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Crown Prince swears in new Cabinet, calls for reforms

MP Wasmî calls for backing Cabinet 'formed by people'



KUWAIT: HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah poses for a group photo with HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and his Cabinet ministers after they were sworn in at Bayan Palace yesterday. — KUNA (See Page 3)

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The new 16-member Cabinet headed by HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah was sworn in yesterday by HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, who called on the ministers to continue with reforms, implement economic programs and push the wheel of development.

HH the Crown Prince also said he was hopeful and optimistic that fruitful cooperation will prevail between the government and the National Assembly to implement legislation that serve the interests of the people, while sticking to the constitution. HH the Prime Minister vowed the new Cabinet will push through the reforms, correct the economic path and make development plans its top priority.

The Cabinet, which was announced on Tuesday,

includes four MPs, the highest for many years. The new Cabinet includes nine new faces, while the entire economic team was changed with the exception of Oil Minister Mohammad Al-Fares, who also got the portfolio of electricity and water.

MP Obaid Al-Wasmî, who is considered an opposition lawmaker but has mended fences with the government in the past few months, welcomed the new Cabinet "which was formed by the people".

Addressing the prime minister, Wasmî said on Twitter that "the government, in whose formation and programs the people took part in, should defend it as long as it sticks to the constitution and achieves the aspirations of the nation".

MP Muhalhal Al-Mudhaf said the government should translate its plans into actions without delays, adding that he will continue to practice his parliamentary roles in asking questions and grilling ministers.

News in brief

Expats can renew driving license

KUWAIT: The interior ministry yesterday resumed online and in-person renewal of driving licenses of expatriates, after suspending the service to ensure holders meet all the required conditions. During the suspension, only citizens, Gulf nationals, bedoons and drivers on article 20 visas were allowed to renew their driving licenses. Licenses can now be renewed up to six months prior to the expiry date as long as the conditions are met.

Kuwait reports 329 COVID cases

KUWAIT: The health ministry said Monday that 329 people tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 24 hours, taking Kuwait's total caseload to 415,678. Recoveries went up by 56 to 411,442, the ministry's spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said, noting that recoveries represent 99 percent of overall infections. The death toll from the pandemic remained unchanged at 2,468. Four cases are in ICUs and 21 patients are in hospital wards, while 1,768 others are being treated at home. — KUNA

French parents sue over wrong jab

RENNES: The parents of a 10-year-old girl in France are suing the authorities after their daughter received a Moderna COVID vaccine only allowed for adults over feared side effects. The ARS regional health service said the girl was mistakenly administered the Moderna shot on Dec 22 at the vaccination center in Avranches. France and several other countries are not letting children receive the Moderna vaccine over a potential risk of myocarditis, or inflammation of the heart muscle. — AFP

WHO warns of 'tsunami' amid record cases

PARIS: The world smashed a record number of COVID infections in a week, an AFP tally revealed yesterday, as the WHO warned a tsunami of cases from both the Omicron and Delta variants of COVID-19 will push health systems towards the brink of collapse. The highly transmissible variant propelled the United States, France and Denmark into fresh records yesterday. The AFP tally showed registered infections were up 37 percent to 6.55 million globally from Dec 22-28 compared to the previous seven-day period.

UK PM: 90% in ICUs have not had booster jab

LONDON: Around 90 percent of coronavirus patients in intensive care units have not had a booster jab, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said yesterday, defending his decision not to tighten virus curbs in England. Speaking at a vaccination center, Johnson urged people to get "vital" booster jabs, saying "the overwhelming majority" of those currently going into intensive care in our hospitals have not had the booster jab.

"I've talked to doctors who say the numbers are running up to 90 percent

of people in intensive care who are not boosted," the prime minister added in Milton Keynes in central England. Those who have not been vaccinated are "eight times more likely to get into hospital," he warned. The UK has been hit by a huge surge of the new Omicron variant, with England and Wales reporting record case numbers on Tuesday. The UK has been one of Europe's worst hit with a death toll of 148,021.

So far more than 32.5 million people have had booster jabs in the UK, Johnson said. He urged the 2.4 million people who had two jabs more than six months ago but no booster to come forward. While Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales have limited social contacts and closed nightclubs ahead of New Year's Eve celebrations, Johnson justified his decision not to do so in England.

Continued on Page 2

They were the highest figures since the World Health Organization declared a pandemic in March 2020, underscoring the blistering pace of Omicron transmission, with tens of millions of people facing a second consecutive year of restrictions dampening New Year's Eve celebrations. The surge, currently worst in Europe, is forcing governments to walk a tightrope between imposing restrictions designed to stop hospitals becoming overwhelmed and the need to keep economies and societies open two years after the virus first emerged in late 2019.

The United States, where Omicron is already overwhelming hospitals, recorded its highest-ever seven-day average of new cases at 265,427, according to a tracker maintained by

Continued on Page 2



NEW DELHI: A health worker screens passengers for COVID-19 at a railway station yesterday. — AFP



MILTON KEYNES: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson visits a COVID-19 vaccination center at the Rainbow Pharmacy in the Open University Campus' Walton Hall yesterday. — AFP

Local

Kuwait's Crown Prince urges new Cabinet to bear responsibilities and achieve development

Ministers called to follow diligent work, teamwork to continue reform



KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah gestures as he meets members of the new Cabinet at Bayan Palace yesterday.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah takes his oath.



Minister of Oil, Electricity and Water Dr Mohammad Al-Fares takes his oath. —Amiri Diwan photos

Defense Minister thanks political leadership for trust



Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah takes the oath.

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah expressed yesterday his deepest thanks and gratitude to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for renewing their trust in reassigning him in this position. This confidence is a source of pride, posing a great responsibility, and "I pray to Allah Almighty to bestow upon me with guidance to fulfil my duties," Sheikh Hamad Al-Jaber said in a press release issued by the Ministry of Defense. He thanked the former Cabinet ministers, who performed well and exerted all possible efforts to serve their beloved country with great sincerity, wishing them everlasting success in the upcoming responsibilities they will shoulder.

The Defense Minister congratulated the new ministers for being trust worthy of the political leadership, adding that he is looking forward to work with them in as one team, under the leadership of the Prime Minister His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. "We should offer all potentials and capabilities to serve our beloved country," he added, stressing on the importance of cooperation with National Assembly MPs, upon principles of justice and equality, sanctity of public money, and protecting it from any abuse or waste. The Defense Minister, on behalf of all personnel at the Defense Ministry, renewed the promise to His Highness the Amir, His Highness the Crown Prince, and His Highness the Prime Minister to serve the safety and stability of the country and to sacrifice the most precious for it. —KUNA

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday at Bayan Palace His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, who took the constitutional oath as well as the new Cabinet. The Cabinet includes Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Ahmad Mansour Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Oil, and Minister of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy Dr Mohammad Abdullatif Al-Fares, Minister of Awqaf (Endowment) and Islamic Affairs Essa Ahmad Al-Kandari, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Minister of State for Communication and Information Technology Dr Rana Abdullah Al-Fares, Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr Ali Fahad Al-Mudhaf, Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Nazaha (Integrity) Enhancement Justice Jamal Hadhel Al-Jalawi,

Minister of Information and Minister of Culture Dr Hamad Ahmad Rouh El-Din, Minister of Health Dr Khaled Mhawes Al-Saeed, Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment Abdulwahab Mohammad Al-Rushaid, Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Ali Hussein Al-Mousa, Minister of Commerce and Industry Fahad Mutaq Al-Shuraian, Minister of Social Affairs and Community Development, Minister of State for Housing Affairs and Urban Development Mubarak Zaid Al-Arou Al-Mutairi and Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs Mohammad Obaid Al-Rajhi.

The new Cabinet took the constitutional oath and later His Highness the Crown Prince delivered a speech on the occasion. His Highness Sheikh Mishal said that he was pleased to convey His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's greeting and congratulations, wishing them success. His Highness the Crown Prince added that he appreciated the sincere efforts made by former ministers in fulfilling their responsibilities and wished them the best.

Addressing the new Cabinet, His Highness the Crown Prince said, "you have responsibilities and duties that require diligent work in the spirit of one team to continue the reform process, implement economic programs and advance development in the country." His Highness Sheikh Mishal noted that "we look forward with the utmost optimism to a fruitful and constructive cooperation between the legislative and executive branches to approve and implement legislations and laws that are in the interest of the country and citizens." His Highness the Crown Prince added that such cooperation would coexist with commitment and adherence to the constitution that we are all proud of, and under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Prime Minister expressed appreciation to His Highness the Amir and His Highness the Crown Prince "for the great trust that you have put on us", vowing to exert all efforts in order to translate their instructions into action to achieve development. —KUNA



Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Ahmad Mansour Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah takes his oath.

Kuwait's new Interior Minister thanks leadership

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Ahmad Mansour Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah yesterday expressed gratitude to His Highness the Amir and the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for his appointment to hold the interior portfolio. The freshly assigned minister of interior extended his sentiments of appreciation to 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 on the assignment. He pledged on behalf of the Interior Ministry's personnel to spare no efforts for maintaining the homeland sanctity and stability. —KUNA

Newly assigned minister vows to achieve digitalization

KUWAIT: State Minister for Municipality affairs and State Minister for Communications and Information Technology, Dr Rana Al-Fares, yesterday expressed appreciation for the confidence granted to her by His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Fares affirmed in statement yesterday following a swearing-in ceremony of the newly formed Cabinet, that she is keen on translating political leadership's instructions of digitalizing government services and working towards reformation and development. She has added that this is a patriotic responsibility and she intends on continuing development plans and furthering aspirations towards more prosperity especially in fields of architecture and government services.



Municipal Affairs, Communication and Information Technology Minister Dr Rana Al-Fares takes her oath.

She has also stated that she will be working hand in hand with executive and legislative bodies to achieve such aspirations. Minister Fares extended her gratitude towards those working in the Ministry of Public Works and Public Authority for Roads and Transportation for their hard work throughout the two years she served as minister there, commending their efforts in facing challenges and overcoming hard circumstances. —KUNA



Minister of Education Dr Ali Fahad Al-Mudhaf takes the oath.



Minister of Justice Jamal Al-Jalawi takes the oath.



Information Minister Dr Hamad Ahmad Rouh El-Din takes his oath.



Minister of Health Dr Khaled Al-Saeed takes the oath.



Minister of Finance Abdulwahab Al-Rushaid takes his oath.



Minister of Commerce Fahad Al-Shuraian takes the oath.



Minister of Social Affairs Mubarak Al-Arou Al-Mutairi takes the oath.



Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs Mohammad Al-Rajhi takes the oath.

Local

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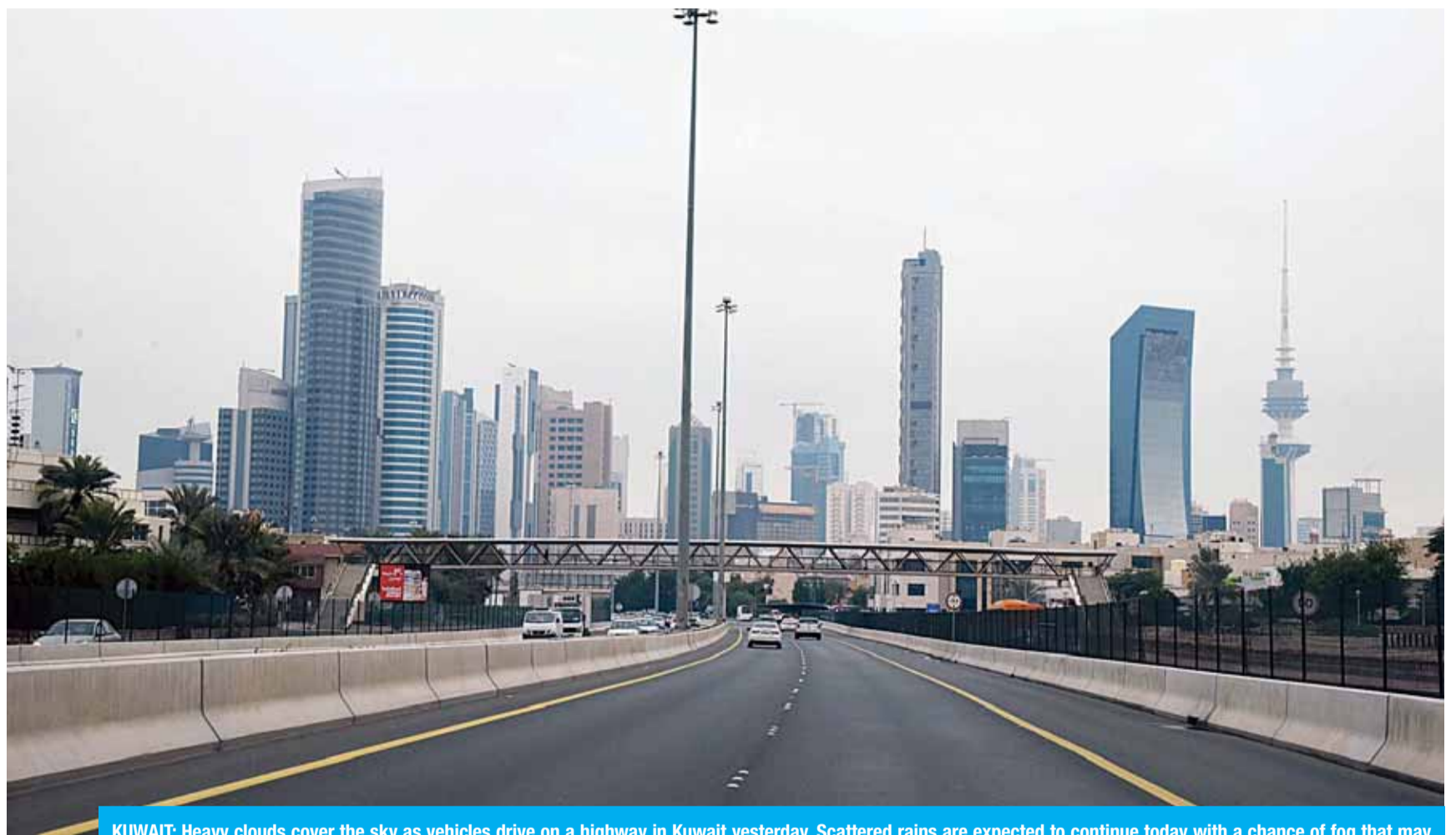
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Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Heavy clouds cover the sky as vehicles drive on a highway in Kuwait yesterday. Scattered rains are expected to continue today with a chance of fog that may drop horizontal visibility, according to the Kuwait Meteorological Department. —Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

News in brief

Kuwait informatics award announces winners

KUWAIT: His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah Informatics Award announced yesterday four winners of the prize in its 21st edition. In a statement, the award's committee said that the winners of this year's award are Abdullah Al-Mutawa and Mohammad Al-Doub from Kuwait, Majed Al-Amri from Oman, and Dubai's health authority from the UAE. The highest honorary award was given to the Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah for using technology and facilitating services for pilgrims, it added. All winners have pioneered in digital technology in the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Internet to help provide a better service for community.

