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14 **Nadal tests positive for COVID in latest blow**



10-day home quarantine for arrivals, 3 if PCR negative

Booster shot must be taken within 9 months after second dose

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The Cabinet yesterday imposed a 10-day home quarantine on all arriving passengers starting from Sunday, Dec 26, as the number of new coronavirus cases reported in the country increased slightly. At an extraordinary meeting, the Cabinet decided that passengers arriving in Kuwait must carry a certificate of a negative PCR test conducted within 48 hours instead of 72.

Arrivals must then undergo home quarantine for

10 days, but the period can be reduced if a PCR test taken 72 hours after arrival is negative, a Cabinet statement said. The statement said travel must be restricted only when "necessary" and people must continue to observe health conditions and precautionary measures.

The Cabinet statement also said people who had taken the second COVID vaccine dose more than nine months ago are no longer considered to be immune unless they take the third booster dose. This means that Kuwait no longer considers vaccines

administered nine months ago as sufficient to protect people against the coronavirus.

In recent days, health authorities have reported a slight increase in the number of new coronavirus cases after more than two months of extremely low cases. Based on statistics provided by the health ministry, between Oct 10 and Dec 10, Kuwait reported fewer than 40 cases daily and as low as 12 cases on one day, with the percentage of infection dropping to as low as 0.1 percent. But in the past five days, the ministry has reported more than 40 cases daily, with

75 cases on Sunday and 81 on Friday. Kuwait has reported only a few deaths in the past two months.

The Cabinet's measures come amid worldwide panic over the new COVID-19 Omicron variant which has hit several European countries, especially the United Kingdom, where Kuwaitis prefer to spend their holidays. Kuwait has so far reported just one Omicron case in a European man who arrived from an African nation that has reported several Omicron cases. The name of the country and the man's nationality were not revealed.

News in brief

New Year holiday on Jan 2

KUWAIT: The Cabinet announced yesterday that Sunday, January 2, 2022 will be a holiday in lieu of the New Year's Day holiday, which falls on Saturday.

Dubai airport fully operational

DUBAI: Dubai airport, one of the world's busiest travel hubs, is fully operational for the first time since the coronavirus pandemic erupted in March 2020, officials said yesterday, even as the UAE recorded a rise of infections amid fears of the new Omicron variant. "Following the opening of the final phase... (the) airport is 100 percent operational with all terminals, concourses, lounges, restaurants, and retail outlets now open," a statement said. — AFP

Egypt jails key revolution figure

CAIRO: Egypt yesterday sentenced Alaa Abdel Fattah, a leading figure in the 2011 revolution, to five years in jail, with two others receiving four years. A computer programmer, blogger and high-profile activist who mobilized youths in the uprising that unseated autocrat Hosni Mubarak, Abdel Fattah had been in pre-trial detention since Sept 2019. Abdel Fattah, his lawyer Mohamed Al-Baqer and the blogger Mohamed "Oxygen" Ibrahim were convicted of "broadcasting false news" in their trial in Cairo. — AFP

US cities locked in grim spiral of record murders

WASHINGTON: Several American cities, both large and small, have seen a record number of homicides this year, a deadly spiral born at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic last year and which the authorities are still struggling to control. A convergence of factors is to blame, according to experts interviewed by AFP: the painful reverberations of the coronavirus and of the varied traumas it triggered; an economic recovery that has left minority groups lagging far behind; and a record profusion of guns in the country.

Philadelphia has broken a gruesome record set in 1990 with at least 535 homicides this year in a population of 1.5 million. The "City of Brotherly Love" thus surpassed both New York and Los Angeles, the two largest US cities. "In Philadelphia, like a lot of major cities, we are poor," said Dorothy Johnson-Speight, who heads the nonprofit group Mothers in Charge.

Continued on Page 2

Over 700,000 flock to Saudi music festival

RIYADH: Record crowds of over 700,000 revelers flocked to Saudi Arabia's MDLBeast Soundstorm music festival, authorities said yesterday, at the end of the four-day event in the oil-rich desert kingdom. The electronic music festival comes as Saudi's leaders are pushing efforts to change its conservative image and diversify its economy, only a few years after the country lifted a ban on music and dancing.

International entertainers and musicians - including superstar French DJ David Guetta - performed at the event. The festival, which ended on a Sunday, comes as Saudi Arabia sees a spike in coronavirus cases amid increased fears over the spread of the new omicron variant. Saudi Arabia has recorded the highest number of COVID-related deaths among Arab Gulf countries, with more than 8,860 fatalities.

Continued on Page 2



BANBAN, Saudi Arabia: People attend the Soundstorm music festival, organized by MDLBEAST, on the outskirts of the Saudi capital Riyadh on Dec 16, 2021. — AFP

Philippines typhoon death toll hits 375

SURIGAO CITY, Philippines: The death toll from the strongest typhoon to hit the Philippines this year surged to 375 yesterday, as desperate survivors pleaded for urgent supplies of drinking water and food. The Philippine Red Cross reported "complete carnage" in coastal areas after Super Typhoon Rai left homes, hospitals and schools "ripped to shreds". The storm tore off roofs, uprooted trees, toppled concrete power poles, smashed wooden houses

to pieces, wiped out crops and flooded villages - sparking comparisons to the damage caused by Super Typhoon Haiyan in 2013.

"Our situation is so desperate," said Ferry Asuncion, a street vendor in the hard-hit seaside city of Surigao, which was devastated by the storm. Residents urgently needed "drinking water and food", he said. At least 375 people were killed and 56 are missing in the latest disaster to hit the archipelago, with 500 more injured, the national police said.

More than 380,000 people fled their homes and beachfront resorts as Rai slammed into the country on Thursday. One of the hardest-hit islands was Bohol - known for its

Continued on Page 2



DEL CARMEN, Philippines: Tricycles speed past fallen coconut trees along a highway in this town on Siargao island yesterday, days after Super Typhoon Rai hit the province. — AFP

Separated Yemeni twins return home

SANAA: Conjoined twin boys from war-torn Yemen who were successfully separated in surgery in Jordan returned to the capital Sanaa this month, the UN children's agency said yesterday. Ahmed and Mohammed were born on Dec 16 last year, joined at the chest and abdomen, in Sanaa, the country's rebel-held capital, UNICEF said. They were transported to Jordan after urgent calls for their medical evacuation and surgery.

The twins were separated in July at Amman's Speciality Hospital in a nearly eight-hour operation involving 25 surgeons and technical advisers. The twins were seven months old at the time. Their father, Yasser Albukhaity, was all smiles upon returning to Sanaa on a United Nations medical flight. "I can't express my feelings," he said, according to the statement, while the agency released pictures of the flight dated Dec 2.

"There was a feeling of fear at the beginning, but we had great faith in Allah and in the medical team. Thank God the surgery was a big success. I wish for them to be educated like other children, to finish their higher studies, and to be of great benefit for their country in the future."

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SANAA: A handout picture released on Dec 2, 2021 shows conjoined twins Mohamed and Ahmed in the hands of their parents after arriving in the Yemeni capital. — AFP

Local

Crown Prince to represent Amir at tonight's Amir Cup final

Qadsia, Kuwait face off in 59th Amir Football Cup final match

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah will sponsor the final match of His Highness' Cup tonight. The final encounter that pits Al-Qadsia SC against Kuwait SC will be held at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium. His Highness the Amir has designated His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to attend the match on his behalf.

The final match of the 59th Football Cup of His Highness the Amir will kick off at 06:45 pm with a

pre-game special ceremony. Al-Qadsia SC aims to claim the championship title for the 17th time, and becoming the team with most wins, especially as it is currently tied with Al-Arabi with 16 titles. Al-Qadsia and Al-Arabi are followed by Kuwait SC with 14 wins, and it aspires to reduce the difference by winning the title this upcoming match.

The two teams faced off previously during the finals of His Highness the Amir Football Cup eight times, and each won four times, making it hard to predict who will win the final match. This will be

the first match which will not feature extra time in case of a tie and the two teams would hold penalty shoot-outs after the original time ends in a draw. The first Amir Cup was held in the 1961-1962 season. Al-Qadsia and Al-Arabi won their titles 16 times ever since, Kuwait SC 14 times, Al-Kazma SC won seven times, Al-Salmiya SC and Al-Yarmouk SC won the title twice, while Al-Fahaheel won one time.

His Highness the Amir's sovereign patronage of the game and the presence of His Highness the

Crown Prince reflect the care of the leadership for sports, and the football sport in particular, Kuwait Football Association (KFA) Chairman Sheikh Ahmad Al-Youssef Al-Sabah said in a press release. Sheikh Ahmad expressed gratitude to His Highness the Amir for his sovereign patronage of the competition and to His Highness the Crown Prince for his kind attendance of the final game. He appreciated the efforts made by the various state departments to set the stage for the match and ensure its success. — KUNA

Kuwaiti cartoonists unveil 50 caricatures at Expo 2020 Dubai



DUBAI: Kuwait Caricature Society's fair at Kuwait Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai. — KUNA photos



Artworks displayed at the fair.



Kuwait Caricature Society's chief Mohammad Al-Hajeri and society members at Kuwait's Pavilion.



A workshop for children at the society's fair.

DUBAI: More than a dozen Kuwaiti cartoonists are displaying some 50 caricatures for art aficionados attending the ongoing Expo 2020 Dubai, the first

global fair to be held in the Middle East region. "These works on display show just how far caricature art has come in Kuwait and the wider Gulf Arab

region," said Kuwait Caricature Society chief Mohammad Al-Hajeri in a statement to the press. Kuwaiti artists are eager to use a grand stage such

as Expo 2020 Dubai to give their works some global exposure, he said, adding that caricature art in Kuwait has flourished in recent years. — KUNA

Philippines typhoon death...

Continued from Page 1

beaches, "Chocolate Hills" and tiny tarsier primates - where at least 94 people have died, provincial Governor Arthur Yap said on Facebook. In Bohol's coastal town of Ubay, a state of calamity has been declared, with many wooden houses flattened and fishing boats destroyed.

A senior official at the national disaster agency said he had not expected as many deaths. "I was proven wrong as it appears now coming from the reports," said Casiano Monilla, deputy administrator for operations. Rai hit the Philippines late in the typhoon season: Most cyclones develop between July and October. Scientists have long warned that typhoons are becoming more powerful and strengthening more rapidly as the world becomes warmer because of human-driven climate change.

The Philippines - ranked among the most vulnerable nations to the impacts of climate change - is hit by an average of 20 storms every year, which typically wipe out harvests, homes and infrastructure in already impoverished areas. In 2013, Typhoon Haiyan was the strongest storm ever to have made landfall, leaving over 7,300 people dead or missing. The death toll from Rai is

not expected to get anywhere close to that number.

The Philippines has an established disaster management system that provides early warnings of approaching storms and moves vulnerable communities into evacuation centers. But the storm has dealt a savage blow to the tourism sector, which was already struggling after COVID-19 restrictions decimated visitor numbers.

"SOS" has been painted on a road in the tourist town of General Luna on Siargao Island, where surfers and holidaymakers had flocked ahead of Christmas, as people struggled to find water and food. "There's no water anymore, there's a water shortage, on day one there was already looting in our neighborhood," Siargao resort owner Marja O'Donnell told CNN Philippines.

There has also been widespread destruction on Dinagat and Mindanao islands, which along with Siargao bore the brunt of the storm when it hit, packing wind speeds of 195 km per hour. Police reported 167 deaths in the Caraga region, which includes Dinagat, Siargao and the northeastern part of Mindanao. At least 14 people died on the Dinagat Islands, provincial information officer Jeffrey Crisostomo told broadcaster ABS-CBN, saying the area had been "levelled to the ground".

But letters written by Dinagat residents, and posted to Facebook, expressed hope. "We are happy to be alive," Aimee Antonio-Jimeno wrote to her sister. "Our houses are roofless but we are not hopeless!" With electricity knocked out in many areas, there is no signal or internet, hampering efforts to assess the storm's damage. — AFP

The rise of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in 2017 has ushered in a number of reforms. A social shift in the conservative Gulf state has included the lifting of a ban on women driving and allowing mixed-gender concerts and other events. For the young Saudi woman, who spoke on condition of anonymity, such events have been beneficial in offering younger generations an outlet.

"We are thirsty for music, entertainment, movies, laughter and outings. It's like we're rediscovering our country and that makes us very happy," she said. Saudi Arabia is seeking to diversify its economy away from oil, investing heavily in recent years in the tourism, entertainment and sports sectors. While the sweeping social changes have been embraced by many, some remain apprehensive. "How is it possible that these scenes are in the country with (Islam's) two holiest sites," tweeted one person, alongside a video of men and women dancing together. — AFP

US cities locked in grim spiral of...

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"We're talking about a poor educational system, housing issues, resources for families that need support... We have a very high rate of food insecurity."

After the death of her son - killed at 24 in a pointless argument over a parking space - she created the group in 2003 to fight against violence in this eastern city known as the cradle of American democracy. Mothers in Charge, which organizes anger-management sessions and supports families of homicide victims, had to limit its activities for months due to the pandemic. The absence of such support "kind of escalates anger," Johnson-Speight said. "When you don't have a place to go with it, or you don't know how to handle it and you're not getting support with it, yeah, it can be worse."

The numbers are dramatic, in both big and medium-sized cities: the federal capital of Washington has seen at least 211 homicides, while smaller or medium-sized cities like Albuquerque, New Mexico (with 100), Portland, Oregon (at least 70) and Richmond, Virginia (80) have also set records. "In simple terms, this country has lost its damn mind," said David Thomas, a retired policeman who teaches criminology classes at Florida Gulf Coast University.

"People are just angry. They're just off about everything. And with that frustration, their coping mechanisms seem to fail," he added. Young people, particularly those of color, "have these beefs, they get mad at each other, and they play it out on Facebook, then it

ends up in a shooting," said Thomas, who is African-American. "There's no respect, and there's no value for human life." Johnson-Speight also blames the influence of so-called drill music or drill rap - a type of hip hop characterized by dark and brutally violent themes. In the videos, young people see drill rappers "showing the different kinds of guns that are available" while playing aggressive music. "It's dancing, it's entertainment, but it's guns, guns, and more guns," she said. "It's like, 'Go-Kill-Somebody 101.'"

But for crime analyst Jeff Asher and for many other specialists, the leading cause of the surge in homicides is "the huge increase in gun sales" since the pandemic began. Gun sales set a record in 2020, with nearly 23 million sold, according to the Small Arms Analytics & Forecasting consultancy, which expects a still-high figure of 20 million sales this year. "Everybody has a gun," said Michael Pflieger, a Catholic priest and long-time anti-violence activist in Chicago. "A gun now has become the first line of defense and offense to many people. The people on the street will tell you, 'You know, I gotta have a gun because everybody else does.'" His city of Chicago, in the northern Midwest, has suffered for years from violence and corruption. This year it has already passed the grim mark of 800 homicides - a record that had stood since 1994. Most of the killings involve settling of scores between street rivals, and most victims are African American, often children struck by stray bullets.

Some American liberals have pushed a "defund the police" initiative aimed at transferring part of city budgets from law enforcement to social programs meant to address underlying causes of violence. Pflieger thinks the push for defunding is not helpful. "It is not about getting rid of the police," he said, "but getting rid of programs that are not working and taking that funding and putting it into community programs to help prevent violence." — AFP

ices in the country. A UN Development Program report last month said the war will have claimed 377,000 lives by the end of the year through both direct and indirect impacts.

More than 80 percent of the population of around 30 million require humanitarian assistance. "This is a welcome happy ending story of one family, but millions of children in Yemen continue to suffer in silence," said Philippe Duamelle, UNICEF's Yemen representative, in a statement. "In Yemen, today more than ever, children need our support to realize their fundamental rights to health, nutrition, education, protection, as well as water, sanitation and hygiene." — AFP

Over 700,000 flock to Saudi...

Continued from Page 1

Over the four days, 732,000 people flocked to the event, "one of the largest music festivals in the world", said Turki al-Sheikh, head of Saudi's General Entertainment Authority. The festival has since its launch in 2019 witnessed large crowds, most of them young men and women, who can freely mingle and dance to western music. "We've never seen anything like this in Riyadh before - crowds, music, VIP rooms, unconventional clothing for the kingdom," one Saudi woman, who attended the festival, told AFP.

Separated Yemeni twins...

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Yemen has been torn by war since 2014, when the Iran-backed Houthi rebels seized Sanaa from the government, which is supported by a Saudi-led military coalition. The conflict, which the UN calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis, has devastated health serv-

Local

Kuwait foreign minister heads delegation at UK-GCC talks

Sheikh Dr Ahmad meets UK counterpart on sidelines of joint talks



LONDON: A group photo of participants in the GCC-UK talks. —KUNA photos

LONDON: Kuwait's Foreign Minister and State Minister for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah headed yesterday the Kuwaiti delegation partaking in the joint talks

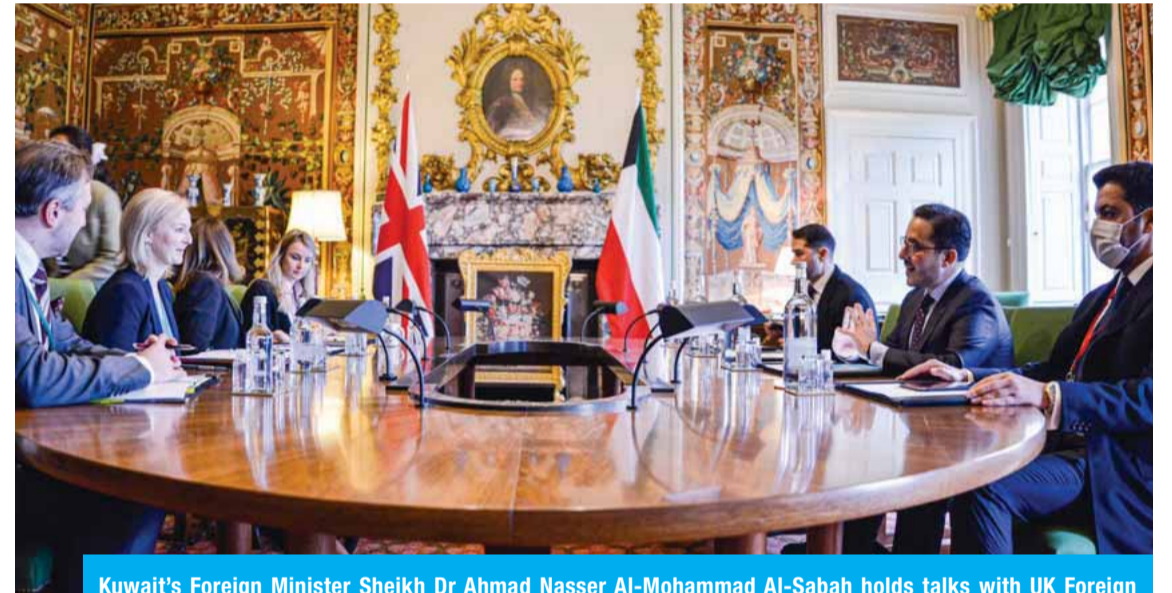
between the GCC and the United Kingdom in London. The talks focused on GCC-UK ties and ways to enhance them in various fields, including political, economic, investment and others, Kuwait's Foreign

Ministry said in a statement. It pointed out that they also exchanged views on a variety of regional and global issues of mutual concern. Sheikh Dr Ahmad had held talks earlier yesterday with UK Foreign

Secretary Liz Truss, focusing on plans to improve bilateral ties. The encounter came on the sidelines of foreign-ministerial level talks between the UK and the six-member Gulf Cooperation Council. —KUNA



Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah chairs Kuwait's delegation at the GCC-UK talks.



Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah holds talks with UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss.

PM receives Japanese ambassador



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets the Japanese Ambassador to Kuwait Takaoka Masato. —KUNA

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received yesterday at Seif Palace the Japanese Ambassador to Kuwait Takaoka

Masato on the occasion of his tenure ending. The Head of His Highness the Prime Minister's Diwan Abdulaziz Dekheel Al-Dekheel attended the meeting. —KUNA

Multiple injuries in Jahra garage fire



KUWAIT: A garage in Jahra caught fire Sunday evening, Kuwait Fire Force said. Firemen from two fire stations responded and found out that four persons were hurt when they tried washing equipment with combustible material inside the garage. A fireman was also injured while fighting the fire. All were taken to hospital.

Meanwhile, a vehicle caught fire in Abu Halaifa, prompting Mangaf station to respond as firemen found out that the flames spread to another vehicle near a mosque. The fire was put out before it spread any further. Investigations were opened to reveal the cause of the fires, KFF said.

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News in brief

Expat driving license decisions discriminatory

KUWAIT: Kuwait's National Diwan of Human Rights described the interior ministry's recent decision to suspend expats' driving licenses - which the ministry has since retracted - as discriminatory, saying that it contradicts with international laws and violates human rights. Such decisions also harm the national economy and damage Kuwait's reputation, the Diwan's President Jassem Al-Mubarak said. Meanwhile, he added that suspending visas of expatriates aged 60 and older who do not have a university degree is inhuman, calling for avoiding measures such as making residents pay fees that exceed the average person's capabilities.

Kuwait reopens Abdaly border tomorrow

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Interior Ministry announced reopening the Abdaly border outlet with Iraq for passenger and cargo traffic every day from 8:00 am to 8:00 pm starting tomorrow. All passengers must adhere to those timings and follow health precautions as stipulated by the Ministry of Health, the interior ministry said in a press statement yesterday.

Arabic declaration at Dubai Expo

DUBAI: UAE Vice President and Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum signed the UAE Declaration of Arabic Language at the UAE's pavilion of Expo 2020 Dubai on Sunday. The document marks the World Arabic Language Day and coincides with a meeting of Arab culture ministers. Speaking on the occasion after signing the document along with Arab League chief Ahmad Abul Gheit, Sheikh Mohammed said the declaration aims to "commit to working together to enhance the status of the language that represents our identity, culture, and science."

Karate team wins gold

KUWAIT: Kuwait's national karate team clinched one gold and two bronze medals to up its tally to 10 at the Kazakhstan-hosted Asian championship, its federation chief said on Sunday. Ali Al-Ali powered his way to victory in the over 76 kg division, while his compatriots Abdullah Al-Mutairi and Saad Al-Halfi both finished third in their respective categories, Kuwait's karate federation chief Mohammad Al-Jasem said. He attributed the "outstanding" results to the support the athletes receive at home, saying he expected the team to strive for greater achievements in forthcoming events.

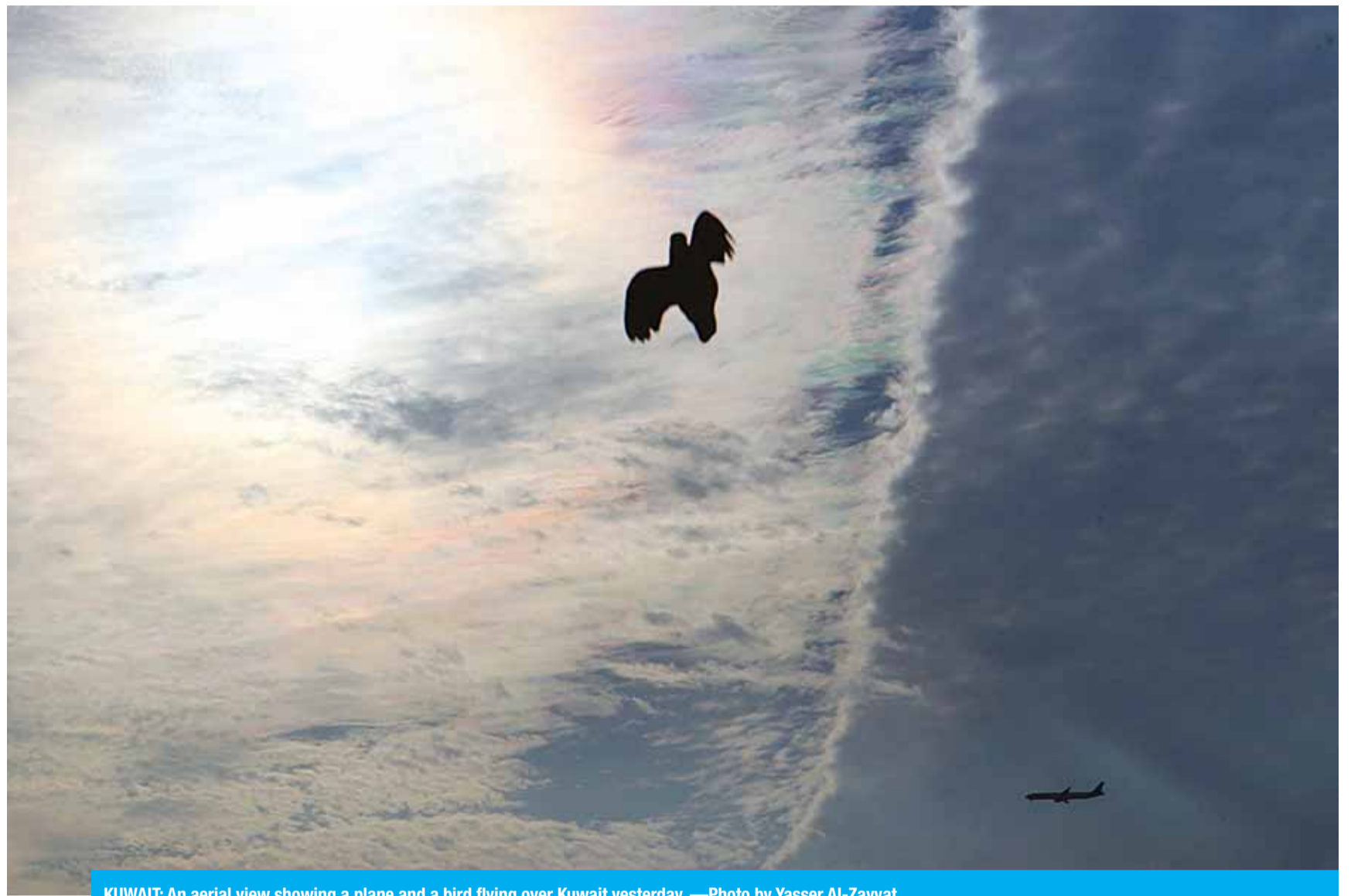
US Dollar steadies at KD 0.302

KUWAIT: Exchange rate of the US dollar remained stable against the Kuwaiti Dinar, trading yesterday at KD 0.302 and the Euro also steadied at KD 0.340 compared with Sunday's rates, said the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK). CBK added in its daily bulletin that the British Pound Sterling was also stable trading at KD 0.400, likewise the Swiss Franc that remained at KD 0.327, as well as the Japanese Yen at KD 0.0026.

OPEC basket price drops to \$74.23 pb

VIENNA: The OPEC's daily basket of crude fell by 43 cents to reach \$74.23 per barrel on Friday from \$74.66 pb the day earlier, the cartel said Monday. The average monthly rate of the basket hit \$80.37 pb in November, thus keeping the annual average since the beginning of this year at \$41.47 bpd. The OPEC+ alliance decided, at its 23rd ministerial meeting on December 2, to maintain the current output plan, designed to increase the oil production gradually, with the conferees having decided to pursue increasing oil supplies by some 400,000 bpd.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: An aerial view showing a plane and a bird flying over Kuwait yesterday. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KRCS, OCHA discuss climate change, ways to alleviate risks of natural disasters

Kuwait urges use of modern technology in disaster relief



KUWAIT: A group photo taken on the sidelines of the workshop.



The workshop in progress. —KUNA photos

KUWAIT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) and United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Kuwait (OCHA) held yesterday a workshop on international humanitarian affairs, emergency preparedness and climate change. The two-day workshop aims to exchange experiences in order to protect and manage the environment, avoid disasters and reduce their effects. In a speech, he delivered during the workshop, KRCS Assistant Director Anwar Al-Hasawi said that Kuwait contributed to activating the role of the local community to control disaster risks by increasing social awareness.

"KRCS has realized the seriousness of these disasters and the severe damage they caused in a number of Arab countries," Hasawi added. He explained that KRCS was keen to participate with international organizations in many conferences and workshops related to early warning of natural disasters, including the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Hasawi called for the use of modern technologies to enhance capacities in reducing disasters and confronting risks to ensure a safer world for future generations, express-

ing his hope that the workshop would produce important, realistic and feasible recommendations.

Calls for action

Meanwhile, Director of the Emergency Preparedness and Response Unit at the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian



Climate change effects on Kuwaiti environment

Affairs, Rmzi Al-Dhafer, expressed his appreciation for Kuwait's efforts in the field of climate change at the local and international levels, and its calls for action to confront climate change. He referred to the efforts made by the Emergency Unit in the Office to

alleviate the suffering of the most vulnerable populations in the region and mitigate the increasingly devastating effects of climate change.

In a statement to the press, Director of Disaster and Emergency Management at KRCS Yousef Al-Meraj said on the sidelines of the workshop that several topics were discussed, including international humanitarian law and information, early warning systems, disaster response mechanism, principles and rules of humanitarian response for the Red Cross and Red Crescent, and Climate and Environment Charter for humanitarian organizations.

The workshop will also discuss a working paper on climate changes and monitoring the global warming phenomenon and its impact on the local environment, as well as the resulting significant rise in temperatures, which led to the large number of dust storms and their economic consequences, Meraj stated. He pointed out that the workshop will discuss the dimensions of climate change on the Kuwaiti environment, the most important international agreements ratified by the State of Kuwait in this regard, and the mechanism for implementing its commitments and efforts to reduce carbon emissions. —KUNA

Filipinos celebrate Christmas after two-year hiatus



KUWAIT: A view from the event. —Photos By Ben Garcia



A general view of the audience.

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The Philippine Embassy in Kuwait along with its attached agencies, namely the Department of Labor and Employment and the Department of Social Welfare and Development, held an event yesterday to celebrate Christmas with the Filipino community in Kuwait at Crowne Plaza Hotel in Farwaniya.

There are around 230,000 Filipino workers in Kuwait, the majority of whom are domestic helpers. Many of those domestic workers are allowed one day off a month by their employers, although a tripartite agreement signed between

Kuwait and Philippines early this year states they are entitled to one day off per week.

Loida, a domestic helper who has been working with her employer for the past 15 years in South Surra, was among the crowd at Crowne Plaza. "I took a day off today to celebrate Christmas with the Filipino community. I am only permitted to take a day off once a month. I hear about this party on Pinoy Arabia ME and asked permission from my boss last month," she said.

The event was attended by a special guest from the Philippines' Department of Social Welfare and Development, Deputy Administrator Arnel Ignacio,

who presented two songs for the Filipino workers. The event was also attended by Philippine Ambassador to Kuwait Noordin Pendosina Lomondot. This was the first big event and gathering of Filipinos in Kuwait after an almost two-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Speaking at the event, Philippines Labor Attache to Kuwait Nasser Mustafa said he was grateful for the community's support and assistance given to the Philippine Embassy for the success of the daylong event. "This is the happiest moment for Filipinos after two years. We need to cherish the holidays and the fact that we are still alive

after the pandemic. There are some of us who didn't make it, but we remember them today too. We pray for the Filipinos who didn't survive COVID-19," said Mustafa.

"We want to share the happiness with our kababayans. We want to make our people happy and celebrate Christmas with them. Although we are Muslims, together with our dear Ambassador Lomondot, we celebrate this occasion because Filipinos are celebrating this big time," he added. The highlight of yesterday's event was a singing contest and presentations by solo and choral groups, plus generous gift-giving and raffle draws.



HK leader hails 'patriots only' vote despite record low turnout

UN chief criticises Lebanese leaders

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SANTIAGO: Chilean president-elect Gabriel Boric (C) waves surrounded by supporters on arrival to deliver a speech, following the official results of the runoff presidential election, in Santiago. — AFP

Chile elects Boric as president

Kast conceded defeat even before the final result was known

SANTIAGO: The streets of Santiago erupted in celebration Sunday after leftist millennial Gabriel Boric became Chile's youngest-ever president-elect with an unexpectedly large victory over his far-right rival in a polarizing race. Boric, 35, garnered nearly 56 percent of the vote compared to 44 percent for ultra-conservative Jose Antonio Kast, who conceded even before the final result was known. Tens of thousands of Chileans took to the streets of the capital and other cities after Kast's concession, honking car horns in approval, brandishing pro-Boric placards, waving the rainbow LGBTQ flag and shouting: "Viva Chile!"

Fireworks lit the skies for hours on end. "I'm thrilled, I am crying with joy. We dealt a blow to fascism!" pharmacy worker Jennie Enriquez, 45, told AFP. "I am happy because there are going to be many changes that will help the people and the working class," added construction worker Luis Astorga, 58. Boric had campaigned on the promise of installing a "social welfare" state, increasing taxes and social spending in a country with one of the world's largest gaps between rich and poor.

Branded a "communist" by his detractors, he vowed in his first official address Sunday to "expand social rights" in Chile, but to do so with "fiscal responsibility." "We will do it protecting our macro-economy, we will do it well... to improve pensions and healthcare," he said.

'Great triumph'

Kast congratulated Boric, who leads an alliance that includes Chile's Communist Party, "on his great triumph." "From today on, he is the president-elect of Chile and he deserves all our respect and constructive cooperation. Chile always comes first."

Kast is an apologist for brutal dictator Augusto Pinochet and his neo-liberal economic model, credited with Chile's relative wealth but blamed for its deep-rooted social inequality.

He opposes same-sex marriage, contraception and abortion, and had initially pledged to close the ministry of women's affairs, a promise he later rowed back on. According to a projection by Chile's Servel



Boric will be inaugurated in March next year

election body, turnout was more than 55 percent—a record since voting became voluntary in 2012.

Boric won by a margin of nearly a million ballots out of 8.3 million cast by 15 million eligible voters. "Clearly more young people came out, it seems clear... that Boric managed to mobilize the segment that is more difficult to mobilize, which is the segment of young people," Claudia Heiss of the University of Chile told AFP.

"All (Kast's) anti-rights, anti-women, anti-gay speech, I think it helped mobilize that young segment," she added. The new president will face the difficult task of healing a society reeling from a polarizing campaign replete with antagonistic attacks and fake news onslaughts.

For a country that has voted centrist since the

democratic ousting of Pinochet 31 years ago, it was a stark choice between two polar opposite political outsiders. Boric on Sunday reiterated his plans for "a more humane Chile, a more dignified Chile, a more egalitarian Chile." Congratulations poured in from elsewhere in Latin America, from Brazil's ex-president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, Cuban leader Miguel Diaz-Canel and Argentina's Alberto Fernandez on the left, to right-wing presidents Ivan Duque of Colombia and Guillermo Lasso of Ecuador.

Boric and Kast had softened their policy proposals in a bid to appeal to Chileans left without an obvious candidate when they split the centrist vote in the first round, leaving only the two antipodes. Both represent parties that have never been in government.

'President of all Chileans'

Chile is 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. The 2020 referendum 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. President Sebastian Pinera, who leaves office with a low approval rating, said Sunday the country was living in "an environment of excessive polarization, confrontation, disputes."

Pinera urged his successor, before the result was known, to never forget that "he will be the president of all Chileans, and not just those who support him." Boric will be inaugurated in March next year. — AFP



Anthony Fauci

Fauci warns of bleak winter with Omicron

WASHINGTON: Top US pandemic advisor Anthony Fauci on Sunday warned of a bleak winter ahead as the COVID-19 Omicron variant spurs a new wave of infections globally, sparking restrictions and concerns over hospital capacity. "One thing that's very clear... is (Omicron's) extraordinary capability of spreading," Fauci told NBC News. "It is just... raging through to the world."

Since it was first reported in South Africa in November, Omicron has been identified in dozens of countries, prompting many to reimpose travel restrictions and other measures. Despite indications it is not more severe than the Delta variant — currently still the dominant strain — the heavily mutated Omicron has been shown in early data to have a worrying resistance to vaccines and higher transmissibility.

Fauci also cautioned against too much optimism over Omicron's severity, noting that in South Africa, while the hospitalization-to-case ratio is lower than with Delta, this could be due to underlying immunity from widespread previous infections. "No matter how you look at it," he underscored, "when you have so many, many infections, even if it is less severe, that overcomes this slight to moderate diminution in severity."

"Our hospitals, if things look like they're looking now in the next week or two, are going to be very stressed," particularly in areas of the country with low levels of vaccination, Fauci said. On Sunday, US Senator Elizabeth Warren wrote on Twitter that she had tested positive for COVID-19 despite being vaccinated and boosted, and was experiencing mild symptoms. She did not indicate whether she had been infected with Omicron.

Fauci urged unvaccinated Americans to get a shot and the vaccinated to get boosters, which have been shown to re-up protection. The administration of President Joe Biden, who is due to address the nation on pandemic developments on Tuesday, has been campaigning hard for vaccination. While a little more than 70 percent of the US population has had at least one shot, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, another 50 million eligible people remain unprotected, Fauci said. — AFP

Dutch prosecutors say MH17 suspects 'served military interests'

THE HAGUE: Dutch prosecutors said yesterday that four suspects accused of downing a Malaysia Airlines flight with a surface-to-air missile were seeking to serve "their own military interests", as they launched closing arguments in the closely-watched trial. Four suspects are being tried in absentia for launching a BUK missile that hit flight MH17 over war-torn eastern Ukraine in 2014, killing all 298 people on board.

