



**4** Booster shots available at Jaber Causeway drive-thru



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# Speaker rejects calls to quit, blasts opponents

## Ex-MP Barrak says opposition to draw new 'roadmap'



KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem meets MP Obaid Al-Wasmi on Sunday after he returned from a medical trip abroad. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem has refuted calls by opposition MPs to step down, saying he was elected in the first round by a majority in the Assembly and this cannot be undermined by a group of "seven, nine or even 100 lawmakers". Speaking to reporters after visiting MP Obaid Al-Wasmi on his return from an overseas medical trip, Ghanem expressed hope that nothing will happen in this Assembly term to obstruct the work of the parliament, like what happened in the previous term.

He said dissolving the National Assembly is in the hands of HH the Amir, but "in my view, I think things are heading for the better", adding that obstructing the work of the National Assembly does not serve the interests of the Kuwaiti people.

Ghanem also hoped that the prime minister will form a Cabinet that meets the aspirations of the Kuwaiti people, adding that if the new government is formed this week, the Assembly will resume its sessions from Jan 4.

About calls by opposition MPs for the departure of Ghanem and the prime minister, the speaker said "it is the right of anyone to say whatever he wants, but I believe that such calls are unrelated to the constitution or any person who respects the constitution". "The Assembly speaker was elected by Kuwaitis and not in China, by overwhelming popular support that cannot be broken by seven, nine or even 100 MPs. The Assembly speaker was elected despite the intervention of public funds thieves," he said.

Meanwhile, ex-MP and opposition leader Musallam Al-Barrak, who recently

returned from exile in Turkey, said yesterday there are efforts to invite the 31 opposition MPs to a meeting to draw a roadmap for the future. He said the plan for opposition political groups should include political reforms and the approval of a number of urgent bills for the benefit of the people.

MP Hamdan Al-Azemi yesterday asked the finance minister if Iraq had paid its last payment of compensations resulting from the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. The lawmaker said the Iraqi central bank announced a few days ago that Iraq paid its last payment of multibillion-dollar reparations imposed by the UN Security Council for damages caused by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The lawmaker also asked the minister if Kuwait has granted Iraq any loans in the past 20 years and if yes, what is their value.

### News in brief

#### Saudi executes IS-linked man

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia yesterday executed a Yemeni man accused of plotting a suicide attack in the kingdom and of links to the Islamic State group, the interior ministry said. "Mohammed Al-Saddam, a Yemeni national, sought to target civilian gatherings at a public facility under the instructions of the Daesh terrorist organization," the interior ministry said. It said the man had "pledged allegiance to IS" and was planning a "suicide attack using an explosive belt". — AFP

#### Record COVID cases in EPL

LONDON: The Premier League has revealed a record 103 players and staff tested positive for the coronavirus in the period from Dec 20 to 26. So far in December, 15 Premier League games have been called off, while the three divisions below the top tier have been decimated by postponements. "The League can today confirm between Monday 20 December and Sunday 26 December, 15,186 COVID-19 tests were administered on players and club staff. Of these, there were 103 new positive cases," a Premier League statement said. — AFP

#### Algeria drops case against teen

ALGIERS: Algerian prosecutors have dropped a case against a 14-year-old girl who was facing trial in connection with the country's pro-democracy Hirak protest movement, her lawyer said yesterday. "The prosecution... recognized that it had been an error (and) dropped the charges," Abdelhalim Khereddine said. According to Algerian law, the age of criminal responsibility is 18 and minors are tried in juvenile courts. Her case had sparked outrage online. — AFP

#### Foreign spouses need clearance

COLOMBO: Foreigners seeking to wed Sri Lankans will need security clearances from the defense ministry. The new rules will require foreigners from next week to get a clean bill of health and a security check before their nuptials, with registrar general W M Weerasekera attributing the policy to "national security" concerns. The new regulations have prompted scorn from opposition lawmakers who pointed out that several members of the ruling family are dual nationals. — AFP

## Coalition says Iran, Hezb aid Houthi strikes

RIYADH: The Saudi-led coalition on Sunday accused Iran and Hezbollah of helping Yemen's Houthi rebels to launch missiles and drones at the kingdom, where two people were killed. Since the coalition intervened almost seven years ago to support Yemen's government, Saudi Arabia has regularly accused Iran of supplying the Houthis with weapons and Hezbollah of training the insurgents. Tehran denies the charges.

## UAE issues first civil marriage license for non-Muslim couple

ABU DHABI: The UAE issued its first civil marriage license for a non-Muslim couple, state media reported yesterday, as the Gulf country seeks to keep its edge over regional competitors. The United Arab Emirates - where foreigners make up 90 percent of the approximately 10-million population - has been amending its laws to present itself as a modernizing force in a largely

Lebanon's Iran-backed Shiite militant movement Hezbollah has previously denied sending fighters or weapons to Yemen. The latest Saudi accusation came as the coalition intensified an aerial bombing campaign against the Iran-backed Houthis in retaliation for deadly attacks on the kingdom.

Coalition spokesman Turki Al-Malki told a news conference the Houthis were "militarizing" Sanaa airport and using it as a "main center for launching ballistic missiles and drones" towards the kingdom. Malki showed reporters a video clip which he said depicted "the headquarters of Iranian and Hezbollah experts at the airport" where, he alleged, "Hezbollah is training the Houthis to booby-trap and use drones".

Continued on Page 2

## COVID: Where does pandemic go from here?

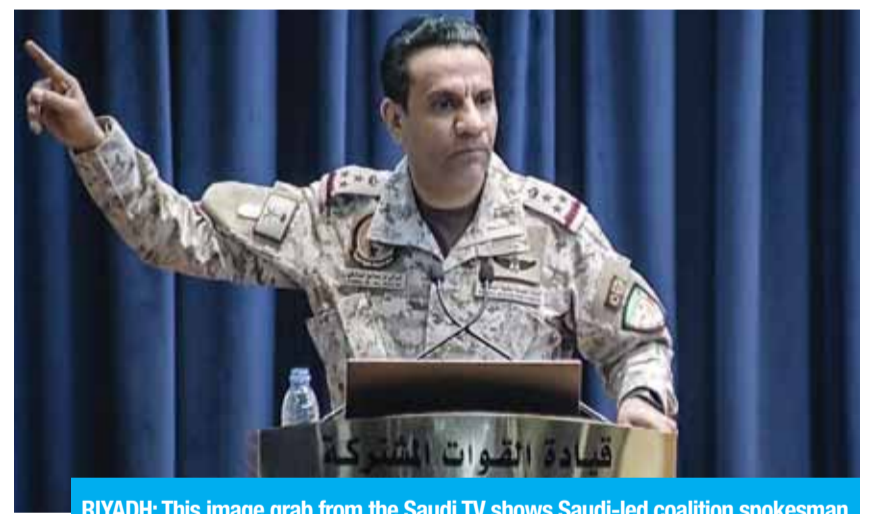
GENEVA: Two years in, as the now Omicron-fueled COVID crisis rages, there is still hope the pandemic could begin fading in 2022 - though experts say gaping vaccine inequalities must be addressed. It may seem like a far-off reality, as countries impose fresh restrictions to address the fast-spreading new variant and surging cases and a depressing feeling of déjà vu sets in. "We're facing another very hard winter," World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom

Ghebreyesus said last week.

But health experts say we are far better equipped now than a year ago to tame the pandemic, with ballooning stocks of safe and largely effective vaccines and new treatments available. "We have the tools that can bring (the pandemic) to its knees," Maria Van Kerkhove, the top WHO expert on the COVID crisis, told reporters this month. "We have the power to end it in 2022," she insisted. But, she added, they must be used correctly.

A year after the first vaccines came to market, around 8.5 billion doses have been administered globally. And the world is on track to produce around 24 billion doses by June - more than enough for everyone on the planet. But glaringly unequal vaccine

Continued on Page 2



RIYADH: This image grab from the Saudi TV shows Saudi-led coalition spokesman Turki Al-Malki speaking during a press conference on Sunday. — AFP



DURA: A Palestinian ministry of health employee prepares a dose of vaccine during a Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccine drive in this village west of Hebron in the Zionist-occupied West Bank yesterday. — AFP



## Local

# Kuwait spearheads diplomacy efforts in region in 2021

**KUWAIT:** The following is a report highlighting major events related to Kuwait's foreign policy throughout 2021:

**Jan 4:** Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah announces an agreement to open land and air borders between Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

**Jan 10:** Committee for POWs and the missing of the Foreign Ministry announces the identification, through DNA tests, of remains of 13 Kuwaiti martyrs in Iraq.

**Feb 8:** Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Nasser, addressing an extraordinary ministerial meeting of the Arab League, reiterated Kuwait's firm and principled stance regarding the Palestinian issue, including the two-state solution; an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital on the basis of the June 4, 1967 borders.

**March 1:** Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Nasser, addressing a donor conference, announces a \$20 million contribution from KFAED to Yemen over a two-year period.

**March 3:** The Foreign Ministry identifies remains of eight POWs and people who went missing during the 1990 Iraqi invasion.

**March 28:** The Foreign Ministry receives the third batch of properties and archive material stolen during the 1990 Iraqi invasion.

**March 30:** Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Nasser, addressing a Brussels conference on Syria, indicates that the \$300 million contribution over three-year period (2019-2021) is appropriately processed.

**March 30:** Foreign Ministry announces handing the remains of an



**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah addresses a donor conference. — KUNA photos

Iraqi person, who was missing in the Kuwaiti island of Boubyan in February, to the Iraqi side.

**April 1:** Kuwait opens a health center in Tunisia to provide medical services to more than 6,000 people.

**April 8:** Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Sabah co-chairs a meeting of the Turkey-Kuwait Joint Committee for Cooperation in Ankara.

**April 13:** Kuwait's permanent delegate to the UN-Geneva Jamal Al-Ghunaim becomes member of the World Health Organization's Al-Sumait prize board.

**May 10:** Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Sabah signs memorandum of understanding with Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation Arancha Gonzalez Laya to strengthen political dialogue, boost economic relations and strengthen scientific cooperation.

**May 11:** Kuwait Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Sabah takes part in the Arab League extraordinary virtual session.

**May 16:** Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Sabah chairs Kuwait's dele-

gation to the virtual emergency meeting of the Executive Committee of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to discuss developments in Palestine.

**May 20:** Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Sabah participates in a joint session held between UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Arab countries participating in the 75th General Assembly of the United Nations in New York.

**June 6:** Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Sabah heads the Kuwaiti delegation to the first meeting of the Kuwaiti-Saudi Coordination Council, hosted by Saudi Arabia, resulting in a number of agreements and MoUs in diverse fields particularly economy and trade.

**June 15:** Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Sabah heads the Kuwaiti delegation to an Arab Foreign Ministers' meeting that addressed the file of Ethiopian Renaissance Dam at the request of Egypt and Sudan.

**June 15:** Kuwait is elected to the Independent Presidency Council of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and represents the Near East and North Africa Group for the fifth time.

**June 16:** Kuwait's Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Sabah heads the Kuwaiti delegation to the 148th GCC ministerial meeting, held at the GCC General Secretariat headquarters in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

**June 28:** Kuwait's Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Sabah heads the Kuwaiti delegation to the

ministerial meeting of the international coalition combating so-called Islamic State (IS) which was held in the Italian capital, Rome.

**July 11:** The Foreign Ministry announced identities of 10 Kuwaiti martyrs who were killed by the Iraqi regime and identified by DNA testing.

**Aug 5:** Representative of His Highness the Amir, Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Sabah participates in the inauguration ceremony of Iranian president-elect Ibrahim Raisi in Tehran.

**Aug 22:** The foreign ministry, acting upon His Highness the Amir's instructions, facilitates the transfer of 5,000 Afghans to the US via Kuwait.

**Sept 3:** Kuwait and Tonga sign a declaration to establish diplomatic relations.

**Sept 20:** Kuwait chairs the 65th General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency for the first time since joining the organization.

**Sept 25:** Representative of His Highness the Amir, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah delivers a speech before the UN General Assembly dealing with a host of international issues including coronavirus, Palestine cause, Libya, Yemen and climate change.

**Oct 30:** The Foreign Ministry asks Lebanese Charge d'Affaires to leave Kuwait within 48 hours, and recalled its Ambassador in Beirut.

**Nov 2:** His Highness the Prime Minister, representing His Highness the Amir at the UN climate summit in Glasgow, calls for collaboration of efforts to address global warming.

**Nov 18:** The foreign ministry announces the identity of 18 prisoners and missing Kuwaitis, who were discovered in mass graves in Iraq. — KUNA



**VIENNA:** People walk outside The Hotel Palais Coburg, where talks were to resume yesterday on reviving the 2015 Iran nuclear deal. — AFP

## Iran seeks assurances as talks resume

**TEHRAN:** Iran said nuclear talks that were set to resume yesterday in Vienna should focus on lifting sanctions on the Islamic republic and "guarantees" the US will return to the fold. Negotiations to salvage the 2015 Iran nuclear deal resumed in late November, after a five-month hiatus following the election of ultraconservative Iran President Ebrahim Raisi. The talks seek to bring back the United States, after it withdrew from the accord in 2018 under then president Donald Trump and began imposing sanctions on Iran.

Iran has reported progress in the talks, but European diplomats have warned they are "rapidly reaching the end of the road". US negotiator Rob Malley has said there are only "weeks" left to revive the deal, if the Islamic republic continues its current pace of nuclear activities. Ahead of the resumption of talks, Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said the agenda yesterday should be "the issue of guarantees and verification" on the lifting of US sanctions if it returns to the accord.

"The most important thing for us is to reach a point where we can verify that Iranian oil will be sold easily and without any limits, that the money for this oil will be transferred in foreign currency to Iranian bank accounts, and that we will be able to benefit from all the revenues," he said, quoted yesterday by state news agency IRNA.

The opening of the eighth round of the talks involves delegations from Iran and the other countries that remain party to the landmark accord - Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia. The multilateral nuclear deal reached in 2015 offered Iran a lifting of economic sanctions in return for strict curbs on its nuclear activities. The goal was to make it practically impossible for Iran to build an atomic bomb, while allowing it to pursue a civilian nuclear program.

But the deal started to unravel in 2018 when the Trump administration pulled out and began imposing sanctions on the Islamic republic. US President Joe Biden has said he is willing to return to the deal as long as Iran also resumes the original terms. Iran, which denies it wants to acquire a nuclear arsenal, has gradually abandoned its commitments to the accord since 2019, including by stepping up its enrichment of uranium.

The UN's nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, recently expressed concerns over Iran's growing stockpile of highly-enriched uranium. Iran's archrival, the Zionist entity, which staunchly opposes the nuclear deal, had reportedly warned in November that the Islamic republic had taken the technical steps to prepare to enrich uranium to military-grade levels of around 90 percent.

"Stopping Iran's nuclear program is the primary challenge for (Zionist) foreign and security policy," Zionist Foreign Minister Yair Lapid said yesterday. "We prefer to act through international cooperation, but if necessary, we will defend ourselves, by ourselves," he added. On Saturday, Atomic Energy Organization of Iran director Mohammad Eslami said Tehran has no plans to enrich uranium beyond 60 percent, even if the Vienna talks fail.

Eslami said the enrichment levels were related to the needs of the country, in remarks published by the Russian news agency RIA Novosti. "Our targets related to enriching uranium are meeting our industrial and production needs... and those of our people," he was quoted as saying. Asked whether Iran plans to enrich beyond 60 percent purity if the talks fail, he said "No".

Moscow's ambassador to the UN in Vienna, Mikhail Ulyanov, welcomed that statement on Twitter, calling it "a positive message". In a tweet yesterday, Ulyanov said delegations from China, Iran and Russia met in the morning "to compare notes" before the talks start. "We advise all the participants in the negotiations to come to Vienna with the will to obtain a good agreement," Iran's foreign affairs spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said yesterday. —AFP

## Coalition says Iran, Hezb aid...

Continued from Page 1

Malki showed other clips which he said depicted a Hezbollah member placing explosives in a drone, and a man he identified as a Hezbollah official telling Houthi members "we must strengthen our ranks". The footage could not be independently verified. The Arab military coalition led by Riyadh intervened in Yemen in 2015 to back the internationally recognized government, a year after the Houthis overran the capital Sanaa.

The Houthis come from the minority Zaidi Shiite sect and have their traditional stronghold in Yemen's mountainous north. Between 2004 and 2010, they fought six wars against Yemen's then-government and battled Saudi Arabia in 2009-2010 after storming over the border. The deaths of two people overnight Friday from a rebel missile strike on the Saudi city of Jazan were the first such deaths in the kingdom in three years.

On Sunday, Malki said the international community must "stop hostile acts by this terrorist organization," a reference to Hezbollah. Since Jan 2018, the Houthis have launched 430 ballistic missiles and 850 drones towards Saudi Arabia, he said. Sunday evening the coalition announced it had made new strikes near an air force academy in Sanaa to prevent weapons from being moved.

Earlier Sunday the coalition said it had struck a Houthi rebel camp in Sanaa, destroying weapons warehouses. On Saturday, the coalition launched what it called a "large-scale" military operation against the Houthis after the rebel missile strike that hit Jazan. The coalition raids left three civilians dead, including a child and a woman, Yemeni medics told AFP.

Malki also accused Iran's ambassador to Sanaa, who died of COVID-19 last week after his evacuation from Yemen, of "leading the planning of military operations in Marib" - the Yemeni government's last stronghold in the north. The Houthis warned in a statement that they will "face escalation with escalation".

World powers and the kingdom's Gulf Arab allies condemned the rebels' deadly strike on Saudi Arabia. "Houthi attacks are perpetuating the conflict, prolonging the suffering of the Yemeni people, and endangering the Saudi people alongside more than 70,000 US citizens residing in Saudi Arabia," Washington's embassy to Riyadh said in a statement. Ludovic Poulle, the French ambassador to Riyadh, on Twitter offered condolences to families of victims in the "barbaric Houthi attack".

The coalition has intensified its air strikes on Sanaa, including last week on what it called "military targets" at the airport. United Nations aid flights were interrupted as a result. The insurgents often launch missiles and drones into Saudi Arabia aimed at its airports and oil infrastructure. The UN's World Food Program said it has been "forced" to cut aid to Yemen due to lack of funds, and warned of a surge in hunger. — AFP

## COVID: Where does pandemic...

Continued from Page 1

access has meant that as many wealthy nations roll out additional doses to the already vaccinated, vulnerable people and health workers in many poorer nations are still waiting for a first jab.

About 67 percent of people in high-income countries have had at least one vaccine dose, but not even 10 percent in low-income countries have, UN numbers show. That imbalance, which the WHO has branded a moral outrage, risks deepening further as many countries rush to roll out additional doses to respond to Omicron.

Early data indicates that the heavily-mutated variant, which has made a lightning dash around the globe since it was first detected in southern Africa last month, is more resistant to vaccines than previous strains. While boosters do seem to push protection levels back up, the WHO insists to end the pandemic, the priority must remain getting first doses to vulnerable people everywhere.

Allowing COVID to spread unabated in some places dramatically increases the chance of new, more dangerous variants emerging, experts warn. So even as wealthy countries roll out third shots, the world is not safe until everyone has some degree of immunity. "No country can boost its way out of the pandemic," Tedros said last week. "Blanket booster programs are likely to prolong the pandemic, rather than ending it." The emergence of Omicron is evidence of that, WHO emergencies chief Michael Ryan told AFP. "The virus has taken the opportunity to evolve."