Kuwaitis in Iraq urged to avoid bird hunting

BAGHDAD: Kuwait's Embassy in Iraq appealed to its nationals to abide by instructions and avoid hunting birds in Muthanna Governorate and the southern areas in Iraq. In a statement, the embassy cautioned against using the visa of visiting religious shrines to practice bird hunting as this move runs counter to the law and jeopardizes themselves. Iraq's authorities banned hunting birds in the country's southern governorates and areas which include different species of birds and wild animals.

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, continues its strategic partnership with FoodBuzz, the community event that offers a unique social environment for visitors to socialize, connect, and enjoy the spring and winter seasons. The event, which runs for two days every month from November 2021 to February 2022, is held at Assima Mall in the heart of Kuwait City and features many distinguished food and beverage brands.

By partnering with FoodBuzz, Zain continues its ongoing efforts of empowering local talents as part of its solid and well-focused Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility strategy. The company continuously works towards identifying initiatives like FoodBuzz that carry a clear

objective of empowering the next generation of Kuwaiti businesses that are well-capable of contributing to national economy.

For the second consecutive month, Zain was present at FoodBuzz via its dedicated booth, where the company offered many social and entertaining programs to visitors, sharing the wonderful positive atmosphere that the Kuwaiti community enjoys nowadays as normal life gradually returns after the pandemic. Zain also held exciting competitions at the event and presented valuable prizes to winners.

FoodBuzz, established in 2016, introduces a new concept that is all about networking, connecting, and exploring Kuwait's food and beverage community at its best. The event serves

huge numbers of visitors who are primarily employees from business sectors, given that it is located at the heart of Kuwait's business community, allowing them to engage and socialize in a professional environment while enjoying a variety of food and beverage vendors during winter and spring seasons.

Zain expressed its ongoing keenness in supporting events that uplift local talents to higher levels, by encouraging outstanding projects and ideas like FoodBuzz, which served over 6,000 visitors last season. Zain's support is aimed at investing in the creative abilities of Kuwaiti entrepreneurs, preparing them to engage in the business world by encouraging them further and nurturing innovation within their businesses.

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KUWAIT: Zain's team at the company's booth.



From the event at Assima Mall.

Kuwait's Sharikh wins King Faisal Prize for 'Service to Islam'

RIYADH: Mohammad Al-Sharikh, Kuwaiti Chairman of Sakhr Software Company, was granted Tuesday the King Faisal Prize in the category of 'Service to Islam' for 2021. The Prize includes five categories. In a ceremony held under the patronage of Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz, Sharikh said "winning the prize is the end of the ambition", appreciating those who named him for the award.

The award was given to Sharikh for his prominent role in supporting and planting the spirit of research and innovation to preserve Islamic heritage through modern technology. In medicine for 2021, the prize was given to UK Professor Robin James Franklin and US Professor Stephen Mark Strittmatter. In Arabic Language and Literature for this year 2021, Moroccan Professor Mohamed Mechbal won the prize.

Since 1979, King Faisal Prize has honored 275 winners from 43 nationalities for their contribution to serving Islam, Muslims and humanity. Every winner in the five categories obtains 750,000 Saudi riyals (about \$200,000), a 200-gm 24 carat gold



RIYADH: Mohammad Al-Sharikh, Chairman of Sakhr Software Company, receives the prize. —KUNA

medal and a written patent including the name of the winner and a brief on his research. Kuwaiti scientists Dr Abdulrahman Al-Sumait and Dr Abdullah Al-Ghunaim won the prize in 1996 and 2016 respectively. —KUNA



Hong Kong media outlet closes after police raid, arrests seven

Former US Senate leader Harry Reid dies at 82

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Russia court hits Memorial with second ban

Blinken calls Russian closure of Memorial 'affront' to human rights

MOSCOW: A Moscow court yesterday hit Russia's most prominent rights group, Memorial, with a second ban in as many days despite an international outcry. Judge Mikhail Kazakov ordered the dissolution of Memorial's Human Rights Centre, which campaigns against contemporary rights abuses in Russia, at the request of prosecutors.

On Tuesday, the country's Supreme Court ordered the dissolution of Memorial International, the group's central structure which chronicles Stalin-era purges and maintains the group's extensive archives in Moscow. That ruling was slammed by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and EU foreign policy chief Josep Borell, at a time when tensions are already high between Russia and NATO over the Ukraine conflict.

The trials cap a year that began with the jailing of President Vladimir Putin's top critic Alexei Navalny and signal the end of an era in Russia's post-Soviet democratisation process, which began 30 years ago this month. Prosecutors accused Memorial's rights centre of failing to use on its publications the "foreign agent" label, which denotes organisations that receive funds from overseas, and allegedly justifying terrorism and extremism.

During yesterday's hearing at the Moscow City Court, a prosecutor charged that it was actually Memorial that violated the rights and freedoms of Russians and cited an alleged lack of accounting transparency. After the ruling, several dozen supporters applauded Memorial's lawyers outside of the courthouse in freezing temperatures.

"We had no illusions," said lawyer Ilya Novikov. "But it is very important that this ship is sinking with a raised flag." Alexander Cherkasov, head of Memorial's rights centre, branded the court decision "political" and said the group will continue working "somehow". Supporter Yelena Ponomaryova described the ruling as the "collapse of the entire judicial system". "It's a shameful decision," she said.

'Heartless closure'
Memorial, Russia's

most prominent rights organisation, was founded in 1989 by Soviet dissidents including Nobel Peace Prize laureate Andrei Sakharov. Memorial's rights centre has campaigned for the rights of political prisoners, migrants and other disadvantaged groups, and highlighted abuses, especially in the turbulent North Caucasus region that includes Chechnya.

"Memorial is the need of the citizens of Russia to know the truth about its tragic past, about the

fate of many millions of people." On Tuesday, prosecutors charged that Memorial International "creates a false image of the USSR as a terrorist state and denigrates the memory of World War II".

Meanwhile, Washington on Tuesday condemned the closure by Russia's Supreme Court of the prominent rights group Memorial International, calling it an "affront" to human rights. "The persecution of International Memorial and Memorial Human Rights Center is an affront to their noble missions and to the cause of human rights everywhere," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement, referring to the group's sister organization that also risks closure.

The decision, he added, "follows a year of rapidly shrinking space for independent civil society, media, and pro-democracy activists in Russia."

Marie Struthers, Eastern Europe and Central Asia director at Amnesty International, said the accusations against Memorial were "bogus". "The Russian authorities' heartless closure of the Memorial Human Rights Centre, an organisation that has provided assistance to thousands of people both at home and abroad for 30 years, is another blow to civil society in Russia," she said.

This week's rulings against Memorial have come as no surprise to the group after Putin himself accused it of advocating for "terrorist and extremist organisations". Political observers say that the charges of extremism and terrorism have been used by Russian authorities to punish Putin critics.

The court ruling against Memorial International had sparked an international backlash. "The people



MOSCOW: Lawyer of the human rights center 'Memorial' Ilya Novikov speaks to the media after Moscow City Court ordered the closure of a branch of the Memorial group. — AFP

of Russia—and the memory of the millions who suffered from Soviet-era repression—deserve better," said Blinken.

Borrell tweeted: "Critical looks on their past are essential for the healthy development and progress of societies." "Even by the standards of 2021, the closure of Memorial is an extraordinary event. A monstrous one," Meduza, an independent news website, said in an editorial. —AFP

US sees possible progress in Iran nuclear talks

VIENNA: The United States said Tuesday it had seen possible progress in talks with Iran but joined European negotiators in pressing for urgency in rolling back Tehran's nuclear programme. Negotiations resumed Monday in Vienna in a fresh push to make headway on reviving a landmark 2015 agreement that curtailed Iran's nuclear activities in return for sanctions relief.

"There may have been some modest progress," State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters in Washington. "But it is in some ways too soon to say how substantive that progress may have been. At a minimum any progress, we believe, is falling short of Iran's accelerating nuclear steps and is far too slow."

Former president Donald Trump in 2018 withdrew from the nuclear accord and imposed a slew of punishing sanctions, including a unilateral US ban on Iran selling its key export of oil. President Joe Biden supports a return to the agreement but Iran has kept taking steps away from compliance as it presses for sanctions relief.

The Vienna talks began after Biden's election but stopped in June as Iran elected a new ultraconservative government. They resumed in late November with Iran agreeing to keep talking after a brief break. "This negotiation is urgent," negotiators from Britain, France and Germany said in a statement. "We are clear that we are nearing the point where Iran's escalation of its nuclear programme will have completely hollowed out the JCPOA," the so-called E3 powers said, referring to the deal's official name by its acronym.

"That means we have weeks, not months, to conclude a deal before the JCPOA's core non-proliferation benefits are lost." Zionist entity, Iran's arch-enemy, has warned of military options if the Islamic republic's programme advances and is suspected in a shadowy campaign that has included the assassination of Tehran's top nuclear scientist. The Biden administration has also warned of a return to pressure if talks fail and Iran pursues its nuclear work.

'Unprecedented' enrichment

Iran was in compliance with the 2015 deal before Trump's withdrawal but has since taken key steps including stepping up its enrichment of uranium, although it denies that it wants to acquire a nuclear arsenal. On Saturday, Atomic Energy Organization of Iran director Mohammad Eslami said Tehran had 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. In response, E3 negotiators said Tuesday that 60 percent enrichment was still "unprecedented for a state without nuclear weapons". Military-grade levels are around 90 percent.

"Its increasing 60 percent stockpile is bringing Iran significantly closer to having fissile material, which could be used for nuclear weapons," they said. The United States did not specify areas of progress but Russia—which is participating along with China and the Europeans—said a working group had a "useful meeting" on nuclear issues and informal discussions on lifting sanctions.


"We observe indisputable progress," Moscow's ambassador to the UN in Vienna, Mikhail Ulyanov, wrote on Twitter. US negotiator Rob Malley is participating indirectly, with European diplomats shuttling between hotels, as Iran refuses direct contact with the United States. —AFP



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International

Father of teen shot by US police in department store demands jail terms

'The only thing I want is justice for my daughter'

LOS ANGELES: The father of teenager accidentally shot dead by US police in a department store, demanded jail time Tuesday for the officers involved in her killing. The death of 14-year-old Valentina Orellana-Peralta is the latest at the hands of law enforcement in a country where guns abound and police readily resort to deadly force.

"The only thing I want is justice for my daughter," Juan Pablo Orellana told reporters. "I will not rest until the last day, until all these criminals are in jail." Valentina, a Chilean immigrant, was hiding in a changing room last Thursday as Los Angeles police rushed into the Burlington department store to confront a man swinging a bike lock at customers.

Video footage of the chaotic incident shows several officers prowling the aisles with weapons drawn, one of whom opens fire almost as soon as he sees the attacker. One of the bullets he fired went through a wall and killed the schoolgirl, who had been trying on clothes with her mother for Christmas.

"We were together in a fitting room shopping for Christmas clothes," a tearful Soledad Peralta said. "We heard screams, we sat hugging each other praying, when something hit Valentina and threw us to the floor."

"She died in my arms. I couldn't do anything. I couldn't do anything. To see a daughter die in

your arms is one of the greatest and deepest pains one can imagine. She meant the world to me," she said. The parents were accompanied by lawyers, including Benjamin Crump, a prominent Black attorney specializing in wrongful death suits, whose clients have included the families of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd.

Los Angeles Police Chief Michael Moore has pledged a "complete and transparent investigation" into Valentina's death. Civil rights groups have been quick to criticize the ready use of weapons in a department store, where officers could not have known the full circumstances, including whether bystanders were present. Emergency calls included reports that the suspect had a gun, but no firearm was subsequently found.

Family 'destroyed'

There is no official national record of fatal shootings by US police officers, and reporting of incidents by police departments is voluntary. A tally by the Washington Post shows 900 people have been shot and killed by police in the last year.

Police frequently defend their use of deadly force by pointing out that in a country with an abundance of guns, they routinely encounter life-threatening situations. In the wake of a number of mass casualty shootings, police training has mor-



LOS ANGELES, California: Protestors hold signs calling for justice for 14-year old Valentina Orellana-Peralta, who was killed by a stray police bullet last week while shopping at a clothing store. —AFP

phed from stressing the need to negotiate and avoid violence to moving quickly and decisively to neutralize an attacker.

Valentina's father on Tuesday said the actions of police officers last week were "negligent".

"They destroyed us as a family," he said, showing the skateboard he had bought his daughter for Christmas. "All she wanted was to be an American citizen. But death is what my daughter came here to find." —AFP

Abbas makes rare visit to Zionist entity for talks

JERUSALEM: Zionist entity unveiled a package of "confidence-building measures" for the occupied West Bank yesterday, after Defence Minister Benny Gantz hosted talks with Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas on his first visit in years.

Abbas, leading a high-ranking delegation on his first visit for an official meeting since 2010, held talks with Gantz at his home in the central town of Rosh HaAyin, according to sources and media.

"We discussed the implementation of economic and civilian measures, and emphasised the importance of deepening security coordination and preventing terror and violence — for the well-being of both Jews and Palestinians," Gantz said after the meeting on Tuesday evening.

Yesterday, Zionist entity's defence ministry announced "confidence-building measures" with the Palestinian Authority (PA). These included a \$32 million (100 million shekel) advance payment to the PA in taxes collected on its behalf by Zionist entity, and the granting of 600 extra permits allowing Palestinian businessmen to cross into Zionist entity.

It also announced the regularisation of 6,000 more Palestinians living in the occupied West Bank, which has been under Jewish control since the Six-Day War of 1967. Zionist entity had already announced in October — for the first time since 2009 — the regularisation of the status of 4,000 Palestinians living in the large swathe of the West Bank known as Area C, where the Zionist entity exercises civilian as well as military control.

'Tense conditions'

"The meeting dealt with the importance of creating a political horizon that leads to a political solution, in accordance with international resolutions," Palestinian Civil Affairs Minister Hussein al-Sheikh said yesterday. Excluding annexed east Jerusalem, the West Bank is home to nearly 500,000 Jewish settlers, living in communities regarded as illegal under international law.

The talks also covered "the tense conditions on the ground due to the practices of settlers" as well as "many security, economic and humanitarian issues", Hussein al-Sheikh added. After Zionist entity's coalition government led by Prime Minister Naftali Bennett was formed in June, Gantz had visited the PA's headquarters in the West Bank city of Ramallah in August for talks with Abbas, the first official meeting at such a level for several years.

But after those talks, hawkish Bennett, the former head of a settler lobby group who opposes Palestinian statehood, underlined that there was no peace process under way with the Palestinians, "and there won't be one". Right-winger Bennett leads a motley coalition of parties ranging from the Jewish nationalist right to the left and centre.

Zionist entity's right-wing opposition Likud party condemned the latest meeting, saying that "concessions dangerous for Zionist entity's security are only a matter of time". The party added a dismissive reference to Bennett's governing coalition, which includes an Zionist Arab party for the first time.

"The Zionist-Palestinian government has put the Palestinians and Abbas back on the agenda... it is dangerous for Zionist entity," the Likud said.

Gantz's meeting with Abbas follows a recent visit to the region by US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan, with the administration of President Joe Biden seeking to reboot relations with the Palestinians that were broken under Donald Trump. Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, also condemned the visit. —AFP

Italian minister talks migration with Tunisian president

TUNIS: Italy's top diplomat Luigi Di Maio discussed clandestine migration with Tunisian President Kais Saied on Tuesday, in his first visit to the North African country since the president's July 25 power grab. The foreign minister praised Tunisian efforts to stem the flow of irregular migrants, according to a statement on the presidency's website. Saied pointed out "the limits of traditional policies in managing the phenomenon of clandestine migration".

