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I 'fully trust' you, Amir tells Crown Prince, Speaker, PM

Al-Ghanem: Kuwait leadership keen on authorities' cooperation, country's future



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem (right) and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah (left) at Dar Al-Yamama yesterday. — Amiri Diwan photo

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah yesterday received the Crown Prince, Assembly Speaker and the Prime Minister and stressed he "fully trusts" them and wished them all success. The Amir, who last week delegated some of his powers to the Crown Prince, told the three leaders that "you are the pillars of Kuwait and you hold great responsibilities" to serve the ambitions of the people. The Amir also called on the three leaders to cooperate among them in running the affairs of the country.

Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said that he listened to the guidance of the Amir and HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah on the need to cooperate with the government to serve national interests. The Speaker added that, the Kuwaiti leadership was keen on the executive and legislative authorities' cooperation to address important national issues of concern.

In a press release after the meeting, Al-Ghanem said that the parliament will be willing to cooperate with the government for the benefit and interest of Kuwait.

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No more business visit visas to work permits: PAM

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The Public Authority of Manpower (PAM) announced yesterday that it has stopped transferring business visas into work permits as of today. The Authority said it will continue to accept such visas which had been issued until the end of the year but new visas issued from yesterday will not be transferred. The Authority said the reason for taking such a measure is the decision of the government to resume issuing all types of visas through the Interior Ministry. Reports said that the Interior Ministry has resumed issuing tourist visas to certain nationalities through online applications.

Interior Ministry's Residency sector announced that in cooperation with the information technology department the e-visa system was updated so that tourist visas can be issued through Interior Ministry's website for 53 countries whose nationals are allowed to apply for such visas - that in addition to some residents of GCC countries where jobs are mentioned in the ministerial decision 220/2008.

These are: doctors, pharmacists, lawyers, engineers, consultants, judges, prosecutors, university professors, journalists, pilots, computer programmers, managers, business men, diplomats, owners managers and company mandoubs and commercial establishments as well as privileged Saudi residency holder.

Australia lists Hezbollah as a 'terror group'

SYDNEY: Australia yesterday listed all of Hezbollah as a "terrorist organization", extending a ban on armed factions to the entire movement, which wields considerable power over Lebanon. Home Affairs Minister Karen Andrews said that the Tehran-backed Shiite group "continues to threaten

Continued on Page 2

UAE Crown Prince makes first Turkey visit in decade

ANKARA: The United Arab Emirates announced a \$10 billion fund for investments in Turkey yesterday during Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed's visit to Ankara, burying past rivalries. The first high-level visit to Turkey since 2012 comes a day after the Turkish lira crashed, the latest turbulence in a tumultuous period for the economy.

The UAE and Turkey backed opposing sides in the Libyan conflict and have diverging opinions on other regional issues such as gas exploration in the eastern Mediterranean. Relations were particularly tense after a Saudi Arabia-led blockade on Qatar

by Arab countries including the UAE in 2017. Doha is one of Ankara's closest allies. Erdogan greeted Sheikh Mohammed on the ceremonial blue carpet at the presidential palace in Ankara yesterday before they went into talks. The meeting was followed by a signing ceremony for several agreements, the content of which was not divulged.

A formal dinner was planned later at the palace. "The UAE announced the establishment of a \$10 billion (8.93 billion euros) fund to support investments in Turkey," the official Emirati news agency WAM said.

Continued on Page 2



ANKARA: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (right) shakes hands with Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan as they attend a signing ceremony regarding the agreements between the two countries yesterday. — AFP

India seeks to ban cryptocurrencies

NEW DELHI: India's government will introduce a bill to ban private cryptocurrencies and create a framework for a central bank-backed digital money, parliament said in a shock announcement late Tuesday. The proposed bill "seeks to prohibit all private cryptocurrencies in India", the Lok Sabha said, and comes after Prime Minister Narendra Modi warned last week that Bitcoin presents a risk to younger generations and could "spoil our youth" if it ends up "in the wrong hands".

It is the latest such move by a major emerging economy, after China declared all cryptocurrency transactions illegal in September. India's crypto market has boomed since the country's Supreme Court overturned a previous ban in April last year, growing more than 600 percent over the past year according to research by Chainalysis. Between 15 and 100 million people in Asia's third-largest

economy are estimated to own cryptocurrencies, with total holdings in the billions of dollars.

Their investments will now face an uncertain future. India's central bank announced in June that it is working to introduce its own digital currency by the end of the year, while warning it has "serious concerns" about private cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin, Ethereum and others.

The bill, to come before the new legislative session, will allow for some exceptions to promote cryptocurrency technology, according to parliament's bulletin of upcoming business, but no further details about the proposed legislation were released. The market price of Bitcoin appeared unaffected and was up 1.67 percent in Tuesday's trade.

But the phrasing of the proposed bill sent alarm bells ringing among local traders and enthusiasts. "The wording has created a panic," Kashif Raza, founder of crypto-education platform Bitinning, said, adding that the industry expected the government to take a more favorable view after recent consultations with the industry. "Obviously there will be a shutter-



BANGALORE: The cryptocurrency symbol of Bitcoin is pictured at the entrance of a private office in Bangalore. — AFP

down on the industry," he added. "The industry will die in its natural way. Intellectual capital will move away, investors will face losses."

Cryptocurrencies have been under scrutiny by Indian regulators since first entering the local market in 2013. A surge in fraudulent crypto transactions following the Modi government's

demonetisation of nearly all banknotes in 2016 led to the country's central bank banning crypto transactions in April 2018. The Supreme Court lifted the ban two years later and investments have surged in the time since. Indians have been bombarded in recent months with advertisements for

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Local

EU appreciates Kuwait's 'constructive and positive role' in the region

Deputy Foreign Minister concludes visit to Brussels

BRUSSELS: Kuwait's Deputy Foreign Minister Majdi Al-Dhafiri concluded his one-day visit to Brussels Tuesday evening after holding constructive and successful talks with European Union and Belgian officials. "I heard today from the EU highest appreciation of Kuwait's role in the region and its foreign policy which was led by the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and is being completed by determination and strength by HH Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah."



Kuwait set example in 'diplomatic heritage'

he told the press after the talks. He said Kuwait is leading the "active diplomacy" by having contacts and communication with the countries of the region to create a climate of regional stability and security.

"The Kuwaiti diplomatic heritage has become an example for the countries of the world and the EU speaks about this Kuwaiti example," stressed Dhafiri. He said that dialogue with the EU is essential and a strategy for the state of Kuwait and added that "we are continuing this dialogue with all our determination to deepen the bilateral ties. "It was very heartwarming to hear that the EU intends to respond to the Kuwaiti request to lift the Schengen visa for Kuwaitis because of the high trust for Kuwait in Brussels he said and hoped that this would happen



BRUSSELS: Kuwait's Deputy Foreign Minister Majdi Al-Dhafiri meets with Secretary-General of the EEAS Stefano Sannino. — KUNA

in the near future." The EU-Kuwaiti relations are strong and distinguished by their untiring efforts for peace and stability and resolving problems based on international law and the UN charter," he added.

Dhafiri had met earlier the Secretary-General of the EU External Action Service (EEAS) Stefano Sannino who said "the relationship between the EU and Kuwait are very important, very relevant for us." "It is a key country in the Gulf region but also beyond playing a very positive and constructive role in the region," Sannino said welcoming the Kuwaiti delegation. "We appreciate this. We are trying to enhance

the relationship with the region. We are going to create a communication relation with the EU and countries of the Gulf which is shaping a framework in enhancing our common work," he added.

Dhafiri also met Theodora Gentsis Director General of the Belgian foreign ministry Tuesday afternoon and discussed Belgian-Kuwaiti relations and ways to strengthen and deepen the relations in all sectors, trade, economic, investments or security. "We are happy to have a strong relationship with the Kingdom of Belgium and Belgium and we seek to develop this relation to the strategic level," he

said. "Belgium's role is pivotal and Kuwait's role is also pivotal in the region," he stressed.

Dhafiri's visit began with a luncheon meeting in Brussels today with Enrique Mora, Deputy Secretary General for Political Affairs, Political Director of the EEAS. Ambassador Ayham Al-Omar assistant foreign minister for the office of deputy foreign minister and Ambassador Naser Al-Hain assistant foreign minister for European affairs, Kuwait's ambassador to the EU, Belgium and NATO Jassem Al-Budaiwi also attended the meetings. — KUNA

Putting gender equality first

By Josep Borrell and Jutta Urpilainen

Rarely in the world have women's and girls' rights been challenged in such a concerning way as they have been in Afghanistan. The EU has made it clear that future EU development assistance will depend on the respect for norms on human rights, including women's and girls' rights. The EU will continue to support women and girls worldwide, sticking to our values and beliefs.

Human rights, freedom and democracy, and equality represent core values that make the European Union what it is. It enriches our societies and strengthens resilience. Gender equality is key for peace, security, economic prosperity and sustainable development.

That is why working on all levels to promote and safeguard progress on gender equality is a political priority and objective for the EU. The EU Gender Action Plan III and the new EU external action budget provide a roadmap for global action towards a gender-equal world. We work closely together with multilateral, regional and bilateral partners, including civil society organizations, to achieve those objectives. We still have a long way to go; there is no room for complacency.

In many countries, the pandemic has exacerbated existing gender inequalities across different areas: education, vocational training, health, security and safety, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and economic opportunities. In addition, the COVID-19 lockdowns have often led to an increase in gender-based violence, in particular domestic violence. At the same time, a significant part of the care burden has fallen on women and girls. Workers in the informal economy and in low-skilled jobs (most of whom are women), migrants, and those belonging to minorities, have been more at risk and face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

Moreover, school closures have exposed girls to an increased risk of sexual exploitation, early pregnancy, child labor, and forced marriage. The Malala Fund estimates that 20 million more girls risk dropping out of school, adding up to a total of 150 million girls - equivalent to a third of the EU population - without educational prospects.

According to a recent UN report, military spending in 2020 still outpaced the worldwide expenses on health, even in a year that was dominated by the corona pandemic. For a sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, we need to redouble our efforts to promote gender equality.

Time to do more

This challenge now requires a global response, when we are building the future we wish for our children and grandchildren to grow up in a post-pandemic world that is more equal, more diverse, and where equal opportunities are a reality. We need to address the root causes of gender inequality and discrimination in order to achieve sustainable change.

The European Union and its Member States, as well as the European financial institutions have stood with the women and girls of the world throughout the pandemic. As Team Europe, we have already mobilized €46 billion in support of over 130 partner countries, with a particular focus on women and youth.

Three examples as an illustration: In Nepal, we



Josep Borrell



Jutta Urpilainen

helped one million girls and boys continue their education through radio-based learning. In Togo, we supported the creation of a universal income scheme and the appointment of women to head new municipalities. Worldwide, the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative has helped 650,000 women and girls prevent or address violence against them, and educated 880,000 men and boys on positive masculinity, non-violent conflict resolution and parenting.

Still, to meet the growing challenges, we need to do more. That is the purpose of the Gender Action Plan III. It promotes leadership and meaningful participation of women, girls and young people in political, economic, social and cultural life, as well as in all matters related to peace and security.

Human development back on track

We are now making this plan a reality with the help of the new €79.5 billion NDICI-Global Europe instrument that will support the EU's external action for the next seven years.

Support for education and particularly girls' education will have a central role. Just as we support education in emergencies, the EU has worked with partner countries throughout the pandemic to minimize its impact on children, and to facilitate a safe return to school.

We already provide more than half of all global aid to education as Team Europe. We will increase funding further, to promote gender equality through quality education at all levels. Our joint €1.7 billion pledge to the Global Partnership for Education in July - to transform education for girls and boys in up to 90 countries and territories - is part of this new beginning.

We are multiplying our efforts, from supporting women and girls' education and economic opportunities to improving their access to sexual and reproductive health services. By 2025, 85% of all the EU's new external actions - across all sectors - will contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment.

This is now being finalized with our partner countries based on close consultation with civil society organizations, women's rights activists, and youth. We need to put human development back on track and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, leaving no one behind. It is crucial we get it right.

- Josep Borrell is the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission

- Jutta Urpilainen is the EU Commissioner for International Partnerships

I 'fully trust you, Amir tells...

Continued from Page 1

"The Amir and Crown Prince tasked us with an important duty relating to the future of Kuwait and its

Australia lists Hezbollah as...

Continued from Page 1

terrorist attacks and provide support to terrorist organizations" and poses a "real" and "credible" threat to Australia.

Hezbollah is part political party and part militia - the only group in Lebanon to have refused to disarm since the civil war ended in 1990. The movement, which plays a pivotal role in Lebanese politics, has been accused of fuelling Syria's civil war by sending thousands of fighters across the border to prop up President Bashar Al-Assad's regime. In 2006, it fought a short yet devastating war against Zionist. Critics have accused the movement of killing former prime minister Rafiq Hariri in 2005, and more recently of blocking investigations into the cataclysmic 2020 Beirut port explosion. Some countries have sought to distinguish between Hezbollah's political and militant factions, fearing a blanket ban could further destabilize Lebanon and hamper contacts with authorities. Australia had such a policy since 2003, when it banned Hezbollah's so-called External Security Organization - a part of the movement's military wing that is chiefly focused

UAE Crown Prince makes first Turkey...

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The move was "to support the Turkish economy and boost bilateral cooperation between the two countries," the agency added. Erdogan has this year sought to improve ties with regional rivals including Egypt in the face of increasing diplomatic isolation that has caused foreign investment to dry up - particularly from the West. The groundwork was laid for the rapprochement with a visit in August by a UAE delegation, as well as a phone call between Erdogan and Sheikh Mohammed, the UAE's de facto ruler.

Investors have become skittish over what they see as Erdogan's unorthodox thinking on interest rates. The lira has lost 39 percent of its value against the dollar since the start of the year and inflation was nearly 20 percent in October. The currency rallied by 5 percent after the news about Emirati mon-

India seeks to ban ...

Continued from Page 1

CoinSwitchKuber, CoinDCX and other home-grown crypto exchanges across television channels,

people and the two authorities are willing to tackle issues such as corruption, economic development, and other topics of great significance," he said.

Ghanem added that during a separate meeting with the Crown Prince, "he asked me to inform the lawmakers to focus on priorities that concern citizens especially fighting corruption and economic challenges" which include "external and internal investments and finding sources of income other than oil".

on shadowy overseas operations.

From now, membership of the entire organization or providing funding for it will now be proscribed in Australia, which has a large Lebanese community. Zionist Prime Minister Naftali Bennett thanked his "friend" and Australian counterpart Scott Morrison for the move. "Hezbollah is an Iranian-backed terror organization in Lebanon responsible for countless attacks in Zionist & around the world," he tweeted.

'Long overdue'

No reason was given for the timing of Canberra's decision, which comes as Lebanon reels from spiraling political and economic crises. Nearly 80 percent of the population is estimated to be living below the poverty line. Elections are expected in March 2022 and there is growing public anger about nepotism and corruption among Lebanon's ruling class.

The move may play well domestically for Australia's conservative government, ahead of its own elections expected next year. Before 2018 polls, Morrison made the surprise move of recognizing west Jerusalem as Zionist capital, helping secure votes in a battleground Sydney seat with a sizable Jewish community.

Matthew Levitt, a former US counter-terrorism financing official now with the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, told AFP the move was "long overdue." — AFP

ey flowing into Turkey to reach 12.2 against the US greenback. Sultan Al-Jaber, the UAE's minister of industry and advanced technology, told Turkish state broadcaster TRT Haber that Turkey was a "natural partner" for Abu Dhabi.

Jaber said the two countries would develop economic, social and trade relations in areas including energy, agriculture, infrastructure, finance and tourism. "The main purpose of this visit is increasing our trade and business partnership through sustainable and successful investments," he was quoted as saying by TRT Haber. The main focus of the \$10 billion fund will be on "strategic investments", especially in sectors including energy, health and food, WAM reported.

Observers say Turkey does not only seek the UAE's financial support, but also to repair ties "between two major players who seek to assert themselves in the region," said Hasni Abidi, international relations professor at the University of Geneva. The two countries also know they are not favored by the White House under US President Joe Biden as they were under his predecessor, Donald Trump, he added, leading to a rethink of their relationship. — AFP

online streaming services and social media.

These platforms spent more than 500 million rupees (\$6.7 million) on advertising spots during the recently concluded T20 cricket World Cup, research by TAM Sports showed, with viewers subjected to an average of 51 cryptocurrency advertisements per match. Analysts say regulation would be central to addressing security risks, with crypto exchanges increasingly targeted by cyber criminals as virtual currency prices soar. — AFP

Local

Amir confident Crown Prince, Speaker, Prime Minister 'up to the task ahead'

Sheikh Nawaf underlines 'huge responsibility' in meeting with top officials



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



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Dar Al-Yamama, yesterday His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. His Highness the Amir also received Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. During the gathering, His Highness the Amir spoke to the three top officials, saying that they held a huge responsibility in their hands and expressed his confidence that they were up to the task ahead.

His Highness called on the three top officials to refer to him in times of need when addressing matters concerning Kuwait, affirming that they were on a mission to achieve the aspirations and dreams of the Kuwaiti people. He called on them to follow the law and constitution to serve the people of Kuwait. His Highness the Amir reiterated his confidence in the officials, wishing them the best in serving the country and its people.

His Highness the Crown Prince replied to His Highness the Amir, affirming that he, Speaker Ghanem, Prime Minister Sabah Al-Khaled, and other officials would carry on their duties with due diligence. Separately, His Highness the Crown

Prince Sheikh Mishal received Speaker Ghanem and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled yesterday at Bayan Palace.

Authorities' cooperation

Following the meeting with His Highness the Amir, Speaker Ghanem said that the Kuwaiti leadership was keen on the executive and legislative authorities' cooperation to address important national issues of concern. He added that the parliament will be willing to cooperate with the government for the benefit and interest of Kuwait. Their Highnesses tasked us with an important duty relating to the future of Kuwait and its people and the two authorities are willing to tackle issues such as corruption, economic development, and other topics of great significance.

According to the 56 article of the constitution, His Highness the Amir assigned His Highness the Crown Prince to some of his constitutional rights and therefore, His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad chose Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled as Prime Minister and tasked him with forming the cabinet, indicated Ghanem. He affirmed that the Crown Prince called on the National Assembly to cooperate with the new cabinet to achieve the dreams and aspiration of the Kuwaiti people. —KUNA

KJA looks forward to 'quantum leap' in govt performance

KUWAIT: Kuwait Journalists Association (KJA) released the following statement yesterday, expressing appreciation for the reappointment of HH Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah as Prime Minister of Kuwait, and hoping that the next phase features a 'quantum leap' in governmental performance.

"Following the Amiri order signed by HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to appoint HH Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah as Prime Minister and assigning him to nominate members of the new Cabinet, Kuwait Journalists Association is looking forward for the next period to see a quality move in government performance and a harmonious relationship between the executive

and legislative authorities, by abandoning disputes and understanding differences.

"The current period comes with much optimism, especially after the call by HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on September 29 for a national dialogue, which resulted in the pardon decrees. This is something that calls for serious work to reach stability, and the first pillar of this condition is the selection of a political and economic reform government that is distant from appeasements, something citizens are no longer tolerate.

"We all are looking forward to see all ministries receive the same level of attention and consideration, particularly the education and health ministries because they are the backbones of society's righteousness and the foundation of the country's development.