Gautam Menon, a physics and biology professor at Ashoka University in India, agreed it was in wealthy countries' best interest to ensure poorer nations also get jabs. "It would be myopic to assume that just by vaccinating themselves they have gotten rid of the problem."

Ryan suggested increased vaccination should get us to a point where Covid "settles into a pattern that is less disruptive". But he warns that if the world fails to

address the imbalance in vaccine access, the worst could still lie ahead. One nightmare scenario envisions the COVID pandemic left to rage out of control amid a steady barrage of new variants, even as a separate strain sparks a parallel pandemic.

Confusion and disinformation would shrink trust in authorities and science, as health systems collapse and political turmoil ensues. This is one of several "plausible" scenarios, according to Ryan. "The double-pandemic one is of particular concern, because we have one virus causing a pandemic now, and many others lined up."

But better global vaccine coverage could mean that COVID - though not likely to fully disappear - will become a largely controlled endemic disease, with milder seasonal outbreaks that we will learn to live with, like the flu, experts say. It will basically "become part of the furniture", Andrew Noymer, an epidemiologist at the University of California in Irvine, told AFP.

But we're not yet there. Experts caution against too much optimism around early indications that Omicron causes less severe disease than previous strains, pointing out that it is spreading so fast it could still overwhelm health systems. "When you have so many, many infections, even if it is less severe... (hospitals) are going to be very stressed," top US infectious disease expert Anthony Fauci told NBC News last week.

That is a depressing prospect two years after the virus first surfaced in China. The scenes of intubated patients in overcrowded hospitals and long lines of people scrambling to find oxygen for loved ones have never ceased. Images of improvised funeral pyres burning across a Delta-hit India have epitomized the human cost of the pandemic.

Officially, nearly 5.5 million people have died worldwide, although the actual toll is likely several times higher. All vaccine hesitancy could increase that toll. In the United States, which remains the worst-affected country with over 800,000 deaths, the constant flow of short obituaries on the FacesOfCovid Twitter account include many who did not have the jab. "Amanda, a 36-year-old math teacher in Kentucky. Chris, a 34-year-old high school football coach in Kansas. Cherie, a 40-year-old 7th-grade reading teacher in Illinois. All had an impact in their communities," read a recent post. "All deeply loved. All unvaccinated." — AFP



Local

# Kuwait's martyrs laid to final resting place in 2021



KUWAIT: A military funeral held for martyrs who were found in mass graves in Iraq. —KUNA photos



Mourners perform the funeral prayer during the funeral of Interior Ministry officer Abdullah Al-Daihani.



A shipment of 20 tons of oxygen sent to Tunisia.

**KUWAIT:** The following is a report highlighting major events related to defense, interior, and national security in Kuwait throughout 2021:

**March 17:** Ministry of Interior wins the 2020 award for best awareness film on combating terrorism and extremism at the end of the 44th virtual conference of Arab police and security chiefs.

**April 12:** Interior Ministry mourned policeman Saad Salem Nafaa who was martyred in a tragic accident while on duty.

**April 14:** Interior Ministry started receiving candidates for parliamentary by-elections for the fifth constituency.

**April 26:** Kuwait National Guard (KNG) received at Ali Al-Salem Airbase French-made Caracal helicopters, commissioned as the core of the guard's fleet.

**April 29:** Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) controlled a fire at tires' dumping ground in Al-Salmi area.

**April 30:** Interior Ministry mourned martyr Abdullah Al-Daihani who was killed in a tragic accident.

**May 15:** Firefighters control a huge fire that broke out at a scrapyards at Abdullah Port.

**May 16:** KFF announced the death of two workers in a fire at a three-storey

commercial complex in Jahra.

**June 8:** Firefighters managed to put out a blaze at a 60,000-square-metre location in Jahra's Amghara area.

**June 14:** Ministry of Interior evacuated 140 citizens and residents that were stuck on Failaka Island due to bad weather conditions.

**June 19:** Firefighters controlled a massive blaze at a warehouse in Shuwaikh Industrial area, which resulted the death of one person and injury of two others.

**July 8:** Customs Department foiled an attempt to smuggle 25,000 bags of Paan.

**July 12:** Customs Department seized 2.22 million Paan bags in three containers.

**July 15:** Ministry of Interior arrested a person possessing 1.2 pills of illegal drugs with a value of KD 2 million (\$6.6 million).

**July 20:** A military transport plane arrived in Tunisia carrying 20 tons of oxygen.

**July 25:** Customs Department foiled an attempt to smuggle 1.4 million bags of Paan.

**Aug 7:** KFF, acting upon His Highness the Amir's instructions, sent 90 firefighters to Turkey and Greece to help in

fighting massive forest fires.

**Aug 11:** Customs Department seized 150 kilograms of hashish in a container.

**Aug 14:** Three people were killed and five injured in a fire in a workers' residence in Abdali area.

**Aug 17:** Kuwait donated six fire engines to Algeria.

**Aug 19:** Kuwait donated six fire engines to Turkey.

**Aug 20:** KFF announced the death of five persons and injury of 15 others in a road accident.

**Aug 23:** Kuwait donated six fire engines to Tunisia.

**Sept 8:** Two workers were killed when a building at Kuwait Airport under construction collapsed.

**Sept 23:** Customs Department seized 1.221 tons of Paan.

**Oct 12:** Deputy Premier and Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah announced that Kuwaiti women would be allowed to register in military service.

**Nov 2:** Kuwait, Saudi and American forces conduct drills.

**Nov 10:** Customs Department seized 30 tons of Paan hidden in containers coming from a Gulf country.

**Nov 21:** Kuwait held military funeral for 19 martyrs who were found in mass



A picture from an operation in which the Interior Ministry seized drugs smuggled inside live sheep.

graves in Iraq.

**Nov 23:** Interior Ministry seized 17 kilograms of narcotics smuggled inside live sheep coming from a neighboring country.

**Nov 28:** Three persons were killed and a child was injured in a fire reported in a house in Sulaibiya.

**Dec 7:** Kuwait received the first

batch of Eurofighter Typhoon aircrafts from Italy.

**Dec 8:** Interior Ministry arrested individuals with 120,000 psychedelic pills.

**Dec 9:** Firefighters control a blaze erupting in Amghara.

**Dec 14:** Kuwait army received two Eurofighter Typhoon aircrafts. —KUNA

## Kuwait discovered two new oil fields in 2021

**KUWAIT:** The following is a report highlighting major events related Kuwait's energy sector throughout 2021:

**Jan 1:** Kuwait Petroleum Corporation's (KPC) International Marketing exports first low sulfur diesel shipment to Pakistan on Al-Salam-2 tanker owned by the Kuwait Oil Tanker Company.

**Jan 4:** Oil Ministry announces discovery of two new oil fields for the Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) in different regions of the country, in addition to the discovery of an extension to the northern part of the Great Burgan field.

**Jan 14:** State-owned global energy provider, Kuwait Petroleum International (KPI), and Oman's national petroleum investment company, OQ, announce their joint venture, Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries Company, will bear the new trademark, OQ8.

**April 10:** Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) began operation of hydrocracking of Clean Fuel Project at the Abdullah Port Refinery.

**April 25:** Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy and Minister of Social Affairs Meshaan Al-Otaibi signed a decree to support local agricultural products.

**May 6:** Kuwait oil price went up \$1.91 to reach \$69.11 per barrel (pb).

**May 19:** Kuwait oil price went up \$1.22 to reach \$69.76 pb.

**May 30:** Kuwait Oil Tankers Company (KOTC) received giant crude oil tanker "Al-Siddeeq" from China's shipbuilding company Bohai.

**June 6:** Kuwait electricity consumption hit the highest level of 15,070 megawatts, amid soaring summer heat crossing the threshold of 50 degrees Celsius.

**June 10:** Kuwait Petrochemical Industries

Company (PIC) announced its Polypropylene Plant obtained three ISO certificates for environment management, quality control and occupational health.

**June 29:** Kuwait crude oil gained 36 cents to reach \$74.94 pb.

**July 12:** Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPI) announced arrival of first LNG shipment of 213,000 cubic meters at Al-Zour Port.

**July 14:** Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) signed three contracts to treat soil polluted by oil spills caused by invading Iraqi forces.

**July 28:** KOC signed two new contracts to treat polluted soil.

**Sept 9:** Kuwait Petroleum International (KPI) won the 2021 Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) for the Chemical Sector Award, in addition to Occupational Health and Safety Gold Award for the 10th consecutive year.

**Sept 10:** KPI opened a gas station near Milan, northern Italy.

**Sept 21:** KNPC announced success of operation of the Clean Fuel Project.

**Oct 5:** Minister of Electricity and Water Meshaan Al-Otaibi launched the smart meters' project and said the ministry plans to install 800,000 of them.

**Oct 18:** KNPC said it controlled a fire in a sulfur cracking unit which injured a number of workers.

**Oct 23:** KPI supplied Gatwick Airport with sustainable airplane fuel.

**Oct 26:** Kuwait crude oil rose \$1.65 to reach \$85.55 per barrel.

**Nov 1:** KOC won two awards from Global Business Outlook Magazine for exploration and production of oil and gas, and crises management.

**Dec 13:** The Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) obtained the ISO 31000-2018 certificate in risk management.

**Dec 15:** Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) opened a gas station in Sabah Al-Ahmad city south of the country. —KUNA

## Several tremors reported in Kuwait in 2021

**KUWAIT:** The following is a report highlighting major events related Kuwait's environment throughout 2021:

**Feb 4:** Kuwait registers a 3.0-magnitude quake in Al-Manaqeesh area southwest of the country, according to Kuwait National Seismic Network.

**April 14:** The Environment Public Authority (EPA) detected the spread of red tide over large swathes off Kuwaiti coasts.

**April 18:** National Seismic Network at Kuwait

Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) recorded two earthquakes at magnitudes of 2.8 and 2.7 degrees on the Richter scale in Kuwait.

**April 23:** EPA detected an increase in dead fish at Sulaibikhat beach.

**May 12:** National Seismic Network at KISR recorded a magnitude three earthquake west of the country.

**Aug 2:** A 4.5-degree earthquake struck southwest of Kuwait.

**Oct 19:** EPA distributed a million environmental-friendly bags to cooperative societies nationwide.

**Nov 17:** EPA and UAE's environmental authority signed a MoU over exchange of environmental projects.

**Dec 21:** EPA opened the Jahra Nature Reserve for the public, and initiated booking for visitors online. —KUNA

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## News in brief

## Amir sends condolence to Greece president

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent yesterday a cable of condolence to the President of Greece Katerina Sakellaropoulou on the passing away of former President Karolos Papoulias. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent him similar cables.

## Kuwait condoles with Bangladesh

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Foreign Ministry expressed support to Bangladesh as it mourns the victims of the fire that broke out in a ferry and killed dozens, while others remain missing. In a statement yesterday, the ministry conveyed its deepest condolences to Bangladesh and the families of the victims, and wished those injured a quick recovery.

## Kuwait denies cancelling IDs

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) denied on Sunday reports that expats' IDs have been cancelled. The IDs of both citizens and expats are issued in line with the Law No 32 of 1982, PACI added in a press statement.

## KRCS explores humanitarian needs in Yemen's Marib

**ADEN:** Director-General of Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) Abdulrahman Al-Aoun met Secretary of Marib Governorate Abdrabbuh Moftah on Sunday to discuss the urgent needs of the internally displaced persons (IDPs). Aoun leads a KRCS delegation on a mission to explore the humanitarian situation in the governorate, located in central Yemen, amid the waves of migrants from the southern districts of the governorate. His meeting with Moftah discussed the response of the Society to the growing needs of thousands of IDPs living in 100 camps in Marib city and Al-Wadi district due to the ongoing conflict. Aoun told his host of society's readiness to scale up its relief effort in Marib and finance projects aiming to achieve sustainable economic recovery. The governorate's secretary thanked the government and people of the State of Kuwait for their continued support to the Yemeni people in various fields. Moftah noted that the recent attacks by the Houthi militias forced more than 100,000 people to flee their homes for safer areas in Marib city. He voiced hope that the KRCS would offer more humanitarian contributions that could alleviate the suffering of the IDPs in the governorate. —KUNA

## Interior Ministry mulls New Year's security plan

**KUWAIT:** Interior Ministry Undersecretary Lt Gen Sheikh Faisal Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah chaired a meeting with field commanders yesterday to discuss security preparations during the New Year holiday.

Lt Gen Sheikh Faisal emphasized the importance of vigilance and readiness as well as instant cooperation between concerned field sectors in order to ensure security control and "confront any alien behavior to the society". He also inspected the plans of fixed and mobile patrols on roads as well as police's presence in gathering areas, camps and chalets.

Furthermore, Lt Gen Sheikh Faisal said health protocols must be observed while securing all governorates to ensure security and safety. He said people must protect the environment and asked for increased campaigns against environment law violators.

## Photo of the Day



**KUWAIT:** Vehicles drive on Istiqlal Road yesterday as Kuwait City high rise buildings are seen. —Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

## Omicron's worldwide spread affects people's travel plans in Kuwait

By Ben Garcia

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait is again witnessing a rise in the number of new coronavirus cases, with 150 cases on Saturday and 240 on Sunday. Kuwait has almost returned to normal, with most restrictions lifted, although facemasks are still needed to be worn in closed places. Kuwait detected its first case of the Omicron variant on Dec 7 in a European traveler who arrived in Kuwait from an African country where the variant is present. On Dec 21, the number rose to 13, after 12 new cases were found.

Kuwaiti authorities have urged all those arriving in Kuwait, even if they're not infected with the virus, to self-isolate and follow all other preventative measures including avoiding gatherings and wearing facemasks. Authorities have also urged the public to take the third vaccine dose (booster) and called on the public to postpone any travel plans except for necessary trips.

But there are some travel plans that couldn't be cancelled, like the couple who planned their trip to Georgia before the Omicron virus was detected. "We already planned for this long before Omicron, and I don't want this trip to be postponed. I have

work-related stress for the past three years and I want to relax and unwind, even for a few days," said Donnalyn and Jonjie, who left for Georgia yesterday for a weeklong vacation.

"I just hope things will be okay, and there will be no further restrictions on travelers," Donnalyn said. The couple was scheduled to travel to France, but Paris imposed further travel restrictions in the last few weeks after a rise in the number of COVID cases. France is reporting a daily record of more than 100,000 new coronavirus cases as President Emmanuel Macron weighs measures to contain the fast-spreading Omicron variant.

Other expatriates who had planned to take their annual vacation in the next few days have changed their minds. "I had planned to go on vacation with my wife and two children in February next year, but with the new variant, I don't want to take any chances, as maybe we won't be able to re-enter Kuwait. I don't want to lose my job, because I have a family to feed and children to send to school," Eric told Kuwait Times.

People in Kuwait are aware of the threat of the new variant and are taking extra personal precautions. "In Kuwait, we have to do our share to help the government protect everyone. If you know



**LOS ANGELES:** Travelers check for flight information at Los Angeles International Airport in Los Angeles, California, on December 24, 2021. Over 2,000 flights were cancelled and thousands delayed around the world as the highly infectious Omicron variant disrupted holiday travel. —AFP

there's something wrong, stay at home until fully recovered so the virus cannot spread to someone else," said Bashir, an Indian resident. As of Sunday, Kuwait has reported 415,151 COVID cases and 2,468 deaths, along with 411,340 recoveries.

## Jaber Causeway drive-thru provides booster shots

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Ministry of Health said the Sheikh Jaber Causeway drive-thru vaccination center started providing booster shots against coronavirus as of yesterday. The service will continue on a daily basis from 4:00 pm to 10:00 pm except Saturdays, the Ministry's Spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said in a news conference. The third booster jab is provided by Kuwait vaccination center at the fairground in Mishref every day except for Fridays from 9:00 am to 7:00 pm and Jleeb sports center without a previous appointment, he noted. He added that 15 healthcare centers started providing booster shots yesterday, but with a previous appointment, in addition to 36 other existing centers, thus raising the total number of third jab providers to 51 nationwide.

Kuwait's Ministry of Health had said on Sunday that 240 people tested positive for COVID-19 in the previous 24 hours, taking the country's caseload to 415,151. The recoveries rose by 41 to 411,340, representing 99.1 percent of the overall infections, the Ministry's Spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said, noting that the death toll remained unchanged at 2,468. There were four ICU cases and 1,343 others



**KUWAIT:** This July 5, 2021 file photo shows cars lining up for people to receive a dose of the COVID-19 coronavirus vaccine at the Jaber Causeway drive-thru vaccination center. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

being treated at home, in addition to 22 patients at hospital wards as of Sunday, he noted. As many as

23,908 swab tests have been conducted which raised the total to 5,862,681, Dr Sanad added. —KUNA



**KUWAIT:** Interior Ministry Undersecretary Lt Gen Sheikh Faisal Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah chairs the meeting.

## KRCS answers hygiene needs in Afghanistan

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) has launched a relief initiative in Afghanistan, with the purpose of meeting the humanitarian and hygiene needs of women, elderly, orphans and the population in inaccessible areas. The humanitarian initiative, which was jointly carried out by the KRCS and Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS), has benefitted as many as 31,500 people who had hard humanitarian conditions in Afghanistan, KRCS' Secretary-General Maha Al-Barjas said. The effort was primarily intended to boost displaced families' resilience, revamp their hygiene and humanitarian conditions and provide them with food staples, she added. Afghanistan is teetering on the brink of a tragic humanitarian situation involving food shortage, bad weather conditions and lingering insecurity, she said, noting that 11 million people are embroiled in food insecurity. The fact that the initiative was jointly launched by both Kuwaiti and Qatari Red Crescent societies pinpoint that coordination among Gulf charities is essential to fieldwork, she pointed out. The KRCS' response to the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan mirrors its universal message to ease out the anguish of people and safeguard human dignity, she boasted. —KUNA





Philippines typhoon death toll rises to 388: Government

## Russia increases jail sentence for Gulag historian

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BAGHDAD: Iraqi judges attend a court session at the Supreme Judicial Council in the Iraqi capital Baghdad yesterday, as the court announced the verdict in the bid filed by the Hashed al-Shaabi ex-paramilitary alliance contesting its defeat in the October 10 parliamentary election. —AFP

# Iraq's top court ratifies election results

## 'The verdict is binding on all authorities'

BAGHDAD: Iraq's supreme court yesterday rejected a motion filed by the Hashed al-Shaabi ex-paramilitary alliance contesting its defeat in the October 10 parliamentary election. "The Federal Court has decided to reject the complaint... and to make the plaintiffs bear the costs," Judge Jassem Mohamed Aboud said, reading out the verdict.

The court "rejects the request of the plaintiffs... not to ratify the final results of the election," he said. "The verdict is binding on all authorities". While the

ruling is a key step forward, it does not mean that the final results have been ratified, an electoral commission lawyer who attended the court hearing said.

That requires an official announcement to endorse the results, only after which can the new parliament be inaugurated and a new government formed. In multi-confessional and multi-ethnic Iraq, the formation of governments has involved complex negotiations ever since the 2003 US-led invasion toppled dictator Saddam Hussein.

Shiite Muslim firebrand cleric Moqtada Sadr was declared on November 30 as the biggest winner of the election. Sadr's movement won nearly a fifth of the seats — 73 out of the assembly's total 329, well ahead of the 17 seats of the Fatah (Conquest) Alliance, the political arm of the pro-Iran Hashed.