Prosecutors launched closing arguments in the trial yesterday, saying the four suspects played pivotal roles in securing the BUK system, which was most likely intended to strike a Ukrainian war plane. "If this was the intention, that doesn't change the accusation of making it a criminal act," public prosecutor Thijs Berger told the judges.

"A mistake in target also makes no difference to the evidence that such a crime has been committed." The suspects "used a BUK missile as a tool to serve their own military interest and hit MH17 with it", he added.

International investigators say the BUK missile was originally brought from a Russian military base, ostensibly to be used in the fight against Ukrainian forces. Berger said the men

on trial "did not press the button themselves, but... used it for their armed struggle with the aim of destroying an aircraft". The four suspects on trial are Russian nationals Igor Girkin, Sergei Dubinsky and Oleg Pulatov, and Ukrainian citizen Leonid Kharchenko. All four have refused to appear in court in the Netherlands and are being tried in absentia.

'Maximum penalty'

In three days of hearings this week, the prosecution are formally charging the four suspects and will set out their sentencing demands. A verdict at the high-security court, near Amsterdam's Schiphol airport where MH17 took off on its doomed flight to Kuala Lumpur, is not expected until late 2022 at the earliest.

"The maximum penalty is life imprisonment," a court spokesperson told AFP. The hearings come as fresh tensions soar over Ukraine, with the West accusing Moscow of planning an invasion. Girkin, 49, also known by his pseudonym "Strelkov", is the most high-profile suspect—a former Russian spy and historical re-enactment fan who helped kickstart the war in Ukraine.



SCHIPHOL, Netherlands: Lawyers Sabine ten Doesschate and Boudewijn van Eijck (R) arrive at the Schiphol Judicial Complex in Badhoevedorp yesterday, for the start of the indictment of the Public Prosecution Service in the extensive criminal proceedings about the downing of flight MH17. — AFP

Dubinsky, 57, who has also been linked with Russian intelligence, allegedly served as the separatists' military intelligence chief. Pulatov, 53, was an ex-Russian special forces soldier and one of Dubinsky's deputies. Kharchenko, 48, allegedly led a separatist unit in eastern Ukraine.

'Corrupt' Russia

Pulatov is the only suspect to be represented by lawyers. Prosecutors will spend today explaining evidence including telephone and electronic eavesdropping, the circumstances surrounding the missile, and the

defendants themselves. The sentencing demand is expected to follow tomorrow and will include an "extensive justification of the requested penalty", the spokesperson said.

Prosecutors said during the opening of the trial in March 2020 that if the court passed a sentence "we will do everything in our power to ensure that it is enforced, whether in the Netherlands or elsewhere". The trial heard harrowing testimony from relatives earlier this year, who spoke of the heartbreak of the loss of children, parents and siblings, and called on "corrupt" Russia to provide justice. — AFP

International

UK's PM Johnson faces calls to tighten virus curbs over Omicron

UK is one of Europe's worst-hit by the virus with 147,128 deaths

LONDON: UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson yesterday faced pressure to tighten coronavirus restrictions to prevent the spread of the Omicron variant, despite opposition to do so before Christmas.

The UK reported 82,886 cases on Sunday as the new variant rages, with the highest number of infections in London. "We have got 104 hospitalisations at the moment which are Omicron-based, we have had 12 deaths," Justice Secretary Dominic Raab told Sky News. "There's a time lag in the data and so we don't know quite how severe it will be," he said.

The UK is one of Europe's worst-hit by the virus, with 147,128 deaths in the country. The government has brought in measures such as COVID passes and made masks mandatory in various settings and has given more than 28 million people third jabs in a race to outpace the virus.

But after Johnson was forced into introducing curbs on indoor mixing last Christmas, he is facing intense political pressure not to do the same this time round. Last week, nearly 100 of his own MPs

rebelled against tougher measures to stop the spread of Omicron, assessing them to be a step too far and a curb on public freedoms.

There has also been public anger at claims that Johnson and his staff broke social-distancing rules in place last year, by holding parties at Downing Street and other government departments.

Unlike in some of Britain's nearest neighbours on the European mainland, there has been no official guidance to restrict socialising yet. The Daily Telegraph yesterday reported the possibility of tightening the rules had led to "heated debate" among ministers.

The Times said 10 ministers were at loggerheads with scientific advisers who want new restrictions, questioning the accuracy of their modelling. Health minister Sajid Javid said Sunday he did not rule out new measures and Raab yesterday said measures were "always under review".

But he said that, with vaccines, "we're in a better position to enjoy Christmas with loved ones this year". —AFP



LONDON: Paramedics unload a patient from the back of an ambulance parked outside the Royal London hospital in London yesterday. UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson yesterday faced pressure to tighten coronavirus restrictions to prevent the spread of the Omicron variant. —AFP

“There's a time lag in the data”

”

Maxwell sex crimes trial set to hear closing arguments

NEW YORK: US prosecutors and defense attorneys lay out their closing arguments in Ghislaine Maxwell's sex crimes trial yesterday before a jury starts considering the fate of the British socialite. Maxwell, 59, faces an effective life sentence if convicted of six counts of enticing and transporting minors to be abused by late financier Jeffrey Epstein, her long-time companion.

The government and Maxwell's lawyers are expected to take between two and three hours each to sum up their case in the Manhattan federal court in New York. Judge Alison Nathan will then instruct the 12 jurors how to consider the charges before instructing them to retire to deliberate their verdict. They must reach a unanimous decision to convict. If they cannot agree, then the judge could declare a mistrial.

Prosecutors have sought to portray Maxwell as Epstein's partner-in-crime in the high-profile trial that began on November 29. They argued that between 1994 and 2004, she recruited young girls to be sexually exploited by the American money-manager who killed himself in jail two years ago while awaiting his own trial.

The trial heard lurid claims by four women against Maxwell, the daughter of former newspaper baron Robert Maxwell. Two said they were as young as 14 when Maxwell allegedly began grooming them and arranging for them to give massages to Epstein that ended in sexual activity.

One, identified only as "Jane," detailed how Maxwell recruited her at summer camp and made her feel "special." She said sexual encounters with Epstein became routine, with Maxwell sometimes present. Another, going by "Carolyn," said she was usually paid \$300 after sexual encounters with Epstein, often by Maxwell herself.

A third alleged victim was Annie Farmer, now 42, who said Maxwell fondled her breasts when she was a teenager at the New Mexico ranch owned by Epstein. The defense has argued that Maxwell was being used as a "scapegoat" for Epstein's crimes after he evaded justice. They also quizzed the women's ability to recollect quarter-century-old events.

Maxwell's attorneys argued that "false memories" had been implanted into the minds of the women under questioning and due to intense media scrutiny. The socialite declined to take the stand but made a brief statement to the judge on Friday. "Your honor, the government has not proven its case beyond reasonable doubt so there is no need for me to testify," she said.

The trial had been expected to last into January, but Maxwell now faces the possibility of learning her fate before Christmas Day, her 60th birthday. She pleaded not guilty to all counts, which carry a total of up to 80 years behind bars. —AFP

Frost: Johnson's indispensable ally

LONDON: Boris Johnson once jokingly referred to his ally David Frost as the "greatest Frost since The Great Frost of 1709" when Britain and Europe suffered the harshest winter in centuries. But the man entrusted by Johnson to lead the country's tortuous Brexit negotiations may yet put the British prime minister out in the cold.

After a torrid week for Johnson, Frost quit the government with immediate effect—and tellingly, not over Britain's European Union departure and its aftermath. Frost, 56, is a firm believer in free markets and individual freedom, and said in his resignation letter that Johnson had strayed away from these values by implementing higher taxes and tougher coronavirus curbs. Johnson's political opponents—from both within and outside his ruling Conservative party—are already circling, not least over claims of lockdown-breaking Christmas parties.

The loss of an ideological ally at such a crucial time increases the sense that the prime minister is running out of places to turn. It also represents a painful personal blow to Johnson, who long stressed that "you could not get a cigarette paper" between the pair. That largely stemmed from Frost's time as Britain's chief Brexit negotiator, where he was a key player in securing the deal that broke years of political deadlock and helped Johnson to his 2019 general election landslide.

Frost, a keen supporter of Brexit, was appointed as Johnson's so-called EU "sherpa" shortly after the

British leader took over from Theresa May in July 2019. He became chief trade negotiator after helping to finalise last year's trade and cooperation deal, inked on Christmas Eve, just days before deadline.

A career diplomat with the foreign ministry, his resume features stints in Brussels in the 1990s and as ambassador to Denmark from 2006 to 2008. More recently, Frost spent nearly three years as chief executive of the Scotch Whisky Association and briefly became chief executive of the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry. He replaced May's top EU adviser Olly Robbins, who drew repeated criticism from ardent Brexiters for being too sympathetic to the bloc.

COVID clash

Frost shares Johnson's "boosterish" view of Britain, making a point of wearing the Union Jack on his lapel and lanyard. His combative approach to Brexit negotiations and unapologetic defence of Conservative values have won him support with grassroots members.

They recently voted him the second most popular minister during a recent poll on influential blog ConservativeHome. But his recent intransigence during negotiations to resolve problems with implementing the part of the Brexit deal concerning Northern Ireland raised concerns that he could collapse the whole agreement.

His departure leaves unfinished and volatile business for his successor, and provides fuel to the increasing number of backbenchers opposed to Johnson's policies. Frost grew up in Derby, central England, and read medieval European history and French at the prestigious Oxford University where he was one of Johnson's contemporaries.

He became a critic of the EU after a stint as a



David Frost

young diplomat working in Brussels. Frost was one of Johnson's first appointments when he returned to government as prime minister in 2019. But signs of a split began to appear in recent weeks, and a speech given last month was seen as a shot across the bows of the prime minister.

"The formula for success as a country is well known: low taxes, light-touch and proportionate regulation," he told the right-wing Centre for Policy Studies think-tank, shortly after the government announced tax hikes. "And personal freedom and responsibility. I am very happy that free Britain, or at least merry England, is probably now the free-est country in the world as regards covid restrictions. No mask rules, no vaccine passports - and long may it remain so."

The government last week reintroduced virus curbs and vaccine passes for large events. Frost is married to Harriet Matthews, a former British ambassador to Somalia, having divorced his first wife, an opera soloist, in 2018. —AFP

UN chief criticises Lebanese leaders

BEIRUT: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres arrived in crisis-ridden Lebanon on Sunday, hitting out at political leaders who "paralyse" the country in the face of its people's suffering.

"I have come with a simple message: The UN stands in solidarity with the people of Lebanon," Guterres told a press conference with Lebanese President Michel Aoun. "Seeing the suffering of the people of Lebanon, Lebanese political leaders do not have the right to be divided and paralyse the country," he added.

He said the objective of his meetings would be "to discuss how we can best support the Lebanese people to overcome the current economic and financial crisis and to promote peace, stability and sustainable development". Lebanon is in the throes of an economic meltdown dubbed by the World Bank as among the planet's worst since the 1850s.

It is widely blamed on nepotism and corruption among the country's ruling

class. Around 80 percent of Lebanon's population is now estimated to be living under the poverty line.

"Lebanese people also expect their political leaders to restore the economy, provide the functioning government and state institutions," Guterres said.

Cabinet has failed to meet since mid-October because of infighting, in particular over the judge charged with investigating the catastrophic August 2020 explosion at Beirut's port that killed at least 215 people, injured thousands and devastated swathes of the capital. The UN chief urged politicians to work together to resolve the crisis and called on the international community "to strengthen its support to Lebanon".

Aoun said authorities were working on a plan to restart the economy that will be "negotiated with the International Monetary Fund", adding that implementing economic, financial and administrative reforms was also required.



BEIRUT: A handout picture provided by the Lebanese photo agency Dalati and Nohra shows Lebanese PM Najib Mikati (R) meeting with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres (L) in the government palace in Beirut yesterday. —AFP

He also told Guterres that he wanted legislative elections set for March next year to be "transparent and fair, in order to reflect the real desire of the Lebanese in choosing their representatives".

The vote, the first major electoral test since the onset in 2019 of the financial crisis, is seen by many as a chance to challenge the ruling elite's stranglehold on the country. Guterres said the elections

would be "key" and that the Lebanese "must be fully engaged in choosing how the country moves forward".

Guterres is set to visit the site of Beirut's port explosion on Monday, holding a minute's silence for the victims. He is scheduled to meet other high-level officials, religious leaders and representatives of civil society organisations before his departure on Wednesday. —AFP

Libya candidates say election delay is inevitable

TRIPOLI: A group of candidates in war-torn Libya's presidential election said yesterday that they expect the polls to be delayed, despite the lack of an official announcement to that effect.

Scheduled for Friday, the vote is meant to cap a United Nations-led peace process after a decade of conflict. But it has been beset by deep divisions over its legal basis, who may stand and court challenges against prominent candidates. Yesterday, 17 hopefuls issued a joint statement in which they implicitly acknowledged that a delay was inevitable. The group urged the electoral commission to "reveal the reasons why there will

be no election on the date set", and called on it to "publish a final list of candidates".

Multiple observers have predicted a delay, but just days ahead of the vote, there has been no official announcement. Libya, torn apart by a decade of conflict since its 2011 revolution, has seen a year of relative calm since a landmark October 2020 ceasefire, and the UN has been pushing for elections as part of a multi-pronged peace effort. But presidential bids by several divisive figures, a controversial electoral law and lack of agreement over the powers of the next government have posed a series of obstacles. The candidacies of eastern military chief Khalifa Haftar and Seif Al-Islam Gaddafi, son of slain dictator Muammar Gaddafi — both accused of war crimes — have sparked particular opposition from rival camps.

Meanwhile, in a country controlled by dozens of armed groups including thousands of foreign fighters, analysts warn that the ceasefire is increasingly fragile. —AFP



TRIPOLI: Local NGO activists gather for a demonstration at Algeria Square outside the Tripoli Municipality in the Libyan capital to protest against any possible postponement of the upcoming elections scheduled for December 24. —AFP

International

Hong Kong leader hails 'patriots only' vote despite record low turnout

'HK is now back on the right track of One Country, Two Systems'

HONG KONG: Hong Kong's leader yesterday hailed the outcome of a "patriots only" legislature election that saw a record low voter turnout and government loyalists sweep every seat. The financial hub selected new lawmakers on Sunday under fresh rules imposed by Beijing that dramatically cut directly elected seats and controlled who could stand for office after huge democracy protests convulsed the city two years ago.

Figures showed just 30 percent of the electorate cast ballots, the lowest rate both of the period since the city's 1997 handover to China and the British colonial era. Hong Kong's chief executive Carrie Lam defended the new system and played down the poor turnout. "Hong Kong is now back on the right track of One Country, Two Systems," she told reporters, naming the model China uses to give the city some autonomy from the authoritarian mainland.

"We cannot copy and paste the so-called democratic system or rules of the Western countries," she added, arguing the new rules meant "anti-China" elements were now excluded and political calm restored. When asked why only 1.3 million of the 4.5 million registered voters cast ballots, Lam replied: "What is the reason, I can't analyse. You may need to turn to other opinion leaders." Zhao Lijian, China's foreign ministry spokesman, blamed the low turnout on the pandemic and "anti-China elements bent on destroying Hong Kong and the interference of external forces".

Loyalty vetting

Lam will fly to Beijing on Monday to meet Chinese leaders as focus shifts to whether she will get backing for a second term in March when a

1,500-strong committee stacked with Beijing loyalists will pick the city's next leader. With her public approval ratings at around 36 percent, Lam has so far declined to say whether she will seek a second term.

Hong Kong has never been a full democracy under either colonial Britain or China, the source of years of protests. Beijing responded to months of huge and often violent rallies in 2019 with a national security law criminalising much dissent and political



Chinese officials called on residents to embrace polls as a vote of confidence

reforms to remove anyone deemed unpatriotic.

Most of the city's prominent democracy activists—including many former elected lawmakers—are either in jail, have fled overseas or been disqualified. Alongside screening out "anti-China" activists, directly elected seats were slashed from half to 22 percent. The largest chunk — 40 — were picked by the 1,500-strong Election Committee, which will also choose the city's next leader.

The remaining 30 were chosen by larger pro-Beijing committees that represent special-interest and industry groups. Only 11 of the 153 candi-



HONG KONG: Starry Lee (bottom-C), chairwoman for the pro-Beijing Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong (DAB), speaks at a press conference with party members in Hong Kong yesterday as Pro-Beijing candidates swept to victory in a "patriots only" legislature vote that saw record low turnout from voters and government loyalists sweep every seat. — AFP

dates who made it through the vetting process were identified as "centrist" or "non-establishment" by local media, but none won enough votes. The result is a legislature stacked with government loyalists similar to the Chinese mainland's rubber stamp law-making bodies.

"The new Legislative Council, now under the complete control of patriots, will function effectively as the guardian of national security and unity," Lau Siu-kai, vice-president of Beijing's

top Hong Kong think tank wrote in the state-run China Daily. Analysts warned the new system could leave the city's rulers even more out of touch with its residents.

"The tension between the authorities and the people will remain in place for a long time while the legislators won't be mediators because they have to toe Beijing's line," said Chung Kim-wah of the Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute. — AFP

Myanmar junta court postpones Suu Kyi verdict

YANGON: A Myanmar junta court yesterday postponed giving its verdict in Aung San Suu Kyi's trial for illegally importing and possessing walkie-talkies, a source with knowledge of the case said. The Nobel laureate has been detained since the generals staged a coup against her government on February 1, ending the Southeast Asian country's brief period of democracy. Nationwide protests against the putsch have been met with a bloody crackdown, with more than 1,300 people killed and over 11,000 arrested, according to a local monitoring group.

Suu Kyi, 76, was due to hear the verdict on charges she illegally imported and possessed walkie-talkies—the latest in a catalogue of judgements in a junta court that could see her jailed for the rest of her life. But the judge adjourned the case until December 27 without explanation, a source with knowledge of the case told AFP.

Earlier this month, she was jailed for four years for incitement against the military and breaching COVID restrictions, in a ruling that was widely

condemned by the international community. Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing later commuted the term to two years and said she would serve her sentence under house arrest in the capital Naypyidaw. Suu Kyi could have faced three years in prison if found guilty on the walkie-talkie charges, which stem from the early hours of the coup when soldiers and police raided her house and allegedly found her in possession of the contraband equipment.

Under cross-examination, members of the raiding party admitted they had not possessed a search warrant for the raid, according to a source with knowledge of the matter. Suu Kyi is also charged with multiple counts of corruption—each of which is punishable by 15 years in jail—and violating the official secrets act. Journalists have been barred from attending the special court hearings in Naypyidaw and her lawyers were recently banned from speaking to the media.