He called for new strategies to encourage "regular migration according to mechanisms that respect the rights of migrants". Italy is a key entry point to the European Union for migrants from across Africa, with tens of thousands boarding rickety boats each year from Libyan or Tunisian shores in search of better lives in Europe.

Former US Senate leader Harry Reid dies at 82

WASHINGTON: Former US Senate majority leader Harry Reid, a Nevada Democrat who rose from humble beginnings to lead the upper chamber during the presidencies of George W. Bush and Barack Obama, has died aged 82. "I am heartbroken to announce the passing of my husband," his wife, Landra, said in a statement released to US media, adding he died "peacefully... surrounded by our family."

Reid, who used his experience in Congress to help Obama steer his landmark Affordable Care Act through the Senate, had been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in 2018. Laconic and soft-spoken, Reid was born and raised in the mining town of Searchlight, Nevada on December 2, 1939, in a house with no hot water or indoor toilets.

A prize-fighter in his youth, he used his pugilistic instincts to work his way up to becoming one of the longest-serving majority leaders in the history of the US senate, and even called his memoir "The Good Fight." Current Senate majority leader Chuck Schumer, a Democrat from New York,

In May, Italy's Interior Minister Lucia Lamorgese visited Tunisia and announced a deal offering the country economic aid in exchange for extra efforts to stop migrants reaching Italy. Several Tunisian civil society groups marked Di Maio's visit with a press conference to demand answers over the death of a Tunisian migrant who had arrived in Sicily in October. Wissem Ben Abdellatif, 26, died after being detained in a centre for migrants to be repatriated. "The living conditions in these centres respect neither human dignity nor basic hygiene standards, especially during the pandemic," said Romdhane Ben Amor of the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights (FTDES).

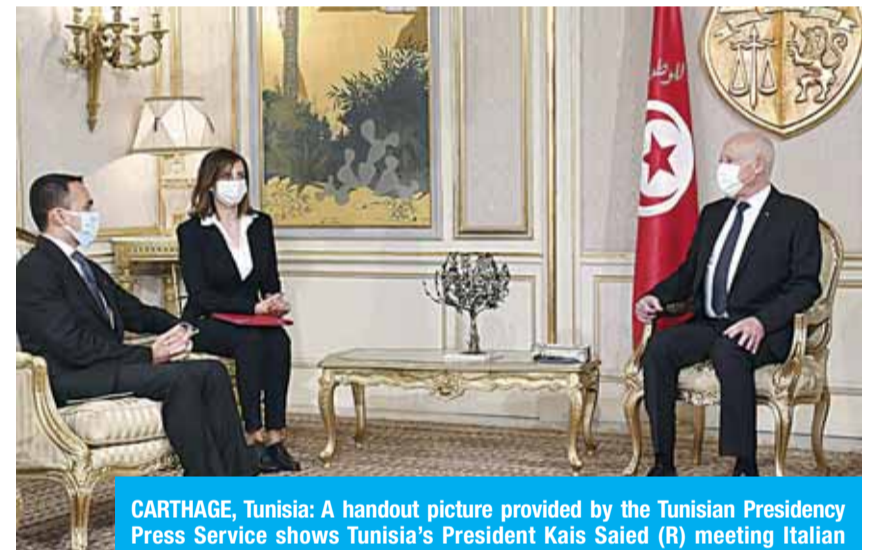
He said Tunisia had "turned into the coastguard", stopping some 26,000 migrants reaching Italy in 2021. Ahmed Mssedi, a member of

said Reid was "one of the most amazing individuals I've ever met." "He never forgot where he came from and used those boxing instincts to fearlessly fight those who were hurting the poor & middle class," Schumer said on Twitter.

'Skill and determination'

Despite his hardscrabble upbringing, he was elected to the Senate in 1986 and became the upper chamber's Democratic leader in the 2004 elections. He served as Senate majority leader from 2007 to 2015. Reid often referred to his working class origins—his father was a miner, his mother a laundress, and neither parent graduated from high school. He hitchhiked 40 miles (65 kilometers) as a teenager to attend the nearest high school, and then graduated from Utah State University and put himself through George Washington University Law School by working nights as a member of the US Capitol police.

Quixotic, he once filibustered the Republicans by himself for nine hours, by reading from the history book he wrote about his hometown of Searchlight. Reid was more conservative than most other Democrats in the Senate. A practicing Mormon, he was staunchly against abortion rights—a stance that sometimes found him working at cross purposes with oth-



CARTHAGE, Tunisia: A handout picture provided by the Tunisian Presidency Press Service shows Tunisia's President Kais Saied (R) meeting Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio (L) at Carthage Palace. —AFP

Avocats Sans Frontieres (Lawyers without Borders), accused Italian authorities of "forcing migrants to sign documents they don't understand". Italian authorities have said some 55,000 irregular migrants

reached Italy between January and the start of November, compared to fewer than 30,000 last year, with Tunisian nationals making up the majority of those who set out from Tunisia. —AFP



PHILADELPHIA, Pennsylvania: File photo shows US Senate Democratic Leader Harry Reid of Nevada and his wife, Landra, leave the stage on Day Three of the Democratic National Convention at the Wells Fargo Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. —AFP

ers in his Democratic caucus. In lieu of a statement, Obama made public a letter he had written to Reid shortly before his death, in which he said: "I wouldn't have been president had it not been for your encouragement and support, and I wouldn't have got most of what I got done without your skill and determination."

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi called Reid a "titan," describing him as "a

leader of immense courage and ferocious conviction who worked tirelessly to achieve historic progress for the American people." Mitch McConnell, the Republican minority leader in the Senate, said that Reid's rise from poverty to political power was a "quintessentially American story, and it took Harry's legendary toughness, bluntness and tenacity to make it happen." —AFP

Maxwell jury deliberations resume under COVID threat

NEW YORK: US jurors resumed Tuesday their deliberations in Ghislaine Maxwell's sex crimes trial, with the judge expressing concern that New York City's "astronomical spike" in COVID cases could disrupt proceedings.

Judge Alison North was considering keeping the panel at work additional days this week as they weigh charges that could result in the British socialite spending the rest of her life behind bars. "We now face a high and escalating risk" that jurors

and other trial participants could contract COVID-19 and be forced to quarantine, Nathan said. "We're in a different place than we were two weeks ago."

The judge has already asked jurors to extend their daily schedule by one hour to 6 pm (2300 GMT) as the fast-spreading Omicron strain drives up case rates in New York City and around the world. Maxwell, who turned 60 on Christmas Day, is accused of recruiting and grooming young girls to be sexually abused by disgraced late American financier Jeffrey Epstein.

The 12-person jury, which began considering Maxwell's fate on December 20, resumed deliberations on Monday after a four-day holiday break. US prosecutors argued that the daughter of former British newspaper baron Robert Maxwell was a knowing participant in the conduct of Epstein, who killed himself in a US jail in 2019 while await-

ing his own sex crimes trial.

Maxwell did not testify but in a defiant statement to the court said prosecutors had failed to prove her guilt. The jury must reach a unanimous decision on any of the six counts facing Maxwell if she is to be convicted. If they fail to reach unanimity on any of the charges, the judge could declare a mistrial.

Prosecutor Alison Moe has argued Maxwell was "the key" to Epstein's scheme of enticing young girls to give him massages, during which he would sexually abuse them. Maxwell's defense team countered that there was a lack of evidence to convict and questioned the accusers' ability to recollect quarter-century-old events. The team also argued that Maxwell was being used as a "scapegoat" for Epstein's crimes after he evaded justice. —AFP

International

Hong Kong media outlet closes after police raid, arrests seven

Latest blow to the city's rapidly shrinking press freedoms

HONG KONG: Hong Kong pro-democracy media outlet Stand News said yesterday it will close after a police raid and arrests of seven current and former staff members, in the latest blow to the city's rapidly shrinking press freedoms. Suppression of the semi-autonomous Chinese city's local press has increased in the wake of 2019's huge and often violent democracy protests and Beijing's subsequent imposition of a sweeping national security law.

Yesterday morning, police officers burst into Stand News' office, seizing phones, computers, documents and thousands of dollars, while hauling its acting editor-in-chief into the headquarters in handcuffs as it was searched. "Because of the current situation, Stand News will stop operating immediately," the outlet said later in a statement on Facebook.

Stand News said its website and social media would no longer be updated and would be taken down soon. It added that acting editor-in-chief Patrick Lam, who was among those arrested, had resigned and all employees were terminated. Steve Li, senior superintendent of the national security police, accused the media outlet of publishing news articles and blog posts between July 2020 and November 2021 that incited hatred towards the Hong Kong government, among other alleged crimes.

"They described Hong Kong protesters as 'being disappeared' and 'violated'... These are malicious allegations without any factual basis," Li told a press conference. The seven individuals were arrested under a British colonial-era law for "conspiracy to publish seditious publication". More than 200 officers were deployed to search the outlet's newsroom with court authorisation to seize journalistic materials, police said.

Around lunchtime yesterday, they could be seen hauling boxes from the office. Li said they seized

about HK\$500,000 (\$64,100) in cash. The national security unit froze about HK\$61 million (\$7.8 million) worth of the outlet's assets, one of the largest sums it has ever frozen, Li said.

'Editorially independent'

Police also arrested former editor-in-chief Chung Pui-ken, as well as four board members who resigned in June—Hong Kong pop star Denise Ho, barrister Margaret Ng, Christine Fang and Chow Tat-chi—according to local media. Former Apple Daily editor Chan Pui-man, the wife of Chung, was the seventh person arrested under the law, police confirmed later in the day.



Website and social media would no longer be updated

Li would not rule out further arrests, and said some individuals not in Hong Kong had been put on a wanted list. Announcing its closure, Stand News thanked its readers, saying it was established as a non-profit in December 2014 to "take a stand in Hong Kong". "Stand News was editorially independent, and was dedicated to protecting Hong Kong's core values such as democracy, human rights, freedom, rule of law and justice," it said.

But Hong Kong's chief secretary John Lee, commenting on the arrests, told reporters those



HONG KONG: Stand News chief editor Patrick Lam is brought to the news outlet's office building in handcuffs after police were deployed to search the premises in Hong Kong's Kwun Tong district yesterday. —AFP

detained were "evil elements" and "bad apples abusing the position... of media worker". The Committee to Protect Journalists described the raid as "an open assault on Hong Kong's already tattered press freedom" and called for charges to be dropped.

Stand News is the second Hong Kong media company targeted by the authorities, after Apple Daily—which shut down in June after its assets were

frozen under the national security law. Li denied police were targeting the media, saying outlets would not face legal trouble if their journalists wrote "unbiased" reports.

Hong Kong has long served as a regional media hub, though it has tumbled down press-freedom rankings in recent years as Beijing asserts greater control over the city. During 2019's unrest, police clashed with several Stand News reporters. —AFP

S Africa's Tutu to lie in state for two days

CAPE TOWN: The body of South Africa's revered anti-apartheid fighter Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who died at the weekend aged 90, will lie in state for two days ahead of his funeral on New Year's Day, his foundations said on Tuesday. The lying in state was initially scheduled to last just one day-Friday-but has been extended today "to accommodate more mourners," the Archbishop Tutu IP Trust and Desmond and Leah Tutu Legacy Foundation said.

The statement expressed deep thanks for the outpouring of support expressed around the world after Tutu passed away. "This deluge of love serves to compensate, to some extent, for COVID regulations restricting the size of gatherings and the nature of the send-off our beloved Arch so richly



SOWETO, South Africa: Anglican devotees set the stage for a memorial service in honour of South African anti-apartheid icon Archbishop Desmond Tutu in front of his house in Soweto, yesterday. —AFP

deserves," the foundations said, referring to Tutu's nickname.

Tutu's body will lie in St. George's Cathedral, in his former Cape Town parish. His body will be cremated after the funeral and his ashes then placed in the cathedral. Attendance at his farewell on Saturday has to be capped at 100 because of anti-coronavirus restrictions, the archbishop of Cape Town, Thabo Makgoba, has said.

Tributes from world leaders poured

in after Tutu's death was announced on Sunday. Within South Africa, many deeply mourn the passing of the last great hero of the anti-apartheid struggle. For years, Tutu was the visible emblem of the fight against white-minority rule while Nelson Mandela and other leaders were behind bars.

His hallmarks were religious faith, unflinching humour and an unstinting will to speak out against injustice—both before and after apartheid. South

Africa's national flag has been placed at half-mast since Monday, while Cape Town city hall and the famous Table Mountain have been illuminated in purple—the colour of Tutu's gown.

Since Monday, the bells of Cape Town cathedral have tolled for 10 minutes at noon to start what the church hopes will be a moment of reflection on Tutu's deeds by those who hear the sound. Religious services are being held around the country in his honour.

Cheapest coffin

The foundations added that Tutu "was very clear on his wishes for his funeral." "He wanted no ostentatiousness or lavish spending," they said. "He asked that the coffin be the cheapest available, and that a bouquet of carnations from his family be the only flowers in the cathedral."

He also asked that those who wanted to buy flowers send the equivalent amount in money to the two foundations instead, they said. Tutu was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 1997 and repeatedly underwent treatment. —AFP

Ugandan novelist and govt critic arrested: Lawyer

KAMPALA: A prominent Ugandan novelist and government critic has been arrested in Kampala, his lawyer said yesterday, prompting calls by rights activists for his release. "Armed men claiming to be from the Uganda Police Force" broke into Kakwenza Rukirabashaija's home on Tuesday, his lawyer Eron Kiiza said, adding that he had been on the telephone to his client at the time.

"I heard them threaten to break his legs," Kiiza told AFP. An outspoken critic of President Yoweri Museveni's government, Rukirabashaija won acclaim for his 2020 satirical novel, "The Greedy Barbarian", which describes high-level corruption in a fictional country. Rukirabashaija had recently stepped up criticism of Museveni's son Muhoozi Kainerugaba—a general who many Ugandans believe is positioning himself to take over from his 77-year-old father—calling him "obese" and a "curmudgeon".

It was not immediately clear who arrested the award-winning author, who wrote on his Facebook page: "Men with guns are breaking my door. They say they're policemen but are not in uniform." There was no immediate comment from Ugandan police. According to Kiiza, witnesses saw Rukirabashaija being bundled into a van known as a "drone", which is associated with abductions of government opponents in Uganda.

Rukirabashaija was selected by the PEN Pinter Prize to win this year's International Writer of Courage award, which is presented annually to a writer who has been persecuted for speaking out about their beliefs. Rukirabashaija has been repeatedly arrested after "The Greedy Barbarian" was published and said he was tortured while being interrogated about his work by military intelligence.

At that time, he was accused of breaching COVID-19 social distancing regulations, inciting violence and promoting sectarianism. The writer described his time in detention as "inhuman and degrading" in his most recent book "Banana Republic: Where Writing is Treasonous". —AFP

Indonesia to bring stranded Rohingya refugees to shore

BIREUN, Indonesia: Indonesia yesterday said it will let dozens of Rohingya refugees come ashore after protests from locals and the international community over its plan to push them into Malaysian waters. At least 100 mostly women and children aboard a stricken wooden vessel off Aceh province were denied refuge in Indonesia, where authorities on Tuesday said they planned to push them into the neighbouring Southeast Asian country after fixing their boat.