Hashed leaders rejected the result—sharply down from their 48 seats in the outgoing assembly—as a "fraud". The Hashed organised protests and appealed the results hoping to have them annulled,

claiming "serious violations".

The Fatah Alliance alleged the electronic voting system had failed to recognise the finger print identification of many voters. It also protested at what is claimed were the alleged failings of a new electronic machine used for the election.

Once parliament holds its inaugural session, lawmakers will elect a president, who will in turn appoint a prime minister to be approved by the legislature. — AFP

## Somalia premier accuses president of 'coup' attempt

MOGADISHU: A long-running political crisis in Somalia escalated yesterday as the president suspended the prime minister, who blasted the move as an "attempted coup" and asked the armed forces to follow his orders. The angry exchange came a day after President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, who is better known as Farmajo, sparred with Prime Minister Mohamed Hussein Roble over the country's sluggish preparations for elections.

Relations between the pair have long been frosty, but the latest verbal broadsides stoke fears for Somalia's stability as the country struggles to stage elections and fight a jihadist insurgency. Farmajo's office yesterday announced the president had "decided to suspend Prime Minister Mohamed Hussein Roble and stop his powers since he was linked with corruption," accusing him of interfering with a probe into a land-grabbing case.

Roble hit back, accusing Farmajo of attempting to carry out "a coup against the government, the constitution, and the rules of the country." "As the president has seemingly decided to destroy government institutions... I order all Somali national forces to work under the command of the office of the prime minister from today", Roble told a press conference.

Despite a heightened military presence around the prime minister's office, Roble was still able to enter the premises, a day after Farmajo withdrew his mandate to organise the elections and called for the creation of a new committee to "correct" the shortcomings. The two men have traded accusations in recent days, with Roble alleging that Farmajo did not want to hold "a credible election".

Farmajo in turn has accused Roble of trying to influence a probe into a scandal involving army-owned land after the premier sacked the defence minister and replaced him on Sunday. "The prime minister has pressurised the minister of defence to divert the investigations of the case relating to the grabbed public land," yesterday's statement by Farmajo's office said.



MOGADISHU: This combination of file pictures created shows Somalia's President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed (L), commonly known as Farmajo walks to make his speech and Somalia's Prime Minister Mohamed Hussein Roble (R) attending the closing ceremony after reaching an agreement for the new elections. —AFP

### US 'deeply concerned'

The dispute alarmed international observers, prompting the US embassy in Mogadishu to urge Somalia's leaders "to take immediate steps to de-escalate tensions... refrain from provocative actions, and avoid violence." Somalia's elections have been hampered by delays for several months.

In April, pro-government and opposition fighters opened fire in the streets of Mogadishu after Farmajo extended his term without holding fresh elections. The constitutional crisis was only defused when Farmajo reversed the term extension and Roble brokered a timetable to a vote.

But in the months that followed, a

bitter rivalry between the men derailed the election again. Farmajo and Roble only agreed to bury the hatchet in October, and issued a unified call for the glacial election process to accelerate.

Somalia's elections follow a complex indirect model. Nearly 30,000 clan delegates are assigned to choose 275 MPs for the lower house while five state legislatures elect senators for the upper house. Both houses of parliament then vote for the next president.

Elections for the upper house have concluded in all states and voting for the lower house began in ear-

ly November. But the appointment of a president still appears to be a long way off, straining ties with Western allies who want to see the process reach a peaceful conclusion.

On Sunday, the US State Department said it was "deeply concerned by the continuing delays and by the procedural irregularities that have undermined the credibility of the process".

Analysts say the election impasse has distracted from Somalia's larger problems, most notably the Al-Shabaab insurgency. The Al-Qaeda allies were driven out of Mogadishu a decade ago but retain control of swathes of countryside and continue to stage deadly attacks in the capital and elsewhere. — AFP

## Ship captain sentenced to 20 months in jail

PORT LOUIS: The captain and first mate of a freighter that crashed into a coral reef off Mauritius, unleashing the Indian Ocean archipelago's worst environmental disaster, were sentenced to 20 months in jail yesterday. "The court took into consideration the fact that both defendants pleaded guilty and apologised. The sentence handed down is 20 months in prison," said magistrate Ida Dookhy Rambarrun.

The MV Wakashio, a Japanese-owned but Panamanian-flagged vessel, ran aground in July 2020, spilling more than 1,000 tonnes of toxic fuel into pristine waters, coating mangroves, corals and other fragile ecosystems. The vessel's captain, Sunil Kumar Nandeshwar, who was convicted by a court in the capital Port Louis last week, admitted drinking during an onboard birthday party.

He and first officer, Hitihanillage Subhoda Janendra Tilakarathna, were found guilty of "endangering safe navigation". "The captain and his second in command were irresponsible and did not deliver as they should on their 'navigational duties'," the magistrate said yesterday.

The MV Wakashio was sailing from Singapore to Brazil with 3,800 tonnes of fuel oil and 200 tonnes of diesel onboard when it ran into the reef off the southeast coast of Mauritius. During the trial, the captain said he had given instructions to approach Mauritian waters in order to gain access to a mobile phone network so that crew members could contact their families.

"The sea was bad, but the visibility was clear and it was safe to navigate... At one point, the ship could not move and had touched the sea floor," Nandeshwar said. "Since I had had a few drinks, it did not seem worthwhile to intervene and it did not occur to me that we were sailing that close." The two men were taken into custody in August 2020, and have been behind bars since then.

**Ecologically critical**  
More than 1,000 tonnes of oil seeped into



PORT LOUIS, Mauritius: File photo shows Sunil Kumar Nandeshwar (L), the captain of the MV Wakashio bulk carrier that had run aground, leaves from the court after he and his deputy was charged under the piracy and maritime violence act in Port Louis, Mauritius. — AFP

waters full of marine life from a gash in the vessel's hull before salvage crews were able to remove all the remaining fuel. The accident occurred near two ecologically critical sites: Blue Bay, known for its coral gardens, and Pointe D'Esny, which hosts a mangrove forest—a crucial ecosystem as well as a weapon in the fight against global warming.

In the days after the accident, thousands of volunteers marshalled along the coast wearing rubber boots and gloves, scrubbing rocks and stringing together makeshift cordons to contain the oily tide.

Thousands of people also took to the streets in the following months to protest the government's reaction to the disaster. On Sunday, fisheries minister Sudheer Maudhoo said that the ship's insurers had agreed to pay compensation worth 112,000 Mauritian rupees (\$2,580) each to hundreds of fishermen and fishmongers for the loss of earnings caused by the oil spill.

The vessel eventually split in two. Its bow and hull were towed 15 kilometres (nine miles) offshore and sunk. The process to dismantle the stern section and remove it from the reef began earlier this year but has been postponed many times due to rough weather and strong waves. — AFP



## International

# South Africa mourns anti-apartheid icon Archbishop Desmond Tutu

## Tutu will be most remembered for speaking against white minority rule

**JOHANNESBURG:** South Africa yesterday began a week of mourning for the revered anti-apartheid fighter Archbishop Desmond Tutu. The Nobel Peace laureate passed away on Sunday at the age of 90, stripping the world of a towering moral figure and bringing the curtain down on a heroic South African era.

His funeral will be held on New Year's Day at Cape Town's St George's Cathedral, his former parish, his foundation said, although ceremonies are likely to be muted because of COVID restrictions.

The widow of South Africa's first black president Nelson Mandela, Graca Machel, yesterday mourned "the loss of a brother." Tutu "is the last of an extraordinarily outstanding generation of leaders that Africa birthed and gifted to the world", she said in a statement.

"He masterfully used his position as a cleric to mobilise South Africans, Africans, and the global community against the brutalities and immorality of the apartheid government," she said. "He stood resolute and fearless, leading demonstrations cloaked in his flowing clerical robe with his cross as his shield — the embodiment of humankind's moral conscience." The bells of St George's will ring for 10 minutes from noon each day until Friday. The church has asked those who hear the sound to pause in their daily work and think of Tutu.

A memorial service will be held in the capital Pretoria on Wednesday. Family and friends will

gather on Thursday evening around Tutu's widow, "Mama Leah." On Friday, his remains will be placed in the cathedral on the eve of the funeral, although attendance for his farewell will be capped at 100, according to the archbishop of Cape Town, Thabo Makgoba.

"Only a fraction of those who want to be there can be accommodated in the Cathedral. So please don't get on a bus to Cape Town," he said in a statement following a press conference. Due to COVID, singing and music at the ceremony will also have to be moderated, officials said.

### Fighter

Diminutive, crackling with humour and warmth, Tutu will be most remembered for fearlessly speaking against white minority rule, although he campaigned against injustice of any kind.

Ordnained at the age of 30 and appointed archbishop in 1986, he used his position to advocate tirelessly for international sanctions against apartheid.

He coined the term "Rainbow Nation" to describe South Africa when Mandela became the country's first black president in 1994. He retired in 1996 to lead a harrowing journey into South Africa's past as head of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which exposed the horrors of apartheid in terrible detail.

He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 for his central role in the fight against apartheid, but

### Bells of St George's will ring for 10 minutes each day



CAPE TOWN: People bring flowers to St Georges Cathedral, where a Wall of Remembrance for South African anti-apartheid icon Archbishop Desmond Tutu has been set up after the news of his death, in Cape Town. — AFP

his combat against injustice long continued after racial segregation was consigned to the history books. He excoriated the African National Congress (ANC) for fostering cronyism, corruption and incompetence after it was voted into office.

### 'Shepherd'

Among the millions who mourned his passing, President Cyril Ramaphosa called Tutu a man of "extraordinary intellect, integrity and invincibility against the forces of apartheid".

The Nelson Mandela Foundation called Tutu "an

extraordinary human being. A thinker. A leader. A shepherd." "He was larger than life, and for so many in South Africa and around the world his life has been a blessing," it said in a statement.

Queen Elizabeth II, Pope Francis, French President Emmanuel Macron were among those who paid tribute to him. Barack Obama — the United States' first black president — hailed Tutu as a "moral compass" who was "concerned with injustice everywhere". Tutu was "a towering global figure for peace and an inspiration to generations across the world," said UN chief Antonio Guterres. — AFP

## Turkey urges Russia to drop 'one-sided' NATO demands

**ANKARA:** Turkey urged Russia yesterday to drop "one-sided" demands and adopt a more constructive approach in its standoff with Western powers and NATO over Ukraine. NATO member Turkey has irritated Moscow by supplying combat drones to Ukraine that Russia fears could be used by Kiev in its conflict with separatists in two eastern regions.

But Turkey has also upset Washington and NATO by acquiring an advanced missile defence system from Russia that resulted in sanctions from the United States. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu urged Moscow and the Western defence alliance to air their differences in direct negotiations proposed by NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg.

Russia wants NATO to provide Moscow with a binding security guarantee and withdraw its forces to positions they held before a wave of eastward expansion that began after the Soviet Union's collapse. "For any proposal to be accepted, it should be acceptable by both sides. Russia made some proposals. But maybe NATO seeks the same kind of guarantees from Russia. This is not a one-sided issue," Cavusoglu told reporters.

"If the requests are maximalist—I'm not saying that Russia is maximalist in any case—both sides must be constructive," he said. "They should come to the table with proposals that both sides can accept."

A NATO spokesman said the Brussels-based alliance had been "in touch" with Moscow about holding a meeting of the NATO-Russia Council on January 12. Russia has not yet formally accepted the offer.

"If Russia has any certain specific expectation or issue from Turkey regarding reducing tensions between Russia and NATO, Turkey will evaluate this positively because our objective is clear," said Cavusoglu. "Everyone would be affected, God forbid, by conflict in the region." — AFP

## Russia increases jail sentence for Gulag historian

**MOSCOW:** A Russian court yesterday increased to 15 years the jail sentence of a prominent Gulag historian who supporters say is being targeted for exposing horrors from the Soviet era. In 2020, Yury Dmitriyev was sentenced to 13 years in prison on a controversial child sex charge in north-western Russia. In December, prosecutors requested that his sentence be extended by two years.

Dmitriyev, 65, is also the local head of rights group Memorial in the region of Karelia. The organisation, which has chronicled Stalin-era purges and contemporary political persecutions, says it may be shut down by Russian courts this week.

Yesterday, a court in the north-western city of Petrozavodsk granted the prosecutors' request to extend the historian's sentence. "Fifteen years to Yury Dmitriyev," Memorial said on Twitter. Anatoly Razumov, a historian who studied Soviet-era repression, said the Gulag researcher was a victim of injustice, adding he was convinced Dmitriyev would be rehabilitated one day.

## UK police probe video after intruder held at Queen's castle

**LONDON:** British police said yesterday they were assessing a video purportedly made by a man who tried to break into a castle where Queen Elizabeth II was spending Christmas in which he said he wanted to kill her. In the video, obtained by The Sun tabloid, a masked figure in a dark hoodie holding a crossbow claims he will "attempt to assassinate Elizabeth, Queen of the Royal Family".

The figure addresses the camera with a distorted voice and identifies himself as an Indian Sikh intent on "revenge" for an infamous 1919 massacre of Sikhs in British-ruled India. The video was shared on the social media platform Snapchat, around 24 minutes before a suspect was detained early on Christmas Day by armed police within the grounds of Windsor Castle, west of London.

The 19-year-old arrested is being held for mental



PETROZAVODSK, Russia: File photo shows Russian historian Yury Dmitriyev, who heads rights group Memorial's branch in Karelia, arrives for a court in the city of Petrozavodsk in northwestern Russia. — AFP

"I am ashamed of what's happening," Razumov told AFP. Asked to comment, President Vladimir Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, said the court ruling was not part of the Kremlin's agenda. Dmitriyev spent decades locating and exhuming mass graves of people killed under Joseph Stalin and set up a memorial to them in Russia's northwest.

health treatment, after officers recovered a crossbow during the brief security breach, according to London's Metropolitan police. "Following the man's arrest, detectives are assessing the contents of a video," the force said yesterday. It has said security processes were triggered "within moments" of the man entering the castle grounds at around 0830 GMT Saturday and that he did not enter any buildings. The incident occurred as the Queen spent a low-key Christmas Day there with her eldest son and heir to the throne Prince Charles and his wife Camilla. In the video, the masked figure said he was seeking revenge for the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, as it is known in India.

In April 1919, British troops fired on thousands of unarmed men, women and children in the northern city of Amritsar. The number of casualties from the event, which galvanised support for independence, is unclear. Colonial-era records put the death toll at 379, but Indian figures put the number closer to 1,000.

"It is also revenge for those who have been killed, humiliated and discriminated on because of their race," the figure added in the video. He also makes several references to Star Wars during the brief address, while also predicting his own "death

### 'Political prisoner'

Over the past few years, he has faced a series of trials on a number of charges, including sexually abusing his adopted daughter. He has pleaded not guilty. He was arrested in 2016 and charged with child pornography over several nude photos of his adopted daughter that he said he took to monitor her growth. A court acquitted him in 2018.

In a stunning turnaround, the not-guilty verdict was later overturned by a higher court and Dmitriyev was put back on trial, accused of forced sexual acts involving a child. He was sentenced to three and a half years in jail in July 2020, most of which he had already spent in pre-trial detention.

Prosecutors appealed against the verdict, asking for a harsher sentence. As a result, the supreme court in Karelia in September 2020 ordered him to a high-security penal colony for 13 years. Memorial has declared Dmitriyev a political prisoner and says "his activity in preserving the memory of political repressions" is the real reason for his prosecution.

Today, Russia's top court will consider a request to shut down Memorial International, the group's central structure, over breaching its designation as a "foreign agent." In a separate case, prosecutors are demanding that a court in Moscow close Memorial's Human Rights Centre, accusing it of condoning "terrorism and extremism" in addition to breaches of the "foreign agent" legislation. A new hearing in that case is set for Wednesday. — AFP



Britain's Queen Elizabeth II

is near". The suspect in the castle incident has been sectioned under the Mental Health Act, which allows the authorities in England and Wales to detain and treat people with mental health issues without their consent. Those held under the legislation are deemed to be a risk to themselves or others. — AFP

## As rebels declare a retreat, what lies ahead for Ethiopia?

**NAIROBI:** With Tigrajan rebels announcing a retreat to their stronghold in northernmost Ethiopia last week, fresh hopes have emerged of a possible end to the 13-month war marked by allegations of massacres and mass rapes. But as forces loyal to Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed chalk up a string of military victories and dismiss the rebel announcement as a cover-up for battlefield losses, prospects for peace remain hazy.

Here is a look at where things stand and the challenges that lie ahead.

### Why have the rebels declared a pullout?

Officially, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) says the pullout from the Afar and Amhara regions is intended to pave the way for a cessation of hostilities followed by peace talks. But the retreat to

Tigray marks a huge reversal for the TPLF, which last month dismissed government calls for it to withdraw from the two regions as "an absolute non-starter". "No army retreats of its own free will. Tigrajan forces were compelled to, and the federal government and its allies know that," said Awet Weldemichael, a Horn of Africa security expert at Queen's University in Canada.

### What explains the government's military success?

Air power has been the one area where the government has always enjoyed an advantage, even when the TPLF appeared to be gaining the upper hand and claiming territorial advances that brought it within 200 kilometres (124 miles) by road from the capital Addis Ababa.

Unlike the rebels, the federal forces have access to fighter jets and armed drones that have bombarded Tigray in recent months, with Ethiopia signing a military cooperation pledge with weapons exporter Turkey in August. "Addis Ababa's heavy deployment of deadly drones were crucial in disabling Tigrajan mechanised operations and vehicular mobility," Awet told AFP. He added that troops from Eritrea, which has backed Abiy against the TPLF, may have also

played a key role. "An army that had been falling back in disarray cannot suddenly become effective in mop-up operations that are necessary to physically push back the opposing army. "That can only be done by the Eritrean military, although we do not have the smoking gun yet."

### Is the war ending?

Not quite. The government announced on Friday that its troops would not advance further into Tigray but warned the decision could be overturned and stopped short of declaring a ceasefire. If confirmed, the temporary halt to fighting may help lower the temperature but observers remain cautious about declaring an end to the war anytime soon. "The prime minister did not make concessions when his forces were losing ground; why would he do so now?" said Awet.

### What are the potential challenges ahead?

The TPLF ruled Ethiopia with an iron fist for three decades until Abiy took over in 2018. It also fought a bitter war with Eritrea in the 1990s. The ongoing conflict has exacerbated ethnic rivalries, with the Amhara—who are Ethiopia's second largest ethnic

group—particularly wary of the rebels and their massive fighting force, said to number around 250,000.

"The Amhara are very reluctant to see the rehabilitation of the TPLF," said William Davison, a senior analyst on Ethiopia with the International Crisis Group. The contested region of western Tigray, which has been occupied by Amhara forces since the war erupted, is likely to be a major sticking point in any negotiations, he added. The TPLF has already asked the UN Security Council to ensure the withdrawal of Amhara forces and Eritrean troops from the region, which is claimed by both Amharas and Tigrajan. "Both Eritrea and the Amhara see the TPLF as an existential threat," Davison told AFP.