Incommunicado

Suu Kyi's long spells of house arrest under a previous junta were spent at her family's colonial-era man-



YANGON: File photo shows a protester holding up a poster featuring Aung San Suu Kyi during a demonstration against the military coup in front of the Central Bank of Myanmar in Yangon. — AFP

sion in Yangon, where she would appear before thousands gathered on the other side of her garden fence. Min Aung Hlaing's regime has confined her to an undisclosed location in the capital, with her link to the outside world limited to brief pre-trial meetings with her lawyers.

The junta has also threatened to dissolve her National League for Democracy, citing alleged fraud in 2020 elections that international

observers said were largely free and fair. A junta-appointed election commission investigating allegations of fraud during the polls is due to report its findings in early 2022, the information minister told a press conference earlier this month. In recent weeks, other senior members of the NLD have received long sentences. A former chief minister was sentenced to 75 years in jail, while a close Suu Kyi aide was jailed for 20. — AFP

S Africa battles 'second pandemic' of rape, abuse

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa: Donning orange bibs, a group of women fan across a Johannesburg township notorious for crime, knocking on doors and stopping anyone they come across on the streets, including teenagers returning from school.

They are called gender-based violence brigades and their mission is herculean: To confront South Africa's plague of femicide and violence against women and children. The cases are gruesome, and the numbers are dizzying. A law student was murdered, her body chopped into pieces and stuffed into a suitcase. Another university student was raped, bludgeoned to death with an industrial weighing scale inside a post office. An eight-months pregnant woman was hanged from a tree.

"We can't just ignore what we (see) until justice takes its course," said Juliet Ngonyama, 52, her orange bib hanging from her shoulders. Orange is a symbol of revolution in South Africa. In this case it symbolises the activists' determination to curb the violence that has worsened since the outbreak of the COVID pandemic.

As the women speak with residents, they unearth cases that would have otherwise gone unreported. Walking in pairs, they engage whoever they come across—male or female. "Gender-based violence is abusing women, children and men emotionally physically, financially and psychologically," is their opening refrain. South Africa has the unenviable reputation having some of the world's highest levels of violence against women.

100 daily rapes

More than 100 rapes are reported daily, while on average a woman is murdered every three hours, according to official data. The latest quarterly crime statistics showed a 7.1-percent increase in rapes, with 9,556 women raped between July and September.

"These statistics are shameful," an exasperated President Cyril Ramaphosa said in November. He has characterised violence against women as a "second pandemic" after COVID-19. "We are in the grip of a relentless war being waged on the bodies of women and children that, despite our best efforts, shows no signs of abating.

"If a nation's character can be judged by how it treats women and children, then we are falling desperately short," he said. The Gauteng provincial government started the women's brigades in August last year "to ensure that victims are reached out to in their household through a door-to-door campaign," said the campaign's coordinator, Senosha Malesela.

"Overall we are seeing an increased number of... cases being opened in police stations," he said. On that day in Rabie Ridge township, neighbours alerted the brigades to a 22-year-old woman who had been repeatedly abused by her brother. She was too petrified to discuss the details because her brother was nearby. Instead, she gave her phone number for the brigades to follow up later that evening.

Women like her, trapped within the same space as their abusers, often end up at shelters. But South Africa only has about 100 such shelters to serve the entire country, and not all provinces fund them well. The Nisaa centre in Johannesburg's southern Lenasia township is as old as South Africa's democracy. Its manager Gladys Mmadintsi does not remember a single day when the centre did not house a victim since it opened its doors in April 1994.

"Instead of going down... it's worse now," said Mmadintsi, 57. St. Anne's Home in Cape Town has also seen an increase in abuse since the pandemic. When AFP journalists visited, one woman had arrived the night before, and another with a baby and toddler in tow arrived that morning. — AFP

More than 50,000 forced from homes in Malaysian floods

KUALA LUMPUR: More than 50,000 people have been forced from their homes in Malaysia and at least seven are dead after the country faced some of its worst floods for years, officials said yesterday. A weekend of torrential rain caused rivers to overflow, flooding towns and villages and cutting off major roads, with many motorists left trapped in their vehicles for hours.

The number of evacuees across the country rose to about 51,000 yesterday, according to official data, with the worst-hit area being the eastern state of Pahang, where some 32,000 were forced from their homes. The country's wealthiest and most populous state Selangor, surrounding the capital Kuala Lumpur, has been badly affected—which is unusual as it typically avoids the worst of the monsoon floods.

Seven people have been confirmed dead in Selangor, according to fire and rescue officials cited in The Star newspaper. With reports of others missing, the toll is expected to climb. Prime Minister



SHAH ALAM, Malaysia: A man sits on the bonnet of a car as he waits to be evacuated by a rescue team in Shah Alam, Selangor yesterday as Malaysia faces some of its worst floods for years. — AFP

Ismail Sabri Yaakob said that a month's rainfall came down in one day in Selangor, adding that tens of thousands of emergency service and military personnel were deployed to aid rescue efforts.

Student Eyilavarasi Magesuaran recalled the moment her house was flooded in the hard-hit city of Shah Alam in Selangor early Sunday. "Water rushed into our house from the rear and back, trapping us inside," the 21-year-old told AFP, adding she was

alerted to the flood by her barking dog.

"I really feared we would drown. We have lived here since 1995, and never experienced flooding." A relative with a truck rescued her family. The rains had largely stopped by yesterday, leaving residents to return to damaged properties and pick up the pieces. The Southeast Asian nation is hit by floods annually during the monsoon season, but those on the weekend were the worst in years. — AFP

cattle and burning and looting homes. The bandits have been increasingly targeting schools in mass abductions of schoolchildren to squeeze ransom from parents and authorities.

A months-long telecom shutdown and military operations in the region have failed to end the violence. Kaduna has been one of the three states worst-hit by the violence. In August, an armed gang stormed a heavily guarded elite military academy in Kaduna city, killing two officers and abducting another, a daring attack that embarrassed the military.

The criminal gangs are known to maintain camps in the Rugu forest, which straddles Kaduna, Zamfara, Katsina and Niger states. In recent days, youth groups have staged protests against the violence, which were dispersed by security forces, who detained protest organisers. — AFP

ple were killed across the locations attacked," Aruwan said. "Houses, trucks, and cars were also burned, along with agricultural produce at various farms," he said. In a statement Sunday evening, President Muhammadu Buhari condemned the "gruesome nature" of the latest killings.

Noting that there had been several other deadly attacks in Kaduna state over the past week, he repeated his call to the security and intelligence chiefs "to do everything they can to destroy" the attackers. So far, 29 of the victims have been identified.

Deadly raids, rustling, kidnappings

Northwest and central Nigeria have been plagued by criminal gangs of cattle thieves and kidnappers who raid villages, killing residents, stealing

Cattle thieves kill 38 civilians in northern Nigeria

KANO, Nigeria: Armed cattle thieves killed 38 people Sunday in three separate attacks in northern Nigeria's Kaduna state, a local official said, the latest bloodshed to hit the region. The assailants, who usually ride on motorcycles, stormed the villages of Kauran Fawa, Marke and Rihera in the Giwa district, Samuel Aruwan, the internal affairs commissioner for Kaduna state, said in a statement.

"Security agencies have confirmed... that 38 peo-

Business

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2021

Boursa Kuwait hosts ESG webinar for listed companies

Event builds on stock exchange's efforts to promote sustainable business practices

KUWAIT: Boursa Kuwait hosted a webinar entitled 'Environmental, Social and Governance Perspectives' for Kuwaiti listed companies and other capital market participants on December 8, 2021. The webinar featured ESG experts from multinational professional services firm Ernst and Young (EY) as well as the United Nations-supported Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI), who highlighted the critical importance of ESG performance, as investors are increasingly paying attention to climate risks and sustainable business practices.

The initiative forms part of Boursa Kuwait's efforts to create a lasting meaningful impact on the community where it operates as part of its Corporate Sustainability strategy and is in line with Goal 4 - Quality Education - and Goal 17 - Partnership for the Goals - of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A member of the United Nations' Sustainable Stock Exchange initiative since 2017, the company has been making a formal commitment to the sustainability of listed companies and their operations.

During the event, which was moderated by the exchange's Institutional Investor Affairs Department's Fahad Al-Dughaisim, EY's Partner and Leader for Climate Change and Sustainability Services, Yasir Ahmad, EY Senior Manager, Matthew John, and PRI's Head of UK & Ireland and Middle East, Eline Sleurink, delivered presentations covering all aspects of the ESG universe. During the webinar, Boursa Kuwait also shed light on its efforts to integrate ESG principles into the company's business and encourage all its stakeholders to embrace corporate sustainability.

The webinar comes on the heels of the stock exchange's launch of its new ESG guide to raise awareness of the benefits of ESG disclosure and best practices. The guide proposes an initial set of sustainability indicators that correspond with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) framework and the State of Kuwait's sustainable development ambitions as set out in the Kuwait National Development Plan and the "New Kuwait" vision for 2035.

Commenting on the initiative, Boursa Kuwait's Head of Markets Noura Al-Abdulkareem said, "We are delighted that the ESG webinar was a success with remarkable participation from our stakeholders. We hope that the thought-provoking insights provided by the industry experts will lead to tremendous outcomes. The webinar underlines our unremitting commitment to driving ESG accountability within the company and the wider capital market."

She added, "The webinar also forms a part of our continuous efforts to further develop the market and elevate its status to meet international standards. We will continue to be at the forefront of the efforts to encourage listed companies to accelerate their transition as they continue to adopt more environmentally conscious and sustainable business



Yasir Ahmad



Eline Sleurink



Noura Al-Abdulkareem

operations." Yasir Ahmad, Partner and Leader for Climate Change and Sustainability Services at EY, highlighted that ESG has evolved into a model of thinking and approach for businesses and leaders to maintain a competitive position in the global market. Stressing that customers are growing socially and environmentally conscious in their buying patterns and that there is increased investor pressure to disclose and address ESG risks, he stated that businesses are expected to practice enhanced reporting and transparency as the global landscape is rapidly evolving from voluntary frameworks to more targeted and mandatory regulation.

EY Senior Manager Matthew John delved deep into the benefits of ESG implementation, as well as the challenges facing the businesses that fail on that front. He emphasized that a considerable percentage of investors agree that ESG performance played a pivotal role in their investment decision-making and went over ESG trends in the Middle

East, sharing insights into leading ESG practices adopted by companies in Kuwait and the wider region, highlighting Boursa Kuwait's ESG reporting guide and its commitment to the Sustainable Stock Exchange Initiative.

Eline Sleurink, Head of UK and Ireland and Middle East at PRI, explained the six principles of responsible investing and highlighted the priority areas and the key ESG issues of PRI. Emphasizing the importance of an economically efficient and sustainable global financial system for long-term value creation, Ms. Sleurink spotlighted the material risks that businesses may endure if they underperform on ESG factors.

Boursa Kuwait's Corporate Sustainability strategy stipulates ensuring initiatives apply and fall in line with the company's corporate social responsibility (CSR), industry best practice standards and investor expectations, creating strong and sustainable partnerships that ultimately achieve success and allow Boursa Kuwait to leverage the capabilities and strengths of other companies or organizations that have experience in different fields, and integrating sustainability efforts with the company culture, in order to achieve longevity and an ongoing impact that is carried on and instilled in the day-to-day operations of the stock exchange.

As part of the strategy, Boursa Kuwait has launched many initiatives in partnership with local and international organizations, focusing on support for nongovernmental organizations and charity programs, financial literacy and capital market awareness, the empowerment of women, as well as environmental protection.

Lira plunges again after Erdogan cites Islam to defend rate cuts

ISTANBUL: Turkey's troubled lira nosedived yesterday after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan cited Muslim teachings to justify not raising interest rates to stabilize the currency. Erdogan has pushed the central bank to sharply lower borrowing costs despite the annual rate of inflation soaring to more than 20 percent.

Economists believe the policy could see consumer price increases reach 30 percent or higher in the coming months. But Erdogan said in remarks aired by state television late Sunday that his Muslim faith prevented him from supporting rate hikes.

"They complain we keep decreasing the interest rate. Don't expect anything else from me," he said in the televised comments. "As a Muslim, I will continue doing what our religion tells us. This is the command." Islamic teachings forbid Muslims from receiving or charging interest on loaned or borrowed money. Erdogan has previously cited his religion in explaining why he believes interest rates cause inflation instead of reining it in. High interest rates are a drag on activity and slow down economic growth.

But central banks raise their policy rates out of necessity when inflation gets out of hand. The Turkish lira has now lost nearly half its value in the past three months alone. It was trading down more six percent against the dollar yesterday afternoon.

A dollar could buy 7.4 liras on January 1. It was worth 17.5 liras yesterday. "You cannot run a modern economy integrated into the global economy on this basis," economist Timothy Ash of BlueBay Asset



ISTANBUL, Turkey: A resident counting Turkish lira banknote in Sultangazi district of Istanbul, after she bought bread at the Istanbul Municipality's cheap bread shop. Turkey's troubled lira nosedived yesterday. —AFP

Management said in a note to clients. "Even Saudi Arabia really does not attempt full shariah compliant macro(economic) management."

Fight with big business

Turkey's nominally independent central bank-stacked in the past year with Erdogan's allies and supporters-has used four successive rate cuts to lower its policy rate to 14 percent from 19 percent.

Diplomats think the powerful but increasingly unpopular Turkish leader believes that economic growth at all costs will help him extend his rule into a third decade in an election due by mid-2023. Erdogan last month launched a self-declared "economic war of independence" aimed at breaking Turkey's dependence on foreign investment and the fluctuating cost of imports such as oil and natural gas.

But the policy is meeting increasing resistance from powerful business leaders who had largely rallied around Erdogan during his 19-year rule. The TUSIAD big business lobby of major exporters issued an unusually firm rebuke of the president over the weekend.

"The policy choices implemented here are not only creating new economic problems for businesses, but for all of our citizens," the big business lobby said. "It is urgent that we assess the damage that has been done to the economy, and quickly return to the implementation of established economic principles, within the framework of a free market economy."

Erdogan attacked TUSIAD directly in his televised comments. "I am calling you out," he said. "You have only one job: to ensure investment, production, employment and growth." — AFP

at a difficult moment for central bankers worldwide. Inflation in Germany soared beyond five percent in November, above the European average, pushed up by a sharp rise in energy prices and pandemic-related shortages in materials and components.

The price surges have caused some anxiety in Germany, a nation of savers still scarred by the hyperinflation of the 1920s that wiped out many people's nest eggs.

ECB challenge

"In light of inflation risks, the importance of a stability-oriented monetary policy is growing," Lindner said in his tweet. Fighting the scourge of rising prices was long the Bundesbank's main mission and outgoing president Weidmann's north star.

Since taking the reins of the central bank in 2011, Weidmann was a vocal advocate of tighter monetary policy. He often cut a lonely figure among European Central Bank policymakers, where he was among a handful of "hawks", favouring less accommodation. Over recent years, the ECB has ratcheted down interest rates to historic lows, including a negative deposit rate for banks' overnight deposits, and unleashed a massive bond-buying programme to support the economy through the coronavirus pandemic. —AFP



FRANKFURT: Jens Weidmann (right), president of the German Central Bank (Bundesbank), and Joachim Nagel, then board member of the bank, in this file photo. — AFP

considered the central bank of central banks.

Close to Scholz's Social Democrats, Nagel is seen as a compromise choice with the staunch economic conservatives in Lindner's FDP. His appointment, which will be made official in the coming days, comes

Germany taps new Bundesbank chief

FRANKFURT: The German government yesterday tapped career central banker Joachim Nagel to take over as president of the Bundesbank, a "continuity" pick to steer the inflation-wary nation through a period of surging prices.

Nagel's nomination marks one of the first big appointments by new Chancellor Olaf Scholz's government, a three-way coalition between the Social Democrats, the ecologist Greens and the liberal FDP. Nagel will replace outgoing president Jens Weidmann, after the long-time Bundesbank chief and well-known monetary conservative steps down at the end of the year.

An "experienced individual", Nagel represented "continuity at the Bundesbank" Finance minister Christian Lindner said in a tweet. Nagel, 55, knows the Frankfurt-based Bundesbank well, having spent 17 years leading the markets division and information technology department.

Since 2020, he has been co-chief of the banking division at the Bank for International Settlements,

EU eyes nuclear, gas as 'green' on sustainable energy list

BRUSSELS: The European Commission plans to present its list of "green" energy sources in January, according to internal market commissioner Thierry Breton, who said he expected it to include nuclear and natural gas. The list, known as the EU's "taxonomy", will determine what sources are seen as sustainable and therefore eligible for investment under rules promoting the 27-nation bloc's shift to a carbon-neutral future.

It was meant to have landed before the end of this year, but deep divisions between member states over including nuclear and natural gas have held it up. An EU summit last week failed to bridge the gaps. "Nuclear power and natural gas will help us achieve our climate goals," Breton told German newspaper Die Welt in a weekend interview.

"That is why we in the commission are to present a taxonomy that includes nuclear power and natural gas." He said the commission was "very close to finalizing" the act that would introduce the list, with member states then having a couple of weeks to comment on it before it could be presented in mid-January. If too few countries banded together to block the list, it would become EU law without requiring adoption by the European Parliament.

France has been pushing for nuclear—which provides more than 70 percent of its energy production—to be included along with around a dozen other countries, but they face opposition from Austria, Germany and Luxembourg. Austrian Environment Minister Leonore Gewessler, attending a meeting of EU counterparts yesterday, said nuclear energy was not climate-friendly and "has no place in the taxonomy".

She said if it figured in the taxonomy, "we will examine it from a legal point of view and, if necessary, we will take legal steps including legal action" to block it. But Breton said the European Union needed to double its electricity production over the next three decades and that "is simply not possible without nuclear power".

Eastern EU countries reliant on fossil fuels for their power such as Poland want natural gas to be on the list, at least as an interim energy source, even though Europe is dependent on Russian gas supplies.

Breton said the EU needed to be "pragmatic" on that point. "Gas is certainly not an ideal energy source for achieving carbon dioxide neutrality... but gas is still better than coal," he said. — AFP

Business

Gulf Bank launches its first Sustainability Report

Report as part of bank's ongoing commitment to ESG principles

KUWAIT: As part of its ongoing commitment to sustainability, and in accordance with global standards and guidelines to enhance transparency and disclosure related to key environmental, societal and governance (ESG) principles, Gulf Bank has launched its first Sustainability Report. The report was issued in keeping with the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) principles, the Kuwait stock exchange's sustainability disclosure guide, the United Nation Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Kuwait Vision 2035, and Gulf Bank's 2025 Strategy.

During a presentation of the most important highlights of the 2020 Sustainability Report, Gulf Bank's Deputy General Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, Ahmad Al-Amir, commented: "At Gulf Bank, we recognize the importance of our role and our active contribution to establishing a more sustainable society by adopting responsible practices with a proactive and sustainable approach, in addition to demonstrating effective leadership and governance. As part of our plan, we are actively providing enhanced financial and banking services, and innovative digital solutions, as well as ensuring more talent acquisition, empowerment of local youth in society, and other practices that ensure the inclusion of environmental, social and governance elements within the work pillars of Gulf Bank."