After a day-long meeting yesterday between officials in the coastal town of Bireun, Jakarta backtracked and said the refugees' boat would be towed to shore on humanitarian grounds. "The decision was taken after considering the emergency condition of the refugees on that boat," said Armed Wijaya, head of the

national taskforce on refugees.

The Rohingya boat is now about 50 miles (80 kilometres) from Bireun and would be pulled ashore, he said without elaborating on the timing. "As it is now in the middle of the pandemic, all refugees will undergo medical screening," he said, adding that the taskforce will coordinate with related stakeholders to provide shelter and logistics for the refugees.

Indonesian authorities first spotted the wooden boat two days ago, stranded about 70 nautical miles off the Indonesian coast, according to a local navy commander. Local fishermen had alerted them on December 25, one of them said. On Tuesday, Amnesty International and the UNHCR called on the government to let the stranded group of Rohingya refugees land. The earlier plan by authorities in Aceh to



BIREUN, Aceh: This handout photo taken and released yesterday by the Indonesian Navy shows sailors bringing supplies to a navy ship destined for Rohingya refugees after their boat was intercepted in the waters off Bireun, Aceh province and were denied refuge in Indonesia. —AFP

send the refugees into Malaysia also angered locals in Bireun, where a group of fishermen on Wednesday

organised a protest demanding authorities to instead allow the Rohingya to disembark. —AFP

Chinese struggle providing food in locked down Xi'an

BEIJING: Chinese officials admitted yesterday they have faced challenges getting enough supplies to residents in locked-down Xi'an, after the city's inhabitants took to social media to complain they didn't have enough food and call for help. Thirteen million residents in northern Xi'an are in their seventh day of home confinement, and national health officials have called for measures to be strengthened further as China battles its worst virus surge in months.

Beijing has followed a strict "zero COVID" strategy involving tight border restrictions and targeted lockdowns since the virus first surfaced in a central

city in late 2019. But officials admitted at a press conference yesterday that "low staff attendance and difficulties in logistics and distribution" had led to trouble providing essential supplies as the country faces a resurgence in infections.

A day before, many residents asked on social media for help acquiring food and other essentials, with some saying their housing compounds would not let them out even though they were running out of food. Xi'an official Chen Jianfeng told reporters that the local government has mobilised enterprises to step up community distribution, with cadres supervising wholesale markets and supermarkets.

"We're trying our best to assist in the problem of staff turnout, and are issuing passes for vehicles that guarantee the supply of necessities," he said. But some were still struggling with supplies. "How do we live? What do we eat?" one user wrote on the Twitter-like Weibo platform.

"Days ago, we could go out once to buy gro-

ceries but that's been cancelled... all online grocery apps are either sold out or beyond the delivery range," the user added. The city stepped up confinement measures on Monday, with many residents told not to leave their homes except for virus testing—after previously being told they could go out once every three days to buy supplies.

Authorities had previously insisted that supplies remain stable as they maintain strict controls of movement into and out of Xi'an. The city has logged over 960 domestic virus cases since December 9. Although the surge in China is low in comparison to rampant cases in Europe and the United States, Chinese officials imposed what they have called the "strictest" possible curbs in Xi'an.

Authorities have also detained at least seven people in the city over attempting to skip quarantine, disrupting order and spreading rumours, local media said. The outbreak comes as Beijing prepares to welcome thousands of overseas visitors to February's Winter Olympics. —AFP



XIAN, China: A resident undergoes a nucleic acid test for the COVID-19 coronavirus in Xi'an in China's northern Shaanxi province yesterday. —AFP

Business

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 30, 2021

Slow progress as Lebanon awaits IMF economic deal

Lebanon mired in one of the worst economic crises in modern times

BEIRUT: Lebanon is mired in an economic crisis branded by the World Bank as one of the worst in modern times, but officials are yet to strike an international bailout deal. The financial meltdown began in 2019, and Lebanon defaulted on its debt last year.

Politicians have failed to enact significant reforms to rescue the Mediterranean country, and many blame the ruling class and central bank policies for the crash. What is delaying progress on talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to strike a deal and unlock crucial donor funds?

How bad is the crisis?

Lebanon's GDP has plummeted from about \$55 billion in 2018 to a projected \$20.5 billion in 2021, a "brutal contraction" that the World Bank says "is usually associated with conflicts or wars". Negotiations with the IMF opened in May 2020, but after two months they stalled amid arguments over the size of financial losses.

Talks resumed in September this year after the formation of a new government headed by Prime Minister Najib Mikati. Lebanese officials have yet to submit a plan for negotiation.

But they have since agreed that financial sector losses amount to around \$69 billion, according to Deputy Prime Minister Saade Chami, who is leading Lebanon's IMF negotiation team.

The Lebanese pound has lost more than 90 percent of its value in two years, and four out of five Lebanese are living under the UN's poverty threshold. Even though the official value of the pound still stands at 1,507 to the dollar, the central bank has adopted multiple exchange rates to try to combat its devaluation on the black market. A unification of

the different rates "would not be possible" without an IMF deal and political consensus, central bank governor Riad Salameh said this month, adding that \$12-15 billion was needed to kickstart recovery.

What's on the table?

Lebanese officials met IMF delegates in early December to discuss "economic policies that will be an integral part of the funding program that Lebanon could receive," Chami said. Restructuring Lebanon's banking sector—a longstanding demand of donors—was among the topics discussed, he added.

"We need to prepare, in cooperation with the IMF, a comprehensive economic recovery plan that will be sent to the (IMF's) funding board for approval," Chami said. The Lebanese government—which has not met since October due to a political dispute over the fate of investigations into the August 2020 Beirut port blast—must also sign off on a deal, Chami added.

He said Lebanon could see "concrete results" as soon as January, but warned that the government must "show it is committed to reforms" before any agreement is reached.

Lebanon's prime minister said Tuesday that the first official meeting with the IMF would take place on January 15. The visiting IMF delegation will review the progress the government has made, and may return in early February to finalise a deal, Mikati added.

To audit or not?

A financial audit of the central bank is among the top demands of international donors, and is widely



Lebanon's GDP has plummeted from about \$55 billion in 2018 to a projected \$20.5 billion in 2021, a "brutal contraction" that the World Bank says "is usually associated with conflicts or wars".

viewed as a precondition for an IMF agreement. The Alvarez & Marsal (A&M) firm launched an audit in September 2020, but was forced to pull out two months later because the central bank failed to hand over necessary data.

In October this year, Lebanese President Michel Aoun said the company would resume its work, and it is due to submit its report to the government next month. Former vice governor of the central bank, Nasser Saidi, suggested the IMF would want to

examine the audit, but Chami said no demands had yet been made. "We don't know if a forensic audit, or any audit, will be part of a potential IMF program," Chami said.

A potential IMF agreement will ultimately bring in other donors, such as the World Bank and Gulf Arab states, who may demand it as a precondition for support. "We need to understand what is going on inside the central bank," Chami said. "There is a total lack of transparency." —AFP

Euro banknote artist fears redesign could revive rivalries

FRANKFURT: Twenty years after arriving in Europeans' wallets, euro banknotes will get a new look with help from the public, a process officials hope will make citizens feel closer to the single currency. But the Austrian artist behind the original banknotes fears the redesign could spark national rivalries, something he painstakingly tried to avoid with neutral illustrations the first time around. Now retired, Robert Kalina was working as a graphic designer for the Austrian National Bank when he won a competition in 1996 to create the artwork for the first-ever euro notes.

"It's incredible to think that the euro is already 20 years old, I hope it stays around for a long time to come," he told AFP. Kalina's designs were initially printed on 14.5 billion banknotes in denominations ranging from five to 500 euros.

The bills in circulation have since almost doubled in volume and found their way into the hands of some 350 million Europeans and many more peo-



This file photograph taken on January 27, 2020, shows euro banknotes and coins in Dortmund, western Germany.

ple around the world.

A challenge

Euro coins, which are minted by euro members, have a shared image on one side and a country-specific one the other. Ireland for instance opted for a harp, France for a tree. But euro banknotes are issued by the European Central Bank, and their designs had to be identical across the euro region and avoid "national bias". The challenge for Kalina was coming up with illustrations all Europeans could

identify with, without stirring nationalist sentiments or appearing to favor one eurozone nation over another.

"Portraits might have been allowed, but only if the faces were anonymous. I excluded that option right away," Kalina said. He decided to focus on architecture. Drawing on inspiration from existing buildings, Kalina simplified and reworked their depictions with the help of engineering experts, to ensure the structures "were no longer recognizable" but still believable.

His bridge designs, showcasing different historical styles in Europe, symbolize the connection between eurozone citizens, "but also between the European Union and the rest of the world". The windows and doorways on the other side of the notes stand for "openness and a vision of the future".

Despite the numerous crises that have rocked the currency since its birth, Kalina says the ideals he sought to portray are "still valid". But earlier this month, the ECB said the bills were ready for a makeover, announcing a design and consultation process with a decision expected in 2024.

Jealousy?

"After 20 years, it's time to review the look of our banknotes to make them more relatable to Europeans of all ages and backgrounds," said ECB president Christine Lagarde. Euro banknotes are "here to stay", she said, although the ECB is also considering creating a digital euro in step with other central banks around the globe. The ECB will rely on a 19-person panel of experts for the banknote design—one from each euro nation—and consult the public along the way. "The question is whether people have come far enough to accept, for example, famous people being represented", even if they are linked to a particular country, Kalina said. —AFP

Philippines lifts ban on new open-pit mines

MANILA: The Philippines has lifted a four-year ban on new open-pit mines, an official said yesterday, in a bid to revitalize the country's coronavirus-battered economy slammed by activists as "short-sighted".

The move sees the Philippine government reverse a ban imposed in 2017, when the then-environment minister blamed the sector for widespread ecological damage. Manila has since reversed course, encouraging mining investments to shore up government revenues as lockdowns and quarantine restrictions ravaged the economy. In April, President Rodrigo Duterte—who had previously threatened to shut down the sector completely—lifted a nine-year ban on new mining deals set by his predecessor.

Wilfredo Moncano, the director of the mines and geosciences bureau (MGB), said yesterday that the environment secretary Roy Cimatu had signed an order lifting the ban on open-pit mining in the country. "We offered the mining [industry] as a potential contributor to the recovery of the economy," Moncano said.

"Once these are commercially producing... these are the ones that will be helping pay our loans to fight the pandemic," Moncano said about nine prospective mining projects stand to benefit from the order and



The Philippines has lifted a four-year ban on new open-pit mines, an official said yesterday.

that the government could generate up to 80 billion pesos (\$1.6 billion) in taxes and royalties annually once commercial operations begin. Open pit mining directly extracts minerals on the ground and differs from other methods that require tunneling or underground mining. The Philippines is one of the world's biggest suppliers of nickel ore and is also rich in copper and gold, but the government estimates 95 percent of its mineral resources remain untapped.

Mining revenues contributed less than one percent of GDP to the economy last year, according to government data. The Chamber of Mines of the Philippines welcomed the decision to lift the ban, saying it "will enable the industry to contribute more to our country's economic recovery". But anti-mining advocates said the decision was a "short-sighted and misplaced development priority of the government". —AFP

Sri Lanka downplays default fears

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's central bank sought yesterday to downplay fears of a debt default, saying its foreign currency reserves had almost doubled and would remain "comfortable" throughout 2022.

The tourism-dependent economy was hampered by the pandemic and the government has imposed a broad import ban to shore up forex reserves, triggering shortages of essential goods such as fuel and sugar. Earlier this month, ratings agency Fitch downgraded Sri Lanka, seeing an "increased probability of a default event in coming months" on the country's \$26 billion in foreign debt.

The central bank said Wednesday, however, that its foreign currency reserves had almost doubled to \$3.1 billion from \$1.6 billion last month, a level that was only sufficient to pay for a month's imports. "Accordingly, the Government and the Central Bank are confident that the reserve position will remain at comfortable levels throughout the year 2022," the bank said in a statement. It also hit out at the "hasty and inexplicable decisions" of rating agencies. —AFP

Stocks fall as investors look to uncertain 2022

NEW YORK: Stock markets mostly retreated yesterday as a "Santa Claus rally" showed signs of fatigue amid lingering fears over the Omicron variant and uncertainty about economic prospects for 2022. COVID-19 cases have surged across the world, prompting governments to impose new measures to limit contagion while the travel industry faced thousands of flight cancellations.

Oil prices dropped yesterday, while the dollar steadied against major rivals. Warnings from the World Health Organization that the risk from the variant remains "very high" have compounded the sense that the pandemic is far from over, though data showing a reduced risk of hospitalization has lifted spirits. "With market activity much reduced for the holiday season, investors continue to tentatively price in a global recovery hitting a minor bump, and not a pothole," noted Jeffrey Halley, senior market analyst at OANDA trading group.

Reflecting the uncertainty, Tokyo closed lower in thin holiday trade yesterday, with the market weighed down by US futures losses. But London rose in midday deals, as the benchmark FTSE 100 index resumed trading after a long holiday weekend. UK traders were catching up with gains across eurozone indices on Tuesday.

China's main stocks index fell in a slide analysts attributed partly to losses for major liquor brands—including Kweichow Moutai, one of the world's biggest drinks companies. Expectations that the country's central bank will add further stimulus in 2022 offered some hope. Trading volumes remain thin going into the new year, when prospects for global growth and the long-term impact of the Omicron variant are expected to become clearer.

Moody's economist Mark Zandi said in a note the Omicron wave would dent growth in the first quarter, but "not have a material impact" on 2022 overall because of a rebound later in the year. "Even after the Omicron wave abates, there will almost surely be others. But we expect each new wave to be less disruptive to the healthcare system and economy than the wave before it," he said. —AFP

Business

KFH concludes a successful CSR year

Innovative activities, comprehensive initiatives and qualitative partnerships

KUWAIT: KFH social responsibility program was characterized by its diversified and comprehensive social initiatives and contributions in 2021. The bank's social efforts have resulted in launching several diversified initiatives, events, and activities at the banking sector level.

KFH has succeeded in taking the concept of social responsibility to a new level of innovation, generality, and sustainability to serve all society categories and develop social and institutional business.

Group DGM, Public Relation & Media at KFH, Yousef Al-Ruwaieh said that coping with and fulfilling the needs and interests of society represent the basic part of KFH approach. He added that KFH contributions in 2021 were diversified and comprehensive, covering several aspects such as environment, health, youth, education, financial and banking culture and recognizing provided initiators and other society segments, such as persons with special needs and others.

He added that the sustainability factor was strongly present in the social responsibility program through the partnerships and programs launched by KFH in collaboration with local and international entities.



Youth and sports

The youth occupied a major part of KFH interest in 2021. The bank launched several qualitative initiatives and distinguished activities to fulfill youth aspirations and interests.

Al-Ruwaieh said that, in this respect, KFH has succeeded in organizing the Padel sport tournament which is the first of its kind at Kuwait level. The tournament was a great success among the youth category and was highly appreciated by the public with tremendous media coverage on various social media channels.