"KJA values the confidence HH the Amir and HH the Crown Prince have put in HH Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled as Prime Minister and asking him to form the new Cabinet. It is a deserved confidence in a person who is known of being a clean hand and sincere at work."

Boursa Kuwait becomes humanitarian partner of KRCS

KUWAIT: Boursa Kuwait sponsored the efforts of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society as a 'Humanitarian Partner', contributing to the sponsorship of the society's 'Basic Education' initiative, helping children inside Kuwait to gain an education. The initiative aims to reduce the burden on low-income families, paying part of the tuition fees for about 5,000 students. The campaign, which is running for the sixth year in a row, pays orphans' full tuition fees.

The initiative forms part of Boursa Kuwait's efforts to create a lasting meaningful impact on the communities where it operates as part of its Corporate Sustainability strategy and is in line with Goal 4 - Quality Education - and Goal 17 - Partnership for the Goals - of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as the National Development Plan for the State of Kuwait, "New Kuwait 2035".

Dr Hilal Al-Sayer, Chairman of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society, commented on the occasion, saying, "The goal of the 'Basic Education' initiative is to decrease illiteracy and the damage it inflicts on the community, through fostering the abilities and educations of the next generation and fulfilling them economically and socially. Education is the foundation of any stable society, which is why we think that this initiative is one of our most promising and important. I would like to thank Boursa Kuwait for their sponsorship and support, and look forward to more fruitful collaborations in the future."

Naser Al-Sanousi, Marketing and Communication Director at Boursa Kuwait, added, "Boursa Kuwait is proud of our strategic partnership with the Kuwait Red Crescent Society as a humanitarian partner and sponsor of this tremendous initiative. Boursa Kuwait seeks to be a force for good for all our stakeholders through an ongoing and diverse range of community and social impact initiatives that are in line with our Corporate Sustainability strategy and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. I would like to thank the



KUWAIT: Dr Hilal Al-Sayer, Chairman of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (right) presents a memento to Naser Al-Sanousi, Marketing and Communication Director at Boursa Kuwait.

Kuwait Red Crescent Society and Dr Hilal Al-Sayer for hosting us today."

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

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

KCCI chairman commends Kuwait pavilion at Expo 2020

DUBAI: The Kuwaiti pavilion at the Expo 2020 Dubai is a window peering into the country's history, tradition and development. Chairman of the Board for the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) Mohammad Al-Saqer said yesterday. Speaking to the press after visiting the pavilion, Saqer said that he was amazed by what the pavilion had to offer for visitors, indicating that the architectural design complimented the State of Kuwait's vision in a sustainably developed region creating various career opportunities and business. The Expo, held for the first time in the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia regions, is a triumph not only for the UAE but also for all Gulf countries as well including Kuwait, he said. Holding the Expo during the challenges posed by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic successful was also another point of achievement for the UAE, he affirmed. Expo 2020



DUBAI: KCCI Chairman Mohammad Al-Saqer is seen during his visit to the Kuwaiti pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai. —KUNA

Dubai began on October 1, 2021 and will last until March 31, 2022. —KUNA

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News in brief

Interior Ministry uses
drones to fight crimes

KUWAIT: The Interior Ministry decided to increase police's presence at locations of large gatherings and where crimes happen more frequently in Kuwait and use drones to monitor those places. This came during a meeting yesterday featuring top Interior Ministry officials to discuss ways to curb the increase in violence in society, the ministry said in a statement.

Six students hurt in
three-car accident

KUWAIT: Six students were injured in an accident reported yesterday in Fintas. Firemen arrived at the scene following a report about a three-vehicle collision in front of a school in the area. The six female students aged 14 and 15 were transported to hospital with fractures and bruises, Kuwait Fire Force said. An investigation was opened into the accident.

Police find drugs inside
live sheep in Kabd

KUWAIT: Kuwait police foiled an attempt to smuggle 17 kilograms of drugs kept inside live sheep in a shipment that arrived in Kuwait, the Interior Ministry announced. Top ministry officials led by Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Al-Sabah were present at the scene to oversee the operation which took place in Kabd, the ministry said in a statement, adding that an unspecified number of suspects were arrested.

'Cryptocurrency minting'
devices confiscated

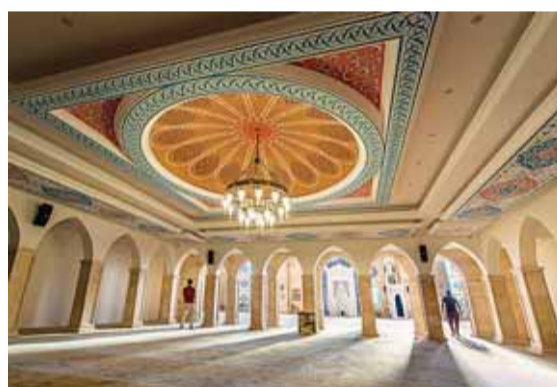
KUWAIT: The customs department confiscated computers believed to be used in minting bitcoins, Al-Rai Arabic newspaper reported yesterday quoting sources. The report does not mention any names or the number of devices allegedly confiscated. According to the sources, customs contacted the Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority to verify the nature of the equipment. The agency confirmed that the equipment could be used in minting bitcoins, they added. The sources explained that low energy fares in Kuwait makes it a target for people minting cryptocurrency through high-tech computers. However, the law in Kuwait does not criminalize importing such devices, they noted.

Constitutional court denies
by-election results appeal

KUWAIT: The constitutional court issued a verdict yesterday denying the appeal on the results in the National Assembly by-election held in the fifth constituency on May 21st. The court withheld announcing the verdict during its session on November 10th. On May 23, 2021, the committee supervising the fifth constituency by-election announced that candidate Obaid Al-Wasmi had won the seat by receiving 43,810 votes.

Kuwait oil price
up to \$79.56 pb

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil went up by 13 cents to \$79.56 per barrel on Tuesday, compared to \$79.43 pb the day earlier, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. Meanwhile, the price of the Brent crude rose by \$2.61 to \$82.31 per barrel, the same case with the West Texas Intermediate, which also hiked by \$1.75 to \$78.50 pb. The OPEC daily basket price rose by 50 cents Tuesday to settle at \$79.40 per barrel, compared to \$78.90 pb last Monday, as per the organization's daily bulletin. The organization's bulletin also mentioned that the average annual price of the OPEC basket in 2020 was at \$41.47 pb. The OPEC+ alliance decided during a ministerial meeting, on November 4, to maintain current oil production plan, designed to increase the output gradually. The alliance's officials are scheduled to re-examine market status at another meeting due on December 2.

Mosques with Ottoman
architecture in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Some mosques in Kuwait are built to mirror Ottoman architecture, with exterior and interior designs and drawings showing its beauty. Among these mosques are Badria Al-Jee'an Mosque, commonly referred to as the Golden Mosque, a 3,600-square-meter newly-built mosque in Salmiya. The other is the cemetery's mosque. —KUNA

Zain strategic partner of FoodBuzz

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced its strategic partnership with FoodBuzz, a 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 Arraya Center 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.

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



KUWAIT: Zain and FoodBuzz officials during the event.

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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China, Russia furious over democracy summit snubs

Biden invites 110 countries to virtual summit on democracy

BEIJING: China and Russia reacted furiously yesterday to US President Joe Biden's planned democracy summit, which will exclude them, with Beijing angered over an invitation for Taiwan and the Kremlin branding it divisive. The global conference was a campaign pledge by the US president, who has placed the struggle between democracies and "autocratic governments" at the heart of his foreign policy.

The inclusion of Taiwan, and not China, led to an angry rebuke from Beijing, which said it "firmly opposes" the invitation to "the so-called Summit for Democracy." Beijing claims self-ruled Taiwan as part of its territory to be retaken one day, by force if necessary. Around 110 countries have been invited to the virtual summit, including the United States' major Western allies but also Iraq, India and Pakistan.

But Russia said the guest list, released Tuesday on the State Department website, showed that the United States "prefers to create new dividing lines, to divide countries into those that — in their opinion — are good, and those that are bad." "More and more countries prefer to decide themselves how to live," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters, adding that Washington is "trying to privatize the term 'democracy'." "That can't do so and should not do so," he said.

Diplomatic coup

The invitation is a major coup for Taipei at a time when China is ramping up its campaign to keep Taiwan locked out of international bodies. Taiwan said the gathering would be a rare opportunity to burnish its credentials on the world stage. "Through this summit, Taiwan can share its democratic success story," presidential office spokesman Xavier Chang told reporters.

Only 15 countries officially recognize Taipei over Beijing, although many nations maintain de facto diplomatic relations with the island. The US does not recognize Taiwan as an independent country but maintains it

as a crucial regional ally and opposes any change to its status by force. China balks at any use of the word "Taiwan" or diplomatic gestures that might lend a sense of international legitimacy to the island.

"I agree Taiwan more than qualifies — but it does seem to be (the) only democratic govt invited that the US govt does not officially recognize. So its inclusion is a big deal," tweeted Julian Ku, a Hofstra University law professor whose specialties include China. Taiwan's foreign ministry said it would be represented at the summit by its de facto US ambassador Bi-khim Hsiao and digital minister Audrey Tang, who is one of the world's few openly transgender national politicians.

Scrutinized guest list

The long-advertised meeting will take place online on December 9 and 10 ahead of an in-person meeting at its second edition next year. India, often called "the world's biggest democracy", will be present, despite increasing criticism from human rights defenders over democratic backsliding under Hindu nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

So too will Pakistan, despite its chequered relationship with Washington. Turkey, a NATO ally of the United States whose President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was dubbed an "autocrat" by Biden, did not make the list. Neither did the city-state of Singapore, or Bangladesh, one of the world's most populous democracies.

In the Middle East, only Israel and Iraq were invited. The traditional Arab allies of the US — Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates — are all absent. Biden also invited Brazil, which is led by controversial far-right President Jair Bolsonaro. In Europe, Poland is represented, despite recurring tensions with Brussels over respect for the rule of law, but Hungary's far-right Prime Minister Viktor Orban is not. On the African side, the



CHIAYI CITY, Taiwan: File photo shows Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen (C) inspects air force troops during a ceremony at the Chiayi Air Force in southern Taiwan. — AFP

Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, South Africa, Nigeria and Niger are invited.

'Decline of democracy'

"For this kick-off Summit... there's a case for getting a broad set of actors into the room: it provides for a better exchange of ideas than setting a perfect bar for qualification," Laleh Ispahani of the Open Society Foundations told AFP. Rather than using the summit as an anti-China meeting, Ispahani urged Biden to

address "the serious decline of democracy around the world — including relatively robust models like the US."

This summit is being organized as democracy has suffered setbacks in countries where the US had placed great hopes. Sudan and Myanmar have experienced military coups, Ethiopia is in the midst of a conflict that could lead to its "implosion," according to US diplomats, and the Taliban took power in Afghanistan following the withdrawal of US troops after two decades. — AFP

German parties to unveil deal for post-Merkel govt

BERLIN: A centre-left-led alliance of parties is poised yesterday to announce a deal to form Germany's new government, putting the Social Democrats (SPD) in charge for the first time in 16 years. Two months after the SPD beat Angela Merkel's conservative CDU-CSU coalition in a general election, its negotiators put the finishing touches on the deal with the Greens and liberal Free Democrats that will install Finance Minister Olaf Scholz, 63, as chancellor.

The relatively rapid accord is likely to be greeted by a heave of relief by international partners wary of a hamstrung Germany while crises from the coronavirus pandemic to Belarus and a weak economic recovery rage. Critical voices within Germany have grown

louder for greater urgency from the new coalition to curb a surging fourth wave of the pandemic as hospital beds fill up and new infections soar to records highs day after day.

In a sign of the emergency, Merkel, who is retiring from politics after four terms, summoned the leaders of the new coalition parties for talks over the rapidly deteriorating COVID situation midway during their last spurt of negotiations Tuesday. Yesterday, the parties said they will meet for a "final session" of talks.

"Afterwards, the leaders of the three parties and the candidate for chancellor, Olaf Scholz, will present the coalition agreement negotiated in recent weeks," they added. With the so-called coalition

contract, the parties have essentially set their policy roadmap for the next four years.

Expected to feature in the agreement along with their stance vis-a-vis foreign policy will be a plan to bring Germany's exit out of coal forward to 2030 from 2038 and a proposal to legalise recreational use of cannabis.

Negotiators are also likely to have resolved a thorny part of the talks — which party takes which ministry. Latest lists leaked on the ministry distribution show Christian Lindner, leader of the business-friendly FDP, running the powerful finance ministry of Europe's biggest economy.

Robert Habeck, co-leader of the ecologist Greens, is touted to lead a new 'super-ministry' grouping the portfolios of economy, climate protection and energy. Annalena Baerbock, the Greens' other leader, will likely become Germany's next foreign minister — the first woman in the job.

The health ministry, which has become highly crucial but also a hot potato during the pandemic, is expected to go to the SPD, according to German media. The lineup, if confirmed, hints at a Germany that could take a more assertive tone vis-a-vis China and Russia, while economically, it would likely stick to budgetary rigour and aggressively push green investments.

The swift pace at which the three parties-known in Germany as the Ampel or "traffic-light" after their colours — came together is a surprise given that the FDP is not a natural partner with the centre-left SPD or Greens. But the parties are anxious to avoid a repeat of the messy negotiations last time round, when Lindner was vilified for pulling the plug on talks with Merkel's CDU-CSU and the Greens. — AFP

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International

UN urges Yemen warring parties to 'de-escalate violence'

'There is no sustainable military solution to the conflict'

DUBAI: The United Nations yesterday urged Yemen's warring sides to "de-escalate violence", a day after one of its agencies warned the conflict will have claimed 377,000 lives by year's end. The Yemeni government, supported by a Saudi-led military coalition, and the Iran-allied Houthi rebels have been embroiled in conflict since 2014, resulting in what the UN calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

"There is no sustainable military solution to the conflict in Yemen," said UN special envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg in a statement. "All warring parties need to de-escalate violence and prioritize the interests of civilians over scoring military wins," he said after a regional tour which included visits to Saudi Arabia, Iran and Egypt. A UN Development Program report said Tuesday that 377,000 people will have died by the end of 2021 through direct and indirect impacts of the Yemen war.

Nearly 60 percent of deaths will have been caused by consequences such as lack of safe water,

hunger and disease, it said, suggesting that fighting will have directly killed over 150,000 people. Projecting the impact of continued fighting into the future, the UNDP warned that 1.3 million people in total will have died by 2030. Grundberg also said that recent developments, including the ongoing battle for the strategic city of Marib, had resulted in ripple effects across Yemen, which has long been the Arabian Peninsula's poorest country.

In recent weeks, fighting has escalated on several fronts, mostly near Marib city, the internationally-recognized government's last major stronghold in Yemen's oil-rich north. Thousands of rebels and pro-government fighters have been killed in the battle for the city. The Houthis this month also seized a large area south of

Hodeida, a Red Sea port city where the warring sides agreed on a ceasefire in 2018, after loyalist forces withdrew. Yemen's grinding conflict has displaced millions, and more than 80 percent of the population of around 30 million require humanitarian assistance. —AFP



Yemen's grinding conflict has displaced millions



SANAA: Yemenis inspect a damaged factory following reported bombardment by the coalition forces in the Houthi-controlled capital Sanaa on November 23, 2021. —AFP

Iran executes man convicted as minor

TEHRAN: Iran executed a man yesterday who was arrested for murder at the age of 17, the judiciary said, despite appeals to spare his life by rights groups including Amnesty International. Arman Abdolali was executed at dawn in Rajai Shahr prison near Tehran, in line with the "qesas" eye-for-an-eye style justice demanded by the victim's family, said the judiciary's Mizan Online website.

Amnesty International had appealed on October 11 for Iran to halt the execution of the 25-year-old who was arrested in 2014 and later convicted of murdering his girlfriend, Ghazaleh Shakour. The London-based rights group said he had been sentenced to death twice but that the execution was stopped both times following international outcry.

It said Abdolali was first sentenced to death in December 2015 after "a grossly unfair trial" by a court that "relied on torture-tainted 'confessions'" following Shakour's disappearance the year before. It said Abdolali was sentenced to death again in 2020 in a retrial, where the court ruled the teenager was responsible in the absence of evidence to the contrary, Amnesty reported. "This young man was not a criminal," Hadi Sadeghi, a judicial official, was quoted as saying by Iranian media in October.

"Like the victim, he came from a respectable family. In prison, Arman continued his studies to obtain a master's degree in education," he said. "The two families knew each other and the victim and the accused intended to get married," Sadeghi added. The body of Shakour, who was 19 at the time of her disappearance, was never found. According to Mizan Online, the victim's mother had said she would forgive Abdolali if he revealed the location of her body.

UN human rights experts also appealed to Iran to halt the execution. "International human rights law unequivocally forbids imposition of the death sentence on anyone under 18 years of age," said the Geneva-based UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Iran executed at least 246 people last year, retaining its place as the most prolific user of capital punishment in the region and the second worldwide after China, according to Amnesty. Iran has often faced international criticism for executing people convicted of crimes committed when they were minors, in violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child that has been ratified by the Islamic republic. In July, a senior Iranian official told AFP that the Islamic republic was doing its best to bring down to zero the number of executions of child offenders. —AFP

Breastfeeding British MP given baby ban

LONDON: A British MP called for reforms yesterday after a parliamentary official rebuked her for bringing her sleeping baby to a debate. Stella Creasy, an opposition lawmaker who has campaigned for MPs to be offered maternity leave, received a warning after speaking at a debate on Tuesday while holding her three-month-old son Pip.

The Labour MP for the London constituency of Walthamstow tweeted an email from an official at the House of Commons citing a rule that "you should not take your seat in the Chamber when accompanied by a child". Creasy and other MPs questioned the ruling, which appeared to stand at odds with previous directives on the practice.

Alex Davies-Jones, a Labour MP, tweeted that when elected in 2019 she was breastfeeding and the Speaker of the House of Commons Lindsay Hoyle assured her she would be able to feed her baby in



British MP Stella Creasy

the main chamber of Westminster Hall, a historic building used for some MPs' sessions. Former Liberal Democrat leader Jo Swinson was reportedly the first to do so in 2018.

"Mothers in the mother of all parliaments are not to be seen or heard it seems," Creasy complained. The MP has regularly brought her baby son, who is still being breastfed, to debates, as she previously

did with her daughter.

"He's very tiny" and "perhaps some of my colleagues are noisier than him", she told Sky News, calling for a more flexible approach from parliamentary authorities. "It's a part and parcel of modern life, isn't it, that sometimes you might need to have your children with you." Despite the formal rule against this, MPs have previously brought babies to debates without reprimand.

Former Liberal Democrat leader Jo Swinson was reportedly the first to do so in 2018. Creasy has campaigned unsuccessfully for MPs to get full rights to maternity leave. "When you're a mum you can't win," she told Sky News. Other MPs backed her.

"I've got quite a lot of sympathy with Stella," Justice Secretary Dominic Raab told Sky News. "We need to make sure we're in the 21st century," he said, while adding it was up to the parliamentary authorities to "work out what the right balance is".

The British government in February announced it would introduce six-month paid maternity leave for senior ministers, but MPs are not entitled to this. Creasy in 2019 became the first MP to hire a locum to work on her behalf in her constituency after her daughter's birth but was not allowed to do this again. —AFP

Mexican women fight for right to self-defense

CIUDAD NEZAHUALCOYOTL: Imprisoned for killing the man she says raped her, Roxana Ruiz is fighting to prove her innocence in a case taken up by activists campaigning for the right to self-defense. "My only crime was to defend myself against the man who raped me," Ruiz, 21, wrote from the prison where she has been held since May in a suburb next to Mexico City.