He added: "We are constantly striving to meet the needs of customers and investors, and provide services of long-term value financially, environmentally, socially and ethically. By applying sustainability practices effectively, we are proud to contribute to our society's development, and enhance economic leadership in global markets."

Furthermore, he noted that this report focuses on communication transparency within global frameworks, enabling Gulf Bank to identify stakeholder interests, requirements and priorities in essential sustainability decisions while increasing transparency and disclosure of the bank's performance.

Social responsibility

Al-Amir pointed out that the bank continues to successfully navigate the challenges of the pandemic in spite of what has been a globally challenging year. With a clear and steadfast strategy in place, Gulf Bank has proven itself especially well-equipped to handle local and global crises,



Ahmad Al-Amir

especially with the resilient and consistent efforts demonstrated by its employees over the last year.

In addition, Al-Amir noted that Gulf Bank was quick to contribute to the Central Bank of Kuwait's KD 10 million fund designed to allow local banks to support national efforts in combating the spread of the pandemic. Gulf Bank donated KD 1 million to the bank's fund, and distributed preventive materials to frontline workers and testing centers.

Gulf Bank also responded to the Kuwait Banking Association initiative to postpone customer loan installments for six months, which cost the banking sector KD 380 million. The Bank also postponed loan installments for another six months, offering customers the option to defer payment of their loans without interest on the deferral period.

In addition, more employees keep volunteering with Gulf Bank as part of the Bank's "Sawaed Al-Khaleej" volunteer program. The program, which aims to strengthen the Bank's role in social responsibility, grew from 116 volunteers in 2019 to 120 volunteers in 2020.

As part of its commitment to educate customers about their rights and various cyber security tips, Gulf Bank also participated in "Diraya," an awareness campaign initiated by the Central Bank of Kuwait and the Kuwait Banking Association, to educate the general public about all matters related to banking and finance.

Governance

Al-Amir noted that the Bank is implementing the best

governance practices, in accordance with the instructions of the Central Bank of Kuwait and the Capital Markets Authority. Gulf Bank maintains the strictest levels of governance through its board of directors and various committees, while adhering to the highest standards of disclosure and transparency, and activating the role of internal and external audits.

Women and youth empowerment

Regarding the bank's efforts to support gender parity, Al-Amir noted that women represent 42.3 percent of the bank's employees, with 38 percent of women also holding a senior management position. Al-Amir underscored the bank's eagerness to support gender equality as part of its commitment to respect and support human rights and implement the United Nations' Principles of Women's Empowerment.

He indicated that the bank also pays considerable attention to local youth, which renders the Bank an attractive employer for graduates seeking employment. The employment rate of new graduates also increased by 57.5 percent, with the number of employees under 30 jumping from 25.5 percent in 2019 to 28.6 percent in 2020. In contrast, the proportion of employees between the ages of 30 and 50 decreased from 69.2 percent in 2019 to 67.4 percent in 2020.

Al-Amir also mentioned that the Bank has recruited six people with special needs over the past year, and has equipped its branches across the six local governorates with ATMs that cater to all needs.

Training

Al-Amir noted that training courses targeting Gulf Bank employees increased by 26 percent to include 1,800 employees in 2020, compared to only 1,429 in 2019. The new training opportunities come as part of Gulf Bank's commitment to keeping up with global banking developments, and ensure continuous human capital development in spite of the pandemic. As part of their precautionary measures, last year's training courses were all conducted remotely.

Kuwaitization

Al-Amir also announced that Gulf Bank's Kuwaitization rate increased by 2.1 percent to reach 75.3 percent in 2020,

while the percentage of Kuwaitization of senior-level jobs increased by 3.4 percent, rising from 49.8 percent in 2019 to 53.2 percent in 2020.

Digital transformation

Regarding the Bank's efforts to digitally transform banking services, Al-Amir explained that the number of active customers on the Gulf Bank mobile application increased by 7 percent last year, reaching 44 percent of customers. The number of active users on the website also grew by 11 percent, reaching 55 percent of customers, while the number of followers on social media increased by 23 percent.

He emphasized that Gulf Bank's 2025 strategy focuses on digital transformation, and aims to consolidate the bank's leading position as the Kuwaiti Bank of the Future, by providing easy and innovative services to facilitate customers' lives and achieve sustainable growth.

Development projects

Al-Amir said that the Bank played a key role in financing seven major development projects that fall under the vision of Kuwait 2035. Gulf Bank also continues to obtain prestigious ratings from international rating agencies, increasing its appeal to foreign investors whose shares in the bank reached 12.47 percent by the end of 2020.

Environmental sustainability

Al-Amir highlighted the bank's role in preserving the environment as it reduced the number of papers used by 5.4 percent last year, saving approximately one million papers. Gulf Bank also reduced its water consumption by 107,000 gallons, energy consumption by 37,220 kwh, and carbon dioxide emissions by 41 metric tons.

Al-Amir concluded by saying: "We are pleased that Gulf Bank has launched its first sustainability report, which will form the cornerstone of our journey towards customers, shareholders and society in the coming years, as Gulf Bank continues to play a key societal role through its distinguished position in the banking sector. Gulf Bank is proud to adhere to the environmental, social and governance standards, and is excited to spearhead important standards of transparency and disclosure for the local and regional banking sectors."



Corporate Communications team at GBK



Executive management after launching the first Sustainability Report

Moving together towards sustainability

The first sustainability report by Gulf Bank for the year 2020

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Business

Global equity, oil markets slump on Omicron panic

Asia stocks tank on fresh global surge in infections sparking a European selloff

LONDON: Global equity and oil markets slumped yesterday on investor panic over the impact of worldwide measures to contain the fast-spreading Omicron coronavirus variant, dealers said. Asia tanked on concern over a fresh global surge in coronavirus infections, sparking a fierce renewed selloff in Europe.

Oil tumbled by more than five percent as traders fretted over the impact on the world's appetite for energy, which has already taken a heavy blow since the pandemic erupted early last year.

Sentiment was jarred by the future of US President Joe Biden's massive social spending bill after it lost the crucial vote of a moderate Democrat. The British pound fell sharply after the surprise weekend departure of Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Brexit minister David Frost.

Omicron 'panic mode'

"After battling endless headwinds in recent weeks, markets have finally been

knocked over as the rapid spread of Omicron finally reaches panic mode," said AJ Bell investment director Russ Mould. "Tighter restrictions across parts of Europe and fears that we could see a circuit breaker in the UK have put a chill in the air for investors."

The EU's drug regulator was set to decide yesterday whether to approve a fifth Covid jab as the United States warned of a bleak winter with the Omicron variant spurring new waves of infections globally.

Since it was first reported in South Africa in November, Omicron has been identified in dozens of countries, prompting many to reimpose travel restrictions and other measures. The Netherlands imposed a Christmas lockdown and Germany tightened restrictions notably affecting the unvaccinated, while media speculation swirls over the re-imposition of tougher UK curbs.

Christmas 'whimper'

The rapid spread of Omicron has

slammed the oil market—and travel stocks—on concerns about demand fallout as countries revert back to containment measures and travel curbs. "Stocks and crude oil have sold off as the markets start the final week before Christmas with a whimper," added ThinkMarkets analyst Fawad Razaqada.

"Risk appetite was non-existent... as investors reacted to the worsening coronavirus situation over the weekend. "Further measures to curb its spread were announced by some of Europe's largest economies—most banning UK visitors, where Omicron is spreading."

With traders beginning to wind down ahead of the festive season, analysts said trade was thinner and markets more susceptible to swings, but the mood has become increasingly glum as central banks start paring their huge financial support to fight inflation.

World markets had briefly risen last week after other major central banks took action to combat soaring inflation as the fragile economic recovery



TOKYO: Asian markets have plunged on fears about the new COVID variant. — AFP

is threatened again by spiking Covid-19 cases.

The Bank of England delivered the first interest rate hike in three years, while the Federal Reserve said it would speed up the taper of its bond-buying

program and indicated three interest rate hikes before the end of 2022. Dealers were unmoved yesterday by news that China had trimmed a key interest rate by five basis points as it looks to reignite the stuttering economy. — AFP

NBK provides NBK Mashroey account for home businesses

KUWAIT: As part of its continuous dedication and commitment to help SMEs flourish in Kuwait and to provide the necessary support to Kuwaiti entrepreneurs, the National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) is proud to announce the launch of NBK Mashroey Account for home-based entrepreneurs.

NBK Mashroey Account will be available for home business owners who wish to benefit from payment services provided by NBK and other payment service aggregators. Under the new service, NBK will issue its customers a certificate in the name of their home business to share it with the designated payment aggregators, so they can



Mohammed Akram

continue using payment gateway services and easily obtain POS machines as per CBK regulations.

On this occasion, Mohammed Akram, Head of segments, Consumer Banking Group at National Bank of Kuwait said: "At NBK, we focus on providing the best banking experience to our customers and to facilitate the success of their business by providing solutions and services that support and help manage their own business in a quick and easy manner."

Akram added that NBK Mashroey Account for home entrepreneurs is in compliance CBK directives, which require home businesses in Kuwait to open a separate account

designated for their business payment transactions in order to keep track of AML activities.

NBK Customers can avail this new service by visiting any NBK Branch and submitting a letter requesting to issue the certificate to the payment aggregator, she explained. Akram emphasized that NBK always strives to provide its customers with the latest and most advanced banking services to offer them a top-notch banking experience that reflects the bank's leadership and huge capabilities.

It is worth mentioning that NBK is keen on supporting and developing SMEs and local businesses, as well as offering an array of products and services that are customized to support young Kuwaiti entrepreneurs seeking to expand their businesses. The bank also seeks to always be closer to its customers by providing various sorts of support and meeting all their banking needs, as well as constant communication with them through all its digital channels.

stc participates in 3rd Cybersecurity Education, Research Conference

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, participated in the third Cybersecurity Education and Research Conference (CERC), whereas the Company provided a key overview on securing critical infrastructure with the zero-trust network model during its session.

The conference was organized by the British Embassy in Kuwait in cooperation with Kuwait University, the Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA), and Kuwait College of Science & Technology (KCST). During his segment, engineer Issa Al-Suwait, General Manager - Cyber Security at stc, provided an overview of the main concept behind the zero-trust model, expressing that no person, device, or system should be trusted by default, even if connected to a verified and monitored corporate network. In this regard, Al-Suwait added that the zero-trust framework incorporates several security protocols that verify the user's identity, authenticate the device, and continuously validate security configurations prior to being granted and during access to applications and data.

While presenting at the conference,

Al-Suwait highlighted that in 2019, the UK's national technical authority and the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), recommended that network engineers incorporate the zero-trust model in new IT deployments, especially when expecting significant use of cloud services. The zero-trust is an enterprise security designed with set principles following a coordinated cybersecurity and system management strategy that is based on the acknowledgement of threats. Therefore, the model assumes that there is no implicit trust granted to users based solely on their physical or network location or asset ownership.

stc released a statement emphasizing its role in spreading awareness to the public on the importance of acknowledging cybersecurity, while providing insights and expert views on how to manage possible threats and breaches. This approach falls in line with the Company's strategy to enable digital transformation by supporting both individual and corporate customers to benefit the local economy.

The Company also stated that it was one of the first telecom companies to comply with the Payment Card Industry (PCI) - Data Security Standard (DSS) after receiving its version 3.2.1 certification. The certification was obtained after completing a comprehensive and



rigorous auditing review of existing processes that involved the acts of securing current customer data. Although protecting customer data comes as an ongoing initiative for the Company, it was able to effectively comply with the technical and operational requirements due to the diligent efforts made by the stc team.

Additionally, stc launched "Shield", the ultimate solution in cyber security and protection offered to its corporate customers. The pioneering service aims to ensure the safety of businesses by identifying risks in possible data breaches, 360 degrees protection, and assessing critical assets to enable a worry-free environment for businesses to thrive digitally.

stc added, "This step and achievement reflects the relentless effort placed forth by the stc team to protect its customers, reinforcing the Company's ongoing commitment to provide its customers with pioneering solutions, backed by a secure online payment portal protected against cyber threats

and privacy data breaches."

The Company expressed that data breaches can not only lead to financial loss and distress but also harm the brand and reputation that institutions spent years to build. Ensuring the protection of sensitive customer data from possible cyber-attacks is not a matter stc takes lightly, especially during times where such attacks are occurring more often, exposing sensitive information due to data breaches.

It is worth mentioning that the initiatives under the third CERC were held at the College of Life Sciences, with the main theme focusing on techniques for protecting advanced technology and vital national infrastructure. Upon concluding the conference, the organizing committee announced its recommendation regarding securing critical infrastructure and accelerating the establishment of a national cybersecurity center to protect the country's digital infrastructure across various fields such as energy, healthcare, financial services, communications, as well as smart cities.

Chile stock market plummets on leftist Boric's poll victory

SANTIAGO: The Chilean stock market and peso took a beating yesterday after leftist millennial Gabriel Boric became the country's youngest-ever president-elect with an unexpectedly substantial victory over his far-right rival. Following a night of street celebrations at the end of a polarizing runoff race, the SP IPSA index opened 6.83 percent down, before regaining some ground.

The peso ceded 3.02 percent to the US dollar to open the day at a historic high of 872.61. In November, the IPSA index gained more than nine percent when far-right fiscal conservative Jose Antonio Kast came out on top in the first election round. The peso rebounded then by 3.5 percent to 800 to the dollar.

Boric, 35, garnered nearly 56 percent of the vote compared to 44 percent for Kast, who conceded even before the final result was known. Tens of thou-

sands of Chileans took to the streets of the capital and other cities to celebrate Boric's victory, honking car horns in approval, brandishing pro-Boric placards, waving the rainbow LGBTQ flag and shouting: "Viva Chile!"

Fireworks lit the skies for hours on end. Boric had campaigned on the promise of installing a "social welfare" state, increasing taxes and social spending in a country with one of the world's largest gaps between rich and poor. Branded a "communist" by his detractors, he vowed in his first official address Sunday to "expand social rights" in Chile, but to do so with "fiscal responsibility." "We will do it protecting our macro-economy, we will do it well... to improve pensions and health care," he said.

'Great triumph'

Kast congratulated Boric, who leads an alliance that includes Chile's Communist Party, on a "great triumph." "From today on, he is the president-elect of Chile and he deserves all our respect and constructive cooperation. Chile always comes first."

Kast is an apologist for brutal dictator Augusto Pinochet and his neo-liberal economic model, credited with Chile's relative wealth but blamed for its deep-rooted social inequality.



SANTIAGO, Chile: Men stand near boards of a bureau de change displaying a rise on the US dollar price after the victory of Gabriel Boric in the presidential runoff election Sunday, in downtown Santiago, yesterday. — AFP

He opposes same-sex marriage, contraception and abortion, and had initially pledged to close the ministry of women's affairs, a promise he later rowed back on. According to a projection by Chile's Servel



TOKYO: Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida speaks during a budget committee session in the upper house at parliament in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

Japan enacts record extra budget to boost economy

TOKYO: Japan's parliament enacted a record supplementary budget worth over \$300 billion yesterday as part of measures to bolster the world's third largest economy as the pandemic threat drags on. The extra budget — larger than the total annual GDP of countries such as Colombia, Vietnam and Finland — will fund part of the massive virus stimulus package announced last month by new Prime Minister Fumio Kishida.

Upper House lawmakers approved the 35.98 trillion yen (\$317 billion) supplementary budget for the current fiscal year, with the majority allocated for economic measures. They include cash handouts for children under 18, subsidies for small businesses, and pay rises for nurses and care-givers.

Japan passed three extra budgets in fiscal 2020-21 as manufacturing slowed during the pandemic and restrictions hit nightlife and tourism, but this marks the first for 2021-22 and the biggest yet. Kishida became prime minister in October after his predecessor Yoshihide Suga stepped down partly over public discontent with his pandemic response.

After leading the ruling coalition to election victory, Kishida quickly announced a record 56 trillion yen in stimulus spending, roughly 10 percent of Japan's total GDP. The country has recorded fewer than 18,400 COVID-19 deaths in its population of 126 million, despite avoiding harsh lockdowns. Emergency measures targeting evening entertainment and crowd sizes at events were in place in major cities and other parts of Japan for much of the year, but were lifted in October. This month, the Bank of Japan's latest quarterly Tankan business survey showed major manufacturers remain cautious about the economy's trajectory, with business sentiment flat for the quarter. — AFP

election body, turnout was more than 55 percent—a record since voting became voluntary in 2012.

Boric won by a margin of nearly a million ballots out of 8.3 million cast by 15 million eligible voters. "Clearly more young people came out, it seems clear... that Boric managed to mobilize the segment that is more difficult to mobilize, which is the segment of young people," Claudia Heiss of the University of Chile told AFP.

"All (Kast's) anti-rights, anti-women, anti-gay speech, I think it helped mobilize that young segment," she added. The new president will face the difficult task of healing a society reeling from a polarizing campaign replete with antagonistic attacks and misinformation onslaughts.

For a country that has voted centrist since the democratic ousting of Pinochet 31 years ago, it was a stark choice between two polar opposite political outsiders. Boric on Sunday reiterated his plans for "a more humane Chile, a more dignified Chile, a more egalitarian Chile." Congratulations poured in from elsewhere in Latin America, from Brazil's ex-president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, Cuban leader Miguel Diaz-Canel and Argentina's Alberto Fernandez on the left, to right-wing presidents Ivan Duque of Colombia and Guillermo Lasso of Ecuador. — AFP



Hans Engelke Energie's employee Ivan Mihaylovich makes a coal delivery in Berlin, eastern Germany. Germany's new government is set to extinguish the coal-powered at-home heat source from a bygone era as part of its ambitious climate plans, as it looks to cut harmful emissions linked to climate change.



Berlin resident Robert Schumann loads a ceramic-tiled heating oven (Kachelofen) with wood in his flat in Berlin, eastern Germany. —AFP photos

END OF AN ERA NEARS FOR BERLIN'S COAL STOVES



Berlin resident Alban Nikolai Herbst fills his heater with coal in his flat in Berlin, eastern Germany.

Alban Nikolai Herbst's Berlin apartment is covered in dust, his precious record collection included, thanks to a coal-powered stove he still uses to heat his home like thousands across the city. Germany's new government is set to extinguish the at-home heat source from a bygone era as part of its ambitious climate plans, as it looks to cut harmful emissions linked to climate change. But Herbst says he remains attached to his coal-powered stove, which he clings to for "sentimental" reasons.