He added that the organizing of Padel 2 under the patronage of the Kuwait Olympic Committee in cooperation with Kuwait Padel Committee, confirms KFH success in fulfilling youth interests and aspirations.

Affirming KFH as the major supporter of youth, Al-Ruwaieh indicated that KFH is the first bank in Kuwait to launch the platform "You are our pride" to honor distinguished people in various fields, such as sports and others. Also, it is the only bank that has a "KFH Initiators" team which includes names that have participated in holding the name of Kuwait high in various fields.

Al-Ruwaieh said that KFH has succeeded in taking social initiatives to a totally new level of innovation utilizing digital technology and other modern applications in collaboration with the creative Kuwaiti youth. As a result of this strategy's success in social responsibility KFH organized during the lockdown period and the exceptional circumstances the virtual walking challenge initiative in cooperation with V-Thru application. The initiative recorded more than 60 thousand participations from various society segments in less than a month.

As for the program "Better health for better life" and as a testimony to concern about youth and sports and to encourage a healthy lifestyle, KFH had organized a virtual cycling marathon for the public where people can participate from any place, they wish according to health conditions. Also, KFH fostered sporting games in cooperation with the application Li3ib.

KFH organized in 2021 the digital race "KFH Digital Wallet Treasure Hunt" which was held at 360 Mall with the participation of 30 teams.

'KFH is Green' campaign

KFH seeks to set a good example in enhancing environmental participations and adopting environment friendly practices and mechanisms to achieve a sustainable growth impact. Accordingly, KFH had launched the "KFH is Green" campaign in 2021. Al-Ruwaieh said that KFH had signed a strategic partnership with the Public Authority for



Abdulwahab Al-Rushoud, princess Ghaida and Maha Al-Berjis



Al-Rushoud touring Jordanian Red Crescent projects

- Al-Ruwaieh: Coping with and fulfilling society's interests and needs capture KFH focus
- KFH contributions in 2021 reflected diversity, comprehensiveness, and sustainability
- Environment and sustainability initiatives topped the social responsibility program
- The bank organized unprecedented tournaments and competitions at the banking sector level
- Social initiatives were taken to a new level of innovation via modern technology
- Launched the "KFH is Green" campaign to spread environmental awareness and adopt environment friendly mechanisms
- Youth initiatives captured KFH major interest and concern in 2021
- KFH resumed its distinguished activities and exclusive offers to customers in general and to youth
- KFH launched an unprecedented initiative to train a group of students

from the Kuwait Society for the Handicapped

- KFH fostered several student events and graduation ceremonies
- The bank renewed strategic partnerships with several universities and schools
- KFH launched awareness campaigns on the international days for diabetes and breast cancer
- KFH was the first bank in Kuwait to launch "You are our pride" platform to honor persons with distinguished accomplishments
- KFH organized the virtual walking challenge initiative and the cycling race to enhance interest in health and cope with KFH campaign "Better health...better life"
- KFH supported initiators and the owners of youth projects through their participation in KFH exclusive offers
- KFH was one of the main subsidizers and contributors to the awareness campaign "Diraya"
- KFH is the major sponsor of engineering student's graduation projects



Agriculture Affairs and Fish Resources to enhance its efforts in the plantation and greening campaign of Kuwait areas for the agricultural season 2021/2022. This affirms KFH belief in its pioneering role in spreading awareness on the need to protect environment and agriculture.

He added that KFH has signed a strategic partnership with the Sidra Initiative and the Green Dream Voluntary Team as part of the qualitative "KFH is Green" campaign and its endeavor to protect environment and call for the plantation and greening of Kuwait.

KFH has subsidized and participated in several environment related activities in cooperation with other entities e.g., the landscaping initiative of the capital streets and facilities in partnership with the Capital Governorate, organizing beaches cleaning campaigns in cooperation with the Public Environment Authority to spread environmental culture and raise the level of awareness on the significance of keeping Kuwait environment clean.

Supporting students and graduates

As part of its social responsibility and its keenness to support students and youth and to honor the achievers, KFH has participated in the graduation ceremony of the students at the college of business administration - Kuwait University. Also, KFH fostered the graduation projects of Kuwait University students - College of Engineering and Petroleum considering that the bank is the major sponsor of students' graduation projects.

KFH has renewed the Memorandum of

Understanding with the Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST) aiming to continue cooperation and execution of joint programs e.g, holding training workshops, providing academic and research expertise, internal internships, attracting qualified staff to "Forsa" program and other job opportunity programs to work at KFH. Also, KFH organized social and educational activities and events to serve students, worked on recruiting distinguished youth at KFH, qualified graduates to have field experience, encouraged internal internship programs, exchanged research, supported students' forums and clubs and performed many other aspects of cooperation.

KFH renewed the memorandum of understanding with GUST and fostered the university students' graduation ceremonies. KFH renewed its strategic partnership with the Australian College in Kuwait and participated, during the year, in the virtual job fair organized by the said college.

KFH renewed its strategic partnership with the administration and marketing club at the College of Business Administration as part of its continuous support to the club activities and events to serve the students.

As part of KFH care for its employees, the bank has honored more than 50 students of the children of KFH employees who scored more than 90 percent in their high school results.

Persons with special needs

In an unprecedented initiative at the Kuwait banking sector level, Al-Ruwaieh said that KFH

had signed a strategic partnership agreement with the Kuwait Society for the Welfare of Handicapped, according to which KFH shall make various initiatives including the training of a group of disabled students in various KFH departments. Al-Ruwaieh added that KFH has honored the first batch of the society students and indicated that KFH is very proud of this qualitative initiative which has reflected the bank strategy and leadership in the field of social responsibility and its major role in supporting the persons with special needs.

Health

Coping with the "Better Health for Better Life" campaign which encourages sports and healthy activities, Al-Ruwaieh said that KFH collaborated with Mishrif Park and the "Li3ib" application to give the opportunity to KFH customers to practice and enjoy cycling at Mishrif Park.

He added that KFH has launched several initiatives focusing on encouraging the practice of sports and health activities by signing strategic partnerships with various health entities to encourage employees to care for their health. KFH launched a fully integrated awareness campaign on the International Diabetes Day and participated in the campaign organized by Dasman Diabetes Institute at Al-Hamra Mall. KFH has also organized a fully integrated awareness campaign on breast cancer during the month of October titled "Be Aware"

Supporting youth projects

KFH support to initiators and owners of youth



Business



projects reflects its leading role in encouraging Kuwaiti youth and enhancing the concept of business leadership and youth initiatives. To this end, Al-Ruwaieh said that KFH is playing a major role in subsidizing and financing youth initiatives.

Social contributions

Al-Ruwaieh indicated that the strategic partnership which KFH had concluded with the Ministry of Interior has resulted in the execution of several social programs and activities during the year e.g., organizing visits to the security staff and appreciating their role during the past period, utilizing KFH social media channels to support the Ministry of Interior initiatives by spreading traffic awareness, providing educational and awareness instructions to road users and pedestrians, giving instructions to parents to observe the safety of their children during the “back to school” season, coordinating in KFH Ramadan program “Do good deeds in Ramadan” and many other initiatives.

Cooperation with Red Crescent

In a new addition to its long record of accomplishments and initiatives that would strengthen the concept of efficiency in achieving a compre-

hensive social growth, Al-Ruwaieh indicated that KFH has signed an agreement with Kuwait Red Crescent Society to organize aid and medical projects for the Syrian refugees and the needy persons in Jordan in cooperation with the Jordan Red Crescent. The agreement includes supporting the winter clothing initiative, medical aid, Kuwait doctors’ participation in surgical operations, providing 1-year foods supplies, establishing a clinic and

other social activities included in the agreement.

In addition, KFH has made donations to the Kuwait Red Crescent to distribute school bags and accessories to the children of the needy families registered at the Kuwait Red Crescent Society.

Diraya campaign

Out of its belief in enhancing financial culture for various society segments and making the best benefit out of all banking services, Al-Ruwaieh said that KFH was one of the main subsidizers and contributors to the “Be Aware” campaign launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait in cooperation with the Kuwait Banking Association. He added that KFH participation in the awareness campaign was very effective as it comprised the posting and spreading of awareness materials on social media channels and all e-channels of the bank.

To ensure the spread of “Be Aware” campaign on social media and achieve its goals, Al-Ruwaieh said that KFH has provided a special budget for paid advertisements and availed all advantages and services offered on social media to enhance

the spread of the campaign through quizzes and questions to the public.

He added that the “Be Aware” campaign is not limited to the public and KFH customers only. The bank is working on spreading awareness among its employees by spreading the campaign contents through its internal network and the employees account on Instagram.

Ramadan initiatives

Al-Ruwaieh indicated that the exceptional circumstances which Kuwait had undergone did not prevent KFH from continuing its distinguished programs and activities which it launched annually as part of the Holy Month of Ramadan program. He added that the program “Increase good deeds in Ramadan 6” for the year 2021 was full of social activities and contributions and various youth, sport, and awareness campaigns. It aimed to achieve distinction in social innovation by applying digitalization and other virtual activities to create an added value for society and enhance the interconnection between KFH and the public while observing health conditions to ensure general safety.



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Business

Inside the ECB's secret lab to sniff out fake euro bills

Banknote counterfeiting in Eurozone fell to a historically low level in 2020

FRANKFURT: On the 23rd floor of the European Central Bank's towering Frankfurt headquarters, on the other side of a security door, anti-counterfeiting experts are poring over some of the best fake banknotes in the eurozone. The room, off limits to outsiders, at first glance recalls a high school science lab—an unusually well-equipped one.

Lined up on the workbenches are 3D microscopes, ultra-sensitive scales and special devices designed to detect around a dozen of the safety features embedded in genuine euro banknotes—and spot the forgeries. The analysis done by the handful of specialists in the room helps the ECB keep up to date with the latest counterfeiting techniques, and hopefully stay a step ahead.

Twenty years after the launch of the single currency, the risk of a eurozone citizen holding a fake euro note is “very slim”, said Jean-Michel Grimal, head of the ECB's currency development division.

And the chances have been getting slimmer by the year. According to the ECB—responsible for issuing bills while the central banks of the 19 eurozone nations each produce their own coins—banknote counterfeiting fell to a historically low level in 2020. Around 460,000 fake euro bills were taken out of circulation last year, an 18-percent drop on 2019.

By comparison, there are currently 27 billion genuine euro notes out there. The safety of euro banknotes has contributed to the “strong trust” eurozone citizens have in the single currency, Grimal said, with recent surveys putting support for the euro at around 80 percent.

Helping police

The lab's biggest treasure is a large iron cabinet

that requires two people to open it, each only knowing part of the secret combination. Inside is a trove of nearly 1,000 fake banknotes, from five- to 500-euro bills, that have been studied over the past two decades.

Every eurozone country has its own counterfeiting detection center, but Frankfurt holds the most “interesting” examples because they are considered the best imitations, said Eric Languillat, one of the ECB's counterfeiting experts. The analysis done here also helps to give “a quantitative view of the (fake) notes circulating in Europe”, he said.

The findings are shared with police services like the EU police agency Europol to help them track down counterfeiting networks. The ECB's research and development teams, tasked with constantly improving the quality and security of euro bills, also feed off the lab's discoveries.

“If we notice the counterfeiters using certain technological methods, the R&D teams will look at what they can put in place to counteract them,” said Grimal. The ECB's tampering-fighting efforts come at a price, requiring a sizable annual budget. But the money spent “is a good investment compared to the cost of a counterfeiting crisis”, said Grimal.

‘Feel, look, tilt’

The Frankfurt analysts examine the bills into the smallest details. On one computer screen, a genuine 20-euro note is blown up to nearly 70 times its size, revealing the tiny waves inside the “20” figure, resembling the ridges of a ploughed field, and quite a challenge to imitate.

Citizens don't necessarily “have the instinct to look closely at notes,” said Languillat.



FRANKFURT: Eric Languillat, counterfeit expert at the Counterfeit Analysis Center of the European Central Bank (ECB) use a microscope to check a fifty Euros bill at The European Central Bank headquarters in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany. —AFP

That's why the ECB has for years encouraged the public to use the “feel, look, tilt” method to check that what they're holding is the real thing—no microscope required. Special printing ensures no other notes feel like euro notes, holding a bill up to the

light reveals the watermark and security thread, while tilting it changes the hologram and color-shifting images. “If you look carefully at a banknote, the quality of a fake is generally pretty bad, it should be easy to spot,” he said. —AFP

Five surprising things to know about the euro

FRANKFURT: Do one and two-cent coins have a future? What does the Dutch town of Spijkenisse have to do with banknotes? Can you still exchange Estonian kroons? Here are some lesser-known facts about the euro, which entered circulation 20 years ago in January.

Old habits

Hidden under mattresses, stuffed into old furniture or stashed beneath floorboards, old coins and notes denominated in long defunct national currencies can still be found in homes across the eurozone. In Berlin and the neighboring state of Brandenburg alone, some 2.63 million deutschmarks (1.35 million euros) were exchanged between January and the end of November 2021.

According to the Bundesbank, there are still around 12.35 billion deutschmarks (6.31 billion euros) out there somewhere. Some are in the hands of collectors, while others are undoubtedly held abroad, as the deutschmark was a prized reserve currency in many countries.

Unlimited amounts of old currency can still be exchanged into euros in many countries, including Germany, Austria, Ireland and the three Baltic states.

Italy stopped redeeming its old coins and banknotes in 2011, with France and Greece following suit in 2012.



Endangered species

The European Central Bank stopped producing purple 500-euro notes in 2019, arguing that they were rarely used in everyday life and were making it easier to commit fraud.

However, you can still pay with 500-euro banknotes issued between 2002 and 2019. As of November, there were still some 376 million such notes in circulation. At the other end of the scale, one and two-cent coins may soon meet a similar fate, as eurozone members complain they are cumbersome and expensive to produce.

Belgium, The Netherlands, Ireland, Finland and Italy have already begun trying to phase out the coins by asking retailers to round off their prices.

Big fat zero

They look and feel like real cash—but the

zero-euro banknotes created by French souvenir entrepreneur Richard Faille in 2015 have no value to anyone but collectors.

The notes have pictures of famous sights or monuments on one side, and a big fat zero on the other. Authorized for printing by the ECB, they are made with the same ink as real euros and have many of the same technical features, including watermarks, security threads, holograms and individual security numbers. However, they are printed using different paper.

Stranger than fiction

In order to avoid inflaming political rivalries, the monuments featured on euro banknotes are not real but fictional structures based on common European design practices. But the seven fictional bridges featured on euro banknotes have now been turned into reality as part of a housing development in Spijkenisse, a town near Rotterdam with a population of around 70,000. The real-life bridges were created by Robin Stam, a designer from the Netherlands.

Cash capers

Anyone entering or leaving the European Union carrying more than 10,000 euros in cash must declare it to customs. In April, a man travelling from France to Spain was intercepted by French customs officers who found 388,460 euros hidden in 25 socks in his German-registered van.