### What can the international community do?

Despite the obstacles, the potential for a pause in fighting has created a small opening for dialogue to end a war that has killed thousands and created a severe humanitarian crisis. "This is an opportune moment to apply diplomatic pressure," Davison said. "In addition to the warring parties grasping this opportunity, there should be an immediate concerted diplomatic effort to encourage them to strike a cessation of hostilities deal and open negotiations." — AFP



## International

# New UN Myanmar envoy says 'deeply concerned' by escalating violence

## 35 civilians killed and their bodies burned in an attack on Christmas Eve

**YANGON:** The new United Nations special envoy to Myanmar yesterday said she was "deeply concerned" by escalating violence in the country and called for a new year ceasefire between the military and its opponents. Nationwide protests against the February coup 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.

Diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis led by the UN and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations have made little headway so far, with the generals refusing to engage with opponents. Special envoy Noeleen Heyzer "is deeply concerned by the continued escalation of violence in Kayin State and other parts of Myanmar", she said in her first statement since taking on the role.

She also called for "all parties to... allow humanitarian assistance to be provided to those in need, including those forced to flee the violence", and for all sides to come to a New

Year ceasefire. On Sunday, a UN official said he was "horrified" by credible reports that at least 35 civilians were killed and their bodies burned in an attack on Christmas Eve in eastern Myanmar, and demanded the government launch an investigation.

Two workers for non-profit group Save the Children remain missing — their vehicle was among several that were attacked and burned in the incident in Kayah state. "The military reportedly forced people from their cars, arrested some, killed others and burned their bodies," it said in a statement.

The charity said Monday it was still investigating the incident. There have also been fresh clashes in recent days between ethnic rebels and the military in Kayin state — also known as Karen state — sending thousands fleeing into neighbouring Thailand.

A junta spokesman told AFP last week that the military had carried out air strikes against Karen



**JERUSALEM:** File photo shows, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) executive director Noeleen Heyzer speaks in Jerusalem. Noeleen Heyzer, the new United Nations special envoy to Myanmar, yesterday said she was "deeply concerned" by escalating violence in the country and called for a New Year ceasefire between the military and its opponents. — AFP

National Union fighters and members of local "People's Defence Force" groups that have sprung

up to fight back against the putsch.

### Frosty relations

Singaporean sociologist Heyzer was appointed by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in October, replacing Swiss diplomat Christine Schraner Burgener. Schraner Burgener had called for the UN to take "very strong measures" against the military to bring the country back to democracy and had been the target of regular broadsides in Myanmar's state-backed media.

Since the coup, the Swiss diplomat had been blocked by the generals from visiting the country, where she had hoped to meet with former civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Last week, state media reported the junta had closed her office in the country "since the activities of Ms Christine Schraner Burgener have concluded".

The junta said it had no comment yet in response to questions on whether it would allow Heyzer to open an office, or whether it would let her visit. Yesterday, a junta court again postponed giving its ruling in Suu Kyi's trial for illegally importing and possessing walkie-talkies, deferring the verdict to January 10. The Nobel laureate, 76, faces a catalogue of charges that could see her jailed for decades. — AFP



### Generals refusing to engage with opponents

## Philippines typhoon death toll rises to 388: Government

**MANILA:** The death toll from one of the most destructive typhoons to hit the Philippines in recent years rose to 388 yesterday, the government said, as disease outbreaks threatened some of the stricken areas. Typhoon Rai struck the south and centre of the Asian nation on December 16 and 17, toppling power lines and trees and unleashing deadly floods that also left hundreds of thousands homeless.

The civil defence office in Manila raised the death toll from Rai to 388 with 60 others missing and hundreds injured. Police previously put the death toll at 375. Civil defence officials said more than four million people were receiving typhoon aid in 430 cities and towns where about 482,000 houses were damaged or destroyed.

More than 300,000 people remain in evacuation camps, with more than 200,000 others sheltering in the homes of relatives or friends. Some survivors have likened Typhoon Rai to Super Typhoon Haiyan, which left 7,300 people dead or missing across the central Philippines in 2013 and remains the country's deadliest on record.

The archipelago gets hit by an average of 20 cyclones each year. As the government rushed to bring food, water and clothing to devastated areas, a new threat appeared in recent days with at least 140 people falling ill from suspected contaminated water. Eighty people were taken ill with acute gas-



**SURIGAO CITY, Philippines:** A family whose house was damaged, take shelter under a tree covered with iron sheets along a highway in Surigao City, Surigao del Norte province, days after super Typhoon Rai devastated the city. — AFP

troenteritis in the southern province of Dinagat Islands, while 54 people are being treated for diarrhoea in hospital on the neighbouring tourist island of Siargao, health undersecretary Maria Rosario Vergeire said.

The central city of Cebu reported 16 diarrhoea cases, she told reporters. "We all know these areas

suffered water interruption. Some areas still have tap water but pipes have been damaged and so there is a possibility of contamination," Vergeire said. Vergeire said the typhoon also spoiled more than 4,000 doses of coronavirus vaccines and damaged 141 hospitals and clinics, only 30 of which have resumed full operations. — AFP

## Trumpism without Trump: Republican playbook for 2022?

**WASHINGTON:** As US Republicans cheered impressive gains in state elections in the fall, their leader may not have been so delighted as he followed the results from his fiefdom in southern Florida. For the results of the gubernatorial races-victory in leftward-trending Virginia and an unexpectedly narrow defeat in deeply Democratic New Jersey-proved one thing beyond doubt: Republicans can win without Donald Trump.

Whisper it, but five years after submitting entirely to the will of its mercurial leader, and one year ahead of the crucial midterm elections, the Republican Party is tentatively picturing life after Donald. "At this stage, he would be the frontrunner if he chose to enter the 2024 presidential race," Matt Lacombe, an assistant professor of political science at New York liberal arts school Barnard College, told AFP.

"But it's also very possible that coordination among potential candidates and party officials... would be sufficient to prevent him from pursuing or succeeding in a second run." After Trump secured the Republican presidential nomination in May 2016, the party abandoned its policy platform at its next two conventions, instead opting to simply declare fealty to its rambunctious chieftain.

The consensus remains that all paths to Congress go through Mar-a-Lago-that to succeed in Washington you had to kiss the ring in Palm Beach, flattering Trump and his ultra-loyal base of tens of millions of ardent devotees.

Republican politicians who fail to toe the line know they risk a public dressing down and primary challenge at best and death threats to their families if his supporters were particularly inflamed. "Despite losing his social media megaphone, his endorsements still energize grassroots supporters, drive donations, and in some cases clear away competitors and force retirements," Tommy Goodwin, a Washington-based political consultant and lobbyist, told AFP.

Some prominent Republicans are seizing on the recent governors' races to call for a course correction, however, navigating around Trump and his "big lie" that the 2020 election was stolen from him by the Democrats.



**WASHINGTON:** File photo shows former US President Donald Trump gestures next to Judge Amy Coney Barrett on the Truman Balcony after she was sworn in as a US Supreme Court Associate Justice. — AFP

In Virginia, Republican multimillionaire Glenn Youngkin won by far exceeding Trump's 2020 showing in the suburbs, especially among independents and women. Trump immediately took credit but in reality, Youngkin soft-pedaled the former reality TV star's support and did all he could in the final weeks to keep his high-profile endorser at arm's length. In New Jersey too, Republican Jack Ciattarelli started out very pro-Trump, even speaking at a "Stop the Steal" rally in 2020, but distanced himself from the ex-president during the campaign proper.

The suburbs are likely to be the key battlegrounds again next year, when the stakes will be control of the House of Representatives and Senate and 36 governorships-yet Trump is far less popular there than in the countryside. The takeaway for many Republicans is that borrowing heavily from Trump's playbook while assiduously avoiding the man himself could be the key. The former president's approval sank to an all-time low of 34 percent after the January 6 insurrection, when thousands of his supporters stormed the US Capitol to stop lawmakers certifying Joe Biden's victory.

Trump has since issued a number of statements praising the insurrectionists and defending their threats on the life of his vice president, Mike Pence. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell has urged the 75-year-old real estate tycoon to stay out of the midterms, telling reporters: "I do think we need to be talking about the future, and not the past."

Yet Rick Scott, the chairman of the Republicans'

Senate campaign committee for 2022, told NBC any Republican would be "foolish" to reject Trump's endorsement-underlining the dilemma Republicans face. "Donald Trump is where he wants to be-the center of attention, a crying child in the candy aisle of a packed grocery store, demanding more soda while he throws bags of candy bars at other children," Peter Loge, an associate professor at George Washington University, told AFP. "It is difficult to imagine him demurring so that others can have their turn in the spotlight."

### 'The past is never dead'

Trump's bully pulpit isn't what it was before social media bans effectively curbed his day-to-day influence and, in any case, his electoral secret sauce was never as powerful as he claimed. Republicans did fairly well down-ballot in 2020 — keeping their Senate loss to the narrowest possible margin and almost taking the House-but stumbled at the presidential level.

And Trump is the first president since Herbert Hoover nearly a century ago to lose the House, the Senate and the White House during a single term. "So far, Trump-endorsed candidates haven't fared particularly well," said Sam Nelson, associate professor and chair of the University of Toledo's political science department.

"While Republican primary candidates actively seek his endorsement, valuable in Republican races, that same endorsement can be somewhat dangerous in a general election in that it motivates Democrats to turn out to vote against the Trump-supported candidate."

Loge believes challengers who think they have nothing to lose may emerge, alongside others concerned about the future of the Republican Party and the country. "The 2022 midterm elections will also go a long way to determining Trump's level of support in 2024," Loge told AFP.

"If Trump-backed candidates win primary and general elections, Trump's stock will go up. If Trump-backed candidates lose primary and general elections, Trump's stock will go down." But Trump remains a hero to the millions of disaffected new voters he brought to the Republican cause in 2016, and is credited with remaking the federal judiciary in the image of his right-wing backers. His deficit-busting tax cuts remain popular among the working classes, although they tilt increasingly toward the mega-rich over the longer term. "William Faulkner famously wrote 'The past is never dead. It's not even past,'" Mark Bayer, a former chief of staff in the Senate and the House, told AFP. — AFP

## Malaysia govt under fire over clean-up after deadly floods

**SHAH ALAM:** Malaysia's government was under fire yesterday as residents accused it of responding too slowly after the country's worst floods in years. Days of torrential rain caused rivers to overflow last week, swamping cities, forcing tens of thousands of people to flee their homes. Damaged appliances and soaked furniture were piled up on the streets and outside homes in flood-hit areas as residents and volunteers continued a massive clean-up drive. Many were frustrated with the authorities.

"I am angry. There is no assistance from the government... We need cash to rebuild our lives," said Asniyati Ismail, who lives in a residential enclave in Shah Alam, the capital of Selangor state. "There is mud everywhere, everything has been destroyed," she told AFP as her two children helped her clean.

The mounds of rubbish left in the area after the floods have also sparked fear of disease outbreaks. Selangor, which encircles the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur, was the state hit hardest by the floods. Many in Shah Alam were left stranded in their homes with barely any food for days, before being evacuated on boats in a chaotic rescue operation.

"The government has been absolutely slow in the rescue mission," resident Kartik Rao told AFP. "And now they are slow in the clean-up operation. Even after seven days, the rubbish in this neighbourhood has not been cleaned up."

Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob has admitted "weaknesses" in the flood response, but has pledged improvements in future. Malaysia is hit by floods annually during the monsoon season, from November to February, but the ones this month were the worst since 2014. They have left at least 48 people dead and five missing across Malaysia, officials said. Global warming has been linked to worsening floods. Because a warmer atmosphere holds more water, climate change increases the risk and intensity of flooding from extreme rainfall. — AFP

## Bangladesh arrests ferry owner after blaze that killed 39

**DHAKA:** Bangladesh police yesterday arrested the owner of an overcrowded ferry that caught fire and killed at least 39 people last week, after investigators blamed the toll on a disregard for safety. The blaze broke out in the middle of the night on Friday when many of the ferry's 700 passengers were sleeping near the southern district of Barguna.

Survivors relayed harrowing stories of having to jump into the Sugandha river from the three-storey ferry, which was only designed to carry 420 people. Most of the victims burnt to death while others drowned in frigid waters while trying to escape.

Ferry owner Hum Jalal Sheikh was arrested yesterday, a police spokesman told reporters, a day after a court issued an arrest warrant for eight people including the captain and crew of the Obhijaan-10. Marine police officer Mahbubur Rahman said the vessel did not have adequate fire extinguishers and buoys to face a major mid-river accident.

"We spoke to the survivors and they said the driver of the ferry kept the vessel moving for nearly an hour after its engine room caught fire," he told AFP. "Had they stopped the ferry and anchored immediately, it could have saved all these valuable lives." Experts in Bangladesh blame poor maintenance, lax safety standards at shipyards and overcrowding for the South Asian nation's frequent maritime disasters. At least 21 people were killed in August when a boat packed with passengers collided with a sand-laden cargo ship. — AFP



# Business

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 28, 2021

## Heavy snow causes traffic jams, flight cancellations across Japan

More than 3,200 households have been left without power in central Japan

**TOKYO:** Heavy snow caused traffic jams, flight cancellations and disruption to train services in central Japan yesterday, with record drifts recorded in some areas. More than 3,200 households have been left without power in the region, according to Kansai Electric Power, as officials warned more snow was forecast overnight.

No injuries or deaths due to the freezing weather have yet been confirmed, government spokesman Hirokazu Matsuno said. "A strong winter pressure pattern is causing heavy snow, mainly along the Sea of Japan side of the country from northern to western Japan, with some areas experiencing record snowfall," Matsuno said.

"The amount of snow is expected to increase tomorrow... increased caution and vigilance are still required." A major road in the Shiga region was closed "due to stranded vehicles", Matsuno said, with TV footage showing long lines of stationary cars that later began to move.

The traffic snarl-up reportedly began when a truck slipped near Hikone city, where 68 centimeters (26 inches) of snow fell in 24 hours to this morning — 30 times deeper than average-according to public broadcaster NHK. Nearly 200 passengers were snowed in overnight on a local train line in the region, NHK said.

One picture from a train carriage posted on Twitter showed a huge pile of fresh powder between two open doors as a station lamp illuminated snowflakes against the night sky. Around 130 domestic flights were cancelled on Sunday due to

the snow, Jiji Press said, with NHK reporting some 50 cancellations yesterday.

Meanwhile, Tokyo stocks closed lower in thin holiday trade yesterday as fears lingered over the impact of the Omicron coronavirus variant.

The benchmark Nikkei 225 index fell 0.37 percent, or 106.13 points, to 28,676.46, while the broader Topix index was down 0.45 percent, or 8.88 points, to 1,977.90.

"Concerns about Omicron weighed on the market," said Toshikazu Horiuchi, a broker at IwaiCosmo Securities. Senior strategist Yoshihiro Ito of Okasan Online Securities also warned in a note that "the sense of caution over the spread of infections (due to Omicron) remains strong".

Japan is on alert after cases of the new variant were reported in major cities including Tokyo, following a long period of declining daily COVID-19 infections nationwide. "The market also lacked strength, with the number of investors limited due to the year-end holiday," Horiuchi told AFP.

The dollar fetched 114.43 yen in Asian afternoon trade, up from 114.38 yen in New York on Friday. SoftBank Group dropped 2.95 percent to 5,220 yen following reports that Credit Suisse has launched legal action to recover funds the bank says the Japanese conglomerate owes. Airlines were lower with Japan Airlines falling 0.32 percent to 2,170 yen and ANA Holdings losing 0.29 percent to 2,376 yen. But chip-making equipment manufacturer Tokyo Electron jumped 2.08 percent to 65,600 yen thanks to strong demand for semiconductors. —AFP



TOYAMA, Japan: People walk along a street in heavy snow in the city of Toyama, Toyama prefecture, brought by an extreme cold front along western and northern parts of the country yesterday. — AFP

## Evergrande vows 'full steam ahead' to deliver homes

**BEIJING:** Embattled Chinese firm Evergrande will deliver almost four times the number of housing units to buyers in December than in the previous three months, its chairman said, as the real estate behemoth grapples with massive debts. Evergrande-drowning in \$300 billion in liabilities-has struggled to repay bondholders and investors after becoming ensnared in Beijing's deleveraging crackdown on the bloated property sector.

But the group-which officially defaulted on a major bond payment this month-has insisted it will be able to complete tens of thousands of units and pay off some debts. "Since the company's troubles began, we delivered fewer than 10,000 units in September, October and November," chairman Hui Ka Yan-known as Xu Jiayin in Mandarin-told a company meeting Sunday evening, according to a post on Evergrande's official WeChat account. "There are only five days left this month, we must charge full steam ahead to guarantee the delivery of 39,000 units this month." The new homes are across 115 developments, he said. "Absolutely nobody at Evergrande is allowed to 'lie flat'," Hui added, referring to an internet slang term for "slacking off" popular among

young people.

In recent months, the company has repeatedly said it will finish its unfinished projects and deliver them to buyers in a desperate bid to salvage its debts, despite having missed a payment of more than \$1.2 billion earlier this month. Earlier struggles to pay suppliers and contractors due to the debt crisis led to sustained protests from homebuyers and investors at the group's Shenzhen headquarters in September.

Since then, the bloated firm has tried to sell off its assets and shave down its stakes in other firms, with Hui paying off some of the debts using his own considerable personal wealth. The provincial government of Guangdong-where the firm is headquartered-is currently overseeing Evergrande's debt restructuring process, but Beijing has yet to roll back any of the restrictions that prompted the housing crunch. Having already blamed the firm's woes on "poor management and blind expansion", China's central bank vowed Saturday to protect the rights of homebuyers and promote the healthy development of the real estate market.

A Chinese property company had said last week that it cannot get in



BEIJING: Evergrande-drowning in \$300 billion in liabilities-has struggled to repay bondholders and investors after becoming ensnared in Beijing's deleveraging crackdown on the bloated property sector.

touch with a money management firm that it gave over \$300 million for investment, the latest example of the country's debt-crippled real estate sector's woes. China Fortune Land Development said in a filing to the Shanghai Stock Exchange that it had recently "lost contact" with China Create Capital after handing over the money in 2018.

There was "no way to judge" how the missing cash would affect Fortune Land's current and future earnings, the filing said. China's heavily indebted property firms have struggled to keep

their heads above water since Beijing last year launched a sweeping crackdown on excessive leverage in the sector. Evergrande has been the highest-profile firm to become ensnared in the crisis, defaulting last week on more than \$1.2 billion of bond debt.

Fortune Land, a smaller player, defaulted on a \$530 million dollar bond in March, according to Bloomberg. The developer said in the filing that one of its offshore units signed a deal in 2018 to let a firm called Wingskengo provide it with wealth management services. — AFP

## Weather disasters cost \$20bn more than last year: NGO

**PARIS:** The ten most expensive weather disasters this year caused more than \$170 billion (150 billion euros) in damage, \$20 billion more than in 2020, a British aid group said yesterday. Each year, UK charity Christian Aid calculates the cost of weather incidents like flooding, fires and heat waves according to insurance claims and reports the results.

In 2020, it found the world's ten costliest weather disasters caused \$150 billion in damage, making this year's total an increase of 13 percent.

Christian Aid said the upward trend reflects the effects of man-made climate change and added that the ten disasters in question also killed at least 1,075 people and displaced 1.3 million.

The most expensive disaster in 2021 was hurricane Ida, which lashed the eastern United States and caused around \$65 billion in damages. After crashing into Louisiana at the end of August, it made its way northward and caused extensive flooding in New York City and the surrounding area. Spectacular and deadly flooding in Germany and Belgium in July was next on the list at \$43 billion in losses.