Rights groups will use Thursday's International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women to argue that legitimate self-defense is not a crime in a country facing a femicide crisis. In a letter published by activists, Ruiz said that her attacker was a man who insisted on accompanying her home after she went for a beer with a friend. Once there, he asked to stay the night, saying that he lived far away.

While she was asleep, the man sexually assaulted her, beat her and threatened to kill her, before she suffocated him while defending herself, she wrote. "I was afraid, terrified," she said. "I didn't want him to hurt anyone else," Ruiz added. Having reflected on

her experience while in prison, "I've started to think that the laws and society are unjust," she wrote. "Maybe I should have let my attacker have his way and perhaps leave me dead or injured," she added.

'Accomplice of femicide'

Mexico registered 736 femicide cases between January and September, following 975 cases in the whole of last year, according to official figures. Despite the clear risks, Ruiz faces an uphill battle to prove that she acted in legitimate self-defense because no forensic evidence was collected from the scene. Her lawyer, Abigail Escalante, accuses the authorities of failing to follow basic protocols such as a gynecological examination. "Why does a woman who suffered a crime have to prove that she's actually a victim?" Escalante asked.

The case has triggered protests by feminist groups, who denounce impunity for men who kill women. In a demonstration outside the jail where Ruiz is being held, protesters put up banners reading "self-defense is not a crime" and "the state is an accomplice of femicide." Her mother Ana Ruiz joined the protest to call for her daughter to be set free. "He wanted to kill her as well as rape her. He had threatened to kill her and she defended herself," she said.



CIUDAD NEZAHUALCOYOTL: Women activists take part in a protest in support of Roxana Ruiz Santiago, 21, accused of murder after she killed a man when defending herself from a rape, at the Bordo court in Ciudad Nezahualcoyotl, Mexico State, on August 23, 2021. —AFP

'Save our lives'

Yakiri Rubio, now 28, was locked up for 18 months on charges of murder after she fatally wounded the man who sexually assaulted her. Rubio was cleared after her lawyer, Ana Suarez, proved that it was self-defense. The authorities "dislike knowing that women can defend ourselves, so they don't want to do their job," she said. Now both work for an association helping women,

including through self-defense classes taught by a martial arts instructor. "It's to learn to save our lives," said Suarez's sister Maria Jose, one of the organizers. Rubio tells women to seek good advice in case they are arrested after defending themselves. Equally important is "that your family believes you, that society supports you, takes care of you and protects you, and that the media reports the truth," she added. —AFP

Canada govt vows faster indigenous reconciliation

OTTAWA: Canada's governor general opened parliament Tuesday in a speech partly delivered in her native Inuktitut, highlighting the "deep wounds" reopened by the recent discovery of mass graves at schools for indigenous children. Governor General Mary Simon, who was sworn in July to serve as the first indigenous representative of Queen Elizabeth II in Canada, said: "This is the moment to move faster on the path of reconciliation."

In the throne speech outlining Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's agenda, she said the discoveries in May of more than 1,300 unmarked graves at schools in British

Columbia and Saskatchewan "horrified" Canadians and underscored how a past policy of assimilation caused "deep wounds."

Those finds, she said, "show how much the actions of governments and institutions of old have been devastating for indigenous peoples, who continue to suffer from it today." Trudeau has made reconciliation with more than 600 tribes a priority for his government, which returned to power following a general election in September. Highlighting the plans of Trudeau's Liberals in her speech, Simon said the government plans to taper pandemic aid down to a Can\$7.4 billion (US\$5.8 billion) package targeting hardest-hit sectors through the spring.

The government will also prioritize affordable housing and subsidized day care, increased immigration, tougher gun laws, and deepening partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region. The statement follows a two-year row between Ottawa and Beijing over tit-for-tat arrests of Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou, and two Canadians, former diplomat Michael Kovrig and businessman

Michael Spavor. All three were released and repatriated in September.

'Our planet is in danger'

In her speech Simon also promised the federal government's support for Canadians on the Pacific coast who are recovering from catastrophic flooding and mudslides caused by heavy rains that left at least four dead and one missing.

Ottawa has already deployed the army to help, and vital road and rail links between Vancouver and the rest of Canada have started to be reestablished this week. The latest flooding to hit British Columbia, following record-high temperatures over the summer that killed more than 500 people, as well as wildfires that destroyed a town, is a stark reminder of "extreme weather worsened by climate change," Simon said. "Our planet is in danger," she said. "From a warming Arctic to the increasing devastation of natural disasters, our land and our people need help." To pass their agenda, the Liberals must rely on at least one other party. —AFP

IAEA 'could not agree' in talks with Iran

VIENNA: The UN nuclear watchdog's head said yesterday that he "could not agree" in talks with Iranian officials to resolve disputes over the monitoring of the country's atomic program, a day after returning from Tehran. Rafael Grossi, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), told the quarterly meeting of the board of governors that his talks in Tehran were "inconclusive", despite what he had earlier described as "intense" negotiations.

"We could not agree yesterday, in spite of my best efforts," Grossi told reporters yesterday, shortly after addressing the board meeting. Among

other officials in Tehran, he met Mohammad Eslami, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran. He had been hoping to make progress on several points of contention between the agency and Tehran.

These include the constraints put on IAEA inspections activity earlier this year, outstanding questions over the presence of undeclared nuclear material at sites in Iran, and the treatment of IAEA staff in the country. The talks came ahead of the scheduled resumption on Monday of negotiations between Tehran and world powers aimed at reviving the 2015 deal that gave Iran sanctions relief in return for curbs on its nuclear program. —AFP

International

China's birthrate plummets to lowest figure in decades

Marriages registered in 2020 reached a 17-year low

BEIJING: China's birthrate plummeted to a record low last year, highlighting a looming demographic crisis for Beijing caused by a rapidly ageing workforce, a slowing economy and the weakest population growth in decades. China relaxed its "one-child policy" - one of the world's strictest family planning regulations - in 2016, allowing couples to have two children. Earlier this year that was extended to three children. But the changes have failed to result in the hoped-for baby boom, as the cost of living rises and women increasingly make their own family planning choices.

Last year, China recorded 8.52 births per 1,000 people according to the 2021 Statistical Yearbook released in the past week - the lowest figure since the yearbook data began in 1978. It is a marked drop from the previous year's 10.41, and the lowest figure since Communist China

was founded in 1949, according to the National Bureau of Statistics. In addition, the yearbook showed the number of marriages registered in 2020 reached a 17-year low, with only 8.14 million couples tying the knot last year.

During the initial COVID-19 outbreak, parts of central China were placed under strict lockdown for months and across the country many govern-

ment offices were temporarily closed. For most of last year, however, there were few formal restrictions on weddings proceeding as normal. The number of divorces fell for the first time in at least 30 years, after a mandatory 30-day "cooling-off period" for divorcing couples was implemented at the beginning of 2020.

The yearbook data highlights many social trends troubling the Beijing leadership, which has pushed a socially conservative agenda for society with women as wives and mothers. The results of a once-in-a-decade census announced in May showed that China's population grew at its slowest rate since the 1960s. Amid official efforts to boost birthrates, Beijing in September called for a reduction in terminations that are not "medically necessary". Some questions have also been raised over the reliability of China's data.

Calculations by Bloomberg yesterday suggested that China undercounted the number of births between 2000 and 2010 by at least 11.6 million - according to discrepancies between the statistical yearbook, for which surveys are conducted annually, and the once-in-a-decade census. Two hashtags about the marriage data trended on the Twitter-like Weibo social network



BEIJING: File photo shows two women and two babies sitting on a bench in a park in Beijing. China's birthrate plummeted to a record low in 2020, highlighting a looming demographic crisis for Beijing caused by a rapidly ageing workforce. —AFP

this week, with more than 140 million views. "I think raising a cat is hard, not to mention getting married and having kids", one netizen com-

plained on the thread. Others said the divorce cooling-off period had deterred people from rushing into marriage. —AFP

Taliban say Doha talks to open 'new chapter' with US

KABUL: Next week's talks between the United States and the Taliban in Doha-the second such meeting since the Islamists seized power-will open a "new chapter" in political ties, the group said yesterday. Washington said Tuesday it would continue to hold talks with the Taliban following a meeting between the two sides in the Qatari capital on October 9-10.

"A new phase of negotiations will begin next week between Afghanistan and America in Qatar," the Taliban said on their official Arabic Twitter account. "At this stage, talks will address opening a new chapter in political relations between the two countries, resolving economic issues, and the implementation of the terms in the previous Doha agreement."

The US State Department said the proposed two weeks of negotiations will address several issues such as fighting the threat of the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda groups, as well as humanitarian aid. Talks will also focus on how to offer safe passage out of Afghanistan for US citizens and Afghans who worked for Washington during the 20-year war.

The American delegation will be led by the US special representative for Afghanistan, Thomas West. Last week, West insisted that any financial and diplomatic support from Washington to the



DOHA: File photo shows Head of the Taliban delegation Abdul Salam Hanafi (R), accompanied by Taliban officials (2R to L) Muttaqi, Shahabuddin Delawar and Abdul Latif Mansour, walks down a hotel lobby in Qatar's capital Doha. The United States will resume talks with the Taliban next week in Qatar. —AFP

Taliban was based on certain conditions.

He said the Taliban have to install an inclusive government, respect the rights of minorities, women and girls, and provide equal access to education and employment. Amir Khan Muttaqi,

foreign minister of the Taliban government-which is not recognised by the international community-last week called for the release of Afghan assets frozen by the US in an open letter to the US Congress. —AFP

Hundreds join anti-vaccine rally in Ukraine

KIEV: Hundreds of protesters blocked roads in central Kiev yesterday to demonstrate against Ukraine's anti-COVID measures and vaccine drive, as the country battles a fresh wave of infections. One of Europe's poorest countries, ex-Soviet Ukraine is battling spiralling cases, blamed in part on the highly contagious Delta variant.

A low vaccination rate has worsened Ukraine's outbreak as people are hesitant to get jabbed despite repeated calls from the authorities. Yesterday, protesters in the capital Kiev held up posters reading "Stop the fake pandemic", "Say 'No' to genocide!" and "Say 'No' to lies". Computer science teacher Oleksiy Mykytenko told AFP that he was suspended from work after refus-

ing to get a jab.

"Why are my rights being violated? Why should I get injected with some substance?" Mykytenko, 48, said. There are currently four vaccines available in Ukraine: Pfizer/BioNTech, Moderna, AstraZeneca and Chinese-made Coronavac.

Ukrainian officials recently said that the anti-vaccination campaign is organised by Russia as part of its efforts to destabilise the situation in Ukraine. In an article for the Ukrinform news agency, first deputy secretary of the national security and defence council, Ruslan Demchenko, pointed the finger at "Russian intelligence services".

He said they use social media to "undermine confidence in vaccination" and show that the restrictions imposed to contain a surge in infections are "an attack on human rights". Russia has not responded to these allegations.

Yesterday, the country of around 40 million people reported 14,325 new coronavirus cases



KIEV: Anti-vaccine protesters rally in Kiev yesterday. Hundreds of protesters blocked roads in central Kiev to demonstrate against Ukraine's anti-COVID measures and vaccine drive, as the country battles a fresh wave of infections. —AFP

and 595 deaths from the virus over 24 hours. While the vaccination drive has accelerated in recent weeks after authorities

imposed restrictions on the unvaccinated entering public places, only 26 percent of Ukrainians are fully vaccinated. —AFP

New Delhi to reopen schools; smog goes from worse to bad

NEW DELHI: India's polluted capital will reopen schools on Monday, one week after it announced a partial shutdown over dangerous air pollution levels, authorities said yesterday. Gopal Rai, Delhi state's environment minister, told journalists that pollution levels in the city had "improved in the last three days" and some of the restrictions would be relaxed.

The authorities had announced a shutdown

of some coal plants, a ban on entry of non-essential vehicles, construction work restrictions and urged people to stay indoors as some air pollutants reached more than 30 times the World Health Organization's recommended maximum. Levels of PM 2.5, the most harmful particulate matter that is responsible for chronic lung and heart disease, were still around 120 micrograms per cubic meter yesterday according to monitoring company IQAir - eight times the WHO limit.

Delhi, one of the world's most polluted cities and home to about 20 million people, is covered in a thick blanket of smog every winter after farmers in neighboring northern states burn crop residue.

"The schools, colleges and institutions can

reopen Monday. The government offices where we'd imposed work from home too will reopen and we'll advise officials to use public transport," Rai said. Restrictions on construction activities in the city had already been eased. Cleaner electric and compressed natural gas-powered vehicles will also be allowed to re-enter Delhi.

The Commission for Air Quality Management for Delhi last week ordered "anti-smog guns" and water sprinklers to operate at pollution hotspots at least three times a day. But critics say such measures are cosmetic moves that fail to address the root causes of industrial pollutants, vehicular pollution and crop burn-off coalescing into toxic winter smog. In a report published last year, Swiss-based IQAir found that 22 of the world's 30 most polluted cities were in India. —AFP

China stuns West with hypersonic missile test

PARIS: A Chinese hypersonic test flight involving a high speed missile launch points to a major breakthrough, but Beijing's capacity to deploy the advanced technology in combat is still doubtful, experts said. The American defence establishment has been rattled by the discovery that a Chinese hypersonic glider around-the-earth test flight in July culminated in the firing of a missile in mid-flight at more than five times the speed of sound over the South China Sea, media reports said at the weekend.

Top powers the United States, Russia and China have all been experimenting with so-called hypersonic glide vehicles-defined as reaching speeds of at least Mach 5 - but up to now none had displayed comparable mastery of a mid-flight missile launch.

Weapons travelling at hypersonic speed would enable an attacking military to overcome defence installations through sheer speed and unparalleled manoeuvrability, and allow a country under assault to pick off incoming missiles more easily.

"The Chinese appear to have mastered the thermic and aerodynamic shock effects linked to hypersonic speed," said Joseph Henrotin, defence strategy researcher and chief editor of DSI, a French military review. This, he told AFP, required "huge computing capacity".

US defence officials were caught off-guard by the Chinese display, the Financial Times reported, citing people familiar with the intelligence. Details of Beijing's test are still sketchy, with analysts wondering whether the missile hit or missed its target, or whether there even was a target.

'Great leap forward'

Either way, the demonstration showed that China has made surprising advances in a technology that many experts had placed much further in the future. "The recent tests constitute a great leap forward for China in terms of technology," said Niklas Swanstrom, China expert and director of the Institute for Security and Development in Stockholm.

But, he told AFP, "even if they have the technology, it is much less clear if they have the ability to deploy them and to make effective use of them in combat operations". And, as important as superfast weaponry may become in the future, any edge China may have gained over the US in that area is nowhere near changing the overall military balance.

"We still have to realize that the US is far ahead of China in terms of overall military technology," Swanstrom said. China makes no secret of having developed at least one aerodynamic wind tunnel capable of conducting tests for hypersonic weapons and equipment.

The state-owned Aviation Industry Corp of China (AVIC) confirmed this month that a Mach 8 wind tunnel called FL-64 had been completed and now had "testing capability", including "weapon separation and delivery".

Meanwhile Chinese scientists are building the JF-22 wind tunnel which can simulate flight at 30 times the speed of sound, state broadcaster CCTV reported in August. Chinese Academy of Sciences researcher Jiang Zonglin told CCTV the tunnel could be used to develop aircraft that could "reach any place on earth within one or two hours".

The advances in China's spacecraft development make the reports of the missile launch "credible", said James Char, an expert on the Chinese military at Singapore's Nanyang Technological University. But it was also possible that US defence officials were exaggerating the real danger from the missile display in a bid to secure more money for their own weaponry. —AFP

Business

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 2021

Algeria's poor fret over plan to slash subsidies on basic goods

Many economists support the plan as a necessary evil

ALGIERS: Algeria plans to scrap its generous state subsidies on basic goods that have long helped maintain social peace but strained state budgets as energy revenues have fallen. Many economists support the plan as a necessary evil, as long as the neediest are protected, but some poor families are fearful about the impact.

The North African country, heavily dependent on oil and gas exports, has for decades subsidized everything from bread and milk to fuel and electricity, at the cost of billions of dollars a year. But income from energy exports has fallen for years, especially during the downturn driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, heightening the strain on public finances in the country of 43 million.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF), which advocates subsidy reform, last month urged Algiers to "recalibrate" its policies. Lawmakers voted last week to wind back the subsidy system that has helped share the energy wealth with all households regardless of income, leaving some people worried about how they will get by.

"It's a disaster," Hafidha, a mother-of-two with a monthly pension of 50,000 dinars (\$360) said at an Algiers market. "Already with the current prices we have a hard time making ends meet. The price of sugar, oil, water and fuel will definitely go up."

Public fears were stoked when fruit and vegetable prices recently skyrocketed. The price of potatoes more than tripled to 140 dinars (\$1) a kilogram, although authorities blamed this on market speculators they said they had since disbanded.

'Recalibration'

During Algeria's transition to a market economy

in the 1990s, subsidies replaced the fixed prices of a planned economy that had been in place since independence from France in 1962. Algeria's subsidy system has been financed by energy exports that account for about 95 percent of foreign revenues and 60 percent of its budget. But with a recent decline in energy prices, "the state no longer has the means for such a generous social policy" economist Omar Berkouk told AFP.

"All the World Bank and International Monetary Fund experts, as well as economists, have pointed to the need to reduce (subsidies) by better targeting the recipients," he added. Critics of state subsidies say they are costly, create harmful market distortions and are inefficient because they help rich households more than poor ones. In early October, the IMF said the pandemic and a fall in oil prices and output had "seriously impacted the economy last year" when Algeria's real GDP contracted by 4.9 percent.

Although a recovery is underway, it recommended "a broad-based fiscal adjustment" with measures to protect the most vulnerable should start in 2022.

Algeria's state budget for next year sets aside the equivalent of \$17 billion for social transfers, including compensation measures, as well as assistance for education, health, housing and support for large families.

This is far below the \$30-40 billion a year in the state budgets between 2012 and 2017.

Identifying the needy

Previous governments considered introducing more targeted subsidies in 2015, and again in 2017 when the current President Abdelmadjid Tebboune



ALGIERS: Algeria has for decades subsidized everything from bread and milk to fuel and electricity. —AFP

was prime minister. "It was ex-president Abdelaziz Bouteflika who prevented any such action, with an eye to running for a fifth term," Berkouk said about the late veteran leader who was ousted amid mass protests in 2019.

Zoheir Rouis of the Jil Jadid (New Generation) party said the lifting of subsidies should not be "an end in itself but another way to optimize public spending". Social and labor issues expert Nouredine Bouderra however slammed the move as "dangerous for national cohesion" in comments to the Reporters news outlet, arguing it comes as the

purchasing power of many Algerians is already "under violent assault".

Prime Minister Aïme Benabderrahmane, who is also finance minister, assured parliament that "the government has no intention of cutting state aid", promising instead "a new philosophy that targets families in need with direct aid". But Berkouk voiced concern that "it's difficult to identify the people in most need" given the large informal economy and absence of income and asset declarations.

"The poor are visible in the streets, but there is no statistical tool to identify them." —AFP

Why is Turkish currency in freefall?