But cash amounts declared at customs are typically much larger than this. In 2020, German customs recorded 13,335 declarations totalling 31 billion euros, or an average of 2.3 million euros per declaration. —AFP

Two decades on, euro can't shake reputation as price driver

FRANKFURT: Europeans have been living with euro banknotes and coins for 20 years now, but many still point the finger at the single currency for covertly driving up consumer prices—despite plenty of evidence to the contrary. “The euro is a catastrophe, it's catastrophic,” says Maria Napolitano, a 65-year-old Italian living in Frankfurt.

“With 100 deutschmarks, you could fill up your shopping trolley. Now, 100 euros aren't enough to fill two bags.” It's an impression that is shared by many across the eurozone, from Paris to Rome, Madrid to Athens. Victor Irun, a 53-year-old teacher in Madrid, said that for Spaniards the switch to the euro was “like entering a club for rich people while not wearing the right clothes.”

“You had the impression we weren't yet ready,” he told AFP. “It was as if we were living in Spain, but paying with French or Dutch money.” Some Germans even coined a new nickname for the single currency—“teuro”, a pun on the German word for expensive, “teuer”. In a 2006 study, university professor Hans Wolfgang Brachinger compiled an index of “perceived” inflation among Germans, which measured a “felt” increase in consumer prices of seven percent between 2001 and 2002, compared with around two percent normally.

In reality, however, official statistics showed no pick-up in inflation in Europe's biggest economy. “There was a very strong feeling in several countries that prices had gone up, and yet we had official stats telling us otherwise,” said Giovanni Mastrobuoni, an economics professor at the University of Turin. In a detailed study on the issue, he tracked the prices of different everyday goods in the eurozone—from fruit, vegetables and bread, to beverages and restaurant meals—and found that the prices of some inexpensive products really did increase as a result of the switch to the euro. —AFP

110m of Qurain shares sold in a single auction at 30% above opening price

KUWAIT: The Chief Executive Officer of KFH Capital (The investment arm of Kuwait Finance House), Abdulaziz Naser Al-Marzouk, said that the success of the sale transaction of 110 million of Qurain shares to Petrochemical Industries Company in a single auction and in one day against a value exceeding the opening price by 30 percent affirms the market readiness to accommodate such major deals. The market has all the means to conclude and finalize this kind of deals. Accordingly, this represents an opportunity to expand the private sector role and achieve better employment of liquidity. He indicated that the market needs this kind of stock deals. KFH Capital is currently considering the possibility of executing this type of new deals in collaboration with local partners considering the major success achieved from the sale of Qurain shares.

Al-Marzouk added, in a press release, that Qurain shares were offered for sale in an auction with an opening price of Fils 320 per share i.e., a total value of KD 46.750 million. He affirmed KFH Capital ability to execute sale and acquisition transactions of major companies shares. KFH Capital provides all human expertise, facilities, technical and organizational arrangements to achieve such deals, thus providing more investment opportunities to the company's customers and the market in general.

He praised the success which the sale transaction has achieved, which makes it a model for similar future successful deals. Also, he appreciated the remarkable cooperation which KFH Capital



• **Al-Marzouk:** The deal affirms the market ability to accommodate the purchase of grand companies shares.



• **Al-Azmi:** The sale proved share's quality and durability of Qurain's position and plans.

received from Kuwait Petrochemical Industries and Bourse Kuwait who have exerted all efforts to make this deal a success and facilitate the conclusion thereof.

Al-Marzouk reiterated that the advisory services team at KFH Capital has managed the sale transaction in a professional manner. The sale was made at the highest price in a transparent and direct auction comprising 3 competitors. He added that since the

day KFH Capital was appointed by Petrochemical Industries Company as a sale advisor for the sale of 10 percent of Qurain Petrochemical Industries Company shares, the specialized team of the company started the financial study process and the marketing of this investment opportunity to several local and global investors. The team has also followed up the successful completion of the sale transaction in an auction at Bourse Kuwait.

From his side, the CEO - Petrochemical Industries Company, Mutlaq Rashed Al-Azmi appreciated and praised the arrangements and preparations made by all parties to execute the sale transactions of 10 percent of Qurain shares in an auction with returns reaching KD 46.750 Million. He indicated that KFH Capital has managed the deal in a highly professional manner and achieved the best results. The remarkable demand on the auction and the increase in the share price compared to the opening price depict the quality of the offered shares, durability of Qurain financial position, investors trust and the volume of future accomplishments and plan.

Al-Azmi added that Qurain Company achieved major success and remarkable results since the day it was listed in the Kuwait Stock Exchange. The company currently controls several companies working in several fields in the petrochemicals market, thus achieving remarkable financial performance, sundry cash flows, enhancing profitability and minimizing the risks of depending on a single market or field of business. He reiterated that the deal which coincides with the ending of 2021 is the most important and successful deal by all measures. He appreciated the efforts exerted by KFH Capital which has proven its capability to achieve the best marketing calibers and utilize all its facilities to conclude this successful deal. The results of the deal have fulfilled the expectations and aspirations of Petrochemical Industries Company considering the proceeds from selling this amount of shares.

Lifestyle | Feature



Books are displayed inside a bookstore at Karakoy port in Istanbul.



Turkish doctorate student Gulfer Ulas visits a bookstore on Istiklal Avenue in Istanbul.



A woman sits inside a bookstore at Karakoy port in Istanbul. —AFP photos

TURKISH CRISIS TURNS BOOKS INTO VANISHING LUXURIES

Turkish doctoral student Gulfer Ulas saw the first edition of her favorite Thomas Mann collection published for 33 liras. She found the second print of the same two-volume set selling months later at her Istanbul book shop for 70 liras (about \$6 at the latest exchange rate).

The jump exemplifies the debilitating unpredictability of Turkey's raging economic crisis on almost all facets of daily life - from shopping to education and culture. Publishers fear it could also kill off an industry that offers a rare voice of diversity in a country where most media obey President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's socially conservative government. "I am a PhD student in international relations so I have to read a lot. I spend almost 1,000 liras a month on books on my reading list even though I also download from the internet," Ulas said. "Book prices are skyrocketing."

'Essentials over books'

The Turkish book industry - almost entirely dependent on paper imports - pinpoints one of the flaws in the economic experiment Erdogan has unleashed on his nation of 84 million people in the past few months. Erdogan has ripped up the economic rule book by orchestrating sharp interest rate cuts in a bid to bring down chronically rising consumer prices.

Economists struggle to remember the last time a big country has done something similar because cheap lending is widely presumed to cause inflation - not cure it. Turks' fears about further erosion of their purchasing power prompted a surge in gold and dollar purchases that erased nearly half the lira's value in a matter of weeks. The accelerating losses forced Erdogan last week to announce new currency support measures - backed by reportedly heavy exchange rate interventions - that have managed to erase a

good chunk of the slide.

Few economists see this as a long-term solution. The lira now routinely gains or loses five percent of its value a day. Kirmizi Kedi publishing house owner Haluk Hepkon says he fears all this uncertainty "will compel people to prioritise buying essentials and put aside buying books". "You publish a book, and let's say it becomes a hit and it costs 30 liras. And you go to a second edition in a week and the price climbs to 35 liras," Hepkon said. "Then for the third or fourth printing, only God knows how much it will cost."

'Paying the price'

Turkey's last official yearly inflation reading in early December stood at 21 percent - a figure opposition parties claim is being underreported by the state. The next report on January 3 is almost certain to show a big bump because the lira's implosion has ballooned the price of imported energy and raw materials such

as those needed to make paper. Applied economics professor Steve Hanke of Johns Hopkins University calculates Turkey's current annual inflation rate at more than 80 percent.

Turkish Publishers Association president Kenan Kocaturk said global supply chain disruptions caused by the coronavirus pandemic have contributed to his industry's problems by raising the price of unbleached pulp. Turkey imports the raw material because its own paper mills have been privatized and then largely shut down. "Only two of them continue production while the others' machines were sold for scrap and their lands were sold," Kocaturk said. "Turkey is paying the price for not seeing paper as a strategic asset."

'Resistance'

Publishers are already trying to minimize risks by planning to put fewer books in print in the coming year. The

Heretik publishing house says it will not print some books "due to the rise in the exchange rate and the extraordinary increase in paper costs". Aras publishing house editor Rober Koptas said he was worried because printers represented a voice of ideological "resistance" in Turkey. "Almost the entire press speaks in the same voice and the universities are being silenced," said Koptas.

"But culture is just as important as food, and maybe more so given there is a need for educated people to address economic woes," Hepkon of Kirmizi Kedi added. Avid readers such as Ibrahim Ozcay say the crisis is already keeping them from buying their favorite books for friends. "I was told that the book I want now costs 38 liras. I had bought it for 24 liras," said Ozcay. "They say this is due to the lack of paper on the market, which does not surprise me. Everything in Turkey is imported now," he fumed. —AFP



In this file photo, Swiss-French photographer Sabine Weiss poses in front of her pictures as she visits a retrospective exhibition of her work. —AFP

Street photography pioneer Weiss dies

Swiss-French photographer Sabine Weiss, who chronicled social change with a unique gaze for nearly eight decades, has died aged 97 in her Paris home, her family said yesterday. Weiss was the last of the French humanist photography school of post-World War II that reimagined the evocative powers of images, which included Robert Doisneau, Willy Ronis and Brassai.

A pioneer of what later became known as street photography, Weiss captured the condition of ordinary people in the French capital, often outdoors, in a body of work that has been shown in major retrospectives around the world. She was also in high demand as a portrait photographer of artists, including composers Benjamin Britten and Igor Stravinsky, renowned cellist Pablo Casals and French painter Fernand Leger.

"From the start I had to make a living from photography, it wasn't something artistic," Weiss told AFP in an interview in 2014, adding that she started taking pictures in 1942. "It was a craft, I was a craftswoman of photography," she said. Weiss was born in Switzerland and moved to Paris in 1946, and she later became a French citizen. Her work has featured in 160 exhibits and is shown in permanent collections of several leading museums, including the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and the Centre Pompidou in Paris.

Weiss said that she had wanted to immortalize "the snotty-nosed kids," "the beggars" and "the little piss-takers" in her photos. "A good picture must move you, have a good composition and be sober," she told French daily La Croix. "People's sensitiveness must jump out at you."

She told the France Inter broadcaster: "The people who know me are the ones who like my view of things. I have empathy." In the 1950s the photographer and her American husband, the painter Hugh

Weiss, explored the streets of Paris, often at night, looking to capture furtive moments on film, such as a quick kiss, crowds rushing to the metro or workers on construction sites. "Back then the capital, at night, was covered in a beautiful mist," she remembered. She loved taking pictures of children, saying "it's great fun to play with street kids."

Born Sabine Weber on July 23, 1924, in Saint-Gingolph on the shore of Lake Geneva, she bought her first camera at 12, and became an apprentice in a prestigious Geneva photo studio at 16. Her first job after her arrival in Paris was with the fashion photographer Willy Maywald. After she opened her own studio in 1950 in the bourgeois 16th Arrondissement of the capital, Doisneau brought her onto the team of the iconic fashion magazine Vogue and into the Rapho photo agency.

She met and photographed many of the celebrities of the time, travelled extensively, and made a living out of work in the fashion, advertising, architecture and performance industries. Apart from Vogue, her media clients included Newsweek, Time, Life, Esquire and Paris Match. "I've done everything in photography," she told AFP in 2020. "I went into morgues and into factories, I took pictures of rich people and I took pictures of fashion," she said. "But what remains are the pictures I took for myself, in stolen moments."

In 2017, Weiss donated 200,000 negatives and 7,000 contact sheets to the Elysee museum in Lausanne, Switzerland. Renowned for her prowess with black-and-white photography, she was nonetheless pleased with the arrival of digital cameras, saying they brought "amazing" progress in sharpness and lens quality. But she also observed that "people don't really take pictures of the world around them anymore, instead they take pictures of themselves." —AFP

TIME CAPSULE FROM CONFEDERATE STATUE REVEALS US WAR ARTIFACTS

A time capsule buried 130 years ago in the base of a statue of a Confederate general revealed its secrets on Tuesday - bullets, buttons and currency from the 1861-65 US Civil War along with other artifacts. The copper box was found Monday embedded in the stone pedestal of a statue of General Robert E Lee, who commanded the Army of Northern Virginia during the bloody conflict between the North and the South.

Lee's bronze statue was erected in 1890 in Richmond, the Virginia city that was the capital of the pro-slavery South during the Civil War. It was taken down in September, one of a number of Confederate monuments removed in recent months. The time capsule was opened on Tuesday by conservators at the Department of Historic Resources in Richmond and the contents were in relatively good condition, having suffered only a bit of water damage. "It's in better shape than we had expected," said Kate Ridgway, the state archaeological conservator. At a ceremony during which the 14x14x8 inch (35x35x20 centimeter) box was opened before live television cameras. "We thought everything would be soup and it's not soup so that's great," Ridgway said.

An 1887 article in a Richmond newspaper had listed some of the items secreted away in the time capsule and they matched some of those found on Tuesday. The newspaper article had mentioned what would have been a rare 1865 photograph of assassinated president Abraham Lincoln in his casket but no such photo was found. What was found was an engraving from the April 29, 1865 edition of Harper's Weekly depicting a woman weeping next to Lincoln's casket.



Photo shows a time capsule, a shoebox-sized container which was found last week in Richmond, Virginia, in the granite pedestal of a statue erected in 1890 of General Robert E Lee, who commanded the Army of Northern Virginia during the Civil War. —AFP

Bullets, banknotes, buttons, coins

Several Civil War bullets known as Minie balls were also found in the container along with a piece of wood with a bullet lodged in it. There was a shell fragment said to be from the 1862 Battle of Fredericksburg. "We were actually afraid this was live ordnance," Ridgway said. "This was part of the reason we had the bomb squad come out. It is, in

fact, not live." A small Confederate flag and a Masonic symbol carved out of wood were also found enclosed in an envelope.

The wood used for the carvings reportedly came from a tree that grew over the grave of another famed Confederate general, Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson. Also found in the box were Confederate banknotes, buttons with the seal of the state of Virginia and a bundle of 12 copper coins. The box also contained a black leather bound Bible and an 1884 edition of a book written by Carlton McCarthy titled "Detailed Minutiae of Soldier Life in the Army of Northern Virginia." A commemorative bookmark featuring General Lee was stuck inside the McCarthy book.

Also found were an 1881 guide to Richmond, an 1887 almanac, a number of Masonic documents and the 1886 and 1887 reports of the Richmond Chamber of Commerce. A different shoebox-sized container found in the base of the Lee statue was opened by the conservators last week but was clearly not the time capsule mentioned in the 1887 newspaper piece. It contained three water-logged books, a photograph in a soggy cloth envelope and a coin.

The items appeared to have been mementos left behind for posterity by some of the workers who erected the statue. Lee's statue in Richmond became the focus of protests for racial justice last year following the death of George Floyd, a Black man who was murdered by a white police officer in Minnesota. During the Civil War, the Confederate South seceded from the United States and fought to maintain slavery, which the rest of the country had abolished. —AFP

'ROBOT CHEF' COOKS UP VEGGIE BURGERS



Photo shows cut up halves of plant-based hamburgers with meaty taste, made and cooked by a robot according to customer requirements. —AFP photos



A man extracts a cooked plant-based hamburger with a meaty taste, produced by a robot according to customer requirements.