A cold snap and winter storm in Texas that took out the vast state's power grid cost \$23 billion, fol-



Record rainfall from Hurricane Ida turned some New York City streets into rivers and shut down subway service. — AFP

lowed by flooding in China's Henan province in July that cost an estimated \$17.6 billion.

Other disasters costing several billion dollars include flooding in Canada, a late spring freeze in France that damaged vineyards, and a cyclone in India and Bangladesh in May.

The report acknowledged its evaluation mainly covers disasters in rich countries where infrastruc-

ture is better insured and that the financial toll of disasters on poor countries is often incalculable.

It gave the example of South Sudan where flooding affected around 800,000 people.

"Some of the most devastating extreme weather events in 2021 hit poorer nations, which have contributed little to causing climate change," the report's press release noted. — AFP

## Sri Lanka shuts 3 foreign missions as dollar crisis worsens

**COLOMBO:** Sri Lanka announced yesterday the closure of three overseas diplomatic missions in a bid to save foreign currency reserves, as the country's central bank slapped tighter controls on dollars needed to finance essential imports. The Sri Lankan High Commission (embassy) in Nigeria and consulates in Germany and Cyprus will be closed from January in the restructuring, the foreign ministry said.

"The restructuring is undertaken with a view to conserving the country's much needed foreign reserves and minimizing expenditure related to maintenance of Sri Lanka's missions overseas," the ministry said in a



statement. The island's tourism-dependent economy was hammered by the pandemic and the government in March last year imposed a broad import ban to shore up forex reserves, triggering shortages of essential goods such as fuel and sugar.

The closure of the three missions came on the same day the Central Bank of Sri Lanka tightened restrictions on foreign currency remittances received by locals. It ordered all commercial banks to hand over a quarter of their dollar earnings to the government, up from 10 percent.

This means banks will have even fewer dollars to give to private traders who are importing essential goods. Sri Lanka had foreign reserves of just \$1.58 billion at the end of November, down from \$7.5 billion when President Gotabaya Rajapaksa took office in 2019.

The central bank has appealed for foreign currency — even the loose change of people returning from overseas trips. Earlier this month, ratings agency Fitch downgraded Sri Lanka due to mounting fears of a sovereign default on its \$26 billion foreign debt.

The government insisted it can meet its obligations. Food shortages have been worsened by the government's ban on agrochemical imports, which was lifted last month after widespread crop failures and intense farmer protests. — AFP



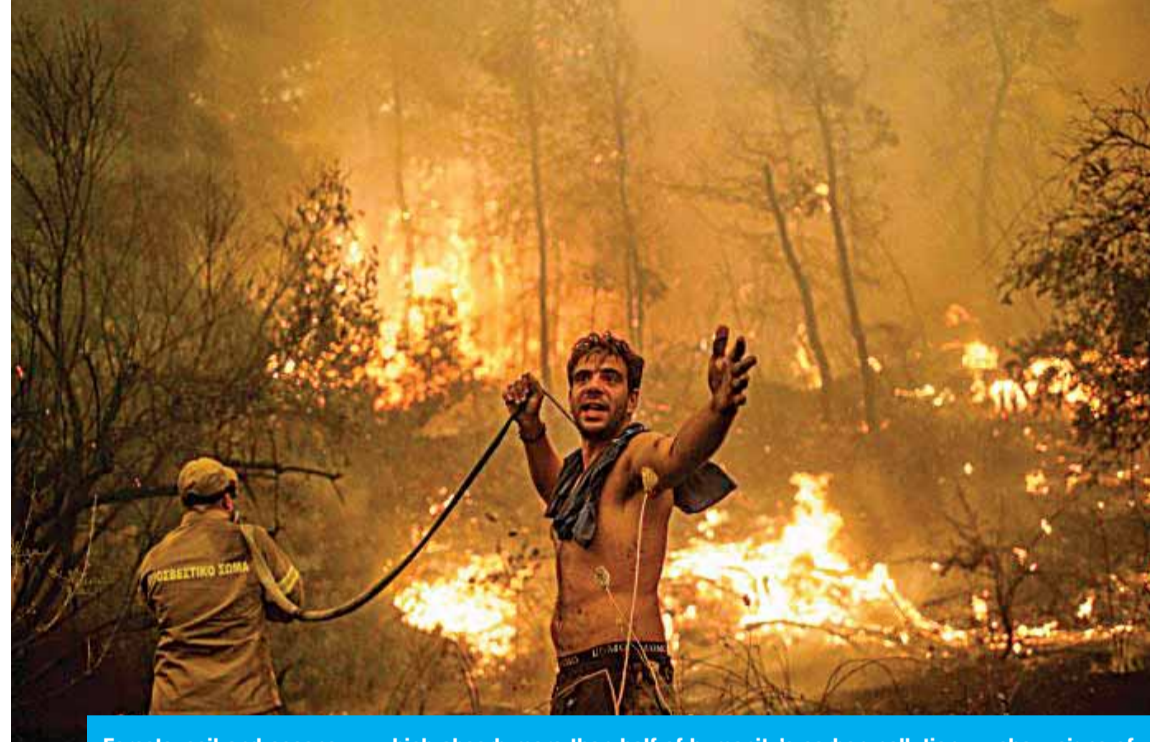
## Business

# Climate change 2021: Experts say there's no turning back now

## Countries make solid advances in beating back the threat of global warming



**ISTANBUL:** This aerial photograph taken on June 6, 2021 in Turkey's Marmara Sea at a harbor on the shoreline of Istanbul, shows a jelly-like layer of slime that develops on the surface of the water due to the excessive proliferation of phytoplankton, gravely threatening the marine biome.



**Forests, soil and oceans — which absorb more than half of humanity's carbon pollution — show signs of saturation. —AFP photos**

**PARIS:** Across a quarter century of UN climate conferences tasked with saving humanity from itself, one was deemed a chaotic failure (Copenhagen/2009), another a stunning success (Paris/2015), and the rest landed somewhere in between.

This year's COP26 inspired all these reactions at once. Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, leading a 100,000-strong march through the streets of Glasgow, dismissed the two-week meet as a "green-washing festival".

But dedicated experts in the negotiating arena hailed solid-even historic-advances in beating back the existential threat of global warming. More often than not, observers vacillated between approval and criticism, hope and despair.

"The Glasgow Climate Pact is more than we expected, but less than we hoped for," Dann Mitchell, head of climate hazards at Britain's Met Office, said with haiku-like economy.

Gauging the efficacy of measures announced at the COP26 summit largely depends on the yardstick used to measure them. Compared to what came before, the first-ever call by 196 countries to draw down coal-fired power, or a promise to double financial aid each year—to roughly \$40 billion—so poor nations can brace for climate impacts, are giant steps forward.

Likewise a provision obliging countries to consider setting more ambitious targets for reducing carbon pollution every year rather than once every five years. But all these hard-won gains at COP26 shrivel in significance when stacked up against hard science.

### Glasgow exit lane

An unbroken cascade in 2021 of deadly floods, heatwaves and wildfires across four continents, combined with ever more detailed projections, left no doubt that going beyond the 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) heating limit envisioned in the Paris Agreement would push Earth into the red zone. "As a lifelong optimist, I see the Glasgow outcome as half-full rather than half-empty," said Alden Meyer, a senior analyst at climate and energy think tank E3G.

"But the atmosphere responds to emissions—not COP decisions—and much work remains ahead to translate the strong rhetoric here into reality."

The past year also saw Part 1 of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) first comprehensive synthesis of climate science in seven years. It found that global heating is virtually certain to pass 1.5C, probably within a decade. Meanwhile, ocean levels are rising faster than anticipated, and will do so for centuries. And forests, soil and oceans—which absorb more than half of humanity's carbon pollution—show signs of saturation.

Then there is the threat of "tipping points" that could see permafrost release massive amounts of CO2 and methane, the Amazon basin transformed into savannah, and ice sheets shedding enough mass to submerge cities and deltas home to hundreds of millions.

"Make no mistake, we are still on the road to hell," said Dave Reay, head of the University of Edinburgh's Climate Change Institute. "But Glasgow has at least created an exit lane."

### Permanent breaking story

Part 2 of the IPCC report on climate impacts, seen exclusively by AFP ahead of its February 2022 publication, reveals another yawning gap between the baby steps of COP26 and what is needed in the long term. Helping vulnerable nations cope with the multiplier effect of global heating on extreme weather could soon require trillions of dollars per year, not the tens of billions put on the table at COP26, a draft version of the report makes clear.

"Adaptation costs are significantly higher than previously estimated, resulting in a growing 'adaptation finance gap'," said an executive summary of the 4,000-page report. The failure of rich nations to deliver \$100 billion a year by 2020 to help developing countries makes it hard to imagine where these trillions will come from. Glasgow marked the transition from fleshing out the rules for the 2015 Paris treaty to implementing its provisions.

But unlike the aftermath of other major COPs, the climate crisis will remain a permanent breaking story that is not going to recede into the background anytime soon.

How that saga unfolds will depend a lot on the world's four major emitters, collectively responsible for 60 percent of global carbon pollution. The United States and the European Union have pledged carbon neutrality by 2050 and recently set more ambitious emission-reduction targets for 2030.

But they refused to set up a fund demanded by more than 130 developing countries to help pay for climate damage already incurred.

### All sectors, all countries

China and India—accounting for 38 percent of global emissions in 2021, and rising—have resisted pressure to give up fossil fuels. Beijing has steadfastly refused to do what scientists say is doable and necessary to stay under 2C: peak their emissions far earlier than 2030.

If climate politics remains stymied, however, global capital is already flowing into what some have called the most massive economic transformation in human history. In Glasgow, former Bank of England governor Mark Carney boasted that nearly 500 banks, insurers and asset managers worth \$130 trillion were ready to finance climate action.

"If we only had to transform one sector, or move one country off fossil fuels, we would have done so long ago," commented Christiana Figueres, who headed the UN climate convention when the Paris deal was struck. "But all sectors of the global economy have to be decarbonised, and all countries must switch to clean technologies." Where some of that money might flow—and who might get left out—has also come into focus, with major investment deals announced for South Africa, and others in the pipeline for emerging economies such as Indonesia and Vietnam.

But there is little incentive for private capital to help the poorest and most vulnerable countries to cope with climate ravages and shore up their defenses. "We cannot just wait for open market incentives to have their way, we need to set prices on carbon globally, we need to set science-based targets that become climate laws," said Johan Rockstrom, director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research. —AFP

## US retail sales up 8.5% this holiday season

**WASHINGTON:** US consumers were in the mood to spend this holiday season, with retail sales soaring 8.5 percent over last year, a study released Sunday showed. Online sales were up 11 percent and in-store sales up 8.1 percent between November 1 and Christmas Eve, according to the Mastercard SpendingPulse study.

The increase, which was the strongest in 17 years, does not reflect automobile sales.

"Consumers splurged throughout the season," said Steve Sadove, senior advisor for Mastercard and former CEO of Saks Incorporated. The boom saw "apparel and department stores experiencing strong growth as shoppers sought to put their best dressed foot forward," he said.

Americans flocked to clothing, which experienced a 47.3 percent increase in sales year-to-year as well as jewelry, with a 32 percent increase. The period included several weeks before the Omicron COVID-19 variant spread



**WASHINGTON:** US department store sales were up 21.2 percent, while electronic products experienced 16.2 percent growth.

widely in the United States.

Department store sales were up 21.2 percent, while electronic products experienced 16.2 percent growth. "It's been a resurgent season for retailers as consumers stocked their carts with

gifts and gadgets," Mastercard said.

The study also indicated that US households made their purchases earlier than in years past, including to lock in "guaranteed by Christmas" delivery. —AFP

## Crispy Chicken arrives at McDonald's Kuwait

**KUWAIT:** No stranger to menu innovations and creating fan-favorite instant classics, McDonald's Kuwait announced one of the most exciting additions to its menu yet: the all-new Crispy Chicken. Made with the highest-quality, 100 percent halal chicken, the Crispy Chicken features juicy, tender and succulent chicken meat covered with a crispy coating and fried to perfection.

Speaking about this latest menu offering, Muntaser Al-Qadah, general manager of McDonald's Kuwait, said: "We know that there is an ever-growing appetite in the market for delicious crispy chicken offerings and that our customers in particular are constantly on the lookout for good, high-quality options. So, we are expanding our menu with this new addition, which we consider to be a major attraction for chicken lovers - to give them exactly what they are craving, delivered in a uniquely

McDonald's way."

The Crispy Chicken line-up has already proven to be a runaway success for McDonald's across all markets where it has already debuted, including Malaysia, Hong Kong, Oman, Qatar and Jordan.

"This new offering builds upon our signature mouth-watering chicken classics. Our menu has always proudly boasted some of the most popular chicken meals in the market - which are not only delicious but made with the highest commitment to quality," added Al-Qadah.

He further noted: "Like everything else we do, we were determined to deliver a product that meets our unparalleled standards for quality and excellence. That meant undergoing a long years-long process - to not only perfect the recipe, but also source the best ingredients. As a result, we have partnered up with one of the leading suppliers of chicken meat in the region, the Saudi-based Tanniah Food Company, to source the highest quality pure, 100 percent halal chicken meat, because we have always believed that great quality is the true secret to great taste. And we



continue to strive to develop our offering and deliver the absolute best food in the market."

Available as a two-piece meal, a three-piece meal and a nine-piece sharing bundle, the Crispy Chicken will be available at all McDonald's restaurants and via all delivery platforms.

## Stocks markets mixed as Omicron spreads

**LONDON:** World markets diverged in thin holiday trade yesterday as fears lingered over the spreading Omicron coronavirus variant. The highly mutated strain has fuelled a massive increase in cases across the globe, with countries reviving lockdowns, thousands of flights cancelled, and cruise ships returning to port with COVID-infected passengers.

Frankfurt was up 0.1 percent and Paris was flat in midday trading while Asian markets finished down. London and Hong Kong were closed for a holiday. "Omicron cases are surging in the US and Europe, and although markets have well and truly priced in a less virulent strain, the disruption to goods and services from isolating workers, notably air travel, seems to be the main fall-out so far," said Jeffrey Halley, analyst at foreign exchange firm OANDA.

"That is only likely to cause short-term nerves, with the global recovery story for 2022 still on track," Halley said. On Friday before the Christmas break, markets wavered in similarly subdued trade.

A day earlier on Wall Street, the S&P 500 ended the last session before the long holiday weekend at a fresh record following a raft of mostly decent US economic data. A study released Sunday showed US consumers were in the mood to spend over the holiday season, with retail sales soaring 8.5 percent over last year. Online sales were up 11 percent and in-store sales up 8.1 percent between November 1 and Christmas Eve, according to the Mastercard SpendingPulse study.

"Consumers splurged throughout the season," said Steve Sadove, senior advisor for Mastercard and former CEO of Saks Incorporated. —AFP



## Business

# 2021 — A major milestone in NBK's journey to digital transformation

## Youth-centric services, payment solutions and rewards remain focus



Weyay team



Service Hero Award

**KUWAIT:** It was another year of remarkable achievements, leadership and strengthening our competitive advantage, during which National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) ingrained its leading position, provided the best banking services and products, and introduced advanced payment solutions and pioneering digital initiatives for the first time in Kuwait. NBK continued to build and reinforce its customer relationship, bringing them closer through identifying their individual needs and providing them with the latest in banking services.

NBK's leadership in providing advanced and pioneering personal banking services in Kuwait and the region was highly recognized by international organizations. In 2021, NBK won the Best Retail Banking Services in Kuwait, and Best Loyalty/ Rewards Program in the Middle East at the "Annual Asian Trailblazer Awards - 2021". NBK was also awarded the "Best Consumer Digital Bank" in Kuwait and the Middle East by Global Finance magazine.

### Youth-centered approach

2021 was the year of youth, with all CBG activities focused on meaningfully engaging young people through continuously providing the best banking services and enhancing payment solutions. NBK rewards program, awards and exceptional offers also used a youth-centered approach.

The new services and improvements introduced to NBK Mobile Services Program focused on meeting youth aspirations and their lifestyle. For instance, during the year, NBK launched the UEFA Champions League Mastercard issued by NBK, specifically designed for customers interested in football, sports and healthy lifestyles.

NBK also launched various exclusive offers to Al-Shabab customers as it increased their opportunities to winning a Tesla car as part of NBK's summer campaign. Students who transfer their allowance to their NBK bank accounts and apply for NBK Al-Shabab Prepaid Card have three chances to enter the draw. NBK also launched a unique package to serve international students studying abroad including NBK Foreign Currency Prepaid Card with no fee for loading or issuance, no annual fee, and no minimum balance for account opening, promotional offer from Qatar Airways, International SIM card offer, and transportation voucher in the United

States and the United Kingdom, as well as various offers and promotions.

NBK ended the year by launching "Weyay", the first digital bank in Kuwait, targeting mainly Kuwaiti youth as its services and cards were specifically designed to suit their lifestyle and meet their needs.

### Talents of leadership

The key focus of NBK's strategy is to stay on its course as the bank of choice and to remain a strong personal partner to each client throughout their financial journey, starting from childhood. NBK's approach isn't limited to just offering Zeina Package, tailored to young bankers, but also extends to fostering their interests and nurturing their talents. In 2021, NBK signed a sponsorship agreement for "FM Academy" and extended its sponsorship of the "Sadan" Soccer Academy for two years. Moreover, NBK signed a partnership and sponsorship agreement with Rafa Nadal Academy Kuwait (RNAK) a leading sports institution specializing in tennis and fitness.

NBK's partnership spans the full spectrum from sponsoring talents to supporting businesses, which was a major focus in 2021 as it geared its efforts towards services that support entrepreneurs by strengthening ties and cooperation. Supporting this goal, CBG launched Business Banking Plus, which provides an exclusive banking experience along with a host of privileges designed to support and develop entrepreneurs and their businesses. NBK also launched Business Concierge Service for Business Plus customers in order to meet entrepreneurs' needs quickly and easily at any time in cooperation with Peacock Concierge.

### The largest branch

NBK Mobile Banking continued to establish its position as the bank's largest branch during 2021 on the back of continually applying our development strategy and adding numerous services and improvements throughout the year to meet customers' needs and facilitate and speed up their transactions. Our continuous development and enhancement were clearly reflected in increased demand as NBK Mobile Banking registered base increased in 2021 by 35 percent (YoY) and active users base jumped by 20 percent (YoY).

The latest enhancement that will be added to NBK Mobile Banking services will be the first of its kind in Kuwait. Users will be able to transfer money using a QR code and benefit from the new set of tools to review NBK Rewards Points and NBK Miles Program at a glance, as well as displaying the balances of bank accounts and credit cards. NBK was awarded Best Mobile Bank in Kuwait - 2021 by Global Finance Magazine.

### Sustainable rewards

In line with its strategy to achieve sustainability in all its business practices, NBK rewarded its clients in 2021 with exceptional and sustainable rewards. Throughout the year, NBK launched unique and exclusive campaigns and promotions including draws and prizes designed to create the best client experience. NBK launched its annual summer campaign 2021, giving customers the chance to win 9 Tesla Model 3 cars.

NBK also launched a variety of exceptional rewards for its customers, including cashback campaigns, salary transfer rewards, and other exclusive offers to enrich client's experiences and meet their individual needs. Moreover, NBK was recognized by receiving two awards at the 12th "Annual Asian Trailblazer Awards - 2021" namely: Best Retail Banking Services in Kuwait, and Best Loyalty/ Rewards Program in the Middle East.