ANKARA: The Turkish lira has been in freefall as President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has championed interest rate cuts despite rampant inflation. The currency hit a record low this week—exceeding 13 to the dollar—and has lost over 43 percent in value against the US greenback since the start of the year.

Here are key questions about the lira's collapse:

Why is the lira crashing?

Erdogan insisted this summer interest rates had to fall, taking the unorthodox view that high rates equal high inflation. The central bank has since slashed the main interest rate by 400 basis points, sparking doubts about its independence. In its latest decision last week it suggested another cut was likely in December. But the lira's issues go deeper.

Erdogan, who has sacked three central bank governors since July 2019, has refused to accept any responsibility for the lira's collapse. "I reject policies that will condemn our people to unemployment, hunger and poverty," he said on Monday, warning



ISTANBUL: A man walks past a currency exchange agency near Grand Bazaar in Istanbul yesterday. —AFP

that the country was in a "war of economic independence".

Kerim Rota, who is in charge of economic policy at the opposition Future Party, said the lira was suffering the worst monthly devaluation since 1994, and the second worst in the past 40 years.

"If it reaches 14.25 (to the dollar) at the end of the month, it will be the highest. It's now out of control, this is clear to see," Rota told Halk TV in an interview Tuesday. The Turkish currency rose yesterday, trading at under 12 lira to the dollar.

What are the risks?

While many say Turkey's banking sector is stronger since the 2001 economic crisis, there are concerns about

the impact on banks and the potential for capital controls. "Banks are better placed to cope with the spillovers from a weaker lira than they were a few years ago," said Jason Tuvey, an emerging markets analyst at Capital Economics.

But, he added, "the risk is that the lira suffers further sharp and disorderly falls that do trigger problems in the banking sector. A credit crunch could ensue that weighs heavily on economic activity."

Any signs of a "flood of withdrawal requests" from foreign exchange deposits would likely trigger more aggressive capital controls, he warned. Over half of all deposits in Turkish banks are in foreign currencies, mainly dollars.

Turkey's official inflation target is five percent but has stubbornly remained in the double digits in the past two years, nearing 20 percent last month. Opposition parties say real inflation is much higher than what the official data shows. Given the situation, the opposition has called for an early election ahead of a scheduled vote in June 2023, but Erdogan vowed Tuesday that "there will be no early election".

What does Erdogan expect?

The president is prioritizing growth with the economy expected to expand by nine percent in 2021 and 3.5 percent in 2022. During another currency crisis in 2018, the central bank aggressively hiked the main interest rate but the likelihood of a repeat under a more determined Erdogan is low.

Some experts have accused the president of seeking to make Turkey more attractive as a hub for cheap production with Turkish wages worth less in dollar terms. Turkey's net monthly minimum wage of 2,825.90 liras amounted to \$380 in January 2021 but as of yesterday was equivalent to \$222.

"Until recently, Team Erdogan's '2023 goals' included becoming a post-industrial powerhouse and a high-tech leader. Now, it's to make Turkey a source of ultra-cheap labor," tweeted Duke University professor Timur Kuran. —AFP

IEA urges OPEC to take 'necessary steps' to lower oil prices

PARIS: The head of the International Energy Agency yesterday called on OPEC and its allies to take measures to help bring oil prices down to "reasonable levels". "I very much hope to see in the next meeting or meetings they... make the necessary steps in order to comfort the global oil markets and help bring the prices down at reasonable levels," Fatih Birol told reporters.

The head of the IEA, which unites oil consuming nations, took aim at Russia in particular. "Russia can easily increase exports to Europe about 15 percent... and significantly comfort the European gas markets," said Birol.

Natural gas prices in Europe have surged this year and Russia, the region's major supplier, has been slow to step up deliveries. OPEC nations and their allies, including Russia, are slowly increasing their output each month towards pre-pandemic levels. They have declined to move faster despite a jump in prices to over \$80 per barrel, a level that many analysts worry could undermine the global economic recovery.

The United States and a handful of other oil consuming nations announced on Tuesday a release of their strategic oil reserves in a bid to blunt soaring prices at the pump that are biting into consumers pocketbooks and pushing up transportation costs. Global crude prices rose further as the move was less ambitious than anticipated. —AFP

Oil majors 'pocketing the difference' as gas prices surge: Biden

WASHINGTON: Oil majors have raised gasoline prices for the sake of their own profits, US President Joe Biden said Tuesday as his administration looked for ways to lower prices at pumps nationwide at the beginning of the holiday travel season. The White House has upped the pressure on oil markets amid a spike in energy prices that has driven overall US inflation to record levels.

Biden had earlier in the day announced the United States would release crude from its national stockpile along with China, India, Japan, Korea and Britain in a bid to drive global prices lower, while again taking aim at oil majors he accused of unfairly raising prices.

"The price of gasoline in the wholesale market has fallen by about 10 percent in the last few years but the price at the pump

hasn't budged a penny," Biden said at the White House. "In other words, gas supply companies are paying less and making a lot more," he said, accusing companies of "pocketing the difference" between wholesale and retail prices.

Last week, he urged the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to look into the causes of the nationwide spike in gasoline, saying oil companies have increased prices at the pump even as their expenses decline and profits soar. Analysts say the case for misconduct by oil firms is not clear cut. Energy is a global market and crude prices are rebounding from the depths of the pandemic downturn last year, when they briefly went negative.

The United States is dealing with a record wave of inflation as it goes through its own stronger-than-expected economic rebirth, with consumer prices seeing their biggest annual jump in more than three decades last month. "We and this administration are leaving no stone unturned as we examine the market to figure what's behind the high prices," Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm told reporters Tuesday. "If historical averages were true today, people would be paying about 30 cents less per-gallon at the pump based upon the differential between unfinished gas and gasoline at the pump. So he's asked for the FTC to take a look at this." —AFP

France sanctions US e-commerce site over 'dangerous' goods

PARIS: France has ordered search engines to remove US-based e-commerce platform Wish from their results over it selling substandard or unsafe products, the economy ministry said yesterday.

Search engines like Google are expected to remove the website—which offers cheap, mostly Chinese products—from their results in the coming days. Application stores are no longer to feature the Wish app. But the website operated by San Francisco-based firm ContextLogic should be accessible to customers with the right web address.

"There is no reason to tolerate online what we do not accept in physical shops," Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire told French newspaper Le Parisien. The sanctions come after France's DGC-CRF anti-fraud agency analyzed 140 products sold on Wish and found a large majority to be "non-conforming".

Ninety percent of electronic items examined were deemed "dangerous", as were 62 percent of costume jewelry products, and 45 percent of toys. The anti-fraud agency noted that even after it informed Wish about these failings and the website removed the substandard items, they then reappeared under different names. The latest sanction should last until the website conforms with French law. The US startup said it was taking legal action against the measures, which it called "illegal and disproportionate". —AFP



ANNAPOLIS, US: The price of gas is seen as traffic moves through Annapolis, MD, on Tuesday. —AFP

Business

Spanish government feels heat as economic recovery falters

Country faces sluggish consumption, soaring energy prices and weak growth

MADRID: Spain's leftist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez started the year with a bullish economic outlook. Months later, he faces protests, strikes and an emboldened opposition as the recovery from the pandemic slump trails other European nations.

Gone is the optimism shown earlier this year when Sanchez forecast a strong comeback in 2021 for the eurozone's fourth-largest economy. The country has since faced sluggish consumption, soaring energy prices and weak growth.

"Little by little, the climate changed and clouds gathered," said Rafael Pampillon, an economist at CEU-San Pablo University. Anger over the state of the economy is now starting to spill out into the streets.

Hundreds of auto workers protested in Madrid on Monday to draw attention to the problems the sector faces, while in the southern city of Cadiz metalworkers have been on strike since mid-November to demand wage increases. As Christmas approaches, truckers have threatened to go on strike to protest against rising fuel prices.

The government had initially forecast the economy would expand by 9.8 percent in 2021, one of the highest figures in the eurozone. But in April it slashed its forecast to 6.5 percent, as Spain was hit by a third wave of COVID-19 infections. Most economists, however, believe growth will not surpass 5.0 percent this year.

In recent weeks, disappointing data regarding household consumption and investment have been released that have dampened Spain's economic outlook. Revised figures show gross domestic product (GDP) expanded just 1.1 percent during the second quarter, less than half of the 2.8 percent initially forecast.

And growth was just 2.0 percent in the third quarter, instead of 2.7 percent. "In absolute terms, it's not so bad, but

we could expect better," said Pedro Aznar, a professor at Spain's ESADE business school. He recalled that Spain's tourism-dependent economy contracted 10.8 percent in 2020, one of the worst results among industrialized countries, so it had "a lot of room to grow".

Factories closing

While Spain's GDP remains 6.6 percent below pre-pandemic levels, Italy has narrowed the gap to 1.4 percent, Germany to 1.1 percent and France to just 0.1 percent. Analysts blame soaring energy costs, supply chain disruptions and an overreliance on tourism for the slower growth in Spain.

Energy prices have risen across Europe, but the impact has been especially intense in Spain, since it relies heavily on energy imports, and the higher price of gas and electricity has "hurt consumption," said Aznar. Higher energy prices have also contributed heavily to inflation, which reached 5.4 percent in October, a 29-year high.

And global supply chain problems have dealt a blow to Spain's key automaker sector, which accounts for 11 percent of economic output, said Pampillon.

"This forced many factories to close," he added. Before the pandemic hit in spring 2020, Spain was the world's second-most popular tourist destination after France.

The government has said it was hoping to attract around 45 million tourist visits this year, approximately half the figure for 2019. But as of the end of September it welcomed just 20 million, as people continue to limit travel because of the pandemic.

'Overly optimistic'

"The government was overly optimistic," said Pampillon, adding Spain has also been slow to use money from



BEYOND GDP: MONITORING
MADRID: Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez has said he remains 'confident' about Spain's economic prospects. — AFP

the European Union's economic recovery fund.

One of the main beneficiaries of the fund, Spain is set to receive 140 billion euros (\$157 billion) in grants and loans. Aznar said the slower economic growth will "weaken" the government's budget forecasts and possibly "create a problem with Brussels", which enforces EU deficit rules.

Pablo Casado, the leader of the main opposition conservative Popular Party (PP) which currently tops the polls, accused Sanchez of economic "incompetence" during a debate in parliament earlier this month. He has called for structural reforms to lower taxes, make the labour market more flexible and "reduce bureaucracy and waste".

Sanchez has said he remains "confident" about the country's economic prospects. "Spain is doing better and I promise that next year we will be even better than today," he said recently. — AFP

Powell 'right person' to lead Fed, fight inflation: Biden

WASHINGTON: Jerome Powell is the "right person" to lead the Federal Reserve and fight the record spike in US inflation, President Joe Biden said as he made his long-awaited pick for chair of the world's most influential central bank. The nomination, expected to win confirmation by the Senate, ends weeks of speculation over whether Biden would appoint the Republican chair to a second term or heed calls from left-wing members of his Democratic Party to replace him with another candidate, such as Fed Governor Lael Brainard.

Instead, Brainard will serve as vice chair, Biden said, while Powell will remain in the Fed's driver's seat, presiding over the rollback of its pandemic stimulus and the likely beginning of interest rate hikes next year. Speaking alongside Powell and Brainard at a White House event, Biden credited the Fed chair with helping to spur the economy's faster-than-expected recovery from last year's collapse, pointing to the progress made towards restoring the more than 20 million jobs COVID-19 destroyed.

"I believe Jay is the right person to see us through and finish that effort while also addressing the threat of inflation and what it poses to our economies and families," Biden said, referring to Powell by his nickname. Powell has led the central bank's response to the massive pandemic downturn, which saw it slash

its lending rate to zero and roll out trillions of dollars in liquidity.

The bank has pulled back those measures as the economy has recovered, but inflation has also spiked, fueling a drop in Biden's approval ratings. The Fed chair and other central bank leaders argue the inflation wave will prove temporary and have said they do not foresee rate hikes at least until the middle of 2022, while saying their policies can address employment disparities, with racial minorities and less-educated people getting hired less.

Powell pledged to use "our tools to support the economy and a strong labor market and to prevent higher inflation from becoming entrenched."

Powell, 68, was appointed by Biden's Republican predecessor Donald Trump and took office in 2018 after the then-president decided not to give Democrat Janet Yellen a second term in the seat.

Now Treasury secretary, Yellen told CNBC that she believes Powell and Brainard will "have broad support among Congress and the public and can be counted on to do an excellent job." Powell must be confirmed by the Senate, which Biden's Democrats narrowly control, though analysts predict he will receive a number of votes from Republicans in the opposition-one of whom, Mitt Romney, immediately confirmed his intention to vote yes. — AFP

Biden dives into US oil reserves to soothe Americans on inflation

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden tapped the US strategic oil reserves in a bid to reassure Americans angry about inflation and goods shortages as they head off to Thanksgiving—and to buoy up his sinking poll ratings. Facing growing discontent around the country over inflation and especially the soaring price of fuel in filling stations, Biden on Tuesday announced a coordinated plan with other big consumers to release national oil reserves onto the market.

The White House said that following weeks of negotiations, "this release will be taken in parallel with other major energy consuming nations including China, India, Japan, Republic of Korea and the United Kingdom."

"It will take time but before long you should see the price of gas drop," Biden said in a speech at the White House. Beijing and Tokyo confirmed yesterday that they would join the United States but gave few details.

Despite the announcement, both main crude contracts surged soon after the news-WTI more than two percent and Brent more than three percent—with analysts saying the release had been well telegraphed but the amount was less than expected. And they extended the gains in Asian trade.

While the US economy is rebounding strongly from the COVID-19 lockdowns, supply chain disruption and inflation is stirring anxiety as the holiday season begins with Thanksgiving today. "Moms and dads are worried asking will there be enough food we can afford to buy for the holidays? Will we be able to get Christmas presents to the kids on time?" Biden said, acknowledging that for many the price rises are "painful."

However, he pushed back at critics who accused him of failing to grasp the challenge. Biden noted that the two biggest trading ports, both in southern California, were now working 24/7, as opposed to just 40 hours a week. In the latest average of polls from fivethirtyeight.com, Biden's approval rating is just 42.8, with 52.2 percent disapproving.

Biden said the price of gasoline in the wholesale market has fallen by about 10 percent in the last few years but the price at the pump hasn't budged. "In



TEXAS CITY: An oil refinery on Galveston Bay in Texas City, Texas. — AFP

other words, gas supply companies are paying less and making a lot more," he said, accusing companies of "pocketing the difference" between wholesale and retail prices.

Republican opponents were not impressed with Biden's reassurances on tapping the oil reserve.

"Joe Biden's failed leadership caused skyrocketing prices, and now American families are paying more for gas, groceries, and everything this Thanksgiving," Republican National Committee chair Ronna McDaniel said in a statement.

Expensive holiday trips

US employment is rapidly rising, wages are up and the stock market is climbing ever higher, but inflation, especially for fuel, is spoiling the mood. Average fuel prices at filling stations are \$3.41 a gallon, the highest level since 2014, according to latest figures from the AAA motorists' association. This represents an increase of \$1.29 over gasoline prices a year ago.

Like millions of Americans, Biden and his wife Jill are traveling to see family or friends ahead of Thanksgiving, although in his case it was to be on Air Force One later Tuesday for a short flight to the picturesque island of Nantucket. High transport costs are also juicing costs and scarcity throughout the economy, with supply issues impacting everything from second hand cars to clothing. Biden said the rough patch was temporary and that visions of empty shelves at Christmas would not come to pass. "Families can rest easy. Grocery stores are well stocked with turkey and everything, you know, (that) you need for Thanksgiving," Biden said. — AFP

president informed me a week ago that he had decided to reconsider my appointment as head of the Bank of Mexico," Herrera tweeted without elaborating.

Herrera has already been replaced as finance minister by Rogelio Ramirez de la O, an economic consultant and ally of Lopez Obrador. The surprise withdrawal of Herrera's nomination "creates uncertainty," tweeted Gabriela Siller, head of analysis for the financial group BASE.

"International investors are asking who will be the next governor of the Bank of Mexico and why Herrera was not ratified," she added. The news comes at a time when Mexico is facing rising inflation that has prompted the central bank to raise interest rates for fourth consecutive meetings. — AFP

NBK launches 'Weyay,' the first digital bank in Kuwait

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait announced the launch of "Weyay", the first fully digital bank in Kuwait, made in Kuwait for the youth of the country.

"Weyay" was launched in an inauguration ceremony attended by a number of board members, as well as Isam Al-Sager, NBK Group CEO, Shaikha Al-Bahar, NBK Group Deputy CEO, Salah Al-Fulaij, CEO of NBK - Kuwait, Sulaiman Al-Marzouq, Deputy CEO of NBK - Kuwait, Mohammed Al-Othman, GM-Consumer Banking Group at NBK, alongside the presence of a select of the bank's executive management and Kuwaiti tech industry leaders and influencers.

Digital future

Commenting on the launch, Shaikha Al-Bahar, NBK Group Deputy CEO stated: "Digital banks are the new normal course and are the new generation of transformations in the banking industry, especially in view of customers' increasing reliability on digital services and financial apps provided by fintech, telecoms companies and some of the world's leading technological corporates."

Therefore, the launch of "Weyay" as the first digital bank in Kuwait reinforces NBK's leadership position in digitizing banking services and its excellence as a provider of latest innovations and cutting-edge banking solutions. "All our strategies aim to be fully prepared for the future; with its anticipated evolutions, milestones that will be offered through huge opportunities and crises as well, as seen during the pandemic. Therefore, we started our digital journey years ago and set a road map to sustain our excellence and leadership locally and regionally," she added.

The past period, demonstrated the success of NBK's insightful and proactive vision in implementing the digital transformation strategy, developing its digital services and channels, and providing advanced and innovative payment solutions.

"We have completed a chapter of our digital journey; during which we succeeded to build a solid technological infrastructure

and created a digital culture that became embedded in all of our operations, products, and services. Now, we are starting a new chapter in which we continue to invest in developing our digital platforms and increase reliance on Artificial Intelligence (AI); out of our belief that digital advancement is the main driver of future growth across all the markets in which we operate," Al-Bahar concluded.



(From right): Isam Al-Sager, Muthana Al-Hamad, Shaikha Al-Bahar and Haitham Al-Khaled

Modern vision

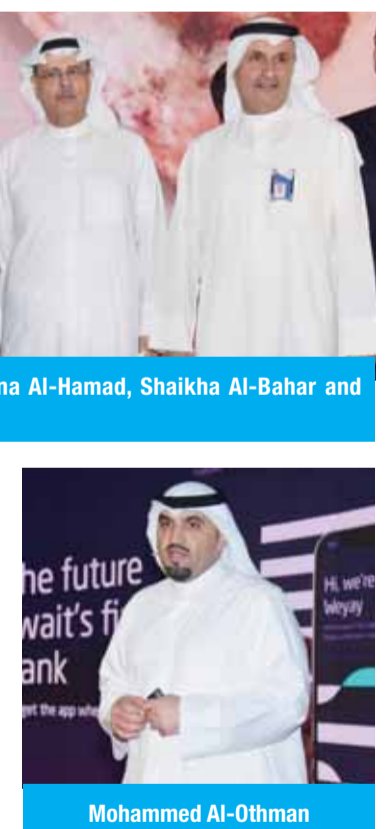
On his part, Salah Al-Fulaij, CEO of NBK - Kuwait said: "Weyay" provides an array of innovative digital banking services and solutions designed by NBK youth cadres for the for their peers of Kuwaiti youth."