A fast food restaurant is serving up a veggie steak made and cooked by a robot that tailors ingredients and cooking time to customer tastes. "It's the first time that a machine is making a personalized hamburger by itself," said Rachel Vizman, CEO of SavorEat, a Zionist start-up that specializes in meat alternatives. Customers can use an app to choose the amount of vegetable protein or fat in their "steak", as well as its size and how they

want it cooked, she said.

The "robot chef", which is the size of a large oven, can make three different steaks simultaneously - though a human staff member makes up the burgers. It mixes ingredients including beans, potatoes and chickpeas to create a texture that "resembles that of real meat", said Vizman, who started the business in 2018 along with two professors from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

The steaks at the BBB restaurant in the coastal city of Herzliya are cooked within minutes, she said, adding that they contain no animal proteins and are kosher. "We hope to respond to the cravings of vegetarians, vegans and flexitarians," who occasionally eat meat. BBB's Ahuva Turgeman said. Around five percent of Zionists say they are vegan and the market for meat alternatives is on the rise, according to SavorEat. —AFP

Sports

Djokovic withdraws from ATP Cup, deepening Australian Open doubts

COVID casts a dark shadow over Australian Open

SYDNEY: Novak Djokovic has pulled out of this week's ATP Cup in Sydney, organizers said yesterday, heightening doubts over whether he will defend his Australian Open title. There has been intense speculation as to whether he will travel to Australia, having refused to confirm if he has been inoculated against the coronavirus.

"World No 1 Novak Djokovic has withdrawn from the 2022 ATP Cup," organizers said in a statement ahead of Saturday's start to the team tournament. "Team Serbia will now be led by world No 33 Dusan Lajovic." Djokovic, the nine-time Australian Open champion, could win a record 21st Grand Slam title if he plays at Melbourne Park next month, but to enter Australia he and members of his entourage have to be vaccinated.

He has previously expressed his opposition to the vaccine and his father Srdjan said in late November that Djokovic would probably not play the first Grand Slam of the year, accusing the organizers of "blackmail". Djokovic has been named in the entry list for the Australian Open, which starts on January 17, but he could yet withdraw. He was also originally on the entry list for the ATP Cup. Tennis Australia has organized charter flights to bring international stars into Melbourne and Sydney.

Defending women's Australian Open champion

Naomi Osaka was among those to touch down on Tuesday, but Djokovic was not on board. Players can also opt to fly commercial. The ATP Cup has been hit by several withdrawals - either because of COVID or injury - and as a result France will replace Austria in Group B after Dominic Thiem and Dennis Novak pulled out, organizers said yesterday. Team Russia's Andrey Rublev, who has COVID, Aslan Karatsev and Evgeny Donskoy have also withdrawn, the ATP Cup said, as has the USA's Austin Krajicek.

COVID looks set to cast a dark shadow over the Australian Open and the raft of tournaments in the country beforehand. Spanish superstar Rafael Nadal, who was due to play a warm-up event in Melbourne next week, was among several players to have contracted the virus at an Abu Dhabi exhibition tournament this month. His Abu Dhabi opponent, Wimbledon semi-finalist

Denis Shapovalov, also later tested positive.

Three female players at the same event also tested positive - Olympic gold medalist Belinda Bencic, US Open champion Emma Raducanu and Wimbledon quarter-finalist Ons Jabeur. Earlier yesterday, Nick Kyrgios urged Nadal and Djokovic to play at the Australian Open, saying it would be a "disaster" if the 'Big Three' were missing. Swiss ace Roger Federer has already pulled out as he recovers



MADRID: Serbia's Novak Djokovic hits a return during the men's singles semi-final match between Croatia and Serbia at the Madrid arena. Djokovic has pulled out of the ATP Cup in Sydney, organizers said yesterday, amid speculation about his vaccination status and whether he will defend his Australian Open title. —AFP

from a knee injury and Nadal's plans are unclear.

The dominant 'Big Three' have won 20 Grand Slam titles each and Kyrgios said tennis still needs them, starting in Melbourne next month. "I honestly don't know Novak's current situation with anything COVID-related or what he needs to play," the col-

orful Kyrgios told the Melbourne Age newspaper. "I hope he's had a good Christmas and I hope he's able to play in the sport for as long as possible because I've voiced before I think Federer, Nadal and Djokovic need to be (playing). "If all three aren't there, it's a disaster." — AFP

England must hit 'reset' button after Ashes debacle

LONDON: Former England bowler Steve Harmison said the Test team must hit the "reset" button as a searching inquest began into their humiliating Ashes capitulation in Australia. Joe Root's men were bowled out for a paltry 68 on Tuesday as they slipped to an innings defeat in the third Test in Melbourne - handing Australia an unassailable 3-0 lead in the five-match series.

It was the latest in a string of woeful efforts with the bat - England have not once reached 300 in six innings in Australia. Harmison, who was part of the England team that won the Ashes on home soil in 2005, said the "embarrassment" could prove to be a moment of reckoning for some in the England set-up. "There is going to be a big inquest," he told BT Sport. "There's going to be a lot of things blamed, people's careers on the line."

He added: "When you look at the history of the Ashes in Australia, the only teams that have gone over there and done anything meaningful are the teams that have got first-innings runs. "Last night, they (Australia) bowled brilliantly but that's embarrassing, I'm sorry, no fight. There was nothing there." England - reigning world champions in the 50-over, white-ball format - have endured a chastening year in Test cricket, losing their series in India and tasting defeat at home against New Zealand. Harmison said it would be short-sighted just to look at the roles of head coach Chris Silverwood and Root, who has had a fine year personally with the bat.

He was critical of the England and Wales Cricket Board's (ECB's) selection policy, saying there was no continuity of decision-making, meaning players did not know their roles in the side. "At this moment now, England's red-ball (Test) team is in a lot worse state than what the white-ball team was in 2015, when we left the World Cup with our tail between our legs," he said.

"And we pressed the reset button and I think we have to," Harmison said it was crucial to find the right balance between red and white-ball cricket and it was vital to find batsmen with the ability to bat for long periods. "I think we need to have a look at everything we do with the red ball and that comes from the top all the way down to under-19 red-ball cricket and try and make sure it gets better and better and better," he added.

Silverwood under fire

Former England captains Michael Atherton and Nasser Hussain both believe Silverwood should be dismissed after the dismal tour concludes. "I can't see a situation where Silverwood will survive this tour. All the responsibility lies with him as that's the way Giles has set things up," Atherton told Sky Sports.

Hussain added: "When England went down the rotation policy at the start of the year, Atherton said 'let's judge Silverwood by results at the end of year'. Well, England have lost nine Test matches, their worst-ever year. "Those results speak for themselves so I think he is incredibly vulnerable." BBC cricket correspondent Jonathan Agnew said he would be surprised if Root stayed on as captain while the skipper himself told the BBC: "You can't start looking at things too far in the future".

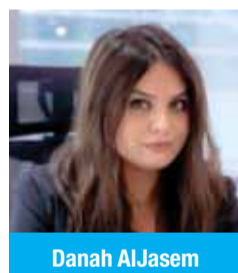
Agnew, himself a former England Test bowler, said England's domestic structure was not "fit for purpose". "The (first-class) County Championship has been marginalized to the fringes of the season for the convenience of playing more limited-overs cricket," he wrote. "The ability to produce a solid defense has given way to the desire to hit ramps, scoops and towering sixes. — AFP



stc sponsors BeInspired Obstacle Run

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced its sponsorship of the BeInspired Obstacle Run 2021. The competition attracted running enthusiasts from around Kuwait to participate in the challenging event held at Sahara Kuwait Golf Resort.

Upon concluding one of the most challenging competitions of its kind in Kuwait, stc's Corporate Communications team, led by Danah AlJasem, with Aseel AlShaheen and Yousef Al-Maqroun who organized the event in collaboration with Inspire Fitness. The team recognized the winners of the Men's and Women's Obstacle Run that was carried out throughout the day. In line with social distancing protocols to maintain health measures, the competition was held in small groups, each consisting of



Danah AlJasem

a limited number of contestants.

Danah AlJasem, General Manager of Corporate Communications at stc, said, "stc is keen to support initiatives that encourage individuals, of all ages and nationalities, to adopt a healthier lifestyle and promote teamwork that can lead to higher productivity in the workplace. This competition falls in line with our social responsibility framework which focuses on promoting health awareness and an active lifestyle, while simultaneously supporting unique local initiatives that help bring our community together for a good cause."

AlJasem added, "We are pleased to collaborate with Inspire Fitness in one of the most successful runs in 2021, which was unfortunately postponed last year due to the pandemic lockdowns. We look forward to continue building our relationships with similar entities that share the same strategic directions with stc in this field." AlJasem indicated that stc considers this competition to be a significant one as it concludes the series of events stc partici-

ated in this year. As an avid supporter of sports, stc's participation in this event comes days after concluding the Amir Cup, the most followed football championship in Kuwait.

AlJasem concluded, "We will continue to support and participate in similar initiatives that empower the Kuwaiti society by embracing an active culture through various platforms. We hope that our support inspires the youth and younger generation to adopt active and healthier lifestyle choices that will help them achieve future successes." It is worth mentioning that the BeInspired series was launched by Inspire Fitness, a fitness health club with the latest training equipment and highly qualified personal trainers, creating a highly unique fitness experience.

Inspire offers a multitude of outdoor activities, including a triathlon club, swimming, rock climbing, and a tennis club for all ages. Clients also have access to a fully equipped gym, variety of classes, a heated swimming pool, and CrossFit gym. To find out more about stc's events, promotions, and sponsorships, follow stc's official social media platforms, visit one of stc's branches, download mystc mobile application, visit www.stc.com.kw or contact the customer service center by dialing 102 for around the clock assistance.

Black Jack wins prestigious yacht race

SYDNEY: Supermaxi Black Jack won the prestigious Sydney to Hobart yacht race on Tuesday ending years of frustrating near misses. Owned by Australian Peter Harburg and skippered by Mark Bradford, Black Jack took line honors after a tight tussle with LawConnect on the River Derwent after two days 12 hours 37min and 17sec of racing. For Harburg it was his first win in the race after several times falling short and comes in a boat named after Australian Formula One legend and three-time world champion Jack Brabham, who was also a friend of his.

Harburg's decision to stay on shore for the first time and not be on the boat - which he bought ahead of the 2017 race - paid off handsomely. Indeed Harburg had been on board when it finished second (2018), third (2017) and fifth (2019) - the latter occasion it led before being overtaken by four other boats. "Mark said he was confident from the start. I was confident when that [finish] cannon went off," said Harburg.

"We will both be in tears anytime ... It's the grand prize of yachting in Australia. It's the first time I've been involved in the winning team." It is the second time the boat itself has won the race having triumphed in 2009 under the name of Alfa Romeo when powned by Neville Crichton - Harburg subsequently bought it and changed the name. The crew celebrated with hugs and pats on the backs before undergoing



HOBART: Photo shows yacht Black Jack heading towards Hobart during the 2021 Sydney to Hobart yacht race. —AFP

Covid-19 tests and then finally set foot on dry land.

Bradford said the win was rich consolation after so many years of trying and missing out. "We've had five, six years in a row now and we've finished first, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh," he said. It was one of the slowest Sydney to Hobart races ever with harsh conditions forcing withdrawals due to damage or minor crew injuries. On Tuesday morning, Black Jack had regained a six nautical mile lead on LawConnect. Weather is critical in the 628-nautical-mile race down Australia's

east coast to Hobart, one of the world's most challenging ocean events.

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. But this year, organizers also faced the trials of a global pandemic, which already nixed last year's edition - cancelling the event for the first time since it began in 1945. Several yachts were also unable to compete because of COVID-19, including favorites Comanche and Wild Oats XI. —AFP

Sports

'Massive blow' as sports count cost of more COVID restrictions

'Restrictions necessary' as Omicron takes hold

PARIS: The French Government became the latest administration to impose limits on attendances at public events in a bid to combat the dominant Omicron variant of COVID-19 and inflicting yet more financial pain on sports. The French announced attendances would be restricted to 5,000 outdoors and 2,000 indoors for three weeks beginning next Monday.

It is a measure Pierre Venayre, director general of European Champions Cup finalists La Rochelle, described as a 'massive blow to professional rugby'. The French follow the Scottish, Welsh and Irish administrations in deciding the restrictions are nec-



A blow to professional rugby

essary as Omicron takes hold. South Africa cricket authorities also decided to hold the three Test series with India behind closed doors.

This latest restrictions follows after crowds were barred for months globally when COVID first struck in 2020. Sporting competitions globally have been taking a hit of late with increasing postponements of matches due to positive tests within clubs. The last round of France's elite Top 14 rugby program on Sunday and Monday was decimated and the English Premier League has had 15 matches postponed over the past few weeks.

England, though, have taken no measures to reduce sizes of crowds instead insisting on either proof of vaccination or a negative test taken within the past 48 hours. Lost revenue from postponed matches can at least be recuperated at a later date when they are finally played. However, for those which take place in front of reduced crowds there is no making up their losses unless governments come up with compensation packages.

French fourth division side Vannes had been



CENTURION: South Africa's Dean Elgar plays a shot during the fourth day of the first Test cricket match between South Africa and India at SuperSport Park in Centurion yesterday. — AFP

looking forward to a financial bonanza in hosting French giants Paris Saint Germain in the French Cup on Monday. Now their dreams have been shattered as their 9,600 sell-out has been reduced to 5,000 and according to their president Maxime Ray losses in revenue of 250,000 euros (\$282,000). "We are missing out on what is a fortune to us," he said.

'Disproportionate to reality'

Whilst the French government mull over a compensation package, the Welsh administration have put one in place. Economy minister Vaughan Gething announced a £3 million (\$3.97 million) spectator sports fund will be available to support those clubs affected by the loss of revenue. However, for Welsh rugby clubs that will not make up for the losses of having no spectators at all.

The Scarlets and Cardiff Blues are already lick-

ing their wounds over a loss of £250,000 (297,000 euro, \$335,000) each due to their trip to South Africa where their matches were postponed owing to COVID. With both of them due to play fellow Welsh opposition on January 1 - normally a money spinner as the festive period is when they can expect packed stadia - in the United Rugby Championship they are preparing for further losses.

"The commercial impacts to all of us as clubs is catastrophic without significant further support," said Scarlets chairman Simon Muderack. For Irish rugby too the scenario is bleak with the government having imposed capacity for outdoor venues to 50% or 5,000 people - whichever figure is lower - and will remain in place till January 30. That date falls before the beginning of the Six Nations - Ireland host Wales on February 5. — AFP

Mbappe staying at PSG for now

PARIS: Want-away striker Kylian Mbappe said Tuesday he would finish the current season with Paris Saint-Germain, at which time he becomes a free agent. The brilliant 23-year-old striker was asked if he would be joining Real Madrid any time soon in an interview with CNN, and he had a sharp response. "Not in January," said Mbappe, who Madrid tried to buy in July with an audacious bid of 180 million euros (\$209 million). PSG had just signed Lionel Messi from Barcelona, but turned down Madrid's hefty offer.

But with the transfer market about to reopen, Madrid are expected to make another move.