Arriving in Berlin in the mid-1990s, Herbst discovered an odor that had long disappeared from the streets of western cities, where - unlike in the ex-communist east - domestic coal burning had died out. The "heavy heat" emanating from his stove suits his work as a writer too. "I am always at my desk. I work from six o'clock in the morning to 10 at night sometimes,"



An employee at Hans Engelke Energie gathers wood pellets before loading them onto a conveyor belt as he fills his delivery truck at the company's depot in Berlin, eastern Germany.

he says. Hans Engelke Energie supplies much of the coal used in the ovens across Berlin, and estimates between 5,000 to 6,000 homes still rely on the retro heat source.

The family-run business is one of the last in Berlin still delivering briquettes of black coal to customers. It has had to diversify over recent years to survive, and now delivers home heating oil and

wood pellets. "We sell gas and electricity, too," says company head Peter Engelke, adding that the company "hopes to prosper for a long time". Germany's new government, which took office this month, has made the battle against climate change a priority, announcing a target to phase out the use of coal by 2030.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz's coalition has pledged to expand renewable energy and decrease reliance on sources such as Russian gas in the long run. Some Berlin residents have already made the shift at home. Graphic designer Robert Schumann, who lives in the east of the city, still uses his ceramic stove to heat his home, but has dropped the coal in favor of wood. "It's more ecological," he says, drawing a comparison with fossil fuels excavated from the earth. "Less ash, and it's a more sustainable energy source because trees grow back." —AFP

BIG-TICKET ITEMS GO UNSOLD IN AUCTION OF MARADONA ASSETS

A virtual auction of some 90 items owned by late football superstar Diego Maradona on Sunday failed to attract any big bid-

ders, with a seaside apartment, two BMW's and the house he had bought for his parents among the larger items failing to sell. More than

1,500 potential bidders - in Latin America, Italy, France, England, Russia and Dubai - had signed up to take part, its organizers said. But by the

end of the three-hour affair, sales totaled only \$26,000, with more than \$1.4 million in assets unbid on, according to AFP calculations. The morning's highest bid went to a painting of the world-class footballer titled "Between Fiorito and the Sky," by artist Lu Sedova. It sold for \$2,150.

It was followed by a photograph of Maradona with late Cuban leader Fidel Castro, purchased for \$1,600 by a buyer in Dubai. "Auctions are like that - one cannot know the result until it is over," said organizer Adrian Mercado at the conclusion of the sale. "We expected much, but the reality is that it is always unknown."

The biggest-ticket items included the house in Buenos Aires that a young Maradona purchased for his parents (valued at \$900,000) and an apartment in the seaside resort of Mar del Plata (\$65,000).

Also unsold were two barely driven BMW cars, a 2017 model valued at \$225,000 and a 2016 model at \$165,000, as well as a Hyundai van, at \$38,000. Among other items that did sell: a painting of Marilyn Monroe was purchased by an Argentine bidder for \$1,500; a team jacket from Naples with his famous number 10 on the back was purchased for \$1,500 from an admirer in Dubai; someone in Germany paid \$270 for training pants Maradona wore with Borussia Dortmund; and a box of Cuban cigars brought \$550 from a fellow Argentine.

But there was no interest in his six television sets or the gym equipment he trained on in Dubai. The sale had been ordered by Judge Luciana Tedesco to pay the debts and expenses accrued by the estate of Maradona, who died of cardiac arrest on November 25, 2020. The court will now have to decide what to do with the unsold items. —AFP



Aerial view of a house owned by the late Argentine football star Diego Maradona which will be auctioned among other belongings. —AFP photos



A fan is seen at Sony Pictures' 'Spider-Man: No Way Home' Los Angeles Premiere in Los Angeles, California. —AFP

'Spider-Man' rakes in stunning \$253 million

COVID-schmovid: Sony and Marvel's new "Spider-Man: No Way Home" scored the third-biggest domestic opening of all time, taking in an estimated \$253 million in its massive North American weekend opening. Box office watchers are spinning hopeful predictions, with analysts eyeing it as the pandemic era's first potential billion-dollar-grossing film.

Its box office sales trail only 2019's "Avengers: Endgame" (\$357 million) and the previous year's "Avengers: Infinity War" (\$258 million), according to the BoxOfficeMojo website. "Spider-Man" easily surpassed early estimates of \$130-150 million. The new superhero blockbuster is well on its way to earning \$600 million overseas, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations reported Sunday. And this comes as theaters continue to battle their way back from months-long COVID-induced closures. "This is an incredible opening," David A. Gross, who runs Franchise Entertainment Research said.

While most big series struggle to keep their momentum, he added, "Spider-Man" is exploding." Analysts, however, are warning that the industry's recovery still has a long way to go, especially amid fears of a new surge in coronavirus cases fueled by the Omicron variant.

The latest Spider-Man installment is British star Tom Holland's third solo outing in the wildly popular role, played in earlier films by Tobey Maguire and Andrew Garfield. The webslinger has form when it comes to

big openings. The original film starring Maguire in 2002 was the first movie in the history of cinema to gross more than \$100 million on its debut weekend.

Breaking \$1 billion worldwide The "No Way Home" plot picks up directly from 2019's "Far From Home," which saw Peter Parker publicly unmasked by the villainous Mysterio. For "No Way Home" to break \$1 billion worldwide, the film will surely need to do well in China, where it has yet to be granted a release date. Although 2021 is on course to roughly double movie theaters' box office take of last year, there have been more misses than hits. Films leaning toward older audiences, such as Steven Spielberg's "West Side Story," have generally bombed, opening to just \$10.5 million last weekend.

This weekend's other top films were thus relegated to the distant sidelines. Disney's "Encanto," an animated fantasy with music by Lin-Manuel Miranda, placed second for the Friday-through-Sunday period with \$6.3 million, according to Exhibitor Relations. 20th Century's "West Side Story," with Ansel Elgort and Rachel Zegler playing star-crossed lovers in the mean streets of New York, slipped to third spot, at just \$3.4 million. In fourth was Sony's "Ghostbusters: Afterlife," the latest chapter in that supernatural franchise, also at \$3.4 million. And in fifth was Searchlight's new crime thriller "Nightmare Alley." Despite strong reviews, the Guillermo del Toro film took in only \$3 million. —AFP

Lifestyle | Features

IRAQI MUSEUM RESTORES TREASURES DESTROYED BY JIHADISTS

Left in ruins by jihadists, Iraq's once-celebrated Mosul museum and its 2,500-year-old treasures are being given a second life thanks to restoration efforts backed by French experts. Ancient artefacts in the museum were smashed into little pieces when Islamic State group fighters seized the northern city of Mosul in 2014 and made it their seat of power for three years. "We must separate all the fragments... It's like a puzzle, you try to retrieve the pieces that tell the same story," said restoration worker Daniel Ibled, commissioned by France's famous Louvre museum, which is supporting Iraqi museum employees. "Little by little, you manage to recreate the full set."

When the IS jihadists were in control, they filmed themselves taking hammers to pre-Islamic treasures they deemed heretical, proudly advertising their rampage in a video published in February 2015. The largest and heaviest artefacts were destroyed for the sake of their propaganda, but smaller pieces were sold on black markets the world over. The scars of their destruction remain today. On the ground floor of the museum, the twisted iron bars of the foundation poke through a gaping hole.

In other rooms, stones of various sizes are scattered, some bearing etchings of animal paws or wings. Others show inscriptions in cuneiform script. The smallest of these fragments - no bigger than a fist - are lined up on a table, and experts are hard at work sorting through them. For now, their efforts are focused on a winged lion from the city of Nimrud, jewel of the Assyrian empire, two "lamassu" - winged bulls with human heads -



A worker at the Mosul Museum tries to reassemble broken fragments - a larger artefact bearing cuneiform inscriptions, at the museum in Iraq's northern city. —AFP photos

and the base of the throne of King Ashurnasirpal II.

Giant jigsaw puzzle

These pieces, many dating back to the first millennium BC, are being revived with financing from the International Alliance for the Protection of Cultural Heritage in Conflict Areas (ALIPH). Alongside the Louvre, efforts are also

being made by Washington's Smithsonian Institution, which provides training for the museum's teams, as well as the New York-headquartered World Monuments Fund, which is tasked with restoring the building. The base of the Assyrian king's throne, covered in cuneiform writing, appears almost fixed. Some pieces are held together by elastic bands or small metallic rings.

"The base of the throne was pulverized into more than 850 pieces," said museum official Choueib Firas Ibrahim, an expert in Sumerian studies. "We have reassembled two-thirds of them." For some pieces, writing fragments or straight lines help the teams put them together like a giant jigsaw. "We read the inscriptions on this base, and we were able to restore the pieces to their place," said

restorer Taha Yassin. But other pieces without "a flat surface or inscriptions" make them virtually indistinguishable and are more complicated, Yassin added.

Empty spaces

One year after Iraqi troops recaptured Mosul in 2017, the museum received an urgent grant in a bid to restore it to its former glory. After delays due to the coronavirus pandemic, museum director Zaid Ghazi Saadallah said he hopes the restoration works will be finished within five years.

But many gaps will remain, and posters on walls identify the lost artefacts. "Most pieces are destroyed or looted," Saadallah said. Iraq has suffered for decades from the pillaging of its antiquities, particularly after the US-led invasion in 2003, as well as during the later IS takeover. But the current government says it has made the repatriation of artefacts a priority. The Louvre has tasked 20 people to help the restoration efforts, said Ariane Thomas, director of the Louvre's Department of Near Eastern Antiquities.

After three missions this year, seven French experts will take turns visiting Iraq to help guide the restoration process, undertaken with about 10 museum employees. Once the restoration work is complete, an online exhibition will be held to unveil the work. "When we said that with time, money and know-how, we could revive even the most damaged of works, this proves it," Thomas said. "Works that were completely destroyed have started to take form once again." —AFP



Photos show views of a larger fragment of a statue of the ancient Mesopotamian 'lamassu' human-headed winged bull being reassembled at the Mosul Museum in Iraq's northern city.



Rapper Drakeo the Ruler fatally stabbed at LA music festival

American rapper Drakeo the Ruler died Sunday after the rising hip hop star was stabbed backstage at a Los Angeles music festival. Drakeo's publicist Scott Jawson confirmed his client's death to AFP. The 28-year-old, whose real name is Darrell Caldwell, was scheduled to perform on the weekend at the Once Upon a Time in LA concert, alongside hip hop stars Snoop Dogg, Ice Cube and 50 Cent.

"Drakeo was the most original and innovative artist of his generation. A king without a crown or throne," Jawson tweeted. A stabbing incident was reported at the festival venue at 8:40 pm on Saturday, the Los Angeles Times said, citing a city fire department official. One person, not publicly identified at the time, was reportedly taken to a hospital in critical condition. He was later confirmed to be Caldwell, who died from the stab wounds. Live Nation, which helped organize the festival, ended the event early following the incident.

"There was an altercation in the roadway backstage," the promoter told AFP in a statement. "Out of respect for those involved and in coordination with local authorities, artists and organizers decided not to move forward with remaining sets." Snoop Dogg tweeted that he was in his dressing room when he was told about the stabbing and decided to leave immediately. "I'm saddened by the events that took place last night at the Once Upon a Time in LA festival," he said. "My condolences go out to the family and loved ones of Drakeo the Ruler."

Caldwell burst onto the scene in 2015, with many of his releases winning critical acclaim. He was arrested in 2017 on a weapons charge and again in 2018 for murder related to the shooting death of a 24-year-old man. Drakeo spent several years in prison on that charge. He was acquitted in 2019, but was then charged with criminal gang conspiracy. He agreed to a plea deal so he could be released from prison in 2020. While still behind bars, he released the album "Thank You for Using GTL," referring to the company that controls prison phone services. On the album, he raps over the prison phone line to his producer. —AFP

GIANT RUBBER WHALE HELPS KIWI RESCUERS BATTLE BEACHINGS

A two-ton rubber whale can take on a life of its own in the frigid shallows of a windswept New Zealand beach, particularly when a bedraggled group of would-be rescuers is trying to wrestle it into a harness. "Keep the blowhole clear... you're too close to the tail, one swipe can do a serious injury to yourself and the whale," an instructor yells as the Wellington rain lashes his pupils.

Despite the discomfort, enthusiasm levels remain high as the group successfully manoeuvre the five-metre long pilot whale replica onto a mat between two inflatable pontoons. The giant black dummy, and a smaller 200 kilogram version representing a dolphin, are eventually guided to deeper waters by volunteers trained by the New Zealand whale rescue charity Project Jonah. Filled with water the latex marine mammals help teams prepare for real emergencies - New Zealand has one of the highest whale stranding rates in the world.

Around 300 animals beach themselves annually, according to official figures and it is not unusual for groups of between 20 and 50 pilot whales to run aground. But numbers can run into the hundreds when a "super pod" is involved - in 2017, there was a mass stranding of almost 700 pilot whales. "There are always going to be strandings - there was one on Monday, there'll probably be one next week," Project Jonah's communications manager Louisa Hawkes told about 30 trainee whale medics during a course in Wellington.

The wait turns out to be considerably shorter, with a baby pilot whale found stranded Christchurch that same morning. As the course continues in a community hall, a Project Jonah coordinator paces outside giving advice via mobile phone to wildlife rangers at the opposite end of the country desperately trying to save the animal. Sadly, their efforts prove futile and the infant is euthanized a few hours later when its pod cannot be located.

'Perfect whale trap'

"Strandings are incredibly emotional," Hawkes tells the volunteers. "If a whale isn't refloated it can really, really hurt, particularly if you've bonded with it. "You need to ensure you have the resilience needed to cope with whatever's going to happen." No one knows why whales strand but Hawkes said it sometimes occurred when old, sick or injured animals swam ashore and other pod members followed. She said one orca, a male named Nobby, had been rescued on seven separate occasions from North Island beaches after beaching himself chasing stingrays for food.

Most mass strandings in New Zealand involve pilot whales on gently sloping beaches, which con-



A group of volunteers from New Zealand whale rescue charity Project Jonah being taught how to save a stranded whale by a group instructor, at Scorching Bay in Wellington. —AFP photos

fuse their sonar making them think they are in open waters. Other pod members then beach themselves trying to respond to the trapped whale's distress signals. The South Island's notorious Farewell Spit, a 26-kilometre hook of sand that protrudes into the sea, has been the scene of at least 10 pilot whale strandings in the past 15 years.

"It's what we call a perfect whale trap," Hawkes said. Many stranded whales are found to be malnourished because their stomachs are full of plastic pollution, while explosions from undersea mining and naval exercises have also been linked to groundings. Project Jonah was established in 1974 and is regarded as a world leader in whale rescue, helping train New Zealand's conservation department and police in what to do when strandings occur.



'Absolute privilege'

The charity has a network of 4,000 volunteers it can mobilize during mass strandings, most of them ordinary people who have undergone basic training in becoming marine mammal medics. "I'm an ocean swimmer and I've come across lots of dead whales - I want to know what to do when there's a situation where there is a chance of rescuing them," Wellington-based school teacher Leonora Hoke explained when asked why she took the course.

Aside from the emotional toll, Project Jonah warns that whale rescue involves numerous physical risks, including possible injury from the thrashing animals. The whale's blowhole expels bacteria and fungi, while the water around the stranded animals is soon contaminated with faeces and blood, the latter of which can attract sharks.

Even dead whales pose a hazard because their bellies fill with gas as they decompose, and can cause the carcasses to explode. Hawkes, a former youth worker who has been involved with Project Jonah for nine years and lost count of the animals she has saved, said it was worth it to see a stranded whale swimming off into the distance. "It's one of the most enriching, rewarding experiences of your life - it's something that will touch you," she said. "To be able to help out these marine mammals at the most stressful moment of their life is an absolute privilege." —AFP

Lifestyle | Features



Spanish-born British-Irish cyborg artist and activist for transpecies rights, Neil Harbisson, poses in Mataro near Barcelona. —AFP photos

'CYBORG' ARTIST WHO 'HEARS' COLOR TURNS TO TIME TRAVEL

For Neil Harbisson, a self-described "cyborg" artist living near Barcelona, color is quite literally music to his ears thanks to an antenna he designed to overcome color blindness. Well-known in Spain and with an international following that enabled him to meet the likes of Leonardo di Caprio and Tom Cruise, Harbisson is now testing out a new device designed to feel physically the passing of time.

Where once the term cyborg conjured up images of Arnold Schwarzenegger's Terminator, technology today is expanding human capacities through prostheses and implants. Born in Northern Ireland with achromatopsia, a rare condition meaning he can only see in greyscale, Harbisson moved to Barcelona as a child and grew up obsessed with color and things he couldn't sense. It was an obsession that saw the now 39-year-old Briton eventually go under the surgeon's knife to transform his identity and his life.

While at music college in England, he developed the slim metal rod that arches over his head and vibrates according to colors it detects. At first glance it looks like wearable technology, but it's as much a part of his body as his nose or his ears, giving him the ability to "hear" the color his eyes cannot see. "Being a cyborg means technology is part of your identity," he tells AFP. "It allows me to sense colors from infrared to ultra-violet through vibrations in my head that then become sound, so I can actually hear color."

'Eureka moment'

In 2004, he managed to persuade a surgeon - who remains anonymous - to drill it into his skull, the technology becoming part of his body as the bone grew around it. The sensor picks up the frequency of colors and translates them into sounds that he perceives through bone conduction. Humans normally hear using air conduction with sound waves passing through the outer and middle ears and causing the inner eardrum to vibrate. But with bone conduction, the vibrations are transmitted through the skull or jawbone directly to the inner ear.

The color-sound association also means he senses colors when listening to music or even speeches, with every syllable having a frequency that relates to color. "At the beginning, everything was chaotic because the antenna was not telling me: blue, yellow, pink, it was giving me vibrations and I had no idea what color I had in front of me," Harbisson said. "But after some time, my brain got used to it and it slowly became part of my perception and became normal," he added.

Although it cannot be switched off, Harbisson's antenna falls silent in darkness. His "eureka moment" came after dreaming "in color" and realizing the colors "had been created by my brain and not by the chip". Although he may be the first person to "hear" color frequencies as notes, bone conduction helped Beethoven as he started going deaf. The German composer realized he could still hear

by resting a wooden stick on the piano while biting the other end as he played. Some 200 years later, bone-anchored hearing aids work in the same way via a metal implant inserted into the skull.

'Stretch time'

In the home where Harbisson grew up and where his mother still lives, a riot of colored canvases line the walls, the staircase lined with curious-looking "facial scores" of celebrities like di Caprio and Cruise. These Hollywood stars let Harbisson detect the "sound" of their skin tone and lip color, which are rendered in enigmatic charcoal lines. But Harbisson is now turning his attention to a new project. He's created a device shaped like a chunky metal collar, designed to sense the passing of time, and is kicking off a year-long trial to see how it works. "There's a point of heat that takes 24 hours to go around my neck and allows you to feel the rotation of the planet," he told AFP.