"Over the course of a whole year, we have provided all sorts of support to the Kuwaiti youth cadres, who tirelessly worked to design for us a modern integrated vision that meets the needs and aspirations of their peers with dynamic designs, ideas and services that suit their lifestyle," Al-Fulaij continued.

"The Kuwaiti society has a vigorous nature, as two thirds of Kuwaitis are under the age of 34, and Kuwait has one of the highest smartphone and internet penetration rates in the world, making it a necessity to launch a new generation of digital services," he added. Al-Fulaij explained: "The idea of founding "Weyay" was inspired by the desire to launch a non-traditional bank that embodies the youthful and digital-savvy nature of the Kuwaiti society and reflects the future of its banking needs and aspirations and the ability of NBK's innovative banking solu-

tions to meet them."

"We are keen to offer our customers integrated banking products and services, and "Weyay" embodies this strategy as it provides financial engineering to the youth customers, where they can, through a single platform, take their financial and investment decisions and the banking solutions they need that can help them succeed in these decisions," he noted. Al-Fulaij highlighted that updating "Weyay" services will be an ongoing process starting from the launch in order to meet customers' needs.



Mohammed Al-Othman

Central Bank paved the way

Al-Fulaij stressed that the achievements we are witnessing today reflect the success of the Central Bank of Kuwait's supportive policy for digital transformation in paving the way for a new digital era for the Kuwaiti banking sector. Thanks to its efforts that laid the foundations for a huge technological infrastructure and a clear framework for a regulatory environment that gave the Kuwaiti banking sector the precedence in launching advanced digital services on the regional level.

We express our appreciation to the Central Bank of Kuwait for extending all sorts of support that saved time and effort in the course of launching "Weyay", he said.

Mexico president scraps choice for CB chief

MEXICO CITY: Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador has withdrawn his nomination of former finance minister Arturo Herrera to head the central bank, Herrera announced Tuesday.

Lopez Obrador had proposed his then finance minister in June to be governor of the Bank of Mexico, subject to approval by the Senate. "The

Business

Orange boss gets suspended sentence over Tapie payout

Orange's board to decide Richard's future

PARIS: An appeal court yesterday handed the CEO of France's Orange telecoms giant Stephane Richard a one-year suspended sentence for complicity in misuse of public funds over a massive 2008 state payout to businessman Bernard Tapie.

Richard was chief of staff to then finance minister and current European Central Bank chief Christine Lagarde when she approved a 404-million-euro (\$453-million) arbitration payment to Tapie to settle a long-running dispute over his stake in Adidas sports apparel company. The ruling overturned a lower court's not guilty verdict against Richard, 60, and three others in a case that ensnared a slew of senior officials, including former president Nicolas Sarkozy.

Tapie, a flamboyant tycoon and former minister who died last month, was himself acquitted of defrauding the state. Richard said he would appeal the ruling, which included a 50,000-euro (\$56,000) fine. "The accusations of complicity in the embezzlement of public funds are without merit and are not based on any evidence. I reject them completely and will appeal," Richard said in a statement to AFP.

Orange's board of directors scheduled a meeting for later to decide Richard's future. His term is due to end in mid-2022. The economy ministry

said the board will "draw conclusions" from the ruling. The French government holds a 23 percent stake in Orange. The scale of the damages paid to Tapie sent shockwaves through France and created suspicion that the arbitration panel appointed to settle his dispute with the state was biased in his favor.

Lagarde, Sarkozy under fire

The panel judged that Tapie had been the victim of fraud when he sold his stake in the Adidas sports apparel company in 1993 to state-run French bank Credit Lyonnais, which was found to have undervalued the sportswear brand. Lagarde came under fire for deciding not to appeal the amount of the award—a decision for which she was later found guilty of negligence by a court that rules on cases of ministerial misconduct.

Lagarde's handling of the case sparked suspicion that her former boss Sarkozy, whom Tapie had backed for president in 2007, was favorably disposed towards the businessman-allegations Sarkozy vehemently denied. In yesterday's ruling, Tapie's former lawyer Maurice Lantourne was handed a three-year sentence, including one year to serve in prison and two suspended.

Former magistrate Pierre Estoup was ordered



Orange's board will decide the future of CEO Stephane Richard following his conviction. — AFP

to serve three years in prison. Jean-Francois Rocchi, the former head of an entity created by the state to settle with Credit Lyonnais creditors, was given a two-year suspended sentence. — AFP

ABK's Black Friday offer for its Emirates Visa cardholders

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) is presenting its ABK Emirates Visa credit cardholders with a 10 percent cashback on all local and international spends on the 26th & 27th November 2021. This offer is in addition to the existing discount offers.

All ABK Emirates Visa Infinite and Signature credit cardholders are eligible for the cashback during the Black Friday promotion. The cashback is capped at KD 50, which will be credited to the customer's eligible credit card. To benefit from this offer, ABK cardholders need to spend a minimum of KD 100 during the campaign period. All Point of Sale and e-Commerce transactions will be included in qualifying spend criteria. Alongside this offer, any spend on ABK Emirates Visa credit cards will automatically earn Skywards Miles as per the existing points structure.

Markets skeptical as Biden opens spigot on oil reserves

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden is tapping the US strategic oil reserve in an effort to lower gasoline prices, but crude actually rose in Tuesday's trading while analysts warned that there is no guarantee the reserves will make a difference.

As his administration battles a surge in inflation amid the holiday season, Biden announced he would open the spigot on 50 million barrels from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve to cut prices at pumps across the world's largest economy.

An unusual coalition is joining the United States in releasing their stockpiles, including China, India, Japan, South Korea and Britain. One analyst said the grouping amounted to the "official emergence of an 'anti-OPEC+', referring to the bloc of global petroleum producers.

The announcement was not enough to stop energy prices from climbing. West Texas Intermediate oil futures closed New York trading 2.2 percent higher at \$78.50.

Market watchers cautioned against making too much of Tuesday's rally in oil prices, noting that crude had already pulled back in anticipation of the administration's action. The gains in oil prices also reflect doubts about whether Biden's move will appreciably shift the supply-demand interplay in a global crude market that has tightened in recent months as the economic recovery has accelerated, analysts said. "It's symbolic because it's very difficult for the administration to do anything to lower gas prices unless you increase the supply in a meaningful way," said Andy Lipow of Lipow Oil Associates in Houston.

The OPEC unknown

Others members of the six countries involved in the release have not announced details, but they are expected to release far lower amounts than the United States. Analysts noted that the amount of oil involved—perhaps 70 million barrels in total—is relatively paltry in a global market that consumes close to 100 million barrels a day.

Another unknown is how the OPEC+ coalition of oil exporters led by Saudi Arabia will react to the statement. The group said earlier this month it planned to boost output by 400,000 barrels per-day in December. Biden's announcement "increases the probability that they will delay that," said James Williams of WTRG Economics, adding that the group could also scale back plans to lift oil production in January.

The coalition behind Tuesday's release differs from past alliances in some significant ways, analysts said. Releases from strategic stockpiles are normally coordinated by the International Energy Agency (IEA) in Paris, of which leading European nations are members. Of the six countries involved in the release of reserves, the United States, Japan, South Korea and Britain are all IEA members, while China and India are listed on the organization's website as "association countries."

The IEA acknowledged the Washington-led action, saying in a statement it recognized that higher oil prices have "added to inflationary pressures during a period when the economic recovery remains uneven and faces a range of risks." Mark Finley, a fellow at the Baker Institute at Rice University in Houston, said the IEA's apparent non-involvement was "striking" and suggests a break between the European Union and other consuming regions over energy. — AFP

Mazda CX-30 wins JD Power ALG Residual Value award

KUWAIT: JD Power announced that the 2022 model year Mazda CX-30 won its 2022 US ALG Residual Value award for the best residual value in the subcompact utility category. The JD Power US ALG Residual Value Awards recognize automakers' outstanding achievements for vehicles that are forecasted by ALG's proprietary model to hold the highest percentage of their Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price (MSRP) after three years. Residual values are a key indicator of an automaker's success and help determine the overall desirability of automotive brands and their vehicles.

Award winners are determined through careful analysis of used vehicle performance of prior year models, brand outlook, and competitiveness. The forecast model uses a wide variety of macros, industry, segment, and vehicle factors to arrive at the most accurate prediction of a vehicle's future value.

Ashish Tandon, General Manager of KAICO (Kuwait Automotive Imports Co WLL - Alshaya &



Alsagar) stated, "It is a great honor for us that the CX-30 earned the 2022 US ALG Residual Value award for subcompact utility vehicles. Mazda has a holistic approach to vehicle development that prioritizes safety, reliability, driving dynamics, and beautiful design."

Waleed Alqahtani, Mazda Brand Manager of KAICO stated, "The Mazda CX-30, is the perfect blend of sleek styling, driving dynamics and superi-

or craftsmanship. Our customers can be rest assured that they're investing in a car that'll be their partner for a long time to come."

Mohamed Abouelaun, Sr. Manager - After Sales of KAICO stated, "Great residual values are derived from after sales care. We offer best in class services to delight our customers, from service packages, extended warranties, quick service, valet services and even opening on Friday."

African nations cling to fossil fuels despite climate call

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast: African oil and gas producers are likely to pay little heed to the mounting clamor to scrap fossil fuels, the biggest driver of the world's climate crisis. Adding to the pressure, the UN climate summit in Glasgow this month called for greater efforts towards a "phase-down" of unhampered coal emissions and "inefficient fossil fuel subsidies."

The call was diluted after hours of tortuous debate, but even so was historic. It marked the first time that a UN text made specific reference to the energy sources driving global heating.

But African producer nations may well turn a deaf ear to appeals for early curtailment of fossils.

Compared to giant polluters, they are small contributors to the greenhouse-gas problem—and many argue that renouncing oil and gas at this point could cripple development and deepen poverty. "Limiting the devel-



A gas pipeline is laid in Jacquville, Ivory Coast, where locals say they have received no benefit from fossil fuel exploitation. — AFP

opment of fossil-fuel projects and, in particular, natural gas projects, would have a profoundly negative impact on Africa," Nigerian Vice President Yemi Osinbajo, whose country is Africa's major fossil-fuel producer, said recently.

Natural gas "is a crucial tool for lifting people out of poverty" in many African countries, he cautioned.

Osinbajo took up the well-versed argument that a global switchout from carbon-based fuels had to account for economic differences between countries. For poorer countries, "the transition must not come at

the expense of affordable and reliable energy... (and) the right to sustainable development and poverty eradication," he said.

'Debt and corruption'

But his widely-shared idea that fossil-fuel development helps eradicate poverty comes up against some hard facts. In African countries that have had a bonanza from oil and gas production, little of the windfall has trickled down to the poorest, and suspicions of boundless corruption and sickening waste run deep. In Angola, sub-Saharan Africa's second largest

crude producer, oil accounts for half of gross domestic product and 89 percent of exports.

Yet more than half of the 34 million population survive on less than \$2 a day, and the unemployment rate is at 31 percent. President Joao Lourenco has launched an anti-corruption campaign aimed at netting billions of dollars he suspects were embezzled under his predecessor Jose Eduardo dos Santos.

"If one looks at the pattern of fossil fuels in Africa, it's very clear that it hasn't contributed" to development, said Mozambican environmental activist Daniel Ribeiro.

Instead, he said, "it increases debt, it increases corruption."

In his own country, the authorities have set down ambitious plans to exploit immense natural gas deposits off its northeastern coast. Ribeiro accused multinational fossil fuel companies of using tax havens, with the result that Mozambique's economy will get little revenue from the expected boom.

Instead, benefits flow to the "ruling elite" and the Frelimo party, in power since independence in 1975, he charged. That is why the Mozambican government are "really fighting against any kind of 'no to gas' movement," he said. — AFP

Eurozone stocks, euro down tracking COVID, German political deal

LONDON: Eurozone stock markets and the euro slid yesterday as traders tracked regional fallout from surging COVID cases and awaited confirmation that Germany had formed a new government. Investors were also awaiting minutes of the last Federal Reserve policy meeting.

Recent market movements suggest that the Fed could taper its bond-buying program quicker than first flagged and hike US interest rates next year as the economy recovers and inflation surges.

Turkey's lira meanwhile remained wedged close to all-time lows against the dollar after the country's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan dug in on his decision to pressure the central bank to cut interest rates even though inflation is soaring.

Oil prices retreated despite the United States and other countries releasing less stockpiled crude

than expected. A recent surge in oil prices has added to concerns that inflation—already at multi-year highs—will continue to rise, putting further pressure on banks to scale back the easy money policies put in place at the start of the pandemic and crucial to an 18-month rally for stock markets.

The New Zealand central bank yesterday lifted its rates for a second successive month. "Rising COVID-19 cases in Europe and fears of an accelerated tapering program in the US are currently unsettling investors," noted Richard Hunter, head of markets at Interactive Investor. Several countries in Europe have introduced strict containment measures to fight a resurgence of COVID, with Austria returning to a partial lockdown and some fearing Germany, the continent's biggest economy, will follow suit.

A center-left-led alliance of parties was yesterday poised to announce a deal to form Germany's next government, putting the Social Democrats (SPD) in charge for the first time in 16 years. Christian Lindner, leader of the business-friendly Free Democrats, was expected to run the powerful finance ministry. Two months after the SPD beat Angela Merkel's conservative CDU-



CSU coalition in a general election, its negotiators put the finishing touches on the deal with the Greens and Free Democrats that will install Finance Minister Olaf Scholz as chancellor. Meanwhile, the European Union health agency called yesterday on member states to "urgently" introduce anti-COVID measures to reduce the potentially "very high" burden the disease will have in December and January. — AFP

SANCTUARY MANDELA, EX-PRESIDENT'S HOME TURNED INTO BOUTIQUE HOTEL



This aerial view shows the Sanctuary Mandela hotel in Johannesburg. —AFP photos



Former South African President Nelson Mandela's personal chef and now chef at the Sanctuary Mandela restaurant, Xoliswa Ndoyiya (center), prepares meals in the restaurant's kitchen.



Former South African President Nelson Mandela's personal chef and now chef at the Sanctuary Mandela restaurant, Xoliswa Ndoyiya, prepares a dish in the kitchen.



A client sits at the bar in the Sanctuary Mandela hotel in Johannesburg.

Anti-apartheid legend Nelson Mandela liked hearty, simple meals, like oxtail stew. It was a favourite dish of South Africa's first black president and now fills ravioli served in his former home, which has been transformed into a boutique hotel. The inside of the building, hidden on a quiet street in a wealthy suburb of Johannesburg, had been defaced by squatters. But after a floor-to-ceiling remodel, now sun-light floods in from generous skylights and bay windows. The white facade is all that remains of the original building. Mandela lived there for eight years before moving to another home around the corner with his third wife Graca Machel.

He arrived shortly after his release from prison in 1990, and promptly set about meeting the neighbors, general manager Dimitri Maritz said. "He went knocking on every door, to introduce himself and invite neighbors for canapes and cocktails," Maritz said. "A Chinese man shoed him away. When he realized he had shut the door in Mandela's face, it is said that he moved not long after that," Maritz laughed, while noting the tale's whiff of urban legend. The hotel, named Sanctuary Mandela, opened in September for guests seeking to bask in the ex-president's calm and positive energy. The presidential suite was once actually the president's bedroom, though the heads of guests do not rest where his did. After the remodel, the bathroom is now where his bed once stood. The window frames bear his nickname "Madiba" and his Robben Island prison number "466/64"—scratched into the wood by his grandson.

'Not a fussy person'

After Mandela's release at age 71, he yearned for the simple pleasures he had been denied during 27 years in prison: playtime with his grandchildren, the scent of a rose, a sip of his favorite sweet Constantia wine. "He was not a fussy person," said chef Xoliswa Ndoyiya, who served Mandela's meals for two decades. She now heads the kitchen of the hotel's restaurant, where every dish is inspired by his tastes. "He did not want to see an oily plate, he didn't have a sweet tongue. Fruit he would eat all the time, throughout the day," she recalled. "He was more a father than a boss. He made you feel comfortable, like you were part of his family."

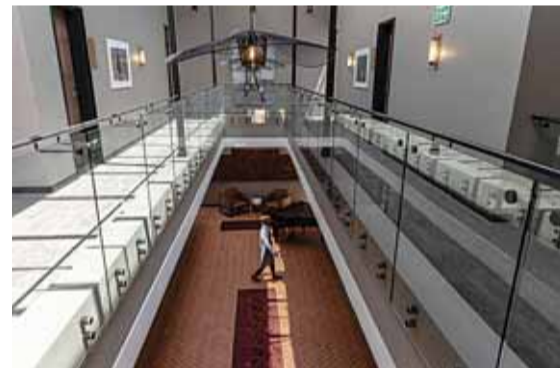
Like Mandela, she's ethnic Xhosa, giving her a shared food sensibility. If she tried to impress Mandela's high-profile guests with food that he didn't fancy, "he would say 'Why are you not feeding me well?' I would feel



A general view of the presidential suite, and one-time bedroom of former South African President Nelson Mandela.



This picture shows the number of the presidential suite, and one-time bedroom of former South African President Nelson Mandela.



A staff member working at the Sanctuary Mandela hotel walks across the hall.



Former South African President Nelson Mandela's personal chef and now chef at the Sanctuary Mandela.

guilty for trying to please the guests instead of my boss," she said. He liked to eat his chicken with his fingers, cleaning the meat to the bone. "With him, you must be humble. He taught us that people will know for who you are. I miss him, very, very much."

'Not a museum'

For as much as the building has been remodeled, the management wants it to feel like a home. Images of Mandela on the walls show him playing peek-a-boo with a baby, dressed to the nines as a young lawyer, and standing with outstretched arms to read a newspaper. Rooms bear the nicknames, Madiba and Tata, that South

Africans fondly used for him. "It is not supposed to be a museum," Maritz said. "We wish to maintain a legacy, but it needs to be self-sustaining, it needs to stay alive." The goal of financial sustainability is a key difference from other sites that memorialize the struggle against apartheid. Here, the assumption is that people are coming for the peace and tranquility that the home offers. Which doesn't mean that they won't talk about Mandela. "We have so many stories," Maritz said. "But we only tell these stories if we are asked." "At first you come for Madiba, the second time for the place itself," he added, hoping that the new venture will embody Mandela's qualities: "Humility and elegance." —AFP

Matt Damon is working on a book about access to clean water

The Last Duel actor has collaborated with civil and environmental engineer Gary White on 'The Worth of Water', which will also feature blurbs from former



US President Bill Clinton and Nobel Prize winner Muhammad Yunus, and the tome will be released on 1 March. The authors - who met at a Clinton Global Initiative event in 2008 - said in a statement: "We're excited to have

written this book together, and we can't wait to share the story of what happens when a movie actor and a civil engineer team up to try and take on the global water crisis - the stumbles and obstacles, the breakthroughs and big gains, and the incredible people we met along the way."

Matt and Gary agreed that their "journey" writing the book had "proved" two things: the ability to fix the issue and how to do it. They continued: "Our journey has proved two things: one, solving the water crisis is possible - within our lifetimes. And two, the key is unleashing the incredible determination and resourcefulness of the people who are fighting every day for essentials like safe water and sanitation." Portofolio, the book's publisher and an imprint of Penguin Random House said of the book: "[It will showcase] the challenges of building and scaling market-based financial solutions to make clean water and sanitation more accessible.