In 2021, NBK clients had more opportunities to win unique prizes and enter various draws during its special event held to celebrate Al-Jawhara Account quarterly draws. This year, NBK introduced new activities for the first time to keep participants engaged.

### Digital channels

NBK digital channels supported its strategy and brought it closer to its clients despite the unprecedented circumstances imposed by the pandemic, as most transactions were executed through those channels. Digital banking channels accounted for over 95 percent of NBK banking operations in 2021, an increase from last year during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, confirming clients' reliance on NBK digital channels even after easing restrictions.

NBK was close to its clients through NBK Contact Center and NBK WhatsApp, as well as its toll-free numbers in many countries around the world. In 2021, NBK received more than 2.2 million calls through NBK call center.

It also continued to enhance its leading position in the banking sector through the largest domestic banking network in Kuwait, with 67 branches all over the Country, as well as a large POS network exceeding 15,000 terminals, all NFC-enabled. In addition, NBK has the largest owned ATM network all over Kuwait comprising over 386 machines. NBK received two awards, "Best Lending in Kuwait" and "Best Online Product Offerings" from Global Finance magazine as part of its annual awards, "Best Consumer Digital Bank - 2021".

### Financial Inclusion

In 2021, NBK focused its efforts to support "Let's Be Aware" campaign launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK). NBK organized several events in support of this initiative through its digital channels and its social media platforms, including hosting a webinar themed "credit cards and latest fraud schemes" on its Clubhouse page.

### Launching Weyay...a crowning moment in NBK's digital journey

Before 2021 draws to an end, NBK launched "Weyay", the first digital bank in Kuwait, in line with NBK's continuous endeavors to enhance its position in digitizing banking services and maintain its leadership by providing the latest and most advanced banking solutions.

### Youth cadres... the key to NBK success

The cadres of Consumer Banking Group at NBK worked tirelessly throughout the year, confirming their unwavering commitment and team work, proving that they represent the main pillar NBK's excellence across all fields. The team's expertise and skills were reflected in all the advanced services and products and the pioneering and innovative initiatives launched by the Bank throughout the year, for which the team was the key to our success. CBG employees also continued their contributions under exceptional circumstances imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, yet they were able to conquer all challenges and keep up the good work.

## First of its kind Mercedes-Benz mobile showroom from Al Mulla Automobiles



**KUWAIT:** Al Mulla Automobiles, a member of Al Mulla Group and the sole authorized distributor of Mercedes-Benz in Kuwait, recently concluded the first tour of its luxury Mercedes-Benz Mobile Showroom by Kuwait Towers, one of the country's iconic landmarks. Over two weeks, customers were able to get a closer look at a wide selection of vehicles from Mercedes-Benz, which were rotated routinely to provide customers with a variety of choices.

The mobile showroom had the full level of hospitality one has come to expect from Mercedes-Benz with a lounge area and barista services, in addition to providing guests and customers with consultation services, the ability to book test drives, and even placing orders on vehicles. Kuwait Towers, the country's most visited tourist attraction, was chosen as the first station on Mercedes-Benz's tour in Kuwait as part of Al Mulla Automobile's ambition to showcase its luxury vehicles in an innovative setting at various

areas around the city. The tour will continue to feature our latest collection of Mercedes-Benz vehicles at more popular spots around the city.

Commenting on this new approach, Steve Brown, Director - Al Mulla Automobiles - Mercedes-Benz Kuwait said: "This new retail approach from Al Mulla Automobiles is part of our commitment to enhance the retail experience for our clients and the public. The Mercedes-Benz Mobile Showroom gives us the flexibility to showcase the best that Mercedes-Benz has to offer in a variety of locations. We look forward to building on this offering and continue providing innovative approaches to our customers with the best-in-class level of service they have come to expect from Al Mulla Automobiles."

The Mercedes-Benz Mobile Showroom from Al Mulla Automobiles will be housed in a variety of locations across Kuwait throughout the upcoming year.

## LuLu Hypermarket launches Christmas, New Year promotion

**KUWAIT:** LuLu Hypermarket, the leader in hypermarket retailing in the region, is ending the year with an amazing Christmas and New Year promotion sale. The spectacular promotion was launched on 23 December at the Al-Dajeej outlet, with a cake-cutting ceremony by top management of the hypermarket in Kuwait, with assistance from little Santa helpers.

The promotion, which is taking place at all LuLu Hypermarket outlets in Kuwait, was also marked by a special Christmas-New Year 20 meter cake-cutting ceremony at the Al-Rai branch a day earlier.

The cake-cutting function at Al-Dajeej outlet was followed by several contests and competitions for children, including a Christmas Santa fashion-show contest, a Christmas cake decoration contest, and a Christmas tree decoration contest. More than 120 young contestants participated in the three events, with the first, second and

third place winners in each contest winning exciting prizes, and all participants receiving consolation prizes.

During the week-long Christmas-New Year celebration period a wide range of products are available at special discounted prices and on exclusive promotional offers. A sensational 'Year-end' deal is also being launched as part of the celebrations, with select products being offered at unbelievable one-off prices. The Christmas-New Year promotion at LuLu Hypermarket is supported by Joyalukkas Jewellers, Malabar Gold and Diamonds, and Kent water purifiers.

A festival atmosphere, reflecting the celebratory mood of the year-end festive season, prevails at all branches. Merry, rotund Santas are present at each branch welcoming shoppers with chocolates and other goodies, while colorful displays and large cutouts of the season's celebrations are present at entrances and along aisles of the hypermarket. Special Christmas-New Year 'Selfie' counters are also a major draw during the promotion.

The Christmas-New Year promotion is in line with LuLu Hypermarket's endeavor to partner and actively participate in celebrations and festivals of the community, and to offer the widest range of quality products at attractive and competitive prices to mark these festive occasions.







## TOM WALKER JOKED HE OWES DUCHESS OF CAMBRIDGE ROYALTIES

The 30-year-old singer was accompanied on piano by Catherine when he performed his track 'For Those Who Can't Be Here' for 'Royal Carols: Together At Christmas' and after the special program aired on ITV on Christmas Eve, the song has enjoyed a surge in popularity. He told The Sun newspaper's Bizarre column: "It was so well received, I probably owe her royalties now. She sent me a letter thanking me for the opportunity but it should be me thanking her. "The song has jumped 57 places in the charts. It was a wonderful experience and she was so warm. She made the effort to thank all the musicians but it was us who felt so grateful to be part of something so special." Tom, who met the duchess at a charity event for 'Action on Addiction', where he performed his single 'Leave A Light On', praised the 39-year-old royal for a "brilliant" performance but suggested she was nervous before recording the segment. He added: "We met for a rehearsal beforehand and I gave her a recording of the track without the piano part so she could practice. It was obvious she had taken the time to perfect it. She was brilliant."



## DUKE AND DUCHESS OF SUSSEX PAY TRIBUTE TO DESMOND TUTU

Prince Harry and his wife Meghan - who have children Archie, two, and Lili, six months, together - recalled their meeting with the South African clergyman during their visit to his home country two years ago and praised his "moral clarity and joyful spirit" in a touching message after news broke he had passed away on

Boxing Day at the age of 90. Harry and Meghan said in a statement: "Archbishop Tutu will be remembered for his optimism, his moral clarity, and his joyful spirit. He was an icon for racial justice and beloved across the world. "It was only two years ago that he held our son, Archie, while we were in South Africa - 'Arch and The Arch' he had joked, his infectious laughter ringing through the room, relaxing anyone in his presence. He remained a friend and will be sorely missed by all." Their message followed a statement from Queen Elizabeth, issued on behalf of the wider royal family, that paid tribute to the anti-apartheid campaigner.

## JOJO AND DEXTER DARDEN ENGAGED

The 'Saved By the Bell' actor recently popped the question to the 31-year-old singer and the 'Too Little Too Late' hit-maker - whose real name is Joanna Levesque - couldn't be happier to be sharing her life with the "most thoughtful, creative, positive, handsome, strong, loving, uplifting human being". Alongside a series of professional photos and videos from the proposal, JoJo excitedly announced on Christmas Day: "Forever with YOU? Sign me UP. Celebrating Christmas a whole fiancee!!!" "The most thoughtful, creative, positive, handsome, strong, loving, uplifting human being asked me to marry him. So obviously I said YESSSS!!! (sic)" JoJo revealed Dexter had proposed on her birthday, 20 December, and they were joined by those closest to them for the "epic" occasion. She added: "Thank you for the most epic birthday surprise ever. And for flying out my mom, your mom, and both of our best friends to share in that incredible moment with us. You are one of one. LFG @dexterdarden. (sic)" The 30-year-old actor thanked his new fiancée in the comments.



## JANICE LONG REMEMBERED AS 'TRULY BRILLIANT RADIO PERSON'

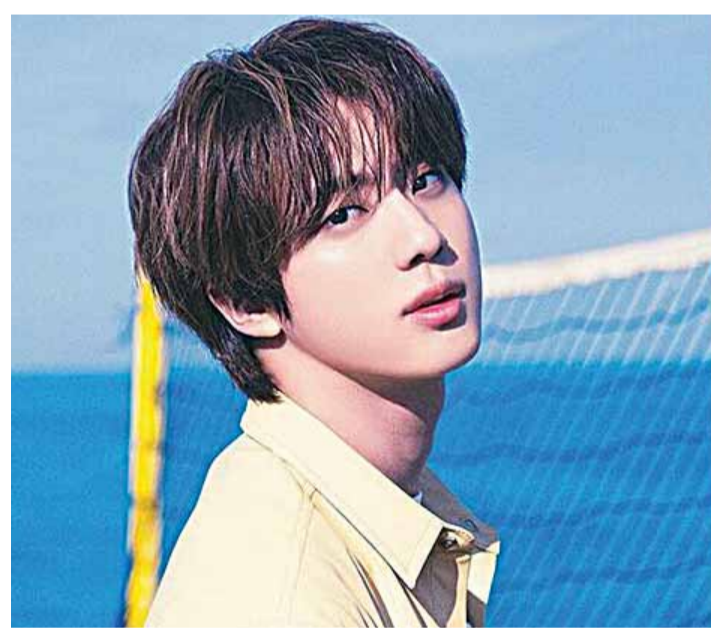
The BBC Radio DJ and former 'Top of the Pops' presenter passed away at the age of 66 on Christmas Day following a short illness and current BBC Radio 1 breakfast host Greg James took to social media to share his memories of the broadcaster. He tweeted: "This is so sad. A truly brilliant radio person. She was so kind and sweet to me when I was on early on R1 and she was on R2 nights at the same time. She picked the greats and got them in session before other DJs had even heard of them. She was such a laugh as well (sic)" Janice was the first woman to have her own daily show

on BBC Radio 1 and championed artists such as Amy Winehouse, Adele and Primal Scream before they achieved chart success. Charlatans frontman Tim Burgess tweeted: "Janice Long was a supporter and mentor for so many bands. To hear our records on her show was always the biggest thrill - her enthusiasm and love shone through. One of a kind. Safe travels, we'll miss ya (sic)" Peter Hook - from Joy Division and New Order - added: "Such sad news about Janice Long. She was always a great friend and a great supporter of our music. She was a lovely lady to be around."

## SIR BILLY CONNOLLY BEHAVES IN 'CERTAIN WAY' AROUND HIS KIDS

The legendary Scottish comedian has suffered from Parkinson's disease since 2013 but admits that he wants to do his best for his children - Jamie, 52, and Cara, 48, with his former partner Iris Pressagh and Daisy, 37. Amy, 35, and Scarlett, 33, with his wife Pamela Stephenson. Speaking in the ITV documentary, 'Billy Connolly: My Absolute Pleasure', which aired on Boxing Day, he said: "Parkinson's dis-

ease has taken a lot from me. I can't play the banjo anymore. It's just a noise. I can't yodel anymore. I can't smoke cigars. It's taken more and more of what I like - it's kind of painful. "But you have to have a Glasgow attitude and say, 'Oh, you think you've got me beat, try this for size.' I just deal with it. If I fall, I fall. "I have to behave in a certain way so my children don't think I'm a dead loss and so they don't feel sorry for me."



## BTS STARS RM AND JIN TEST POSITIVE FOR CORONAVIRUS

The 'Butter' hitmakers returned to South Korea earlier this month and tested negative for the virus at the time of entering a compulsory 10-day period of quarantine, but after feeling unwell over the weekend, RM, 27, and 29-year-old Jin - who were both fully vaccinated in August - had PCR tests, which came back positive. A statement from their management, Big Hit Music, read: "After returning on Friday the 17th from the United States following his personal schedule as part of his offi-

cial vacation period, RM immediately underwent PCR testing, was found negative and entered into self-quarantine in his home as mandated by COVID-19 control procedures. "However, he underwent PCR testing [Saturday] before his scheduled release from quarantine and was found to be positive for COVID-19. "Jin returned to Korea and underwent PCR testing immediately after his return and again before his release from self-quarantine, and was found negative on both occasions."

## GARY BARLOW KICK MARK OWEN OUT OF HIS HOUSE

The 'Flood' singer always speaks to his Take That bandmates on December 25 but one year his pal decided to pop over with his family - and Gary and his wife Dawn couldn't get them to leave. Gary told heat magazine: "We talk every week anyway but there's very few people I speak to on Christmas Day and Mark and Howard [Donald] are two of them. "It's funny, a couple of years ago, Mark and his family popped round for a bit and ended up staying until about midnight - until we kicked them out!" The 50-year-old singer - who has children Daniel, 20, Emily, 18, and 12-year-old Daisy with his wife - likes to "relax" on Christmas Day and isn't as keen on playing games as the rest of his household. He said: "My mum loves bingo and, as she's over this year, we'll do that. "But I'm not one for board games - they all like 'Monopoly' but it's not for me. I just want to relax. "We don't really watch TV - we'll do the 'Queen's Speech' and 'Strictly Christmas Special' but we like to watch a film in the evening."







This aerial photos show people looking at ice sculptures at the Harbin Ice and Snow World in Harbin, in northeastern China's Heilongjiang province. —AFP photos



## TREATING COVID PATIENTS IN SECRET MYANMAR CLINICS



Healthcare workers check children for signs of the COVID-19 coronavirus at a health centre in Demoso township in Myanmar's Kayah state. —AFP photos



A healthcare worker takes a swab sample to test a patient for the COVID-19 coronavirus at a health centre.

A handful of Myanmar nurses hiding from the junta have been running makeshift clinics to treat COVID patients and resistance fighters with medicine smuggled past military checkpoints. With bags packed, they are always ready to flee as healthcare workers find themselves at the forefront of a civil disobedience movement against the February coup and a crackdown on dissent that has killed more than 1,300, according to a local monitoring group.

A boycott of government institutions has left many hospitals without staff and the junta has arrested and killed scores of protesting health workers, rights groups say. Aye Naing - not her real name - left her job in a public hospital soon after the coup and in June began volunteering in Kayah state in Myanmar's east, where the military and anti-coup fighters have clashed repeatedly.

"When the fighting starts, we have to run and hide in the jungle," she told AFP at a clinic housed at a school abandoned because of fighting near the town of Demoso. After a devastating Covid wave in June and July - where new daily cases

peaked at 40,000 - the junta has said new infections are down to around 150 per day, and that the Omicron variant is yet to appear in Myanmar. But with the struggling health system in shambles, limited testing is being done.

In Kayah around 85,000 people have been displaced by the violence, according to the UN's refugee agency, with many crowded into camps where infections spread easily. Most of Aye Naing's patients are displaced families, she said, as well as fighters from local People's Defense Force (PDF) groups - militias that have sprung up across the country to fight the junta. "I was told there weren't many doctors and medical workers in this area, and that villagers were asking for them," she said. "So, I made the decision to come, and tried to get hold of some medical supplies."

At one village, her team conducts swab tests through a small tear in a sheet of plastic stretched over a bamboo frame. Those who test positive are prescribed paracetamol or vitamins, the only medicine on offer. Donated oxygen must be used sparingly: refilling canisters involves a trip to the closest

large town, passing junta checkpoints along the way. After each shift, Aye Naing removes her plastic protective suit and disinfects it, along with her mask, ready for the next one.

### Blocking medicine

In an empty classroom, an infected PDF fighter sits out his quarantine strumming a guitar. In areas where resistance to its rule is strong, the military has blocked the delivery of humanitarian aid and medical supplies, according to a recent Human Rights Watch report. "Burmese military check everyone at their gates and arrest people they find carrying medicines," said Hla Aung, another nurse working at the clinic whose name has been changed to protect her identity.

"It's like we are risking our lives." In the six months following the coup, 190 health workers were arrested and 25 killed, according to a report by Insecurity Insight, Physicians for Human Rights, and Johns Hopkins University. But Aye Naing said she will keep going. "My parents' support keeps me strong," she said. "My father has sent as much medicine as he can." —AFP



## From talking ducks to scary croissants: Weirdest news

How we laughed in 2021! Yes, the year was plagued by COVID, fires and floods... but it did throw up some weird and wonderful news to lift the spirits. Here is our selection:

### A final leak

There was only so long US Secret Service agents guarding Ivanka Trump and her husband Jared Kushner could hold on... Donald Trump's seemingly favorite child and her millionaire partner refused to let agents use any of the "6.5 bathrooms" in their Washington mansion, it was revealed days before her father left the White House in January. Instead they had to use the toilet at Barack and Michelle Obama's nearby home.

### Dog's life

A woman in Quebec stopped by police walking a man on a leash during a coronavirus curfew insisted "she was walking her dog", which was permitted under the rules.

### Childbirth is no excuse

South Korean officials issued a reminder to pregnant women to have enough pressed shirts, socks and underpants and frozen meals ready for their husbands when they are away in hospital giving birth.

### What an amazing tool

A Danish children's television show about the misadventures of a man with "the world's longest willy" went viral. John Dillermand (John Penisman in English) uses his extraordinarily long member to get himself out of tricky situations. But it also lands him in deep trouble like many a male before him.

### What the f... -

The idea that swearing is bad turns out to be a load of

old cobblers. US research found people who use profanities tend to be more intelligent, creative, honest and less likely to "engage in serious unethical behaviors".

### Dead lucky

An Indian man declared dead after a motorcycle crash began to move on an autopsy table as doctors got ready to open him up.

### Just. Stop. Talking

Yoshiro Mori resigned as Tokyo Olympics chief in February after the former premier declared that the trouble with women is... they talk too much. Mori later apologized, saying: "I don't speak to women much."

### We can see you...

The entire board of a California primary school resigned after they were caught dissing parents as pot-smoking slackers on a Zoom call.

### In the mood for love

French male pride swelled at news that the world's most romantic panda - who is naturally French - had managed to couple eight times in one day with his new lover. Pandas are not known for their stamina during love-making, but keepers at Beaulieu zoo said sparks flew when Yuan Zi got up close and personal with his young Chinese mate Huan Huan.

### Saw it coming

A French man who asked his neighbor if he could loan him his saw "to get rid of a body" was arrested in March for the murder of his lodger.

### Only coddling

Taiwan pleaded with people to stop changing their name after scores changed theirs to "Salmon Prince" and

"Salmon Fried Rice" to take advantage of an April sushi chain giveaway for people whose name contained the Chinese characters for the fish.