"Once the brain gets used to it, you can use an app to make subtle changes to the speed of the point of heat which should alter your perception of time," he added. "You could potentially stretch time or make it feel like time is going faster." For now, it's a permanent wearable rather than an implant. A previous incarnation had to be scrapped because he was "getting burnt" at 6:00 pm. "This is an art that does carry some kind of risk but it's an unknown risk because we don't have much history of bodies and technology being merged," he said. —AFP



A member of the 'Amigos do Papai Noel' group, wearing a Santa Claus costume, arrives to Careiro da Varzea, Brazil. —AFP

JAPAN SPACE TOURISTS RETURN TO EARTH AFTER 12 DAYS ON ISS

A Japanese billionaire returned to Earth yesterday, after 12 days spent on the International Space Station where he made videos about performing mundane tasks in space including brushing teeth and going to the bathroom. Online fashion tycoon Yusaku Maezawa and his assistant Yozo Hirano parachuted onto Kazakhstan's steppe at around the expected landing time of 0313 GMT yesterday, along with Russian cosmonaut Alexander Misurkin.

Footage from the landing site, around 150 kilometers southeast of the central Kazakhstan town of Zhezkazgan, showed the trio smiling after being helped out of the Soyuz descent module and into evacuation vehicles in freezing, foggy conditions. "The crew is feeling good," a commentator on NASA TV said, translating comments from Russian mission control. Russia's defense ministry had said on Sunday that Maezawa and Hirano were set to be surprised by recovery crews with a traditional Japanese noodle dish. Their journey marked Russia's return to space tourism after a decade-long pause that saw the rise of competition from the United States.

The trio spent 12 days on the orbiting laboratory where the Japanese tourists documented their daily life aboard the ISS for Maezawa's popular YouTube channel. Addressing his one million followers on YouTube, the 46-year-old billionaire explained how to brush teeth and go to the bathroom in space. In one of the videos, he explained in detail the business of relieving oneself on the ISS. "Peeing is very easy," he said as he demonstrated a handheld funnel astronauts use to suck their urine away.

In other videos, he showed his followers how to properly drink tea and sleep in zero gravity. When the three space travelers arrived on the ISS on December 8, they joined a seven-team crew who were engaged in space biology and physics research. Maezawa plans to take eight people with him on a 2023 mission around the moon, operated by Elon Musk's SpaceX. He and his assistant are the first private Japanese citizens to visit space since journalist Toyohiro Akiyama travelled to the Mir station in 1990.

Turning point

Their return from space caps a banner year that many have seen as a turning point for private space travel. Billionaires Musk, Jeff



Japanese billionaire Yusaku Maezawa is helped to disembark from a helicopter as he arrives at Zhezkazgan airport after returning from the International Space Station (ISS) on the Soyuz MS-20 space capsule, in Zhezkazgan, Kazakhstan yesterday. —AFP photos

Bezos and Richard Branson all made breakthrough commercial tourism flights this year, bursting into a market Russia is keen to defend. Russia has a history of sending self-funded tourists to space. In partnership with US-based company Space Adventures, Russian space agency Roscosmos has previously taken seven tourists to the ISS since 2001 - one of them twice. The last was Canada's Cirque du Soleil co-founder Guy Laliberte in 2009, who was dubbed the first clown in space.

In October, Russia launched its first untrained cosmonauts into space since Laliberte's trip, delivering a Russian actress and a director to the ISS, where they filmed scenes for the first movie in orbit. Moscow had stopped sending tourists to space after NASA retired its Space Shuttle in 2011, which left Russia with a monopoly on supplying the ISS. NASA bought up all Soyuz launch seats for a reported \$90 million (80 million euros) per spot-effectively ending tourist flights.

That changed last year when a SpaceX spacecraft successfully delivered its first astronauts to the ISS. NASA began purchasing flights from SpaceX, stripping



A helicopter carrying the International Space Station (ISS) crew of Roscosmos cosmonaut Alexander Misurkin, space flight participants Japanese entrepreneur Yusaku Maezawa and his production assistant Yozo Hirano, lands at Zhezkazgan airport.

Russia of its monopoly and costing its cash-strapped space agency millions of dollars in revenue. While the cost of tickets to space for tourists has not been disclosed, Space Adventures has indicated they are in the range of \$50-60 million. Roscosmos plans to continue growing its space tourism business, already commissioning two Soyuz rockets for such trips. —AFP

IN BRAZIL'S SWELTERING AMAZON, SANTA SWAPS HIS SLED FOR BOAT

In the heart of Brazil's steaming-hot Amazon region, a sled would be of little use to Father Christmas.

Instead, perched on the prow of a rumbling river boat, he waves cheerily to the excited children who wait for him at river's edge. His red-and-white costume stands in sharp contrast to the emerald green tones of the world's largest tropical forest and the muddy brown waters of the Solimoes River, which feeds into the mighty Amazon.

"Merry Christmas!" Santa cries, vigorously ringing a bell as the boat approaches the town of Parana da Terra Nova, 15 miles (24 kilometers) from Manaus, the largest city in the Amazon. Part of a seasonal initiative by nonprofit group Friends of Father Christmas, he travels to impoverished communities of "Ribeirinhos," families living along the river. When he finally sets foot ashore after a three-hour journey, this Not-Your-Average-Santa does what Santas do everywhere, opening his arms to greet the giddy children who run up to meet him.

"You can't change the world, but you can make children smile at Christmastime," Santa tells AFP. (Don't tell the children, but his real name is Jorge Alberto, he is 57 years old and

his beard, sad to say, is fake.) Furthermore, he lets AFP know, there's nothing really jolly about having to wear the heavy plush outfit in the sweltering Amazon heat, and bringing presents to kids in the most remote regions is no cakewalk.

Santa has to borrow a small boat to get into one narrow branch of the river, and he walks with trepidation across a rough-hewn wooden foot-bridge that inspires little confidence. But when the Amazonian Santa arrives at his destination, the payoff is huge: the ear-to-ear smiles on the faces of children who are able, for a moment, to forget the harsh realities of life in a poverty-stricken, COVID-scarred region.

"Our challenge is to go to places where no one else goes," says Denise Kassama, 50, the coordinator of the project, which aims to bring Christmas cheer to 4,000 children this season. "We don't just come to distribute gifts, we come to bring joy." So even if there was no white Christmas here - the late afternoon instead saw a torrential downpour - Santa and his "elves" are undaunted. They organize games, apply cheery makeup to eager young faces and, yes, spread a good deal of joy. —AFP

Sports

Battling England succumb as Australia clinch second Test

Australia go 2-0 up in the Ashes series

ADELAIDE: Australia ground down a battling England to win the second Test in Adelaide yesterday and go 2-0 up in the Ashes series, leaving the visitors' dreams of winning back the hallowed urn in tatters. England resumed day five of the pink ball Test in deep trouble at 82 for four chasing a massive 468 to win, realistically needing a miracle just to salvage a draw. They gamely hung on into the final session, fighting a desperate rearguard action until ultimately crumbling to be all out for 192, crashing to a 275-run defeat.

Jhye Richardson was the pick of the attack with 5-42. England slumped to defeat by nine wickets in the first Test at Brisbane and the loss this week means their hopes of winning back a trophy they last secured on Australian turf in 2010-11 are all but over. Joe Root's men will head to Melbourne for the Boxing Day Test starting Sunday knowing that the only instance of a team coming from 2-0 down to win the Ashes was Donald Bradman's Australia way back in 1936-37.

“

It's frustrating ...
Lessons learnt

”

'It's frustrating'

"The reason it's disappointing is because we made the same mistakes. I think we could have bowled a lot fuller, and with the bat we need to be better, make bigger scores and apply better," said Root. "The second innings is the attitude and desire we need. It's frustrating because we know we are better. Lessons learnt, we have to be better in the next game." With Root, the world's number one Test batsman, removed by Mitchell Starc in the final over on Sunday evening, England's hopes appeared to rest with allrounder Ben Stokes.

The 30-year-old has so often rescued his team, with memories of his match-winning exploits

against Australia at Headingley in 2019 to keep that series alive still fresh. But trying to nurse England's batting through 90 overs against Australia's relentless bowling was too big a task, even for him. He put his head down and lasted 77 balls for 12 runs before Nathan Lyon struck.

The umpire initially gave the lbw shout not out, but Australia reviewed and it was shown to be plumb in front. Ollie Pope lasted only seven balls, edging to Steve Smith at slip off Starc, out for four to go with his disappointing first innings' five. But Jos Buttler (26) and Chris Woakes (44) dug in, frustrating Australia in a 61-run stand before Jhye Richardson clattered Woakes' stumps.

Ollie Robinson made a dogged eight before Smith took his sixth catch of the match to dismiss him off Lyon, then Buttler incredibly fell after surviving nearly 35 overs by stepping on his own stumps. "I wasn't nervous. I think Jos played very well, and played over 200 balls, so it was good resistance along with

Woakes and Robbo," said interim Australian skipper Smith. "We wanted to stay calm because we knew it would take a couple of good balls and a couple of wickets to get the win. "I had fun this week, enjoyed it," he added. "The guys played well, controlled the game from the first day."

Wrong picks

England's chances of victory had been nigh on impossible - no team had ever posted such a big fourth innings score to win in Test cricket history, with the West Indies' 418 for seven in beating Steve Waugh's Australia at St John's in 2003 the highest. Their problems stemmed from losing seven wickets for 86 runs as they collapsed to 236 all out in the



ADELAIDE: Australia appeal for a decision against England batsman Stuart Broad (3rd right) on the final day of the second Ashes cricket Test match in Adelaide yesterday. — AFP

first innings in reply to Australia's 473 for nine declared, with only Root (62) and Dawid Malan (80) showing any backbone. They also blundered by leaving out Jack Leach, ignoring the warnings of Adelaide Oval's head groundsman before the game that it would be a mistake to not play a specialist spinner.

Bowling coach Jon Lewis admitted they erred in picking an all-pace attack, conceding they misjudged conditions, expecting more swing and less spin. "In hindsight, you might say we should have picked a different side," he said, with returning veteran seamers Jimmy Anderson and Stuart Broad claiming just five wickets between them. While

England struggled, Australia excelled under Smith after Pat Cummins was ruled out hours before the start over a COVID scare.

Workhorse Marnus Labuschagne again reinforced his status as one of the world's premier batsmen, slamming 103 in the first innings and 51 in the second. In contrast to England's batting, Australia showed more depth with five of their top six scoring fifties. Opener Marcus Harris was the only failure. And even with pace spearheads Cummins and Josh Hazlewood missing, Jhye Richardson and Michael Neser ably complemented Starc and Lyon, along with fast-improving all-rounder Cameron Green. — AFP

News in brief

Milik's hat-trick saves Marseille

PARIS: Poland striker Arkadiusz Milik's hat-trick saved Marseille from a shock defeat to fifth-tier Cannel-Rocheville but holders Paris Saint-Germain encountered no similar difficulties in their David and Goliath last 64 French Cup tie on Sunday. PSG, who have lifted the trophy in six of the past seven years, swept aside their fifth-tier amateur opposition Feignies Aulnoye in Valenciennes 3-0. Lionel Messi was rested for the game which was killed off as a contest with two penalties won by Kylian Mbappe in the first half. He converted the first, with Mauro Icardi doing the honors for the second. Mbappe got his double and PSG's third before coming off, job done. Earlier, down at the Velodrome, Cannel-Rocheville took a surprise lead but were reduced to 10 men before half-time as Milik levelled from the penalty spot. — AFP

Tottenham out of Europe

PARIS: Tottenham Hotspur's European campaign for this season is over after UEFA awarded Rennes a 3-0 victory in their final Europa Conference League group match yesterday. Spurs were unable to fulfill the December 9 fixture due to a swathe of COVID-19 cases in the squad. No agreement could then be reached between the clubs for a rearranged date before the deadline of December 31. As a result Tottenham finish third in the section behind group winners Rennes, who progress directly to the last 16, and Dutch side Vitesse who now face Rapid Vienna in a knockout play-off. "The Uefa Appeals Body took the following decision: to declare the 2021/22 UEFA Europa Conference League group stage match between Tottenham Hotspur FC and Stade Rennais FC, that was initially scheduled to be played on 9 December 2021, as forfeited by Tottenham Hotspur FC, who is therefore deemed to have lost the match 0-3," read the UEFA statement. — AFP

Goggia's 'best ever' super-G

VAL D'ISERE: Italy's Sofia Goggia nailed what she considered was "the best" super-G performance of her life on Sunday at Val d'Isere to seal a World Cup weekend double after taking the downhill at the French ski resort 24 hours earlier. The 29-year-old Olympic downhill champion has been in superb form in the past few weeks and now sits atop the World Cup overall standings on 635 points, 65 ahead of American Mikaela Shiffrin, who came fifth. "I believe that was the best super-G performance of my career," Goggia said. "I managed to build up speed at the fundamental moments. I stayed calm, was fluid from top to bottom and never slowed down." Norway's Ragnhild Mowinckel finished second, 0.33sec off the pace, with Elena Curtoni of Italy rounding out the podium. Mowinckel was full of praise for Goggia who is enjoying a barnstorming patch after also winning all three races at Lake Louise two weeks ago. — AFP

Kamco Invest becomes official partner of the 3rd GCC Games 2022

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Olympic Committee and Kamco Invest announced in a joint statement the signing of a sponsorship agreement for the 3rd GCC Games 2022 to be held in Kuwait from January 9th-19th 2022. The regional sports tournaments will be held under the patronage of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. As stated in the agreement, Kamco Invest will be an official partner of the tournament.

Kuwait will be hosting the third edition, organized in partnership with the Gulf Cooperation Council, following the second edition held in Saudi Arabia in 2015 and the first in Bahrain in 2011. The

ABK champions 'The Challenge' in partnership with Platinum Gym

KUWAIT: In line with its ongoing efforts to promote a healthier lifestyle in the community, Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) partnered with Platinum Health Club to sponsor 'The Challenge' weight lifting tournament at Platinum Sabah Al Salem - Platinum Box Area. The participants in the tournament were divided into two groups: over 80kg and under 80kg, who took part in four competitions: Pull-Ups, Back Squat, Bench Press, and Deadlift.

The event was attended by Fawzy Al Thunayan, ABK's General Manager of Board Affairs, who handed out the winning trophies on behalf of the Bank. The winner of the over 80kg category went to Mohamed Adel Al Terkit, while the winner of the under 80kg category was Ali Mohamed Yacoub Bu

Nadal tests positive for COVID-19 in latest blow

MADRID: Spanish tennis star Rafael Nadal said yesterday he had tested positive for COVID-19, which puts in doubt his participation in the Australian Open next month where he was expected to make his big comeback after months of injury. The Spanish former world number one said he took the test when he returned to Spain from Abu Dhabi where he took part in an exhibition tournament last week, his first since August due to a foot injury.

"I am going through some unpleasant moments but I trust that I will improve little by little. I am now confined at home and have informed the people who had been in contact with me," he wrote on Twitter. "As a consequence of the situation, I have to have total flexibility with my calendar and I will analyze my options depending on my evolution," he added. "I will



Faisal M Sarkhou



Sheikh Fahad Nasser Sabah Al Ahmad Al Sabah

qualifiers for team games, shooting, and tennis will begin on January 4th, with the official opening ceremony of the tournament on the 9th. The GCC Games closing ceremony will be held on the 19th of January following the final match of the football championship.

The tournament will be organized across several stadiums, courts, and fields to accommodate the 15 teams and individual competitions. Over 1,500 athletes from the six GCC countries are expected to



Sakhr, with each receiving KD300 and a three-month silver membership.

The second-place winners of the two categories, Mahdy Yacoub Bu Sakhr and Youssef Al Kandary availed a silver membership valid for two months and KD200 and the third place winners, Johnny

participate in the various games which include football, handball, volleyball, basketball, swimming, athletics, karate, judo, fencing, shooting, tennis, cycling, ice hockey, table tennis, and e-Sports.

On this occasion, President of the Kuwait Olympic Committee, Sheikh Fahad Nasser Sabah Al Ahmad Al Sabah, expressed his pride in the private sector's role of empowering the sports scene. He also thanked Kamco Invest's management for supporting and backing young talented athletes from across the region through the sponsorship of this initiative.

Faisal Mansour Sarkhou, CEO of Kamco Invest, commented, "Our sponsorship is in line with our commitment to support the younger generation and the objectives of the tournament to further drive the bond between the gulf countries. We would like to wish all participants the best of luck during their stay in Kuwait, a country they should consider as their second home. Furthermore, we are confident that all participating athletes will put on a competitive performance throughout the entire tournament making it an enjoyable and memorable moment for sports enthusiasts."

keep you informed of any decisions about my future tournaments."

The 35-year-old had been due to fly to Melbourne later this month to compete in an ATP event ahead of the Australian Open which begins at Melbourne Park on January 17. The 20-time major champion has struggled with a foot injury for the past six months forcing him to miss both Wimbledon and the US Open. Nadal lost to another former world number one Andy Murray in an exhibition match on Friday in Abu Dhabi, his first match since August.

He then lost to Wimbledon semi-finalist Denis Shapovalov of Canada on Saturday. It was his first tournament appearance since the Citi Open in Washington in early August where he lost to Lloyd Harris. Nadal had said the championship in Abu Dhabi was a chance to test his foot and work towards the trip Down Under in healthy conditions. "I was able to compete in both matches and even had my chances, so if we put that in perspective it's a very positive thing," he said after the tournament in Abu Dhabi. "The idea is to go there and try my best there in Australia. Being 100 per cent honest, I can't guarantee it," he added, saying he would have to speak to his



ABU DHABI: In this file photo, Spain's Rafael Nadal returns the ball to Canada's Denis Shapovalov (unseen) during the third-place play-off match of the Mubadala World Tennis Championship. Rafael Nadal said he has tested positive for COVID-19. — AFP

team before making a final decision. Nadal had been practicing hard back home in Mallorca and has made a new addition to his coaching staff in the form of his good friend Marc Lopez, who won 2016 Olympic gold with him in doubles in Rio. — AFP

Sports

Liverpool held 2-2 as Son rescues Spurs in thriller

COVID-hit Chelsea put 'at risk': Tuchel

LONDON: Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp claimed referee Paul Tierney has a "problem" with him after Tottenham's Son Heung-min punished Alisson Becker's blunder to rescue a thrilling 2-2 draw on Sunday. Klopp's side recovered from Harry Kane's early strike to move in front thanks to goals from Diogo Jota and Andrew Robertson. But South Korea forward Son equalized after Alisson missed his attempt to cut out Harry Winks' pass. Liverpool held on for a point despite having to play the final 13 minutes with 10 men following Robertson's dismissal for an ugly hack on Emerson Royal.

