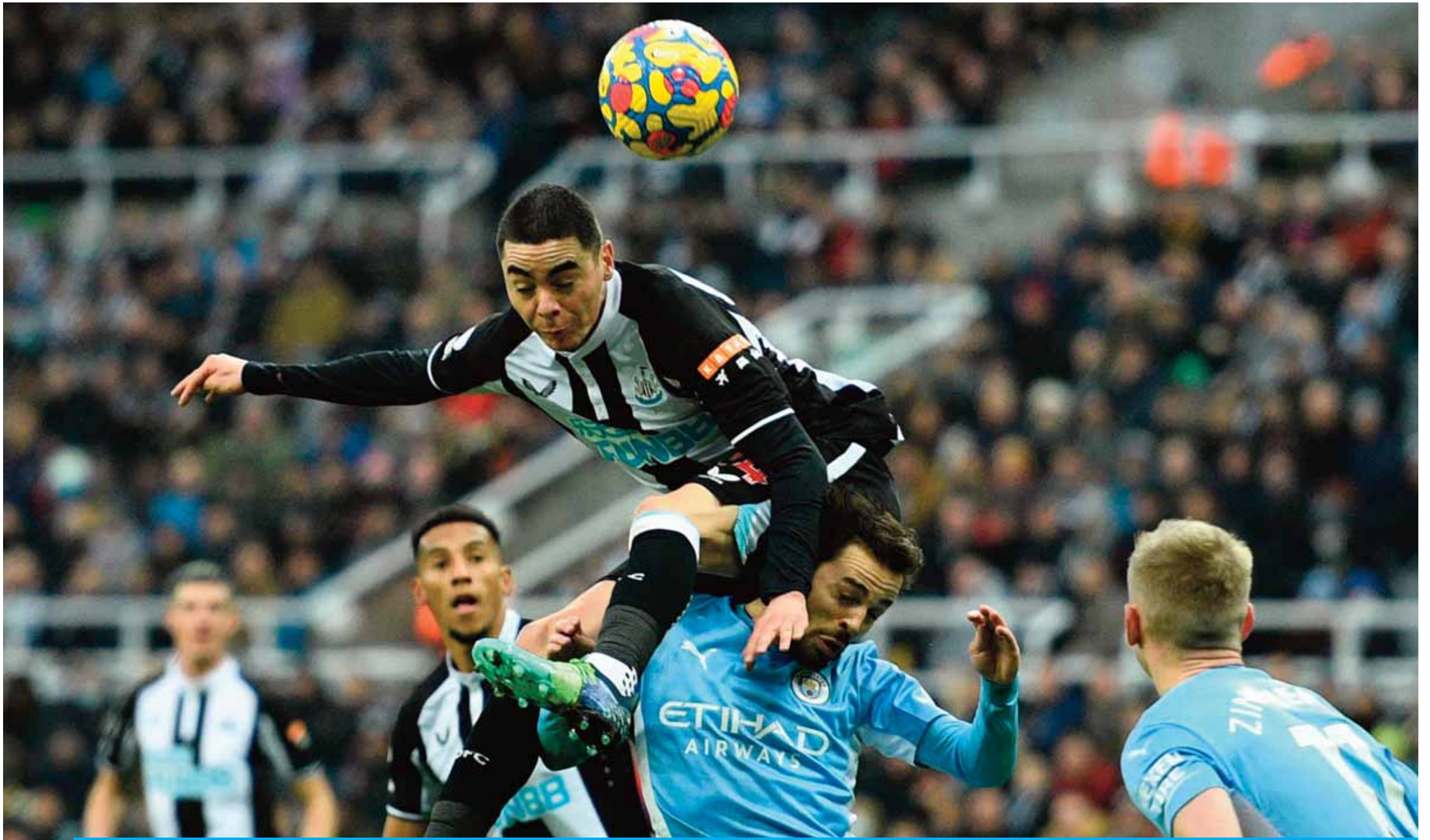
EMERGENCY ☎ 112

NOTICE

We are
Al-Tahany Al Moatamada General Trading and Contracting Company,
the agent of Kolin Construction, Tourism, Industry and Trading Company, we announce the end of the working relationship between us and **Mr. Hakan Tirataci** and he doesn't represent our companies in it's dealing with others.

Man City top Christmas charts

COVID-hit Chelsea held by Wolves



NEWCASTLE: Newcastle United's Paraguayan midfielder Miguel Almiron (up) vies with Manchester City's Portuguese midfielder Bernardo Silva (2nd right) during the English Premier League football match between Newcastle United and Manchester City yesterday. — AFP

LONDON: COVID-hit Chelsea were held to a goalless draw by Wolves yesterday after the Premier League rejected their request to postpone the game as Manchester City put struggling Newcastle to the sword. Just four games were left on the schedule this weekend out of the original 10 as Britain's worsening coronavirus crisis took its toll on the Premier League.

Clubs will meet today to discuss what action to take, with growing questions over the integrity of the competition as the busy festive period looms. Stumbling Chelsea, who have struggled with illness and injuries in recent weeks, were only able to name four outfield players on the bench for their match at Molineux. The visitors, who have now won just two of their past six league games, enjoyed the bulk of possession but mustered just one shot on target and are now six points behind leaders City.

Thomas Tuchel was without Romelu Lukaku, Timo Werner and Callum Hudson-Odoi, who have all tested positive for COVID-19. Jorginho, Kai Havertz and Ruben Loftus-Cheek were also not in the squad. Chelsea earlier confirmed that their

request to have the game called off been turned down. The European champions' request is understood to have been rejected because the Blues were deemed to have had enough players to fulfill the fixture according to Premier League regulations.