"And ultimately, it's the story of how communities and individuals can be empowered to make long-lasting investments in their own well-being." The 51-year-old actor has been a spokesperson for water sanitation since a 2006 visit to Zambia, while Gary is the founder of charities WaterEquity and Water.org. —Bang Showbiz

Dame Helen Mirren would be a Slytherin in 'Harry Potter'

Dame Helen Mirren would be in the Slytherin House at Hogwarts. The 76-year-old actress - who is set to host the upcoming series 'Harry Potter: Hogwarts Tournament of Houses' - believes she would have to choose the green-themed house in the magical school. She said: "If I had to choose, I'd probably choose Slytherin, because there's a punkishness about Slytherin that appeals to me. You know, the bad boys on the motorbikes kind of thing." In the best-selling book series by J.K. Rowling - and its spin-off film franchise starring Daniel Radcliffe - the Slytherin house is full of darker wizards including the Malfoy family, Bellatrix Lestrange and the infamous Lord Voldemort. Helen's admissions come as she is fronting the four-part competition for Cartoon Network which will



see players compete in teams of three for their respective Hogwarts Houses - whether that be Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw or Slytherin.

Each house will then battle it out to answer questions on the beloved series in a

bid to win a trip to the 'Wizarding World' theme park locations in New York and Orlando. While the Oscar-winning actress Helen admitted that the show was a lot of "hard work", she was also amazed at the Potter passion still held by many. She told PEOPLE: "Gosh, it's hard work. "It's really hard work! What these people do, it's not a picnic. But I have to say, I had such fun. I loved it. It was exhausting. At the end of each day, I just fell into bed completely exhausted. But it was enormous fun. "I had no realization of how profound and widespread the absolute engagement with these stories is all across the world, all across races, across genders, across ages. People really, really have engaged with these stories and I find that, in and of itself, a very beautiful story" —Bang Showbiz

Indian wedding music blamed for death of 63 chickens

A traditional Indian wedding procession with pumping music, fireworks, dancing and a marching brass band in shiny jackets has been blamed for the death of 63 chickens. Ranjit Kumar Parida said the party was blasting out "ear-splitting noise" as it passed his poultry farm in the eastern state of Odisha shortly before midnight on Sunday. "I asked the band operators to lower the volume as the music was too noisy and terrifying the chickens. But they did not listen and the groom's friends shouted at me," Parida told AFP. A vet told Parida the chickens had died

of a heart attack, and he filed a police complaint after the wedding organizers refused to pay compensation. Zoology professor Suryakanta Mishra, who has authored a book on animal behaviour, told the Hindustan Times that loud noise increases the risk of cardiovascular disease in birds. "Chickens are governed by a circadian rhythm that is controlled by the natural light/dark cycle of day and night. "Sudden excitement or stress due to loud music could disrupt their biological clock," Mishra said. The story had a happy ending - except for the chickens - after police con-



vinced the warring parties to "solve the matter mutually". "We have not initiated any action as (the poultry farmer) withdrew the complaint," police official Droupadi Das said. —AFP

Lifestyle | Gossip

TEIGEN SLAMS CRITICS OF EYEBROWS TRANSPLANT

Chrissy Teigen has hit back at critics of her eyebrow transplant transformation. The 35-year-old model took to Instagram to enthuse about the procedure, which involves putting hair from the "back of your head" to the brows to create a fuller look, after years of overplucking the facial feature as a teen. She wrote: "I never wear makeup if I can avoid it so I was so excited for this eyebrow transplant surgery where they take hairs from the back of your head!! (sic)." However, not everyone was a fan of the procedure, with the star being mocked for the move. Responding to the haters on her Instagram Story alongside a screenshot of an article about it, she wrote: "WHY are peoples so

riled up over any little thing I do? You're gonna give yourselves a heart attack." In a previous clip, Chrissy had said: "They look so cool. He did hairs up here to even them out. Crazy." The 'Cravings' author added: "a little dark from the pencil it's so cool to have brows again!" She went out to issue a warning: "Teens: do not pluck them all off like I did. (sic)" Chrissy's Dr Diamond chimed in with the sentiment, writing that "too many people" are experiencing the same issue as Chrissy. "He said on a screenshot of Chrissy's post that 'eyebrows play a huge part of the facial aesthetic.'" He went on: "They frame the eyes and can either be an asset to the eyes, or they can be the annoying part of your

morning you have to spend ten minutes filling in." The latest transformation came after the same surgeon removed fat from his client's cheeks. Chrissy - who is married to award-winning musician John Legend - said in an Instagram Story video: "I did that Dr. Diamond buccal fat removal thing here. And since I quit drinking, I'm really seeing the results. And I like it, yeah." The television personality also insisted she feels no embarrassment about having undergone the procedure. Chrissy - who also underwent surgery last year to have her breast implants removed - wrote over the video clip: "No shame in my game."



ALESHA DIXON EATS 'EVERY TWO TO THREE HOURS'



The 'Britain's Got Talent' judge has shared her diet and fitness regimes to maintain her "lean" figure, including chowing down on a healthy variety of foods at regular intervals. The mother-of-two - who has Azura, eight, and Anaya, two, with husband Azuka Ononye - told the December 2021 issue of Women's Health UK magazine: "I eat every two to three hours. My body is naturally lean, so I have to be regimented to maintain my weight. For breakfast, I have porridge with raspberries and maple syrup. Later, I'll eat rye toast with a boiled egg before working out. Then it's a protein shake - I'm trying to hit 75g to 90g a day - with dates, oat milk, flaxseeds, chia seeds and turmeric. Lunch is salmon and veg with quinoa, then a Jamaican dish like ackee and salfish for dinner. I eat plenty of carbs, but I'll opt for fibrous varieties like brown pasta." The former Mis-Teeq star revealed how her fitness routine has always been her "savior in challenging times", and she loves the structure it gives her. She said: "Fitness has always been my savior during challenging times - it rids me of stress and keeps my brain clear. I like structure, so I do a mix of weight training and cardio with my personal trainer, Janet Malinowska, on Mondays, Wednesdays and

Fridays, then Pilates on Tuesdays and yoga on Thursdays. I enjoy sweating, but adding in lower-intensity forms of movement has really helped calm me down. I rest on the weekend." The 43-year-old singer also admitted she has never felt "healthier" mentally as she does now, and she credits her current headspace to learning to "like myself more" and not letting her mind "control" her. Alesha added: "Every day I try to like myself more. I regret things, but that's human." The Power Of Now by Eckhart Tolle has shown her the importance of not letting your mind control you. "I'm in a healthier headspace compared with 10 years ago. I hope that in 10 years' time I'll be in an even better one." Elsewhere, the 'Breathe Slow' singer insisted she has no qualms with ageing as it provides her with "clarity". She explained: "Some people are afraid of ageing, but the beautiful thing about it is clarity. You lighten your load along the way and put things into perspective - it makes life enjoyable as you know what matters. I could say I'm happiest on stage, but it's actually in the garden with my daughters [Azura, eight, and Anaya, two] and our 12-year-old dog, Daisy."

LADY GAGA REVEALS BENNETT'S REACTION TO THEIR 6 GRAMMYS NOMINATIONS

Lady Gaga has shared her delight at Tony Bennett, who has Alzheimer's, understanding her every word when she told him the news they are up for six Grammys. The 'Stupid Love' hitmaker, 35, and the 95-year-old Jazz legend have been showered with nods for their acclaimed second duets album, 'Love For Sale', including the prestigious Album of the Year prize. And the 'House of Gucci' star has been left "utterly speechless" after finding out they are up for several accolades for the follow-up to 2014's 'Cheek to Cheek'. The duo are also in contention for Record of the Year for 'I Get a Kick Out of You', and best Pop Duo/Group Performance, Traditional Pop Vocal Album, Music Video, and Engineered Album Non-Classical. Tony became the oldest artist in history to be nominated in the general categories. Their first LP took home Best Traditional Pop Vocal Album seven years ago. In a lengthy statement on Instagram, Gaga gushed: "Thank you so much to the @RecordingAcademy for these 6 nominations for Love For Sale. I am stunned and shocked and beyond grateful. I don't know what to say. I just keep crying and am utterly speechless. This means so much to me, @itstonybennett, the Bennetts, my family, jazz



music, and the great Cole Porter who wrote all these timeless classics. I'll never forget today and congratulating Tony on his 6 nominations." On Tony's reaction, she continued: "I'll never forget that today he could track every word I was saying and understood the world was celebrating him and celebrating jazz - a genre that embodies the joy, abundance and imagination of Black music throughout history. Thank you to all the Grammy voters for recognizing me and Tony's dedication to jazz music and for also recognizing it in major categories where this music is often not nominated. (sic)" The 'Born This Way' singer admitted there is no better feeling than the "love and partnership" they share - despite their 60-year age gap. Gaga concluded: "This album happened because it was Tony's idea and I made him a promise that we would make it and we did. At 95 years old, he has more nominations than ever, I'm so honored to be his companion in music and his friend. Thank you to the public for loving us, we surely love each other, and you. Believe in love and partnership, even with 60 years between us, and Alzheimer's, there is nothing like the magic of music. I love you Tony, and the world loves you too. How could they not?"

12 TO FACE TRIAL OVER KIM KARDASHIAN ROBBERY

12 people are to face trial over Kim Kardashian West's Paris robbery. The 41-year-old beauty faced a terrifying ordeal in October 2016 when five men gained entry to her hotel room and tied her up while they stole \$10 million worth of jewelry from her at gunpoint and two judges have now indicted a group of people on various charges over the incident. A judicial source told E! News the defendants will be tried for robbery with a weapon committed in an organized gang; kidnapping and forcible confinement; or criminal association. However, prosecutors haven't given the names of those who have been charged, or for which alleged crimes. A trial date has yet to be set. The former 'Keeping Up With the Kardashians' star - who has four children with estranged husband Kanye West - previously admitted she thought she would die during the robbery. Kim told how she felt "immediate panic" when she heard footsteps "stomping up the stairs" to her hotel room. Once inside the room, the intruders "grabbed" Kim - who was only wearing a

bathrobe at the time - and the SKIMS founder admitted she thought she would be sexually assaulted. She said: "I was like, 'OK, this is the time I'm gonna get raped. Like deal, this is gonna happen, just tied her up while they stole \$10 million worth of jewelry from her at gunpoint and two judges have now indicted a group of people on various charges over the incident. A judicial source told E! News the defendants will be tried for robbery with a weapon committed in an organized gang; kidnapping and forcible confinement; or criminal association. However, prosecutors haven't given the names of those who have been charged, or for which alleged crimes. A trial date has yet to be set. The former 'Keeping Up With the Kardashians' star - who has four children with estranged husband Kanye West - previously admitted she thought she would die during the robbery. Kim told how she felt "immediate panic" when she heard footsteps "stomping up the stairs" to her hotel room. Once inside the room, the intruders "grabbed" Kim - who was only wearing a



her for two years prior to the Paris attack. She said: "I didn't know that they had someone at the elevators, someone at the front, someone that moved the camera, someone that broke the door, someone in the getaway car. There was a whole team of people that had planned this."

ADELE OFFERED MILLIONS FOR NETFLIX SPECIAL CHARTING HER COMEBACK

Netflix has reportedly offered Adele "millions" to make a special feature charting her comeback. The 33-year-old superstar has just made a record-breaking return with her latest LP, 30, and after two TV specials in the US and UK, there is a chance fans could see a docu-film on the streaming service, which would include footage from her UK comeback gigs at American Express presents BST Hyde Park next July. A source told The Sun newspaper's Bizarre column: "Adele is the most in-demand woman of the moment and Netflix thinks it could create something really special with her. Her team have been approached about a possible multi-million-pound film that would chart her comeback and huge BST shows next July. At the moment any plans for a world tour are on ice because of COVID and this film could bring Adele live closer to fans who weren't able to get tickets.



"Netflix has done amazing music films with stars including Taylor Swift and Shawn Mendes and it thinks Adele's could be incredible if she was up for it." The insider said the 'I Drink Wine' singer would be given full "creative freedom". They added: "She involved in the early stages of the proposal have made it clear Adele would be in the driving seat. She would have total creative freedom and full approvals on the edits if they do give the project the green light." At the weekend, 'An Audience With Adele' aired on ITV in the UK, and the 'Hometown Glory' singer answered questions from A-listers in the crowd, including the likes of Dame Emma Thompson, Samuel L. Jackson, and Stormzy. The US special, 'Adele One Night Only', meanwhile, saw the Grammy-winner sit down for a one-on-one chat with TV legend Oprah Winfrey and give the live debut of songs from her record before it was released.



KATE BECKINSALE HAS TO HAVE A BATH EVERY NIGHT

The 48-year-old actress admitted her habit can be really "annoying" because she's so set on her evening ritual, she'll take a dip in the tub before she goes to bed, no matter how late it gets. She told People magazine: "I literally cannot transition from day to night unless I have submerged myself in water. Which is really annoying because I could get a hotel room and it'll have cockroaches and go, 'Okay, fine.' But if [the room] doesn't have a bathtub, I'll be like, 'Sorry, can I move?' I really need to have that every day, no matter what. Even when it's Oscar night and you're getting home at seven in the morning once you've been to 15 parties. I still have to go through the whole bath thing." The 'Pearl Harbour' star - credited her youthful appearance to good genes but admitted it was helpful that she "didn't see the sun" until she was an adult after she moved from the UK to

CIARA MASTERED 'DISCIPLINE' EARLY ON WORKING IN FASHION

Ciara learned the art of "discipline" when she launched her fashion ventures. The '1,2 Step' hitmaker runs The House of LR&C with husband Russell Wilson and launched the new apparel line Dare To Roam in August. And while with her music she was able to push back work, that's not possible in the fast-paced fashion business. And so, very early, she had to adjust to the tight deadlines - because fashion "timelines" wait for no one. Speaking to Glossy Pop, the 36-year-old star said: "Obviously, I came from the space of being an artist before I got this great opportunity to be able to build a business in the fashion space." And sometimes, because of that creative mind, you have to have discipline and timelines. "In fashion, timelines don't wait for you. In music, I can be like, 'I want to push this album back; let's do it in a couple of weeks.' But it's like, 'No, you have Nordstrom prepared for the drop on this day.' You've got to make [a certain] time for fashion. So there's that discipline that you learn when you get the chance to be involved on the business side. Now, I've mastered the discipline - I had no



choice but to master it pretty early on in the process. But it's been really fun learning and taking on the challenges that the business side of it all brings you." Ciara also spilled that her sources of inspiration for fashion include, her music and the mood it puts her in, life, and people she clocks on the street in New York and Atlanta, who are of "all different ethnic backgrounds". She shared: "You go through different seasons. Sometimes it's all about the mood you're in - for me, when I'm making an album, my music inspires me and how I want to look. It's like, 'OK, these songs are making me feel this way. This is the vibe I want to be on, from a fashion perspective.' Life inspires me, and sometimes others inspire me - like when I'm walking around in the streets of New York or the streets of Atlanta, where I came from. I see people walking around from all different ethnic backgrounds and rocking all different kinds of styles in a super-expressive way. I get inspired by that. The beauty of fashion is that the inspiration can come from so many different places. Sometimes it's really in the moment: You have a vision for something or an encounter with something that happens in life, and you're like, 'I'm really inspired by this moment. I'm going to go back to the drawing board.' That's the beauty of fashion."

Lifestyle | Features

Pinch of stardust: Bowie back with lost album of early songs

Left on the shelf for two decades following a dispute between David Bowie and his record label, lost album "Toy" is finally seeing the light of day this week. Known only to diehard fans, "Toy" was always a strange beast in the songwriter's long and storied career. It was recorded in 2000 in the honeymoon glow of his performance at Glastonbury Festival, which had re-energized his career after a difficult decade, and revisited songs he wrote before achieving global fame.

Bowie's estate is now releasing "Toy" in two phases: first this Friday as part of a massive retrospective of his work between 1992 and 2001 ("David Bowie 5: Brilliant Adventure"), which includes other live and studio recordings from the period. Then, on January 7, an expanded version of the album ("Toy: Box") will see it released along with alternative and acoustic versions.

'Very honest'

"Toy" mostly featured new versions of songs from the start of his career in the 1960s, before his breakthrough hit "Space Oddity" made him a star. "I still get really elated by the spontaneous event and cannot wait to sit in a claustrophobic space with seven other energetic people and sing till my tits drop off," he wrote in a message to fans at the time.



In this file photo British singer David Bowie performs live at the Olympia in Paris. —AFP photos

But things turned sour when it was presented to his label. They were terrible during the two years before I left," Bowie told his biographer Jerome Soligny in 2002. "Toy" was shelved in the fall-out.

Some of the tracks re-emerged on "Heathen" and on B-sides or compilations—and a low-quality version was leaked online in 2011 — but "Toy" has remained little-known to the general public. Soligny describes it as "a very honest album", the missing link between his 1999 album "hours..." and "Heathen". It also marks the passage of time for



In this file photo American historic producer of British singer David Bowie, Tony Visconti, poses during a photo session in Paris.

Bowie's voice, which had become more of a baritone since his original versions in the 1960s: "The years of cigarettes weighed heavily," said Soligny. Bowie's impetus for revisiting his early tracks began when he and his band tried out a version of his 1966 song "Can't Help Thinking About Me" during their touring in the late 1990s.

The artist wasn't impressed by his early lyrics ("the worst lines I've ever written") but liked the new arrangements. "We didn't really spend much

time listening to the old stuff," guitarist Earl Slick told magazine Rolling Stone. "I didn't even listen to the old recordings. I thought, 'If we want to do this new, I can't have the old one stuck in my head.'"

'Always liked freaks'

The album also marked a rapprochement with his former producer Tony Visconti during its recording in New York. They had not worked together since the 1983 single "Let's Dance". "Bowie wanted to work with him again, but only in little doses, to see how it went, since Tony and him were both strong personalities," said Soligny. It reignited their partnership and Visconti was back working with Bowie on his final album "Blackstar", released just two days before his death in January 2016.

For an artist who so brilliantly played with his image, the cover art is particularly arresting: a disturbing image of Bowie's adult face transplanted onto a baby. Soligny is not shocked. "Sometimes he worked with top fashion photographers to look as beautiful as possible," said the biographer. "But he always liked freaks, like on the sleeve of 'Diamond Dogs' (which featured Bowie as half-man, half-dog) or on 'Lodger', where he appeared with a broken nose." —AFP



In this file photo Canadian singer Justin Bieber arrives for the 2021 Met Gala at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. —AFP photos



In this file photo Musician Jon Batiste (right) performs with the Dap-Kings at the Monterey Jazz Festival in Monterey, California.



In this file photo Singer-songwriter Billie Eilish performs during the Austin City Limits (ACL) Music festival at Zilker Park in Austin, Texas.



In this file photo Olivia Rodrigo performs onstage during the 2021 MTV Video Music Awards at Barclays Center in the Brooklyn borough of New York City.

SYA, DEF JAM'S TABOO-BREAKING FEMALE MALAYSIAN RAPPER

Wearing sunglasses and a tiger print dress as she raps into a mic, Malaysian hip-hop artist SYA calls for empowerment while taking a sledgehammer to stereotypes of Muslim women. The first female signing for label Def Jam—the label behind superstars from Jay-Z and Rihanna to BTS and Justin Bieber—in Southeast Asia, her debut single "PrettyGirlBop" tackles misogyny and acceptance in her Muslim-majority homeland. "I just want women to feel more comfortable in their own skin," SYA, whose long dark hair is uncovered, tells AFP. "I don't have to pretend to be somebody else just to fit what society deems is good."