Mbappe poured cold water on that a day after picking up "Best Men's Player of the Year" from Globe Soccer at a ceremony at the Burj Khalifa in Dubai. "I'm with PSG and I'm happy. I'll finish the season here 100 percent," he said. "I'll be giving everything to win the Champions League, the championship and the French Cup," he added before refocussing on Madrid, who his club meet in the next round of the Champions League.

"The main thing I have in mind is beating Real Madrid in February and in March," he said. Mbappe said he had no regrets over revealing his desire to join Madrid. "I was being honest, saying what was in my heart," he said. In October Mbappe confirmed he had told Paris Saint-Germain last July he wanted to leave the club. The French World Cup winner has declined a contract extension as the clock ticks down. Mbappe joined PSG from Monaco for a deal worth a total of 180 million euros in 2017. — AFP



France's forward Kylian Mbappe

Newcastle's trip to Everton postponed

LONDON: Newcastle's Premier League clash at Everton today has been postponed after a coronavirus outbreak in Eddie Howe's squad. Newcastle held Manchester United to a 1-1 draw on Monday despite several Covid cases and injury absences. Howe was also set to be without Callum Wilson and Allan Saint-Maximin against Everton after both limped off against United. Fearing they would not be able to field a full team at Goodison Park, second bottom Newcastle asked for the game to be cancelled and the Premier League agreed.

It is the 16th English top-flight match to be postponed due to COVID issues in December as the Omicron variant causes chaos with the fixture list. "Everton's match against Newcastle at Goodison Park, due to be played at 1930 today, has regrettably been postponed," a Premier League statement said on Tuesday. "The board accepted Newcastle's postponement application as the club does not have the required number of players available for the match (13 outfield players and one goalkeeper), due to Covid-19 cases and injuries."

"The board was able to make its decision in advance of the fixture to give clarity to the affected clubs and their fans. We apologize for the inconvenience and disruption caused to supporters' festive plans." Tuesday's games between Arsenal and Wolves and Leeds against Aston Villa were also postponed because of COVID outbreaks. Just before Christmas, Premier League chiefs insisted they would not halt the season despite pleas from several managers for a "circuit breaker" to limit the spread of the virus. The league has given clubs "emergency" protocols to follow as they battle to keep the virus in check.

"The league is aware that the decisions in the last week to postpone matches will disappoint supporters, and understands their frustrations at a special time of year when fans look forward to attending and watching football games," the statement said. "The league aims to provide as much clarity as possible, but unfortunately postponements sometimes have to be made at short notice, as safety is our priority. Where possible, the league will endeavour to keep supporters updated if games become at risk on a matchday. — AFP



DORTMUND: In this file photo, Dortmund's Norwegian forward Erling Haaland heads the ball to score his team's 4:0 goal during the UEFA Champions League Group C football match BVB Borussia Dortmund v Besiktas in Dortmund. — AFP

Dortmund eager to settle Erling Haaland's future

BERLIN: Erling Haaland is one of the hottest properties in European football and his Bundesliga club Borussia Dortmund are eager to learn if they will lose their star striker in 2022. The 21-year-old has scored a phenomenal 76 goals in 75 games for Dortmund since his arrival from Red Bull Salzburg in January 2020. A release clause in his Dortmund contract, valid until 2024, could allow Haaland to leave in 2022 and club CEO Hans-Joachim Watzke wants to know what the player's agent Mino Raiola has planned. "We will talk in the next few weeks," Watzke said in early December, "and we will all make sure that we don't wait until March or April to know the decision."

In March of this year, Haaland became the fastest player to reach the milestone of 20 Champions League goals in a record 14 games. By comparison, Cristiano Ronaldo needed 56 Champions League games to reach the same goal tally. Lionel Messi

took 40 matches. At the same age as Haaland (21 years, six months), Ronaldo - the Champions League's all-time top-scorer with 140 goals - had yet to score in Europe. Haaland has a contract at Dortmund until 2024, but a release clause, reportedly for around 80 million euros (\$90 million) becomes active next year.

'Next step'

Haaland's agent Mino Raiola fuelled speculation recently by claiming there is "a strong chance Erling will leave Dortmund, maybe this summer, maybe next summer". "He can - and wants - to take the next step," Raiola added, listing Bayern Munich, Real Madrid, Barcelona and Manchester City as possibilities. "When he signed for Dortmund, we all knew that this next step would come." Barcelona president Joan Laporta has already met Raiola, while Bayern president Herbert Hainer said before Christmas that they were out of the running. "I only know for sure that Real Madrid are very interested in him," Watzke revealed recently, adding that he "could also name 25 other clubs." Dortmund have brushed off the constant speculation. "We are used to it, sometimes more, sometimes less," Dortmund coach Marco Rose said of the speculation. "We take it as it is." — AFP

News in brief

Ferran signs for Barcelona

PARIS: Spanish international Ferran Torres signed for cash-strapped Barcelona on Tuesday from Manchester City, the Catalan side announced. Despite their financial struggles, Barcelona have agreed a deal worth an initial 55 million euros (\$62 million, £47 million) for the 21-year-old. "FC Barcelona has reached an agreement with Manchester City for the transfer of Ferran Torres," Barcelona said in a statement on their website. "The player has signed a contract for the next five seasons, until 30 June 2027. "His buyout clause has been set at 1,000 million euros." Torres scored 16 goals in 43 appearances for City since joining from Valencia last year but this season has been disrupted by a fractured foot that has kept him out since October. He won the Premier League, League Cup and reached the final of the Champions League during his only full season in Manchester. — AFP

Arteta tests positive for COVID

LONDON: Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta has tested positive for COVID-19 for a second time and will miss the Premier League clash with leaders Manchester City on Saturday, the club said. The 39-year-old Spaniard's first positive test was in March 2020 which prompted English football to shut down as the pandemic took hold. He is the latest Premier League manager to test positive in the last few weeks following Aston Villa's Steven Gerrard and Patrick Vieira of Crystal Palace. A club statement read: "Mikel Arteta will miss our match against Manchester City on New Year's Day after testing positive for COVID-19. "Mikel is isolating in line with Government guidelines and we wish him well." Arteta - whose side have rebounded from a disappointing start to rise to fourth place after winning their last five matches in all competitions - is still expected to conduct his press conference. — AFP

NFL great Madden dies

LOS ANGELES: Former NFL coach John Madden, who guided the Oakland Raiders to a Super Bowl victory before embarking on a successful broadcasting career and pioneering a blockbuster video game franchise, has died. He was 85. With his distinctive voice and folksy, everyman persona, Madden became a fixture of NFL broadcasts during a 30-year commentary career that began in 1979 and concluded with Super Bowl 43 in February 2009. It was a testament to Madden's status as a beloved broadcaster, and later involvement as the voice of the smash hit "Madden NFL" video game series, that his remarkable achievements as a coach have often been overlooked. "Nobody loved football more than Coach," NFL commissioner Roger Goodell said in a statement. "He was football." The league said Madden died "unexpectedly" on Tuesday morning, but did not give a cause of death. — AFP

Warner eyes one more crack

MELBOURNE: David Warner has hinted he is keen for one last Ashes tour in 2023 to make amends for his failed campaign in England two years ago, drawing inspiration from veteran seamer Jimmy Anderson. The explosive Australian opener would be approaching 37 should he retain his place that long and in all likelihood would have joined the 100-Test club. He currently has 89 caps. Winning in India is also on his bucket list before pulling up stumps on a Test career that has so far yielded 7,551 runs at 48.40. "Winning the Ashes here was obviously a big one," Warner said after Australia crushed England in the third Test in Melbourne to retain the Ashes. "We still haven't beaten India in India, that would be nice to do. "And England away-we had a drawn series (in 2019) but hopefully if I manage to get that opportunity, I might think about going back." — AFP

CAF Champions League rivalry

JOHANNESBURG: Title-holders Al Ahly of Egypt and Mamelodi Sundowns of South Africa will meet in the CAF Champions League for the fourth consecutive season after the groups draw was made in Cairo on Tuesday. Record 10-time champions Ahly and one-time winners Sundowns were placed in Group A with Sudanese clubs Al Hilal and Al Merrikh. South Africa-born Ahly coach Pitso Mosimane made the draw under the supervision of a Confederation of African Football official and appeared happy at the prospect of facing his former club Sundowns. Mosimane masterminded a sensational 5-1 quarter-final triumph by Sundowns over Ahly in 2019, but could not prevent the Cairo Red Devils gaining revenge the following season with a 3-1 overall victory. The coach was in the Ahly dugout when the teams were drawn together at the last-eight stage for a third straight season and once again the Egyptians advanced 3-1 on aggregate. — AFP

Lakers down Rockets 132-123

James, Westbrook triple-doubles propel Lakers



HOUSTON: Jalen Green #0 of the Houston Rockets hangs on the rim after dunking a ball during the first half against the Los Angeles Lakers at Toyota Center on December 28, 2021. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: LeBron James notched a 32-point triple-double on Tuesday to help the Los Angeles Lakers snap a five-game NBA skid with a 132-123 victory over the Houston Rockets. The four-time NBA champion was listed as the starting center for the first time in his 19-year career, as a Lakers team without injured star Anthony Davis grappled with coronavirus-related absences that included Rajon Rondo, Trevor Ariza and head coach Frank Vogel.

"I'm just trying to do whatever it takes for this team," said James, who added 11 rebounds and 11 assists for his third triple-double of the season. "Tonight I was starting at center for the first time in my career and, you know, we were able to get off that five-game losing streak," he added. James became the third NBA player to reach 36,000 career points after Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (38,387) and Karl Malone (36,928). Russell Westbrook also played a key role with a triple-double of his own of 24 points, 12 rebounds and 10 assists - his seventh of the season.

Meanwhile, Malik Monk added 25 points and Carmelo Anthony scored 24

off the bench - his three-pointer with 2:25 remaining giving the Lakers a four-point cushion. James followed with a pair of free-throws and a one-handed slam that made it 124-116 and the Rockets wouldn't get the deficit below five points from there. "Coming off the tough loss in the Christmas Day game we got some big contributions," he said. "Melo was spectacular off the bench once again. Everybody gave us great minutes."

Nuggets hold off Warriors

The league-leading Golden State Warriors shook off a dismal start in Denver, erasing a 24-point halftime deficit but coming up just short in an 89-86 loss to the Nuggets. The Warriors, who lost Draymond Green to COVID-19 concerns on Monday, looked lost as the Nuggets raced to a 10-0 lead to start the game. Denver, led by 22 points from reigning NBA MVP Nikola Jokic, led 60-36 at halftime and held on in the face of a furious late rally from the Warriors that included 15 fourth-quarter points from star Stephen Curry.

Curry, who was held to two points in a first half in which he missed all five of his

three-point attempts, finished with 23 points. With five three-pointers on the night he became the first NBA player to make 3,000 shots from beyond the arc, but with just 1.2 seconds left the ball was in teammate's Andre Iguodala hands with Golden State needing a three-pointer to force overtime.

He missed, and the Nuggets held on for the win. Jokic added 18 rebounds, five assists and a big block of Warriors rookie Jonathan Kuminga's potential game-tying layup with 3.7 seconds remaining. Will Barton added 21 points for Denver. Elsewhere, NBA champion Milwaukee Bucks beat Orlando Magic 127-110 behind 28 points from two-time NBA Most Valuable Player Giannis Antetokounmpo. Khris Middleton scored 21 points for the Bucks, who notched their fourth straight victory.

In New Orleans, Garrett Temple drained four three-pointers in less than four minutes in the fourth quarter as the Pelicans rallied for a 108-104 victory over the Cleveland Cavaliers, who led by as many as 23 points early. Jonas Valanciunas made four free throws in the final 28.7 seconds to seal the victory over



SAN FRANCISCO: Andrew Wiggins #22 of the Golden State Warriors shoots the ball during the game against the Denver Nuggets on December 28, 2021. — AFP

Cleveland, after a knee injury saw Ricky Rubio carried off in the final three minutes. In Toronto, Tobias Harris notched the first triple-double of his career, scoring 19

points with 12 rebounds and 10 assists to back up Joel Embiid's 36 points and 11 rebounds for the Philadelphia 76ers in a 114-109 victory over the Raptors. — AFP

Liverpool stunned as Lookman lifts Leicester

LONDON: Jurgen Klopp admitted Liverpool had only themselves to blame for their shock 1-0 defeat at Leicester as Mohamed Salah's penalty miss and Ademola Lookman's winner dented the Reds' title challenge on Tuesday. Klopp's side saw their 10-match unbeaten run in all competitions ended by Lookman's second half strike. Liverpool trail leaders Manchester City by six points as the champions played at Brentford yesterday.

Beaten for the first time since their 3-2 loss at West Ham in November, second placed Liverpool paid the price for missed chances. Crucially, Kasper Schmeichel saved Salah's first half penalty as Liverpool failed to score in the league for the first time since March. "We were just not good enough. We still had enough chances. What we did with the ball was just not right. We played a really bad game," Klopp said. "We should have defended better. We do that usually, why we didn't do it today is hard to explain. There were so many performances below the normal level."

Liverpool's flop against COVID and injury ravaged Leicester, who were hammered 6-3 by City on Sunday, puts extra pressure on them to take

maximum points at title rivals Chelsea in their first game of 2022 on Sunday. "It's a big gap. In this moment it is not my problem. If we play our normal football, Liverpool football, we have the chance to win more games," Klopp said. "The first thing is not to do it ever again like this. We lost our rhythm and weren't calm enough to get it back. That is our fault."

Leicester boss Brendan Rodgers added: "It's an absolutely heroic performance. An amazing result for us with everything we're going through against one of the best teams in the world." Liverpool had more rest than Leicester over Christmas after a Leeds COVID outbreak forced the postponement of their game on Sunday. Back in action only 48 hours after their thrashing at City, Leicester were unable to field a recognized centre-back for a rematch of the League Cup quarter-final won by Liverpool on penalties last week.

Liverpool, bolstered by Virgil van Dijk's return from COVID, looked set to take advantage of Leicester's makeshift line-up in the early stages. Salah had a golden opportunity to open the scoring in the 16th minute after his slalom through the Leicester defence was halted by Wilfred Ndidi's trip. But Salah failed to score a Liverpool penalty for only the third time as Schmeichel saved his unconvincing effort before the Egyptian headed the rebound against the bar.

Schmeichel made a host of fine saves to keep Liverpool at bay before Sadio Mane was guilty of a shocking miss when he sprinted through the heart



LEICESTER: Leicester City's Danish goalkeeper Kasper Schmeichel (center) saves from a header by Liverpool's Portuguese striker Diogo Jota (2nd left) during the English Premier League football match between Leicester City and Liverpool at King Power Stadium in Leicester. — AFP

of the Leicester defence, only to blaze over. Klopp held his head in frustration and the German had even more reason to rue Liverpool's profligacy in the 59th minute.

Three minutes after coming off the bench, former Everton forward Lookman took Kiernan Dewsbury-Hall's pass, danced past Joel Matip and forced Van Dijk to back off as he planted a fine

finish past Alisson Becker from 10 yards. Elsewhere on Tuesday, Tottenham were held to a 1-1 draw at 10-man Southampton. Southampton took a deserved lead in the 25th minute with a stunning strike from James Ward-Prowse. The game was turned on its head when Mohammed Salisu brought down Son Heung-min in the penalty area shortly before half-time. — AFP