"We did ask to postpone the game," Tuchel confirmed before kick-off. "We thought we had a strong case regarding the security and the health of the players. "We have seven positive cases and every single day we've had another positive case coming in. We travelled together for three hours on the bus, we are in meetings together, we have lunch and dinners together. The situation does not feel like it will stop."

Newcastle calamity

Defending champions City crushed Newcastle 4-0 to confirm their position at the top of the table at Christmas. Eddie Howe's side shot themselves in the foot in just the fifth minute, when calamitous defending handed City the lead after goalkeeper Martin Dubravka had carelessly conceded a corner.

The defense only half-cleared and Joao Cancelo hooked the ball back into the six-

yard box. Newcastle appeared to be in little danger but Ciaran Clark inexplicably chose not to make a simple headed clearance and Ruben Dias headed the loose ball into the net. The home side rallied and Joelinton went close to equalizing with a stinging shot from distance that flew just wide of Ederson's right-hand post.

But City silenced the passionate crowd at St James's Park shortly before the half-hour, when Cancelo jinked his way past Joe Willock and Isaac Hayden before smashing a right-footed shot past the helpless Dubravka from the edge of the area. City maintained their firm grip on the match in the second half, with Riyad Mahrez and Raheem Sterling doubling their lead. Pep Guardiola's City have now won eight league games in a row to move four points clear of second-placed Liverpool, who are in action at Tottenham later on.

But relegation-threatened Newcastle remain three points from safety having now played two games more than Watford, who are just outside the drop zone. The Magpies' wealthy new Saudi-backed owners have indicated they will invest signifi-



WOLVERHAMPTON: Chelsea's Spanish defender Marcos Alonso takes a throw in during the English Premier League football match between Wolverhampton Wanderers and Chelsea yesterday. — AFP

World Cup: After Arab Cup, Qatar faces bigger test

DOHA: Qatar passed their first test with a successful hosting of the Arab Cup but bigger challenges lie ahead when 1.2 million fans and 32 international teams arrive for the World Cup one year from now. Algerian rejoicing at Saturday's 2-0 extra-time win over Tunisia in the final—exactly a year before the 2022 World Cup decider, and with FIFA president Gianni Infantino in the stands—will have been accompanied by satisfaction from Qatari officials.

But now comes the hard work as Qatar prepares for the unique task of hosting a World Cup in and around a single city, Doha, with limited hotel accommodation and a transport network that is likely to come under strain. The wealthy Gulf state will also be bracing for intense scrutiny after coming under fire over the rights of the migrant laborers who have built its infrastructure, including the World Cup stadiums. And it will be mindful of a cul-

tural gap when fans from around the world arrive in a conservative Muslim country with restricted access to alcohol, and where public drunkenness and homosexual relations are illegal.

More than 600,000 tickets were sold for the 16-team Arab Cup, including a Qatari-record 63,439 crowd when the hosts played fierce rivals the United Arab Emirates in the quarter-finals. Six of the eight World Cup venues were employed as Qatar took the chance to test its stadiums and training sites, transport, accommodation, volunteers and other areas including security. A fan ID system was dropped midway through the tournament following reports of long queues and complaints from fans, but crowd trouble appeared limited to some damaged seats at the quarter-final between Tunisia and Oman.

'Lessons learned'

Qatar will "take account of the lessons learned to organize the best World Cup", said Jassim Al-Jassim, the organising committee's vice-president of operations. The Lusail Stadium, which will host the World Cup final, was notably not used for the tournament. In October, its project manager told AFP that it still needed final checks and tests. — AFP

Raptors overpower Warriors as Pistons lose 14th straight

LOS ANGELES: Fred VanVleet finished with 27 points and 12 assists and Scottie Barnes tallied 21 points as the Toronto Raptors rolled over the under-manned Golden State Warriors 119-100 on Saturday. The Warriors were missing several of their top players, including Stephen Curry and Draymond Green, who had been on the current road trip but did not make the trip to Canada. Warriors coach Steve Kerr elected to send them home after a win over Boston on Friday rather than risk them getting the coronavirus and have to potentially quarantine in Canada.

Andre Iguodala (right knee), Otto Porter Jr. (left foot) and Andrew Wiggins (left knee) were also sent back to California. The Warriors dressed just nine players for the fifth game of their eight day road swing. The Raptors were playing for the first time since Thursday's game against the Chicago

Bulls was postponed for COVID-19 reasons. The Raptors were also missing key performers as an hour before tipoff, forward Pascal Siakam and guard Dalano Banton entered health protocols.

"There's a heck of a lot of testing going on right now," said Toronto coach Nick Nurse. Making his first NBA start, rookie Jonathan Kuminga led Golden State with a season-best 26 points. The Raptors jumped out to a 25-10 lead in the first eight minutes. VanVleet had eight points, Chris Boucher had seven and Barnes six during the early scoring burst. "I thought we played a lot better in the second half, competed better," Kerr said. "In the first half, we were on our heels and didn't have a lot of juice and confidence."

Elsewhere, Christian Wood scored a team high 21 points and grabbed eight rebounds as the Houston Rockets handed the Detroit Pistons their 14th consecutive loss with a 116-107 victory. Playing against his former team, Wood led the Rockets who had all five starters scoring in double figures. "I was concerned, because this was our sixth game in nine days and we were starting at noon," Rockets coach Stephen Silas said. "Our first unit really got us off to a good start. Josh (Christopher) set the tone and then Christian worked himself into the game." — AFP

cantly in the squad but before the January transfer window opens they have fixtures against Manchester United and Everton. Liverpool's preparations for their Premier

League visit to Spurs were hit after Thiago Alcantara became the latest of Jurgen Klopp's players to return a suspected positive test for COVID. — AFP