The track, which also features up-and-coming Singapore artist Yung Raja, includes scenes of SYA dressed in white, and stroking a cat wearing a pearl necklace in a lavish bedroom. Underlining her desire that women should not be pigeonholed, it then switches to her holding a snake and wearing a leopard print jacket, as she defiantly raps: "I wanna be like me." She is among a crop of young artists from Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines who have been signed by global music giant Def Jam's Southeast Asian arm. Lauded by the industry as a rising star, the 25-year-old says she faces online abuse from those who believe her behavior is not appropriate for a young Muslim woman. "I've had a lot of disturbing comments," the rapper reveals, adding that she has been accused of being a

prostitute and had her faith questioned. "Is she a Muslim? How much per night? Why is she showing so much skin?"

'Imposter syndrome hit me'

While Malaysia is a relatively affluent country, society remains largely conservative, with critics saying women's rights are not sufficiently protected and harassment is common. SYA says she is facing down the "patriarchal mindset" and "sexualisation" of those who don't conform to the cliched expectations of

undermining the faith.

For SYA—real name Nur Batrisya Mohammad Nazri—art and religion should be kept firmly separate, however. "What does (religion) have to do with me as an artist, and what I create?" she said. The artist, who spent much of her childhood overseas, burst onto the music scene almost by accident when she posted some of her work online, drawing the attention of well-known local rapper SonaOne.

He connected her with Def Jam, which had started a push

syndrome really hit me hard. There are other people out there, especially independent artists, who make music 24/7 and are still struggling to get signed."

'Be your own person'

Growing up, SYA took part in talent shows and listened to artists such as Britney Spears and Michael Jackson. She later drifted towards hip hop as it was "such an outspoken type of genre". Her parents are "getting used to the idea" of her becoming a star, she said, adding that her mum was her "biggest supporter". After months of only doing online shows due to a lengthy coronavirus shutdown in Malaysia, she now plans to return to live performing. SYA has yet to run into trouble with authorities but artists regularly do in Malaysia.

Rapper Namewee, from the country's ethnic Chinese minority, relocated to Taiwan after controversy over videos he made that critics allege insult Islam. Despite this, SYA still thinks male artists have far more freedom to rap about sensitive subjects in the conservative country without fear of being criticized. "For the boys, there are no limitations. If they want to rap about sex or weed, it is a pass," she said. "But for women, if you are Malay, you don't want to insinuate you are doing all of those things." SYA hopes her music inspires other women—not to emulate her, but to be more confident in themselves. "I don't want to be the perfect role model," she said. "You can take inspiration from me (to) be your own person." —AFP



This picture shows Malaysian hip-hop artist Nur Batrisya Mohammad Nazri, known as SYA, rehearsing after an interview with Agence France-Presse (AFP) at a studio in Kuala Lumpur. —AFP

Muslim women Most members of Malaysia's ethnic Malay Muslim community follow a moderate form of the religion and while the majority of women wear a headscarf, there is no law requiring it. But conservative Islam has been gaining ground, pushed by hardline politicians and preachers, accompanied by growing criticism of any activities and behavior seen as

into Southeast Asia, seeking to capitalize on a new wave of regional stars and a youthful demographic with increasing disposable income. "First and foremost, I consider myself a writer... writing was the reason I am doing all of this... I had never planned to be an artist," says SYA. The star confesses she was plagued by "self-doubt" and taken aback by her success. She recalls: "Impostor

JUSTIN BIEBER, JAZZMAN JON BATISTE ATOP GRAMMY NOMINATIONS

Justin Bieber, Billie Eilish and Olivia Rodrigo are leading a crop of pop stalwarts and newbies nominated for this year's Grammy awards. But it's Jon Batiste—the jazz and R&B artist, television personality and bandleader, whose prizes include an Oscar for his soundtrack to the movie "Soul"—who has the most chances at Grammy gold, snagging 11 nominations including in the top categories. Megastar Bieber will vie for eight prizes at the January 31 gala in Los Angeles, as will R&B favorite H.E.R. and singer-rapper Doja Cat.

Grammy darling Eilish is in the running for seven, as is Olivia Rodrigo, a former Disney channel actress who exploded onto the pop scene this year with her breakout "drivers license." The 64th annual show has once again expanded the number of nominees in its prestigious

general categories, taking the count from eight to 10, in the wake of perennial criticism that it lacks diversity. Lady Gaga and Tony Bennett, the 95-year-old crooner beloved for his big band and show tune standards, posted a strong showing with six nominations for work related to their album "Love For Sale."

And rap mogul Jay-Z—a regular critic of the Recording Academy, the body behind the Grammy awards—is now the most nominated artist in the show's history, with 83. He was previously tied with legendary producer Quincy Jones, who had 80. Kanye West meanwhile scored several nominations for his album "Donda"—facing off with longtime nemesis Taylor Swift in the best album category, where she has her sole chance at a 2022 Grammy for her record "evermore." —AFP

Key nominees for the 2022 Grammy Awards

Here is a list of nominees in the major categories for the 64th annual Grammy Awards, which will be handed out January 31 in Los Angeles. Jazzman and bandleader Jon Batiste leads the pack with 11 nominations, followed by Justin Bieber, H.E.R. and Doja Cat with eight, as Billie Eilish and Olivia Rodrigo nabbed seven. This year the Recording Academy, the body behind the gala, expanded the top four categories from eight nominees to 10, offering music's brightest even more chances at Grammy gold.

Album of the Year

- We Are - Jon Batiste
- Love For Sale - Tony Bennett & Lady Gaga
- Justice (Triple Chucks Deluxe) - Justin Bieber
- Planet Her (Deluxe) - Doja Cat
- Happier Than Ever - Billie Eilish
- Back Of My Mind - H.E.R.
- Montero - Lil Nas X
- Sour - Olivia Rodrigo
- Evermore - Taylor Swift
- Donda - Kanye West

Record of the Year, recognizing overall performance on a song

- "I Still Have Faith In You" - ABBA
- "Freedom" - Jon Batiste
- "I Get A Kick Out Of You" - Tony Bennett & Lady Gaga
- "Peaches" - Justin Bieber Featuring Daniel Caesar & Giveon
- "Right On Time" - Brandi Carlile
- "Kiss Me More" - Doja Cat Featuring SZA

- "Happier Than Ever" - Billie Eilish
- "Montero" (Call Me By Your Name) - Lil Nas X
- "drivers license" - Olivia Rodrigo
- "Leave The Door Open" - Silk Sonic

Song of the Year, recognizing songwriting

- "Bad Habits" - Fred Gibson, Johnny McDaid & Ed Sheeran, songwriters (Ed Sheeran)
- "A Beautiful Noise" - Ruby Amanfu, Brandi Carlile, Brandy Clark, Alicia Keys, Hillary Lindsey, Lori McKenna, Linda Perry & Hailey Whitters, songwriters (Alicia Keys And Brandi Carlile)
- "drivers license" - Daniel Nigro & Olivia Rodrigo, songwriters (Olivia Rodrigo)
- "Fight For You" - Dernst Emile II, H.E.R. & Tiara Thomas, songwriters (H.E.R.)
- "Happier Than Ever" - Billie Eilish O'Connell & Finneas O'Connell, songwriters (Billie Eilish)
- "Kiss Me More" - Roget Chahayed, Amala Zandile Dlamini, Lukasz Gottwald, Carter Lang, Gerard A. Powell II, Solana Rowe & David Sprecher, songwriters (Doja Cat Featuring SZA)
- "Leave The Door Open" - Brandon Anderson, Christopher Brody Brown, Dernst Emile II & Bruno Mars, songwriters (Silk Sonic)
- "Montero (Call Me By Your Name)" - Denzel Baptiste, David Biral, Omer Fedi, Montero Hill & Roy Lenzo, songwriters (Lil Nas X)
- "Peaches" - Louis Bell, Justin Bieber, Giveon Dezmann Evans, Bernard Harvey, Felisha "Fury" King, Matthew Sean Leon, Luis Manuel Martinez Jr., Aaron Simmonds, Ashton

- Simmonds, Andrew Wolman & Keavan Yazdani, songwriters (Justin Bieber Featuring Daniel Caesar & Giveon)
- "Right On Time" - Brandi Carlile, Dave Cobb, Phil Hanseroth & Tim Hanseroth, songwriters (Brandi Carlile)

Best New Artist

- Arooj Aftab
- Jimmie Allen
- Baby Keem
- FINNEAS
- Glass Animals
- Japanese Breakfast
- The Kid Laroi
- Arlo Parks
- Olivia Rodrigo
- Saweetie

Best Music Video

- "Shot In The Dark" - AC/DC
- "Freedom" - Jon Batiste
- "I Get A Kick Out Of You" - Tony Bennett & Lady Gaga
- "Peaches" - Justin Bieber Featuring Daniel Caesar & Giveon
- "Happier Than Ever" - Billie Eilish
- "Montero (Call Me By Your Name)" - Lil Nas X
- "Good 4 U" - Olivia Rodrigo

Best Rap Album

- The Off-Season - J. Cole
- Certified Lover Boy - Drake

- King's Disease II - Nas
- Call Me If You Get Lost - Tyler, The Creator
- Donda - Kanye West

Best Rap Performance

- "Family Ties" - Baby Keem Featuring Kendrick Lamar
- "Up" - Cardi B
- "my life" - J. Cole Featuring 21 Savage & Morray
- "Way 2 Sexy" - Drake Featuring Future & Young Thug
- "Thot S***" - Megan Thee Stallion

Best Rock Album

- Power Up - AC/DC
- Capitol Cuts Live From Studio A - Black Pumas
- No One Sings Like You Anymore Vol. 1 - Chris Cornell
- Medicine At Midnight - Foo Fighters
- McCartney III - Paul McCartney

Best Pop Vocal Album

- Justice (Triple Chucks Deluxe) - Justin Bieber
- Planet Her (Deluxe) - Doja Cat
- Happier Than Ever - Billie Eilish
- Positions - Ariana Grande
- Sour - Olivia Rodrigo

Best Global Music Album

- Mohabbat - Arooj Aftab
- Do Yourself - Angélique Kidjo & Burna Boy
- Pa Pa Pa - Femi Kuti
- Blewu - Yo-Yo Ma & Angélique Kidjo
- Essence - WizKid Featuring Tems—AFP

Sports

France's Benzema gets one-year suspended term in sex tape case

Defense team plans to appeal 'very severe, unfair' sentence

VERSAILLES: A French court yesterday gave Real Madrid striker Karim Benzema a one-year suspended sentence for complicity in a bid to blackmail his former France team-mate Matthieu Valbuena with a sex tape.

The sentence, which included a 75,000-euro (\$84,000) fine, was tougher than that sought by prosecutors against the star player over the 2015 extortion attempt, which led Benzema to be cast out of the France team for five-and-a-half years.

Benzema, 33, was not in court in the Paris suburb of Versailles for the verdict, which came hours before Real Madrid took on Sheriff Tiraspol in a Champions League game in Moldova. He was not accused of being behind the extortion attempt but rather of conspiring with the suspected blackmailers by putting pressure on Valbuena to pay them off.

The court ruled that he had "implicated himself personally, through subterfuge and lies, to convince his team-mate to submit to the blackmail". It added that he had shown "no kindness towards Valbuena", as he had claimed, "just the opposite" and had even appeared to take pleasure in his fellow player's demise.

His defense team immediately announced plans for an appeal. Speaking to reporters at the courthouse, one of his lawyers, Sylvain Cormier, said he was "stunned" by the sentence which he called "very severe, unfair and unfounded".

A second lawyer, Antoine Vey, said that Benzema, who did not attend his trial, would "come and explain himself" when the case went to an appeal. The prosecution had called for

Benzema to be given a 10-month suspended sentence.

'Not a good Samaritan'

Benzema was one of five people tried over the ultimately unsuccessful attempt to blackmail Valbuena with a sexually explicit video stolen from his phone. He claims he was only trying to help Valbuena when he approached him at the French team's training center in October 2015 and told him he could help him find someone to "manage" the issue of the video.

But prosecutors said his remarks in a phone conversation to a childhood friend also convicted over the extortion attempt — Benzema told his alleged accomplice "he's not taking us seriously" — proved his part in the plot. They added that Benzema's involvement was all the more serious given his leadership role in the French team, which should have made him a model "of hope, fame and moral values."

In Benzema's absence — his lawyers said he was kept away by his professional commitments — Valbuena, 37, monopolized attention at the trial. The midfielder, who also lost his place in the France team over the affair, said the blackmail attempt had left him feeling "frightened" and fearful for his career.

He said that Benzema did not put a figure on the amount sought by the blackmailers to keep the compromising video out of the public domain but was "very insistent" he should do a deal with them. Benzema's four co-accused received sentences ranging from 18 months suspended to two-and-a-half years behind bars.

Verdict not expected to affect career



BARCELONA: In this file photo taken on October 24, 2021 Real Madrid's French forward Karim Benzema looks on as he warms up prior to the Spanish League football match between Barcelona and Real Madrid at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona. — AFP

No threat to career

The verdict is not expected to damage Benzema's career, with French football federation president Noel Le Graet saying he could keep his place in Les Bleus even if convicted and Real Madrid also remaining supportive of their star player.

But Benzema's conviction is expected to cast a pall over his stunning comeback to the national team earlier this year after a years-long absence. At club level, Benzema is also having a sensational season, putting him in the running for the Ballon d'Or for the

world's best player, which will be announced on November 29.

Benzema has scored nine times for France since being recalled by manager Didier Deschamps for the Euro 2020 finals — delayed by a year due to the coronavirus pandemic — making him the fifth-highest scorer in the history of Les Bleus. His performances have helped rehabilitate him in the eyes of many French fans and coach Didier Deschamps. "He's no longer the same person, he's matured", Deschamps said last month. — AFP

News in brief

Suspended sentence for Lyon fan

LYON: The Lyon fan who threw a bottle at Marseille captain Dimitri Payet in a weekend Ligue 1 match was on Tuesday handed a six-month suspended prison sentence. Wilfried Serriere, 32, was also banned from Lyon's Parc OL stadium for five years as a result of Sunday's incident. Earlier Tuesday French football chiefs held crisis talks with high ranking French government ministers to identify ways to combat the wave of violence that has rocked Ligue 1 this season. Payet required treatment after being struck on the side of the head as he prepared to take a corner for the visitors in the fifth minute, prompting both teams to return to the changing rooms. A food delivery driver, Serriere was ordered to pay the Marseille skipper one euro in symbolic damages. He apologized to Payet, and said it had not been his intention to hit him.

Nigeria lose Osimhen

ROME: Napoli's Nigerian striker Victor Osimhen seems certain to miss the upcoming Africa Cup of Nations as he needs three months to recover from surgery to a smashed cheekbone, the Serie A leaders said on Tuesday. Osimhen suffered multiple face fractures following a clash of heads during Napoli's defeat at Inter Milan on Sunday. The 22-year-old underwent surgery on Tuesday having titanium implants placed in his cheekbone and eye socket. "The player is doing well and will remain under observation for the next few days," said Napoli in a statement. The club said Osimhen was "expected to return to action in three months" which would put him out of contention for the Africa Cup of Nations which runs from January 9 to February 6 in Cameroon.

Advocaat quits as Iraq coach

BAGHDAD: The Iraqi Football Federation on Tuesday announced the departure of coach Dick Advocaat after only three months in the job. The veteran Dutch manager, 74, is replaced by Zeljko Petrovic, a federation spokesman said, for the upcoming Arab Cup in Qatar. "Advocaat expressed his deep regret over the disappointing results for the aspirations of the generous Iraqi fans, and for him personally, after he had hoped that the national team would achieve direct qualification for the World Cup in Qatar," spokesman Ahmed Odeh Zamel added.

Giants fire Garrett

NEW YORK: New York Giants offensive coordinator Jason Garrett has been sacked after the team's loss to the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, a statement said Tuesday. The Giants confirmed that Garrett had been relieved of his duties as offensive coordinator in the wake of Monday's 30-10 defeat in Tampa. The 55-year-old joined the Giants in 2020 after his contract as head coach of the Dallas Cowboys expired at the end of the 2019 season. The Giants are currently bottom of the NFC East standings with three wins and seven defeats following Monday's loss to the Bucs. It follows a losing 2020 season where the team finished with a 6-10 record.

No timeframe on Spurs' success for new boss Conte

LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur boss Antonio Conte has refused to set a timeframe for ending the north London club's long wait for silverware as he insisted trophies were the "target". Europe's new third-tier Conference League, where Spurs travel to Slovenia for a tie with NS Mura tonight, may offer the best hope of ending a trophy drought dating back to a 2008 English League Cup triumph. But recently-appointed Spurs head coach Conte, who guided London rivals Chelsea to the 2016/17 Premier League title and 2018 FA Cup, is well aware of the scale of the challenge.

"I know this is not simple, I am honest to understand this, but we want to try and build something important and try and lift trophies together, this must be our target," he told a pre-match press conference yesterday. The 52-year-old Italian added: "To build something ready to fight, in England it is not easy because



LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur's Italian head coach Antonio Conte gestures on the touchline during the English Premier League football match between Tottenham Hotspur and Leeds United at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London, on November 21, 2021. — AFP

the other teams are very, very strong but I know that through the work we can improve a lot. If you ask me how much time we need before it happens, it is very difficult to tell you this. In our heart and mind, this must be our

inspiration and we are to try to do this for the best of the club."

Conte's predecessor, Nuno Espirito Santo left his entire first-choice starting XI at home for the game away to Vitesse Arnhem last

'Duracell bunny' Haraguchi eager to break Union duck

BERLIN: Dubbed 'Duracell bunny' for his seemingly tireless energy, Genki Haraguchi is a shoe-in for Union Berlin this season, but the Japan midfielder is desperate to break his duck for the Bundesliga club. "I want to score," the 30-year-old attacking midfielder told reporters having yet to hit the net in 19 games since his off-season transfer from second-tier Hanover.

Haraguchi's silky passing has helped Union's strikers Max Kruse and Taiwo Awoniyi bag 16 goals between them this season, but he wants to get on the scoresheet. "I want to make the difference in games. I am generally happy with my form this season, but I want to score goals," he said.

It seems to be just a matter of time. The Japan veteran showed his finishing prowess at Hanover last season by having a hand in 16 goals — scoring nine and creating seven more — which earned him a free transfer to Union. "He's one of the winners of the season so far," Union's CEO Oliver Ruhnert told Kicker. "He's a bit like the Duracell bunny — he always gives his all."

Haraguchi came close to scoring against former club Hertha Berlin in Saturday's 2-0 derby win which saw Union climb to fifth in Germany's top

flight. He made key contributions by creating goals in wins over Moenchengladbach and Wolfsburg, a home defeat to Bayern Munich and draw with Cologne.

He'd love to hit the net tonight at Maccabi Haifa in the Europa Conference League, where Union need another win, having beaten the Zionist entity's champions 3-0 in Berlin, to climb off the bottom of their group. "It's a big goal for us to reach the next round, but we have to win the last two games," said Haraguchi.

Midfield switch

After failing to make an impact in four years at Hertha, Haraguchi was loaned to Fortuna Dusseldorf, who he helped win promotion in 2018 before being sold to Hanover. There he rebooted his career by switching from the wing to attacking midfield, which yielded 15 goals and 16 assists in the last three full seasons.