### The First Prankster

US First Lady Jill Biden, a notorious prankster who once stuffed herself into an overhead locker on Air Force Two when her husband was vice president, disguised herself as a flight attendant on Air Force One to hand out ice cream to reporters on April Fools' Day.

### Let's be ladies about this

The reigning "Mrs World" was arrested after pulling the crown off the head of her successor as "Mrs Sri Lanka" and smashing her dressing room mirror after the ceremony in Colombo turned ugly.

### Flash in the cam

A Canadian lawmaker who appeared stark naked on a House of Commons Zoom conference call was caught on camera six weeks later peeing into a coffee cup during a virtual committee meeting. "Obviously I'm embarrassed," Liberal MP William Amos said.

### Scary pastry

A "dangerous-looking animal" in a tree that struck terror into a quiet street in Krakow, Poland, turned out to be a croissant blowing in the wind.

### Life's a Bitche

The French town of Bitche had its Facebook page taken down after the US tech giant thought its name was an insult.

### Four weddings

A Taiwanese bank clerk married four times in a month so he could max out the country's statutory eight days of

paid holidays for newlyweds.

### What the duck!

Science was rocked in September by news that ducks can talk - and they are quacking good impersonators. Biologists said they can parrot human speech and even imitate the sound of a door closing.

### Hard to swallow

Kosovo surgeon Skender Telaku removed a mobile phone from the stomach of a prisoner without cutting him open after he swallowed it to hide it from prison guards. Luckily the phone did not ring during the delicate procedure.

### Disappearing art

A Danish artist given \$84,000 to make artworks out of banknotes pocketed the cash and sent the gallery two blank canvasses entitled, "Take the Money and Run".

### Minaj misses the ball

Rap star Nicki Minaj was not allowed into New York's Met Ball after revealing she had not been vaccinated because a friend of her cousin in Trinidad said his testicles swelled up after he got the jab.

### Lock me up, please

A man under house arrest in Italy on drug offences pleaded with police to lock him up because he couldn't bear being stuck at home with his wife. Police made the 30-year-old Albanian's day by jailing him.

### Dog and bone

Scientists in Scotland have invented the DogPhone, which will allow bored Beagles or yappy Yorkies to call their owners for a chat anytime they feel the need. Never fear, the owners can always put them on paws. —AFP



Lifestyle | Features

# 'SPIDER-MAN' SURPASSES \$1 BILLION GLOBALLY, HOLDS BOX OFFICE TOP SPOT

The hit new "Spider-Man" became the first billion-dollar-grossing film of the pandemic era over the Christmas weekend, reaching the milestone while holding firmly to the North American box office top spot, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations said Sunday. "Spider-Man: No Way Home," British star Tom Holland's third solo outing in the wildly popular role, has grossed \$467.3 million in North America and \$587 million internationally, raking in more than \$1 billion over 12 days and proving analysts' predictions that it could reach the milestone sum.

It rocketed to that benchmark at a speed only matched by 2015's "Star Wars: The Force Awakens," according to industry outlet Variety, and comes even as the rapid spread of the Omicron Covid-19 variant casts a pall over holiday outings worldwide. Sony's latest installment to the comic-inspired series took an estimated \$81.5 million in North America for the three-day period over the Christmas weekend, holding its top spot after scoring the third-

biggest domestic opening of all time with more than \$260 million, smashing early estimates.

Its debut box office sales trailed only 2019's "Avengers: Endgame" (\$357 million) and the previous year's "Avengers: Infinity War" (\$258 million), according to the BoxOfficeMojo website. With an estimated \$23.8 million, "Sing 2," Universal's star-studded animated jukebox musical follow-up to "Sing," was this weekend's runner-up.

It beat out two other new series installments: "The Matrix Resurrections" from Warner Bros, which sees Keanu Reeves reprise his iconic role as Neo, underperformed at \$12 million. In fourth place, also earning less than expected, was 20th Century's spy prequel to the "Kingsman" films, "The King's Man," with \$6.4 million. Lionsgate's "American Underdog" - based on the true story of Kurt Warner, who went from stocking shelves at a grocery store to National Football League MVP - slid in at number five on its opening weekend with an estimated \$6.2 million. —AFP



A giant inflatable Spider-Man is displayed on the red carpet for the 'Spider-Man: Far From Home' World premiere at the TCL Chinese theatre in Hollywood. —AFP

## 'DALLAS BUYERS CLUB' DIRECTOR DIES AT 58

Award-winning Canadian filmmaker Jean-Marc Vallee has died at age 58, his publicist announced Sunday. "Rest In Peace, Jean-Marc Vallee. The world is far less interesting without you in it," Hive Communication Collective wrote on Instagram.



Jean-Marc Vallee

The Quebecois producer and director was Oscar-nominated for "Dallas Buyers Club" in 2013, for which actors Matthew McConaughey and Jared Leto both took home Academy Awards. In recent years, he has drawn acclaim for his work on HBO shows "Big Little Lies", for which he won an Emmy award, and "Sharp Objects".

US media reported that Vallee died suddenly in his cabin near Quebec City over the weekend. The cause of death was not immediately known. HBO said it was "shocked at the news of his sudden death". "Jean-Marc Vallee was a brilliant, fiercely dedicated filmmaker," the company's statement to The Hollywood Reporter said.

"Jean-Marc stood for creativity, authenticity and trying things differently," Vallee's producing partner Nathan Ross said in a statement shared with US media. "The maestro will sorely be missed but it comforts knowing his beautiful style and impactful work he shared with the world will live on."

His other notable works included the Oscar-winning 2009 film "The Young Victoria" starring Emily Blunt and "Wild" in 2014, for which Reese Witherspoon earned an Oscar nomination. —AFP

## MAX VERSTAPPEN RETURNS HOME AFTER A THRILLING VICTORY ALONG WITH MOBIL 1

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

20 December 2021, Houston

Max Verstappen returned to the Red Bull Racing Technology Campus and received a guard of honor from the entire Team as orange flares were let off by staff along Bradbourne Drive when Max arrived on-site. Arriving in an orange Honda NSX, the 2021 Formula 1 Drivers' World Champion was greeted by staff at the campus who lined up on either side of the road to welcome Max back to Milton Keynes.

When Max arrived at the entrance to the trophy room, he jumped out the NSX and was hugged by Christian Horner and Adrian Newey. But that wasn't the end of his day, after this he was greeted by the Team and his RB16B. With Checo still in Abu Dhabi for testing, he was represented by a life-sized cut-out of him in the team photo. The 2021 season was one of the most compelling in recent years and ExxonMobil will now turn its attention to 2022 to support Red Bull Racing Honda's fight in the Drivers and Constructors Standings.

About Mobil 1 in Motorsports

Racing provides the Mobil brand the ultimate testing ground to improve the technology in our range of oils and lubricants. Through each race season, our advanced products are utilized in the racing vehicles to help improve their performance and



efficiency. Mobil 1(tm) motor oils serve as the lubricant of choice for many of the world's top race teams who compete in the most demanding and popular motorsports series in the world. The knowledge we gain through these partnerships is integral to how our scientists and engineers develop technologies and constantly push the boundaries.

About Mobil 1

The world's leading synthetic motor oil brand,

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

## Remarkable success for KFH Padel Tour 2



**KUWAIT:** Under the patronage of the Kuwait Olympic Committee, represented by the President, Sheikh Fahad Naser Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah and in collaboration with Kuwait Padel Committee, KFH announced the remarkable success of KFH Padel Tour 2 which was held for 2 days on the Oasis playground with the participation of 64 teams. President of the Kuwait Olympic Committee, Sheikh Fahad Naser Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah expressed his thanks and appreciation to KFH for its constant support to the athletes, praising the organization of the tournament and the support KFH provides to the Kuwaiti youth, wishing everyone good luck and success.

Group DGM - Public Relations and Media, Yousef Al-Ruwaieh at KFH said that the launch of KFH Padel Tour 2 and the increase in the number of participating teams clearly prove the tremendous success of Tour1 organized by KFH. This tournament is the first of its kind in Kuwait for the Padel sport. The tournament witnessed huge youth participation and received great appreciation, remarkable attendance and full coverage in various social media channels.

He added that organizing KFH Padel Tournament comes as part of KFH social responsibility to focus on the interests of youth. He emphasized the significance of KFH Padel Tournament in diversifying sport events for youth especially that this sport achieved worldwide momentum. He indicated that the success of the tournament along with the competition and outstanding performance signify a bright and promising future for this local sport. Al-Ruwaieh indicated that such events are in line with "Better Health, Better Life" program launched by KFH to encourage the adoption of healthy lifestyle through supporting different sport and youth activities.

Qualitative initiatives

He pointed out that, to affirm its status as the main supporter of youth, KFH is the first bank in Kuwait to launch "You Are Our Pride" platform to honor those who made outstanding accomplishments in various fields such as sports, and others. KFH has a team of "KFH Initiators" who held the name of Kuwait high in various fields.

He said that KFH succeeded in taking the

sports activities and initiatives to a new level of innovation. The Padel tournament is a new addition to the present sport activities in Kuwait. He noted that the main goal of the tournament is to create a gathering platform for all sport lovers and enable them to know their skills and technical level through competitive matches. He added that KFH, as part of its strategy, focuses on realizing youth interests and aspirations, and added that youth activities occupied a major part of KFH interest in 2021 as the bank has launched several qualitative initiatives and distinct activities for them.

Prizes and discounts

To support youth and their interests the tournament comprised competitions and prizes to both the public and the players. KFH was keen to cooperate with some Kuwaiti youth running small projects to be present for the distribution of coffee and juice to the public. Intersport store participated in the event and offered the public 25% discount on its products thus indicating KFH keenness to support Kuwaiti youth and add amusement to



the event. Tournament prizes value exceeded KD 3000, the winner team received a cash prize KD 1000 - while the second winner received KD 600 - and the third winner received KD 300.

It is noteworthy that KFH took the initiative of organizing this tournament which stands as a significant opportunity for youth to diversify their sporting interests and

unleash their sporting skills in this new sport in Kuwait. The Padel sport combines two games: squash, and tennis. However, it is different in essence where rules and playing style are involved. This sport requires stamina and proper use of hard rackets on a playground which is smaller than the normal tennis field. There are no restrictions on age to play this game: it is suitable for all ages.



## Sports

# England face nervous wait as COVID-19 threatens Ashes

## Australia scent Ashes victory as England collapse again

MELBOURNE: England were nervously awaiting results of PCR tests after four COVID-19 cases in the camp but veteran Jimmy Anderson said yesterday they are keen to finish the Ashes series in Australia. Four members of the England party—two support staff and two family members—tested positive for coronavirus just hours before the start of day two in the third Test in Melbourne. The team and management were then required to undergo rapid antigen (RAT) tests as they were about to leave their hotel for Melbourne Cricket Ground.

They were given the all-clear barely 45 minutes before play was due to begin, but must also take PCR tests as a precaution. England bowler Anderson said the team was on the bus ready to leave when they were ordered off to have the RAT tests. "As far as I'm aware, the whole playing group feel fine. We've just stepped up safety protocols around the dressing room, wearing masks and keeping distance where possible," he said after stumps on day two. "We are all having PCR tests now and obviously we need all those to be clear, if possible, so we'll just have to wait and see what the results are." Anderson added that the England team had not been told of the plan should anyone test positive.

Australian broadcaster the Seven Network also said there had been a positive case among its staff working at the MCG, forcing last-minute changes to their commentary team. Driven by the Omicron variant, coronavirus cases are surging in Australia-

particularly in Sydney—where the fourth Test is scheduled to start on January 5, before the Ashes finale in Hobart.

More than 6,000 cases are being reported daily across New South Wales state, where Sydney is located. Nevertheless, Cricket Australia chief Nick Hockley said the plan was to press on as scheduled with the Ashes. "That's absolutely the plan, there's nothing to suggest otherwise. We'll rely on the protocols," he told reporters, before cautioning: "It's a day-by-day proposition."



### 4 team members test positive for COVID-19

#### Keen to carry on

England faced a similar scenario earlier this year when the fifth Test of their home series against India was cancelled after multiple cases among the visitors' support staff. Anderson said he was keen to finish the Ashes series, even though England are facing another heavy defeat. "That's the plan. Again, it's going to depend on the PCR tests and what situation that is going to leave us in," he said. "As long as the group that was here at the ground today are negative, I don't see why we can't carry on." Australia captain Pat Cummins, who missed the second Ashes Test because he was in COVID isolation, said the dramatic events yesterday were "a sign of the times". "You've got to be pretty flexible," he told sports broadcaster SEN.

#### Australia scent victory

Meanwhile, a dazed England lost four wickets in a hostile late spell to leave them at 31-4 - still trail-



MELBOURNE: Australia's paceman Mitchell Starc (center) bowls to England's batsman Joe Root (left) on day two of the third Ashes cricket Test match between Australia and England yesterday. — AFP

ing Australia by 51 runs—and fighting to save their Ashes hopes after day two of a gripping third Test. It came after the visitors—who must win in Melbourne—were rocked by four positive COVID cases in their camp, although no players were among them. Australia had been all out for 267, earning an 82-run lead on England's first-innings 185 on an MCG pitch that was still offering plenty for the bowlers.

Marcus Harris top-scored with a battling 76 against a dangerous English attack led by veteran Jimmy Anderson, who was at his fearsome best with 4-33 off 23 overs. After heavy defeats in Brisbane and Adelaide, England must win to keep the five-

Test series alive, with Australia only needing a draw to retain the urn as holders. But faced with surviving the final hour against a revved-up Mitchell Starc and Pat Cummins, England collapsed again.

Struggling opener Zak Crawley never looked comfortable and after dodging 15 balls he was caught by wicketkeeper Alex Carey for five off Starc. Dawid Malan came in but incredibly was out first ball to Starc lbw after an unsuccessful review, then Scott Boland ruined Haseeb Hameed's day on seven, with Carey gloving an edge. Fired-up Boland bowled Jack Leach without scoring two balls to leave skipper Joe Root unbeaten on 12 and Ben Stokes on two—and England in deep trouble. — AFP

## Rough weather batters Sydney to Hobart race

SYDNEY: Treacherous conditions have pummeled the annual Sydney to Hobart yacht race, forcing dozens of withdrawals as Black Jack led a tight battle for line honors. Sunday's starting fleet of 88 yachts for one of the world's toughest ocean events was cut down to 56 by yesterday evening, as competitors peeled off after suffering damage or minor injuries to crew. A close scrap for line honors was being fought out at the front of the pack between super maxis Black Jack, SHK Scallywag, LawConnect and the slightly shorter 80-foot Stefan Racing. Black Jack, skippered by Mark Bradford, was race leader as they headed into the Bass Strait.

Cruising Yacht Club of Australia Commodore Noel Cornish said although the conditions had been "very tough", the challenge of a "great adventure" is what drew competitors. "That's why in the non-COVID world, people come from all over the world to sail in this race. It's an iconic blue-water challenge," Cornish said. The race leaders were now through the worst of the weather and were expected to arrive in the Hobart by Tuesday afternoon if conditions held, he told media in the Tasmanian capital.

"(The) yachts that are out there now are hunkered in, they're going hard and they're really looking forward to getting down here." Crowds had turned out to watch the boats race out of Sydney Harbour on Boxing Day after COVID-19 forced the blue-water classic's suspension in 2020. But the pandemic continued to cause problems. Before the start, four



SYDNEY: This handout photograph shows Black Jack competing at the start of the Sydney to Hobart yacht race on Sydney Harbor. — AFP

yachts were forced to retire, leaving 88 entrants at the starting line including 17 two-handed crafts, which are allowed to take part for the first time.

It was a sharp reduction from the 157 boats that set out in 2019. In a dramatic start to this year's race, a major technical problem cost the 100-foot SHK Scallywag prime position to LawConnect after leading out of the heads. Numerous withdrawals followed, as southerly winds—which reached 30 knots overnight—whittled the competition down. Weather is a critical factor in the 628-nautical-mile (1,200-

km) race down Australia's east coast to Hobart.

Six men died, five boats sank and 55 sailors were rescued during the 1998 event when a deep depression exploded over the fleet in the Bass Strait. The latest weather update predicted south to southeasterly winds to ease in the day evening in the Strait and onto Tasmania's coast. Though the first yacht to reach the finishing line grabs most public attention, the main prize for sailors is regarded as the handicap honors, which take account of the size of the yachts. — AFP

## Middlesbrough, Huddersfield win amid COVID chaos

LONDON: Middlesbrough and Huddersfield moved into the Championship play-off places on Sunday as the rest of the second tier battled coronavirus chaos. With eight Championship matches postponed due to COVID-19 issues on Boxing Day, there was an opening for Middlesbrough and Huddersfield to climb into the top six.

They both seized the opportunity as fifth placed Middlesbrough beat Nottingham Forest 2-0 at the Riverside Stadium, while sixth placed Huddersfield enjoyed a 3-2 home win against Blackpool. A Ryan Yates own goal and a second-half strike from Andraz Sporar gave Chris Wilder's Middlesbrough a fourth victory in their five-match unbeaten run. It was a first defeat in 10 league games for Forest, who dropped down to ninth place.

The only other game in the second tier on Sunday saw Huddersfield survive a thriller against Blackpool. Two late goals from Sorba Thomas turned the game in Huddersfield's favour after Blackpool's Jordan Lawrence-Gabriel had been sent off just after the hour mark. Blackpool's Jerry Yates opened the scoring with less than a minute on the clock. Danny Ward headed Huddersfield's equalizer two minutes later and Gary Madine restored Blackpool's lead before Thomas' late double. — AFP



Mikaela Shiffrin

## Ski ace Shiffrin tests positive for COVID-19

PARIS: American double Olympic alpine ski gold medalist Mikaela Shiffrin has tested positive for COVID-19, she announced on social media yesterday. The 26-year-old three-time overall World Cup champion will miss the meeting at Lienz today and tomorrow. Her positive test comes just over a month from the Winter Olympics in Beijing, where she will hope to add to the slalom gold she won in 2014 and the giant slalom title in 2018.

"Unfortunately I had a positive COVID test. I'm following protocol and isolating, & I will miss Lienz," she tweeted. Shiffrin did

not say when she tested positive, or if she had already arrived in Austria where she was due to compete in a giant slalom and then a slalom. Shiffrin - who leads this season's World Cup standings - is the latest female ski star to be forced to isolate after testing positive.

Switzerland's 2016 overall World Cup champion Lara Gut-Behrami missed the Val d'Isere and Courchevel meetings. Austria's double ski world champion Katharina Liensberger also missed the Courchevel round of the World Cup season. Liensberger is not a certain starter either in Lienz where there will be no spectators due to COVID. "We are conscious of our responsibility," said Roswitha Stadlober, president of the Austrian Ski Federation. The women's World Cup season moves on to Zagreb on January 4 - for a slalom - and then Maribor in Slovenia (Jan 8/9). — AFP

## Hanyu books Olympic spot

SAITAMA: Two-time Olympic figure skating champion Yuzuru Hanyu has booked his place at the Beijing Games, laying down a marker with a commanding win at Japan's national championships on Sunday. But he failed in his bid to become the first person to land a quadruple axel in competition, slightly under-rotating his maiden crack at the legendary jump. Hanyu, who was making his first appearance in eight months after injuring ankle ligaments, will have the chance to try again in China in six weeks' time.