Klopp was booked after protesting over two key Tierney decisions, insisting Kane should have been sent off and Jota deserved a penalty. The German took aim at Tierney in a post-match blast, saying: "I have no idea what his problem is with me. I was a bit more emotional in the game, I'd have preferred the right decisions on the pitch. Kane was definitely a red card. For the penalty, the referee told me he thinks Jota stops on purpose. It is incredible. He had the best spot on the pitch and doesn't give it. You will have to ask him what his problem is with me."

For the first time in four years, Liverpool won't be top of the Premier League table on Christmas Day. The Reds are three points behind leaders Manchester City, who thrashed Newcastle 4-0 earlier on Sunday. After winning their previous eight games in all competitions, Liverpool once again left London frustrated having lost at West Ham and drawn at Brentford this term. The pulsating encounter was a welcome antidote to the coronavirus mayhem which has engulfed the Premier League, with six games postponed this weekend. Amid calls for the Christmas program to be postponed to stem the virus spread, Klopp said: "We play now on Wednesday, Sunday and Tuesday. That is impossible. We do not have the players. We could maybe have another case or two. We have to think about it, we cannot just push it all through. If we don't play any more and have a break I am fine."

Tottenham had been hit the hardest by COVID, with Liverpool's visit their first game in a fortnight after matches against Rennes, Brighton and Leicester were postponed.

Nine of Antonio Conte's squad contracted the virus and some of them remain in isolation. Liverpool weren't immune either and, just hours before kick-off, Thiago Alcantara tested positive, while Jordan Henderson was sidelined by a non-COVID illness. Virgil Van Dijk, Fabinho and Curtis Jones remained absent having missed Thursday's win against Newcastle after testing positive. Racing onto Tanguy Ndombele's pin-point pass into the Liverpool area, Kane guided a clinical finish into the far corner in the 13th minute. It was only Kane's second Premier League goal of a difficult season for the England captain.

Rush of blood

A feisty affair grew more heated after Kane was only booked for a studs-up foul on Robertson that could easily have been a red card. Liverpool equalized in the 35th minute as Robertson darted into the area and clipped a precise cross towards Jota, who powered a header past Hugo Lloris for his 11th club goal of the season. Jota appealed in vain for a penalty moments later, going down under heavy contact from Emerson.

Seconds after Trent Alexander-Arnold's push on Dele Alli failed to yield a Tottenham penalty, the



LONDON: Liverpool's Portuguese striker Diogo Jota (left) heads towards goal during the English Premier League football match between Tottenham Hotspur and Liverpool at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium on December 19, 2021. — AFP

right-back popped up with a driven cross that Robertson headed home from close-range in the 69th minute. But Alisson's rush of blood gifted Tottenham a point five minutes later when he charged out of his area and missed Winks' pass, leaving Son with the simple task of slotting into the empty net. Robertson became the first Liverpool player to be sent off in 113 games in the 77th minute. Initially booked for his foul on Emerson, Robertson saw red after Tierney changed his decision following a VAR check.

Premier League slammed

In another development, Thomas Tuchel has criticized the Premier League for putting his coronavirus-hit Chelsea side at "huge risk" by forcing them to play at Wolves on Sunday as leaders Manchester City put Newcastle to the sword.

Chelsea drew 0-0 at Molineux while City eased to a 4-0 away win before Tottenham held 10-man Liverpool to a 2-2 draw, denting the Reds' title hopes. But the action on the pitch was overshadowed by Britain's worsening Covid-19 crisis, with just four games played in total out of 10 originally scheduled.

Premier League clubs will meet on Monday to discuss what action to take over the chaos, with growing questions over the integrity of the competition as the busy festive period looms. The Athletic reported that clubs would discuss whether to postpone an entire round of fixtures on December 28, 29 and 30 in an attempt to ease the pressure. Chelsea, who had their request for a postponement rejected, could only field 14 outfield players in their matchday squad on Sunday, with N'Golo Kante, Mateo Kovacic and Trevoh Chalobah all featuring despite struggling for match fitness. — AFP

Hazard returns but Madrid fail to find a way past Cadiz

MADRID: Eden Hazard started for the first time since September on Sunday but Liga leaders Real Madrid were denied an 11th consecutive victory as they were held to a frustrating goalless draw with Cadiz. A spate of positive COVID tests prompted coach Carlo Ancelotti to bring Hazard in from the cold yet his team could not find a way through against a determined Cadiz side at the Santiago Bernabeu.

"We lacked a bit of quality in the final third but we played well, it was just there were no spaces," said Ancelotti. "These are the games we struggle with most." The stalemate reduced Madrid's lead at the top of La Liga from eight points to six at the end of the weekend, after second-placed Sevilla snatched a late victory over Atletico Madrid on Saturday.

Three straight league defeats means Atletico, the defending champions, are now 14 points off the top while Barcelona, who beat Elche on Saturday, are seventh, 16 points adrift. Hazard's last start for Madrid had come in the humiliating Champions League defeat by Sheriff Tiraspol on September 21, with the Belgian's season again interrupted by injury and a lack of fitness. But form has been a key factor too, after Ancelotti stated clearly he "prefers other players" while admitting Hazard would have to show patience and perseverance to earn back his place.

Hazard could even depart as early as January if a significant bid arrived but this was an encouraging night for the 30-year-old, who made little impact



MADRID: Real Madrid's Belgian forward Eden Hazard (center) fights for the ball with Cadiz's Argentinean goalkeeper Jeremias Ledesma (left) during the Spanish league football match between Real Madrid CF and Cadiz CF on December 19, 2021. — AFP

from the right wing in the first half but improved immeasurably when moved more centrally in the second. "It took him a bit of time to get into the game, he did better in the second half," said Ancelotti. "He is not so used to playing close to the wing, on the right, but inside he combined very well with Karim (Benzema). Hazard can be one more weapon for the second half of the season."

It remains to be seen if any of Marco Asensio, Rodrygo and Gareth Bale - all unavailable due to positive Covid tests - are available for Wednesday's game away at Athletic Bilbao, but Hazard will hope he did at least enough to continue his latest attempt at a revival. Luka Modric was also absent, allowing Fede Valverde a chance to impress in midfield, but Madrid missed the Croat's creativity, especially early on. — AFP

Freiburg poach win over Leverkusen to go third in Germany

BERLIN: Kevin Schade poached a late winning goal on Sunday as Freiburg finished 2021 third in the Bundesliga table after a 2-1 home win over Bayer Leverkusen. The 20-year-old Schade came off the bench and stole a march on Leverkusen goalkeeper Lukas Hradecky at a corner to tap the winner into the net six minutes from time.

Freiburg coach Christian Streich let out a primal scream at the final whistle as his team go into the winter break in their highest league ranking in the club's history. "We really wanted to be third over the festive period," goal-scorer Vincenzo Grifo told DAZN. "When we look at the table over Christmas, it makes for good reading." Freiburg took the lead at their

Europa Park Stadium in Germany's Black Forest when Italy forward Grifo chipped in a first-half penalty.

Leverkusen equalized just before the break when Germany defender Jonathan Tah hooked a pass to Charles Aranguiz who headed past the Freiburg goalkeeper. However, with time running out Schade ghosted in front of Hradecky and flicked the ball into the net to the despair of the Leverkusen goalkeeper. Freiburg's defense has conceded a club-record low of 16 league goals in the first half of the season. The hosts' worked tirelessly to contain Leverkusen striker Patrik Schick who scored eight goals in his previous three Bundesliga games.

Freiburg's win saw them leap-frog Leverkusen into third spot, 14 points behind Bundesliga leaders Bayern Munich. The Bavarian giants are on course to win a tenth straight Bundesliga title and start the two-week winter break nine points clear at the top of the table after Friday's 4-0 thrashing of Wolfsburg. Second-placed Borussia Dortmund blew the chance to trim Bayern's huge lead on Saturday when they slumped to a 3-2 defeat at Hertha Berlin. — AFP

Napoli squeeze past AC Milan to reignite title push

MILAN: Napoli got their title challenge back on track on Sunday with a dramatic 1-0 win at rivals AC Milan which moved them up to second in Serie A but was decided by the controversial ruling out of a late equaliser. Eljif Elmas headed home the decisive goal from Piotr Zielinski's fifth-minute corner at a freezing San Siro to end a mini-crisis for Luciano Spalletti's injury-ravaged side and put them four points behind

champions Inter Milan, who are now guaranteed to be top at Christmas with one midweek round of fixtures left before the winter break. Former league leaders Napoli largely looked assured despite missing a host of starters including star striker Victor Osimhen, defensive lynchpin Kalidou Koulibaly and Italy forward Lorenzo Insigne and are back on track after two home defeats at the hands of Atalanta and Empoli. "We had the game in hand pretty well for most of the match, apart from a few moments when Milan's physical play didn't allow us to settle," said Spalletti to DAZN. However Milan thought they had snatched a point in the final minute after a wave of late pressure when Franck Kessie lashed home from close range, only for the strike to be disallowed for offside following a pitchside video check by referee Davide Massa. — AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

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

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144

CHANGE OF NAME

I, PEDDEHAPU VENKATESWARLU (Old Name) S/o Peddehapu Srinivas, D.No. 63-3-4, Sanjeevanagar, Opp: Ravi Supply Company, Rajahmundry-533105. Changing my name from PEDDEHAPU VENKATESH, S/o Peddehapu Srinivas (New Name). Henceforth I am being called as PEDDEHAPU VENKATESH, S/o Peddehapu Srinivas for all purposes. (C 0994) 21-12-2021

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EMERGENCY ☎ 112

NOTICE

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Packers secure place in NFL playoffs

Saints blank Buccaneers; Rodgers ties Favre



BALTIMORE: Running back AJ Dillon #28 of the Green Bay Packers scores a first half touchdown against the Baltimore Ravens at M&T Bank Stadium on December 19, 2021 in Baltimore, Maryland. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: The Green Bay Packers almost squandered a late two-touchdown lead but held on for a 31-30 victory over the Baltimore Ravens on Sunday to secure a place in the NFL playoffs. Quarterback Aaron Rodgers threw for three touchdowns, taking his career tally for the Packers to 442 to match the franchise record of icon Brett Favre. But it was the Packers defense who made the difference right at the end, thwarting the Ravens' two-point conversion attempt with 42 seconds remaining to preserve the victory. "I think at moments like this, it's important, as much as you win with class, you have to savour these a little bit. These are special," Rodgers said.

Tom Brady and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers were not so fortunate on Sunday as they missed an opportunity to clinch the NFC South title after being shutout 9-0 by the New Orleans Saints. Green Bay led 31-17 in the fourth quarter but couldn't put the game away. Tyler Huntley, starting at quarterback for Baltimore in place of injured Lamar Jackson, scored two touchdowns in the final five

minutes on a three-yard run and - with 42 seconds remaining - an eight-yard run.

But his two-point conversion pass attempt was incomplete and the Ravens fell into a first-place tie with Cincinnati in the AFC North. Rodgers connected with Davante Adams on a three-yard touchdown to tie the score at 14-14 in the second quarter. He hit Aaron Jones with a nine-yard scoring pass in the third quarter and found Marquez Valdes-Scantling in the fourth for a 28-17 lead. The milestone day saw the Packers capture the NFC North title to become the first division winners of the season.

In Florida, Brett Maher kicked three field goals and the Saints defense dominated Brady who was shut out in a game for the first time since 2006. Brady completed 26 of 48 for 214 yards, threw an interception and lost a fumble. Brady's two top receiving weapons, Mike Evans (hamstring) and Chris Godwin (knee), were sidelined in the second quarter and missed the rest of the game. Running back Leonard Fournette (hamstring) was sidelined for good in the third quarter.

'I loved it'

New Orleans, who have won the last four NFC South titles, improved to 4-0 in regular-season meetings against Tampa Bay since Brady joined the team. That includes the most lopsided loss of Brady's career, a 38-3 hammering in Tampa Bay last season. "This is the defending world champions and we knew everything we had to do was on defense," said Saints defensive end Cam Jordan. "We got after him (Brady), we hit him early and we hit him often. "The way we attack their offense, I loved it." The Packers remained in the thick of the hunt for top seed in the NFC, while Arizona's hopes in that direction dwindled with a shock 30-12 loss to the Lions in Detroit.

Arizona entered the contest tied for the best record in the league, but for the second straight week they were unable to get a win to lock up their first post-season berth since 2015. Instead, they lost back-to-back games for the first time in 2021 to a Lions team that came into the contest with the worst record in the league. Lions quarterback Jared Goff threw for three touchdowns, running back Craig

Reynolds surpassed 100 rushing yards.

Cardinals quarterback Kyler Murray completed 23 of 41 passes for 257 yards with one touchdown and one interception. The Lions notched just their second win of the season against 11 defeats and one tie. Any pleasure they had in playing spoiler - at least temporarily - to Arizona's playoff hopes may have been tempered by the fact that the victory, along with Jacksonville's 30-16 loss to the Houston Texans, put the Jaguars in position to claim the top pick in the next NFL draft.

The Jags, playing their first game since coach Urban Meyer was fired before he could complete his first season in charge, could wind up with the top pick for the second year in a row. The Dallas Cowboys moved closer to clinching a playoff berth with a 21-6 victory over NFC East division rivals the New York Giants. The Cowboys could be assured of the division title on Tuesday if the Washington Football Team fall to the Philadelphia Eagles in one of the weekend's three games that were postponed because of Covid-19. — AFP

Booker makes impact in return, Trail Blazers cool off Grizzlies

LOS ANGELES: Devin Booker scored 16 points in his return from a seven-game absence as the NBA-leading Phoenix Suns rolled over the Charlotte Hornets 137-106 on Sunday. Booker, who had been out due to a left hamstring strain, made four three-pointers and had six rebounds and five assists in 26 minutes for the Suns, who led by as many as 29 points in the first half. The Suns own the best record in the league and have now won 23 of their last 25 games, including 14 straight at home.

JaVale McGee scored 19 points as Phoenix set season highs in points scored and three-pointers with 20. Mikal Bridges scored 16 points and Landry Shamet had 15, while Deandre Ayton tallied 15 points and 15 rebounds. Miles Bridges scored 26 points and Kelly Oubre had 18 to lead Charlotte. PJ Washington added 13, Jalen McDaniels had 10 and LaMelo Ball recorded nine points, 10 rebounds and seven assists. The Hornets lost for the eighth time in their last 11 games.

In Chicago, DeMar DeRozan scored 38 points after missing two weeks because of COVID-19 measures to lead the Chicago Bulls to a 115-110 victory over the Los Angeles Lakers. Nikola Vucevic had 19 points and 13 rebounds, and Lonzo Ball added 19 points as the Bulls snapped a two-game losing streak. The Bulls were playing their first game since December 11 after two games were postponed because of COVID-19 measures. LeBron James had 31 points, Carmelo Anthony added 21 and Russell Westbrook 20 as Los Angeles lost their second straight. In Memphis, Damian Lillard scored 17 of his 32 points in the first quarter as the Portland Trail Blazers snapped Memphis Grizzlies' five-game winning streak with a 105-100 win.

The Trail Blazers won for the second consecutive



MEMPHIS: Steven Adams #4 and Dillon Brooks #24 of the Memphis Grizzlies force a jump ball against Damian Lillard #0 of the Portland Trail Blazers on December 19, 2021. — AFP

game after ending a seven-game losing skid with a win over Charlotte on Friday. "It's not like we blew them out," Lillard said. "We had to execute. We had to get stops. We had to weather a few storms. It was a great win." Norman Powell finished with 28 points as Portland improved to 13-18 on the season in front of a crowd of 18,400 at the FedExForum. Dillon Brooks scored a career-high 37 points for Memphis. The Grizzlies lost for the second time in their last 12 games.

Portland took the lead, 94-91, on a four-point play by Lillard with just over four minutes left and regained the lead 97-95 on a three-point basket by Powell three minutes later. "It was a big play," Powell said. "I was just trying to find an opening. We are not

going to get too excited, but it's a great win for us. It was great to get a gritty win." The Grizzlies had a chance to tie it with five seconds to go, but Desmond Bane's long shot hit the rim and bounced harmlessly away.

Elsewhere, Saddiq Bey scored 26 points and the Detroit Pistons ended their franchise record-tying 14-game losing streak with a 100-90 victory over the Miami Heat. Hamidou Diallo finished with 15 points and seven rebounds for Detroit, who recorded their first victory since a 97-89 decision over Indiana on November 17. Max Strus led the Heat with 24 points off the bench. Kyle Lowry tallied 19 points, 10 rebounds and five assists, while Dewayne Dedmon had 11 points for Miami, which had won four of its last five games. — AFP

Premier League clubs tackle COVID-19 chaos

MANCHESTER: Premier League chiefs met yesterday to discuss a potential festive "firebreaker" as a result of the escalating coronavirus crisis, with managers voicing fears over player safety and fairness. Just four of the scheduled 10 games took place this weekend due to a number of call-offs caused by outbreaks that left clubs unable to field teams.

Despite record numbers of COVID-19 cases across Britain as the Omicron variant sweeps through the nation, the Premier League has so far insisted the show goes on "where safely possible." So far, the league has been considering applications for postponements on a case-by-case basis but there has been criticism over the decision-making process. Managers forced to balance the wellbeing of their players with the need for results say there has been a lack of clarity over why some games are postponed but others allowed to go ahead.

Chelsea have fallen six points behind Manchester City at the top of the table after draws with Everton and Wolves over the past week while dealing with a worsening outbreak. The European champions' application to have their match at Wolves on Sunday called off was rejected even though they had seven positive COVID cases. "We were put in a huge risk of health and safety to the players, not just because of Covid but also physically," said Chelsea boss Thomas Tuchel. "From a medical point of view, I'm very worried because we have had four consecutive days of positive tests in the squad.

"How will this stop if we carry on and

pretend it's not happening? This is my opinion and it's the medical opinion but it's not the opinion of the Premier League, so we have to play." Title-chasing Liverpool stumbled in a 2-2 draw at Tottenham, with a number of key players absent after returning positive tests. The crisis has come at the busiest time in the English football calendar, with Premier League sides each due to play three rounds of matches between December 26 and January 3.

Even a short circuit-breaker would put strain on the calendar, forcing clubs to cram in fixtures during the second half of the season. The Athletic reported that a compromise solution could result in the middle round of the festive fixtures from December 28-30 being postponed to give squads stretched by infections and injuries extra preparation time. Adding to the frustration over the perceived unfairness of some call-offs is that some of the clubs with the best vaccination rates have been forced to play on.

Unvaccinated players still have to self-isolate for 10 days after coming into close contact with a positive case, which has further depleted a number of squads. The Premier League has not released vaccination data since October when only 68 percent of players were double-vaccinated, while 81 percent had received one dose. Leeds, who have a 99 percent vaccination rate among players and staff according to chief executive Angus Kinnear, had to give debuts to two teenagers and name a 15-year-old on the bench due to an injury crisis for Saturday's 4-1 defeat by Arsenal. — AFP