"I was a typical winger, but now I play more in the middle, it suits me better," he said. "Being on the wing is a lot of one-on-one, but playing in the middle means you have to be more flexible. That is one of my strengths."

Haraguchi's boundless energy has been fully tested this season on international duty with Japan. In mid-November, he flew from Germany to

month in order to ensure they were available for a Premier League match at West Ham. Spurs lost both matches, however.

Conte said he would take his strongest available squad to Slovenia for a game against the Conference League's lowest-ranked team after launching his Tottenham reign with last weekend's 2-1 win over Leeds in the Premier League.

"All the players available will come with us," he added. "They must be ready to play against Mura. "I said on Sunday that I need to make rotation because there are players that are a bit tired because they played many games with the national team and also we worked a lot in the last two weeks. There are other players that need game time. For us this competition is important. We want to take this fixture seriously and we want to go through to the next step".

Tottenham, who have 11 games before the end of the year, will be without Cristian Romero. The defender suffered what Conte said was a "serious" hamstring injury playing for Argentina in last week's World Cup qualifier against Brazil. "About Cristian Romero, we're waiting for another scan," Conte said. "Honestly, I think his injury is serious. We have to wait. I don't know the time he needs to recover." — AFP

play just four minutes — two in each game — in wins over Oman and Vietnam to leave Japan second in their World Cup qualifying group.

That came after flying halfway around the world to be on the bench for October's 2-1 win over Australia in Saitama after playing half an hour of a 2-1 defeat away to Saudi Arabia. "I don't like flying, but I am used to it. I have no idea how many kilometers I

have flown this year," said Haraguchi. "It's just football, I am always proud to play for Japan."

Haraguchi scored in Japan's last-gasp 3-2 defeat to Belgium in the last 16 of the 2018 World Cup and is eager for another chance at next year's finals in Qatar. "We're now in second place (four points behind Saudi Arabia), so have a chance of going to the World Cup." — AFP



BERLIN: Union Berlin's Japanese midfielder Genki Haraguchi reacts during the German first division Bundesliga football match between 1 FC Union Berlin and VfL Wolfsburg in Berlin on October 16, 2021. — AFP

Sports

Ronaldo sends Man United into last 16, Chelsea thrash Juventus

Draw leaves Barcelona with tough task of beating Bayern to qualify

PARIS: Manchester United booked their place in the Champions League last 16 as Cristiano Ronaldo scored in a 2-0 victory at Villarreal on Tuesday, while holders Chelsea also reached the knockout phase by thumping Juventus.

Three-time European champions United went into their first game since sacking Ole Gunnar Solskjaer at the weekend needing a win to confirm a top-two finish in Group F. But they were under massive pressure as defeat would have left their fate out of their own hands.

David de Gea made two crucial saves and United, with Michael Carrick in caretaker charge, took advantage through Ronaldo's 78th-minute lob. Jadon Sancho, so often a peripheral figure since his big-money move from Borussia Dortmund in the close-season, capped a fine individual display with his first goal for the club late on.

"It's not an important result for me personally. It's an important one for the players and the club," said Carrick. Ronaldo's goal was the 799th of his career, his 140th in the Champions League and his sixth in the competition this season.

The other qualification spot in the group remains up for grabs after Young Boys and Atalanta played out a thrilling 3-3 draw in Bern. Late goals from



VILLARREAL: Manchester United's forward Cristiano Ronaldo celebrates after scoring a goal during the UEFA Champions League Group F football match against Villarreal at La Ceramica stadium in Villarreal on Tuesday. —AFP

already this term. Chelsea grabbed their third goal less than two minutes later, Ruben Loftus-Cheek prodding the ball to Hudson-Odoi, who smashed home from close range.

There was still time for Timo Werner, making his first appearance since an injury layoff, to come off the bench and score in added time. "We did really well, it is so tough to score goals against Juventus and we created so much," said Tuchel. "Full credit for an amazing performance and a fantastic result." Zenit drew 1-1 with Malmö to secure a spot in the Europa League knockouts.

Barcelona stutter

Barcelona were held to a goalless draw by Benfica at the Camp Nou in Xavi's second game as coach, but remain above the Portuguese side in Group E. However, the Catalan club will have to beat Bayern Munich in Germany in their final group game to be sure of making the next round.

Benfica host already-eliminated Dynamo Kiev in their last match, trailing Barca by two points. Barcelona endured a nervy first half which saw Gavi

waste the only clear opportunity, blazing over from close range when Memphis Depay was waiting in the middle for a tap-in.

Xavi's men improved after the interval, though, with Frenkie de Jong's header forcing Benfica keeper Odysseas Vlachodimos into a flying save. But it was Benfica who almost took a huge step towards the last 16 deep into injury time, only for Haris Seferovic to shoot wide when he should have scored. "We played well but there's a bitter aftertaste because we were here to win tonight," Barca defender Ronald Araujo told uefa.com. "In front of our fans, our people - and now we simply must go and win in Munich."

The other game in Group E saw Bayern Munich wrap up top spot with a 2-1 victory at Dynamo Kiev. Robert Lewandowski lit up a snowy evening in the Ukrainian capital by scoring a magnificent overhead kick, with Kingsley Coman also on the scoresheet for the six-time winners. In Group G, Lille made Salzburg wait to reach the last 16 as Jonathan David scored a first-half winner in a 1-0 victory in France. All four teams in the group can still go through, after Sevilla saw off Wolfsburg 2-0. — AFP

with one match to play to top the group and progress to the knockout stages. The runners-up would be consigned to a play-off which also features the eight third-placed Champions League group teams.

Napoli are away to bottom side Spartak Moscow who need to win to stay in the race themselves on Wednesday. A win for Rodgers's side could set up a winner takes all trip to Napoli in their final match. Leicester winger Ademola Lookman — on loan from Bundesliga outfit RB Leipzig — is predicting a tough encounter with Legia.

"Whenever you're playing in Europe, you're coming up against a good team," he told the Leicester website. "Unfortunately, we lost to them over there, but we will be looking to use that experience to win our game here. In that game over there, they were very intense, they fought a lot and they made it difficult for us. We couldn't get a victory out of the game, but hopefully this game will enable us to force ourselves on them, take the fight to them and show our true qualities."

'All Bravado'

Celtic, where Rodgers re-established his managerial credentials after a sour end to his term at Liverpool, are battling to book their ticket into the next stage. Celtic can still qualify automatically and could take a huge step in doing that if they beat table-topping Bayer Leverkusen in Germany. Victory would leave them one point off Leverkusen and with a final home game against Real Betis.

"I feel we are in a good place to have a go at them," said Celtic's Australian manager Ange



LONDON: In this file photo taken on August 23, 2021 Leicester City's Northern Irish manager Brendan Rodgers applauds supporters after the English Premier League football match against West Ham United at The London Stadium in east London. — AFP

Postecoglou. "Can we take the game to them and come away with a result? Otherwise it's all bravado without any substance. The reason we play as we do is because that is the kind of team we want to be. If we fall short we fall short. We get back up and go again." — AFP

News in brief

Carrick hails 'calculated' Ronaldo

VILLARREAL: Manchester United's caretaker manager Michael Carrick said he was not surprised Cristiano Ronaldo delivered again in their 2-0 win over Villarreal in the Champions League on Tuesday. Carrick also said he spoke to Ole Gunnar Solskjaer before accepting his temporary role in charge. "It's what he does," said Carrick about Ronaldo. "In the big games, the big moments, when you need a goal or that something, he's there to deliver. He has that cold, calculated mentality to stay calm. He doesn't snatch at chances. I'm delighted to have him and not surprised at all he managed to come up with a goal for us." Carrick is expected to remain in position for Sunday's game at Premier League leaders Chelsea. Manchester United have said they plan to install an interim manager for the remainder of this season before making a permanent appointment in the summer.

Pochettino 'happy' in Paris

MANCHESTER: Mauricio Pochettino insisted he is happy to see out his contract until 2023 at Paris Saint-Germain on Tuesday despite speculation linking him with the vacant managerial position at Manchester United. The Argentine has long been linked with a move to Old Trafford. Manchester United have said they plan to install an interim manager for the remainder of this season before making a permanent appointment in the summer. That appeared to open the door to a move for Pochettino, who is well on course to winning the first league title of his coaching career with a 11-point lead in Ligue 1 and is aiming to end the Qatari-owned French giants wait to win the Champions League with a star-studded forward line of Lionel Messi, Kylian Mbappe and Neymar.

Hazard 'not finished yet'

MADRID: Thibaut Courtois said that Eden Hazard still wants to be a success at Real Madrid and cannot be written off as a failure. Hazard has not started a game since Madrid suffered a shock defeat at home to Sheriff in September. Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti has praised Hazard's professionalism but admitted last month that he currently "prefers other players". The Belgian has been linked with leaving the club either in January or next summer, having endured a nightmare two years since joining Real Madrid from Chelsea for 100 million euros. "I have known Eden for many years and his dream has always been to play for Real Madrid so he feels sad that it's not going how he wants it to," said Courtois in a press conference.



Lewandowski sends Bayern to group's top

Vincent Sierro and Silvan Hefti gave the Swiss champions a 3-2 lead, but Luis Muriel struck in the 88th minute for the visitors. Atalanta face a winner-takes-all match against Villarreal in Bergamo next month.

Chelsea thrash Juve

Chelsea romped into the last 16 and to the top of Group H with an impressive 4-0 thrashing of Juventus at Stamford Bridge. Thomas Tuchel's men knew that qualification would be secured if they could avoid defeat or if Zenit Saint Petersburg failed to beat Malmö.

The Blues dominated the early stages and took the lead through young defender Trevoh Chalobah's third goal of the season. Chelsea's defenders were consistently a menace from set-pieces, and Thiago Silva saw a header saved by Wojciech Szczesny early in the second period. It was a defender who doubled Chelsea's lead in the 56th minute.

England right-back Reece James hammered a fine volley into the bottom corner to net for the fifth time

Man Utd candidate Rodgers keeps focus on Europa League

PARIS: Leicester City boss Brendan Rodgers will put aside speculation linking him with the vacancy at Manchester United to focus on beating Legia Warsaw tonight to ensure the Foxes keep their hopes of automatic qualification to the Europa League knockout stage alive.

The 48-year-old Northern Irishman has been linked with the United role after Ole Gunnar Solskjaer was sacked last Sunday. It comes, though, at a time when Rodgers is encountering his rockiest patch since he took over in 2019.

The Foxes have for the past two campaigns been right in the mix challenging for a Champions League spot. However, this term they are 12th in the Premier League table, eight points off a Champions League spot with almost a third of the season gone. An illustration of how much their form has dropped off was the easy manner in which the team they defeated in May's FA Cup final Chelsea beat them 3-0 last Saturday.

Rodgers needs a quick pick me up against the Polish side who beat them 1-0 in Warsaw in their earlier group stage meeting. Leicester are third in the group, two points off leaders Napoli and one adrift of Thursday's opponents.

Victory over Legia would keep them in the hunt

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144

Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

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EMERGENCY

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Mr. Supreeth Sham, son of Mr. Sham Poojary, resident of 4-15, Om Shanthi Nilaya, Near Melmatta, Adjilu, Post Aroor, Kunjal, Brahmavar, Udipi-576213, Karnataka and Ms. Shaila Dsouza, daughter of Mr. Franky Dsouza, resident of 1-184, Mallampally House, Kunjibettu Post, Shivalli, Udipi-576102, Karnataka both Indian nationals presently residing in Kuwait, have given notice of intended marriage between them under the Foreign Marriage Act, 1969. If anyone has any objection to the proposed marriage, he/she may file the same with the undersigned according to the procedure laid down under the Act/Rule within thirty days from the date of publication of this notice. Communications in this regard can be made by Email (cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in) / letters / telephonic calls (00965 - 22550171, 00965 - 22533125).

(K.S Rathore) First Secretary (CA) and Marriage Officer, Embassy of India, Kuwait



NAPLES: A tourist takes a photo of a mural painting of late Argentinian football legend Diego Maradona at the so-called "Maradona square" in the Quartieri Spagnoli district of Naples yesterday. — AFP photos

The cult of Maradona runs strong in Naples, a year after his death

NAPLES: It is almost 30 years since Diego Maradona ended his remarkable playing spell at Napoli but a year on from his death at the age of 60 the Argentine great is as present as ever in the Neapolitan world. His name is stitched onto shirts, daubed on the walls of the southern Italian city and etched into the hearts of the people, many of whom are too young to have ever seen him play.

And today, on the first anniversary of his death, a bronze statue will be unveiled in front of the stadium which now bears his name — Stadio Diego Armando Maradona — to celebrate the "eternal" link with the "Pibe de Oro", the golden boy.

Diego is everywhere, from the central station all the way to the official Napoli store where his face stares out from the stylized fingerprint on the jersey in the window.

The shirt, worn by the Napoli players in November, is probably one of the last to be found in the city. Produced in limited numbers and sold for charity, these collector's edition jerseys have long sold out on the club's website.

For those who set sail for Naples in memory of Maradona, the first stop is often Mario Filardi's famous fresco in the Spanish Quarter painted in 1990 and restored in 2016.

It is a meandering walk from the ferry

terminal and the wandering pilgrim is sure to pass other images painted on the walls as well as posters for the film "The Hand of God", Paolo Sorrentino's homage to the Naples of the 1980s which was released yesterday in cinemas in Italy.

But the stroll to the Spanish Quarter is worth it. "It was important to come", says Aicha, 17, who braved heavy rain to come to meditate in front of the famous mural which shows a shaggy-haired Maradona in Napoli's powder blue shirt running earnestly towards goal.

It is in a humble surrounding, set back from the road, often found with a couple of cars parked in front. But this yard is dedicated to the worship of Maradona, and adorned with photos, flags, jerseys and other relics left by the football faithful.

Aisha came all the way across Italy from Bari on the east coast, around 260 kilometers, with her family to "see the way the city remembers him". "You can see that it's not just Napoli shirts, but most of the teams he's played with, and pictures of him as a player and also as a man," she told AFP. "It's interesting how normal people, not just supporters, bonded with him."

Facundo Perez, 26, an Argentinian living in Europe, also came specially to Naples to "greet" Maradona, a year after his death. "For me, Diego is a god. To see the flags,

and the fact that he conquered the heart of Naples, it's crazy. I came here to try and understand how much people love him."

Frescoes keep blooming on the walls in Naples and the region beyond. Street artist Mario Casti, who has already produced ten in the last year, was still at work this week finishing off another one for the anniversary. Maradona also inspired the sculptor Domenico Sepe who has created the work that will stand in front of Napoli's stadium.

'Eternity'

"The work was born from a personal need," Sepe told AFP, gazing at the barely-finished sculpture in a foundry in the Pianura district. "On the announcement of his death, something was missing from my daily life. And as a Neapolitan and also as a Napoli supporter and as a sculptor, I decided to pay homage to him with a work that offers him eternity."

A sculptor in the classical tradition, Sepe wanted his majestic bronze to present Maradona almost as a "Greek God". What he has produced is a Maradona with focused gaze, the number 10 on his back, stocky legs bursting, ball at his feet, charging upfield on a pitch the shape of Argentina.

It is a pose reminiscent of the muscular Maradona who inspired Argentina to victory in the 1986 World Cup — although he is



Italian sculptor Domenico Sepe shows a life-size bronze statue of the late Argentine soccer legend Diego Armando Maradona, on Monday at his studio in Naples.

obviously wearing a Napoli shirt. Another statue will be installed in the stadium on Sunday ahead of Napoli's Serie A match against Lazio, when the home side will again be wearing the famous 'Diego shirt'. Napoli are currently top of Serie A and

there is no doubt that the most fitting tribute would be to win the title. They have only done it twice before, in 1987 and 1990 when Maradona was truly in his pomp. Little wonder the Neapolitans worship him still. — AFP

Knicks hold off Lakers, Mavs edge Clippers in overtime

LOS ANGELES: Evan Fournier scored 26 points and Immanuel Quickley put up 12 of his 14 in the fourth quarter Tuesday as the New York Knicks thwarted the short-handed Los Angeles Lakers' comeback bid in a 106-100 NBA victory.

The Lakers, playing without suspended superstar LeBron James, trailed by 25 in the second quarter. They rallied to tie the score twice in the third period, but never managed to get in front despite a triple-double of 31 points, 13 rebounds and 10 assists from Russell Westbrook.

The Lakers scored 36 points in the first quarter, but the Lakers closed the first half on a 16-4 scoring run and opened the third period with a 9-0 run to make it close. They tied it at 79-79 on Carmelo Anthony's dunk, and Westbrook tied it again at 81-81 with a driving layup.

But with Knicks star Julius Randle — who scored 20 points with 16 rebounds — in late foul trouble, Quickley stepped up for New York, hitting four

three-pointers in the final quarter as the hosts held on for the win. "Big shotmaker," Knicks coach Tom Thibodeau said of Quickley. "It's interesting, in the beginning of the year he started off and wasn't making it and it didn't faze him one bit."

"If they're in and out, he's always thinking the next one is going in. Great shooters have short memories. He does," Thibodeau added. Fournier said plays down the stretch kept the Knicks in it, but he added that losing the big lead before hanging on for the win was a "perfect example" of the inconsistency that has hindered the Knicks. "We are very capable of playing really, really good basketball, getting big leads and all of a sudden not so well," he said. "Then they get confident, we lose rhythm and we let them back into the game."

James was serving a one-game suspension after a bloody clash with Detroit's Isaiah Stewart on Sunday. James was ejected after "recklessly" lashing out at Stewart, leaving him with blood pouring from a facial injury. Stewart was suspended for two games for repeatedly going after James in the wake of the clash.

Lakers star Anthony Davis, playing through illness, scored 20 points and pulled down six rebounds. Avery Bradley delivered 15 points for the Lakers and former Knick Carmelo Anthony added 12 as the Lakers lost for the fourth time in five games.

As the Lakers continued their road trip, there was drama back in Los Angeles, where the Dallas Mavericks emerged from a back-and-forth battle with a 112-104 overtime victory over the Clippers. Kristaps Porzingis scored 30 points and Luka Doncic — back in action after missing three games with knee and ankle injuries — added 26 for the Mavericks, who led by 10 with less than four minutes left in regulation.

Clippers forward Paul George fired a three-pointer from the corner over the outstretched arms of Terance Mann to tie the score at time expired in regulation. But the Mavericks dominated overtime, outscoring the Clippers 9-1 with the aid of six points from Porzingis to seal the victory.

Herro ball

In Detroit, Tyler Herro scored 31 points and pulled down eight rebounds off the bench as the Miami Heat rallied for a 100-92 victory over the Pistons to launch a four-game road trip. Jimmy Butler and Bam Adebayo added 15 points apiece for the Heat, who trailed by nine going into the fourth quarter. Herro's jump shot with 8:09 to play gave the Heat their first lead since the first quarter, and they pulled away from there.

Jerami Grant had 21 points and seven rebounds for the Pistons, who had led the Lakers by 15 after



NEW YORK: Julius Randle #30 of the New York Knicks passes around DeAndre Jordan #10 of the Los Angeles Lakers in the second half at Madison Square Garden on Tuesday in New York City. — AFP

three quarters on Sunday only to come up empty. In Portland, CJ McCollum scored 32 points and Damian Lillard added 25 as the Trail Blazers beat Denver 119-100, dealing the Nuggets their fifth straight defeat. — AFP