He was officially named in Japan's Olympic team later Sunday evening, along with Pyeongchang Games silver medalist Shoma Uno and current world number one Yuma Kagiyama. "To be honest, this wasn't an Olympics that I had been thinking about," said 27-year-old Hanyu, who only confirmed this week that he intended to compete in Beijing. "But the road I have taken to get here, and my feelings towards the people who have supported me, made me decide to compete."

Hanyu added that he is "aiming to be number one", and that he is "the only one who has the privilege to be able to compete for a third straight men's figure skating Olympic title". Hanyu has been gearing up all week to attempt the quad axel, considered the holy grail of men's figure skating. He came close to nailing it in practice earlier in the week, and made two failed

attempts as he warmed up ahead of his free skate routine on Sunday. He was unable to land it cleanly in competition either, under-rotating the jump and landing on both feet.

"I was almost going out of my mind with everything I was doing leading up to this competition," he said. "I was reminded just how difficult it is to do a quad axel that I haven't mastered yet in a competition." Hanyu went on to produce a masterclass for the rest of his routine, earning a free skate score of 211.05 for a 322.36 score overall. He showed no sign of being hampered by the ankle ligament injury that forced him to miss the entire Grand Prix season.

Uno finished second with an overall score of 295.82, ahead of Kagiyama on 292.41. Uno hurt himself in the warm-up but still produced a clean free

skate, and will now attempt to claim another podium finish in his second Olympics. "I'm very happy to be chosen for the Olympics, but after watching Yuzuru and Yuma's performances today, it highlighted some areas where I'm lacking," he said. "I want to get back to practice as soon as I can."

Eighteen-year-old Kagiyama, who won both his Grand Prix assignments this season, put in a solid free skate to finish third. But he was unable to make up ground on the leaders after falling on a jump in Friday's short program. Kaori Sakamoto, Wakaba Higuchi and Mana Kawabe were chosen for Japan's women's team. Sakamoto, who finished sixth at the Pyeongchang Olympics, won her second national title on Saturday. The Beijing Olympics begin on February 4. — AFP



SAITAMA: Japan's Yuzuru Hanyu competes in the men's short program during the 2021-22 Japan Figure Skating Championships at Saitama Super Arena in Saitama. — AFP



Sports

# Lukaku revives Chelsea's bid to 'hunt' down Manchester City

## Chelsea overpower Aston Villa 3-1

**BIRMINGHAM:** Romelu Lukaku said Chelsea are "the hunters" of Manchester City in the title race after coming off the bench to score his first Premier League goal since September to help beat Aston Villa 3-1. Reece James' own goal put Villa ahead, but Jorginho quickly leveled from the penalty spot in a clash between two of the many English sides hit by cases of coronavirus. Lukaku was one of Chelsea's absentees due to a positive test for draws against Everton and Wolves last week that saw them lose ground in the title race. But he made his return as a second half substitute and made an almost instant impact to head home Callum Hudson-Odoi's cross.

The Belgian's blistering run then won a second Chelsea penalty in stoppage time that Jorginho slotted home. "I needed a performance like this today," said Lukaku. "We are the hunters now. The last results were not the best and now we have to chase. We have to treat every game like a final. Today we won and now we have to push on." Thomas Tuchel's men move level on points with Liverpool, who have a game in hand, and back to within six of Manchester City, who were 6-3 winners over Leicester earlier on Boxing Day.

But Tuchel reiterated his criticism of being forced to play through a hectic festive period with the extra complication of COVID and without the use of five substitutions. "They make us play all the time even if we have Covid. We have new injuries and it won't stop," said Tuchel. "People in offices make these decisions." Villa's own COVID outbreak saw manager Steven Gerrard forced into isolation after he tested positive on Christmas Day.

The home side got off to the perfect start when James flicked Matt Targett's effort over his own goalkeeper Edouard Mendy to open the scoring on 28 minutes. However, the lead lasted just six minutes

due to Matty Cash's rash challenge on Hudson-Odoi inside the area. Jorginho was Chelsea's top league scorer last season despite all of his goals coming from penalties and the Italian international is his side's leading marksmen in all competitions thanks to nine spot-kicks this season.

### 'Super concerned'

Lukaku will expect that to change over the coming weeks as the club's record signing finds his form after a disrupted start to his second spell at Stamford Bridge. He is yet to start in the Premier League since suffering an ankle injury in October.



We are the hunters now



with his positive test for COVID coming just as he was returning to full fitness. "It's not fair," added Tuchel. "He had a very good performance but he's not ready for that even if he wants it. "We've all been in bed for 10 days with flu. He was a game changer today. I'm super impressed with the guys but I'm super concerned."

A Lukaku in form is what Chelsea need if they are to mount a serious title challenge with clashes against Liverpool and City to come in January. The former Manchester United striker took just 11 minutes to make the difference as he timed his run per-



**BIRMINGHAM:** Chelsea's Belgian striker Romelu Lukaku (right) runs away from Aston Villa's English defender Matt Targett during the English Premier League football match between Aston Villa and Chelsea on December 26, 2021. — AFP

fectly to meet Hudson-Odoi's cross and powered a header low past Emiliano Martinez. Lukaku then powered his way through the Villa defense late only

to be hauled down by Ezri Konsa. Jorginho got the better on Martinez once more from the spot to seal a vital return to winning ways for the Blues. — AFP



**KUWAIT:** Qadsia's Ahmad Al-Reyahi (center) shoots the ball during his team's Kuwait Premier League match against Salmiya on Sunday. — KUNA

## Kazma remain on top, hold Kuwait

By Ahmad Jabr

**KUWAIT:** Kazma held on for a draw in their key matchup with second-place Kuwait on Sunday to stay on top of the Kuwait Premier League standings, while Qadsia's title hopes were dealt a blow after suffering their second defeat this season. Kuwait failed to capitalize on the momentum of their recent Amir Cup win, showing little threat to the hosts' net as the match ended in a 0-0 draw; enough for Kazma to stay in the lead with 13 points and one point ahead of Kuwait.

Meanwhile, Qadsia missed their chance to go on top of the standings when they lost to fourth-place Salmiya 3-2 in the match held at the latter's Thamir Stadium on Sunday. Qadsia seemed to be going for a victory as they led by 2-1 at the end of regulation, but Salmiya were able to turn the table with two goals scored by Hussain Al-Musawi in added time. Qadsia now remain in third place with 12 points and one point ahead of Salmiya.

Al-Nasr and Al-Arabi are in fifth and sixth places with nine and eight points respectively following their 1-1 draw in the other key match of the week. Kazma look to extend their lead when they visit ninth-place Al-Tadhamon on Thursday, while Kuwait will have a tougher test when they host Al-Nasr on Friday. Al-Arabi host Al-Shabaab tomorrow while Qadsia play against Fahheel on Thursday and Salmiya against Al-Yarmouk on Friday.

## COVID-hit Celtic see off St Johnstone as Rangers go 6 clear

**GLASGOW:** Celtic coped without a host of first-team regulars due to a coronavirus outbreak to beat St Johnstone 3-1 on Sunday, but remain six points behind Scottish Premiership leaders Rangers, who were 2-0 winners over St Mirren. Both matches were played in front of crowds limited to just 500 due to fresh coronavirus restrictions aimed at halting the rapid spread of the new Omicron variant.

The new rules led to Scottish Premiership clubs bringing forward their winter break by a week following Sunday's games. Celtic boss Ange Postecoglou will be relieved to now have three weeks off to build up the strength in his squad. The Hoops had to field their third-choice goalkeeper Vasilis Barkas with Joe Hart and Scott Bain plus captain Callum McGregor and full-backs Anthony Ralston and Greg Taylor missing due to suspected positive cases for COVID-19.

"The last couple of days have been pretty chaotic as you would imagine with everything that was happening," said Postecoglou. "But we stayed calm through the whole thing and we knew that this was just a different challenge from the other challenges we have had so far and we just had to get on with it. Celtic already had a lengthy injury list and lost top scorer Kyogo Furuhashi to the recurrence of a hamstring problem early on.

However, the visitors already led at McDiarmid Park by then as Liel Abada forced the ball home from close range after

Elliot Parish saved his initial effort. Abada doubled Celtic's lead with his 10th goal of the season from Tom Rogic's fine through ball. St Johnstone enjoyed their greatest ever season in 2020/21 by winning both domestic cup competitions. But they are ending the year on a low as an eighth consecutive defeat left them still rooted to the foot of the table.

Substitute Chris Kane's header gave the home side hope 21 minutes from time. But Nir Bitton settled Celtic's nerves on 82 minutes when he fired into the bottom corner from the edge of the box. Rangers responded with a routine win at Ibrox against a St Mirren side also hit by a COVID outbreak. Scott Wright and Alfredo Morelos struck inside the first 26 minutes to continue Giovanni Van Bronckhorst's perfect record from seven league games since replacing Steven Gerrard.

"The scoreline needs to be more when you see the chances we created," said the former Dutch captain. "But we can go into the break in the place we want. We'll have a good rest and start over again." Dundee's application to have their 2-1 defeat at Aberdeen postponed ahead of the game was turned down despite having to name a bench with just four substitutes containing two goalkeepers, a 17-year-old and 40-year-old assistant manager Dave MacKay, who retired five years ago.

"The way it's been handled is atrocious," said Dundee manager James McPake. "We've put Aberdeen at risk all for the sake of getting a game of football played." Hearts remain five points clear of the chasing pack for third after holding on to beat Ross County 2-1. New Hibernian boss Shaun Maloney has won both his opening two games after a 3-1 win at Dundee United. But Hibs are still two points behind Motherwell as they beat Livingston 2-1. — AFP

# Classifieds

## Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000	Khalidiya	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
Adalya	22517144

## CHANGE OF NAME

**I Chinukula Shiva Sankar S/O Chinukala Mallikarjuna R/o D.No:11, Mysooravaripalli Soorapurajupalli Post Rly kodur Pin 516101 YSR District of AP, have been changed my name as Cheenakula Shiva Sankar S/o Cheenakula Mallikarjuna**

**I, SHAIK JAHIER AHAMMAD, resident of H. No. 51-15-AS, Rajiv Nagar, Kurnool, AP, India. I have changed my minor daughter's name from KEHARA IRAM (old name) to SHAIK KEHARA IRAM (new name). Henceforth she shall be called by this name for all purposes. (C 0996) 26-12-2021**

**Old name Ramzan Ahmed Abbash New name Ramzan Bee Rafik Ahmed Shaikh. K7037667. (C 0995) 23-12-2021**

**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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## Nuggets hold off Clippers

Bulls overwhelm Pacers 113-105



LOS ANGELES: Eric Bledsoe #12 of the Los Angeles Clippers drives to the basket against Facundo Campazzo #7 of the Denver Nuggets during the third quarter at Crypto.com Arena on December 26, 2021. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: Denver and their NBA Most Valuable Player Nikola Jokic thwarted a furious Clippers rally to emerge with a 103-100 victory in Los Angeles on Sunday. The Nuggets saw their 17-point third-quarter lead evaporate, falling behind by nine with 9:04 remaining only to rally for the narrow victory. Jokic scored 26 points and pulled down 22 rebounds for the Nuggets. Will Barton added 17 and Austin Rivers and Monte Morris scored 12 points apiece as Denver avoided the kind of collapse that saw them waste a 19-point lead in a loss to Charlotte on Thursday.

Luke Kennard drained a three-pointer with 19 seconds left to pull the Clippers within one at 101-100. But Jokic was fouled on an inbounds play and made two free throws to push Denver's lead to three and Brandon Boston's three-point attempt at the buzzer for Los Angeles didn't fall. Boston and Eric Bledsoe led Los Angeles with 18 points apiece. Ivica Zubac scored 17 points and grabbed 11 rebounds for the Clippers, who were playing their

first game since announcing that Paul George would miss at least three weeks with a torn ligament in his right elbow.

Elsewhere, Jimmy Butler returned from an eight-game injury absence to post a double-double in the Miami Heat's 93-83 victory over the Orlando Magic. Butler, who was sidelined with a bruised tailbone, scored 17 points and pulled down 11 rebounds, handing out four assists and coming up with three steals. It couldn't have been more timely after Miami guard Kyle Lowry on Saturday joined the parade of NBA players sidelined by COVID-19 concerns.

Miami were also without regular starters Bam Adebayo and PJ Tucker. Orlando were even more short-handed and the teams reached halftime with Miami holding a slim 42-39 lead, despite connecting on just 37.8 percent of their shots from the field. Six three-pointers in a 30-point third quarter helped the Heat pull away. They led by as many as 18 in the fourth period.

Coping with inevitable injuries has become more problematic for all teams amid the wave of coronavirus cases in the league that mirror the rise of the Omicron variant in the United States. The Magic had six players in the league's COVID protocols on Sunday, with another player cleared to return but still absent because of conditioning issues. Another six players were out with injuries. "You expect the unexpected," Magic coach Jamahl Mosley said.

In Cleveland, the Cavaliers thrashed Toronto 144-99 in the Raptors' first game since December 18. The Raptors, who had three of their past four scheduled games postponed because of lack of available players, had the league minimum eight on Sunday - four on regular contracts and four signed under the league's hardship rules. "We haven't done a thing since our last game," Toronto coach Nick Nurse said before the game. Kevin Love and Darius Garland scored 22 points each for the Cavs, who tied a club record with 46 points in the third quarter.

### LaVine lifts Bulls

In Chicago, the Bulls were buoyed by the return of Zach LaVine from COVID protocols in a 113-105 victory over the Indiana Pacers. LaVine scored 32 points and DeMar DeRozan added 24 for Chicago, who led most of the way en route to their third straight win. LaVine, who hadn't played since December 11, admitted he'd been frustrated to be ruled out because of COVID concerns.

"But that's the world we're living in right now," he said. "Everybody in the league and the world is dealing with it right now, so I'm not doing a poorm mentality." It was another lopsided affair in Washington, where Philadelphia's Joel Embiid scored 36 points and grabbed 13 rebounds in the 76ers' 117-96 victory over the Wizards, who were without top scorer Bradley Beal because of COVID. The Memphis Grizzlies, who lost Dillon Brooks and two other players to COVID concerns on Sunday morning, shook off a slow start against the Kings in Sacramento to triumph 127-102. — AFP

## Bucs, Rams, Chiefs and Cardinals clinch NFL playoff berths

WASHINGTON: Tom Brady and reigning Super Bowl champion Tampa Bay clinched an NFL playoff berth on Sunday by defeating Carolina 32-6, securing the Buccaneers' first division title since 2007. The Los Angeles Rams, Kansas City Chiefs and Arizona Cardinals also sealed post-season spots thanks to Sunday's results while New England missed a chance to clinch with a 33-21 home loss to Buffalo.

Brady, the 44-year-old quarterback who has won a record seven Super Bowl titles, completed 18-of-30 passes for 182 yards and a touchdown while Ke'Shawn Vaughn and Ronald Jones each ran for touchdowns to spark the Bucs. Tampa Bay captured the NFC South division crown and reached the playoffs in consecutive seasons for the first time since capturing the 2003 Super Bowl.

"I'm not taking anything for granted," Brady said. "Winning the division is hard to do. We've earned it. We're 11-4. It's not the greatest record in the world but it's certainly not the worst either. "We've lost some tough games. I think we've learned from each of those losses. Everything is ahead of us." Brady is in the playoffs for the 19th time in his career and for a 13th consecutive season. The Rams also reached 11-4 and boosted their NFC West-division lead to a game over Arizona with a 30-23 victory at Minnesota.

"Punched a ticket to the playoffs, but we know that's not the end goal," Rams coach Sean McVay said. Matthew Stafford threw for 197 yards and a touchdown but was intercepted three times by Vikings defenders. Sony Michel ran a career-high 27 times for a season-best 131 yards and a Rams touchdown and Brandon Powell scored on a 61-yard punt return for Los Angeles. Minnesota's defeat allowed Arizona (10-5) to clinch a playoff berth as well despite a



MINNEAPOLIS: Alexander Mattison #25 of the Minnesota Vikings falls into the end zone for a rushing touchdown against Jalen Ramsey #5 and Jordan Fuller #4 of the Los Angeles Rams in the third quarter at US Bank Stadium on December 26, 2021. — AFP

Saturday loss to Indianapolis.

The Green Bay Packers, with an NFL-best 12-3 record, and Dallas Cowboys had already clinched NFC playoff berths, meaning five of seven NFC post-season spots are claimed with Philadelphia and San Francisco, both 8-7, the teams to beat for the others. Las Vegas' 17-13 victory over Denver meant the Dallas Cowboys were assured of the NFC East title before they hosted Washington on Sunday night. But the Cowboys put an exclamation point on the evening with a 56-14 triumph that featured four touchdown passes by quarterback Dak Prescott.

Patrick Mahomes threw for 258 yards and three touchdowns as Kansas City secured a sixth consecutive AFC West division crown by routing Pittsburgh 36-10, the host Chiefs winning their eighth game in a row to become the first AFC team to secure a playoff berth. New England failed to become the first AFC playoff team as Buffalo's Josh Allen completed 30-of-47 passes for 314 yards and three touchdowns to ignite the Bills, who overtook the Patriots to

lead the AFC East at 9-6.

### Bengals rout Ravens

In another showdown to decide a division lead, Cincinnati's Joe Burrow completed 37-of-46 passes for a club-record 525 yards and four touchdowns to power the Bengals over visiting Baltimore 41-21. Burrow's 299 passing yards in the first half, when the Bengals seized a 31-14 lead, were the most by any NFL quarterback in any half all season.

Houston's Davis Mills threw for 254 yards and two touchdowns and Rex Burkhead ran 22 times for 149 yards and two touchdowns to lead the host Texans in a 41-29 upset of the Los Angeles Chargers, who fell to 8-7. Philadelphia's Jalen Hurts threw for 199 yards and two touchdowns to lead the Eagles over the visiting New York Giants 34-10. Chicago's Nick Foles threw a 15-yard touchdown pass to Jimmy Graham and a two-point conversion pass to Damiere Byrd in the final seconds to lift the Bears to a 25-24 victory at Seattle. — AFP

## NHL postpones 3 more games amid COVID-19 spike

NEW YORK: The National Hockey League will allow teams to use taxi squads to bolster their rosters amid resurgent COVID-19 cases, the league and its players' association said Sunday. With play due to resume today after an extended holiday break, the NHL announced three more game postponements over COVID concerns: Today's night face-off between Columbus and Chicago along with tomorrow's Pittsburgh v Toronto and Boston v Ottawa.

"The League and NHLPA will continue to monitor test results and teams' readiness to play over the coming days and weeks," the two bodies said in a statement, adding that "a variety of factors" would be considered in assessing whether a game should be postponed. That includes the number of players unavailable because of COVID, the risk of further transmission within a team and a club's access to players from its minor league affiliate.

The health and safety of players and club personnel remain the "number one priority," the league said. Clubs were told they could begin forming taxi squads on Sunday, setting up six-player reserve squads that could be ready for a quick call-up if needed. Such squads were used last season in response to the pandemic's impact on the league. Players on loan to the taxi squad will be permitted to travel and practice with the NHL Club, but they can only play in an NHL game if recalled and placed on the active roster.

The league and union also agreed that clubs will be allowed to make emergency recalls of players from the minor leagues if COVID-related absences leave them without a full line-up of players. So far the NHL has postponed 67 games this season. Also this week the league and union agreed not to release players to participate in the Beijing Winter Olympics in February over the pandemic. The three weeks the league would have been on hiatus for the Games could be used to make up missed contests. — AFP