

4 Iran official visits Kuwait, UAE ahead of nuke talks



5 South Africa calls travel bans 'draconian and unjustified'



16 Arsenal thump Newcastle; Howe suffers first defeat



Kuwait, Arab countries ban nine African nations

World races to contain the new COVID variant



JOHANNESBURG: Airport staff assist travelers at various check-in counters while an electronic flight notice board displays some cancelled flights at OR Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg yesterday, after several countries banned flights from South Africa following the discovery of a new COVID-19 variant Omicron. — AFP

By B Izzak and Agencies

KUWAIT: Kuwait yesterday banned commercial flights with nine African nations over the new COVID-19 variant Omicron but allowed cargo, government spokesman Tareq Al-Mazrem said. The ban begins today and is indefinite. The countries are South Africa, where the new variant was originated, in addition to Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Lesotho, Eswatini, Zambia and Malawi.

The Council of Ministers also decided at an extraordinary meeting to ban entry of foreigners from those African countries unless they have spent at least 14 days in a third country. Kuwaiti citizens arriving from those nations must undergo institutional quarantine for seven days with a PCR test done on the day of arrival and a second on the sixth day, Mazrem said. The Council of Ministers also called on citizens to avoid travel out of Kuwait now, unless it is extremely necessary, especially to countries that have reported cases of Omicron.

Fears mounted yesterday that a highly-infectious new coronavirus strain was pushing its way into Europe as the world brought the shutters down to contain the new Omicron variant. Suspected new cases emerged in Germany and the Czech Republic,

while Dutch authorities quarantined 61 passengers from South Africa who tested positive for COVID-19. South Africa complained that it was being "punished" with air travel bans for first detecting the strain, which the World Health Organization has termed a "variant of concern".

Australia and Thailand joined the United States, Brazil, Canada and a host of other countries around the world restricting travel from the region, fearing a major setback to global efforts against the pandemic. Scientists are racing to determine the threat posed by the heavily mutated strain, which is more transmissible than the dominant Delta variant, and whether it can evade existing vaccines.

Anxious travelers thronged Johannesburg international airport, desperate to squeeze onto the last flights to countries that had imposed sudden travel bans. Many had cut back holidays and rushed back from South African safaris and vineyards. "It's ridiculous, we will always be having new variants," British tourist David Good told AFP, passports in hand. "South Africa found it but it's probably all over the world already."

But the virus has already slipped through the net with cases in Europe and Hong Kong and Zionist entity. Germany became the second European

Continued on Page 2

UAE says 100% of population vaccinated

ABU DHABI: One hundred percent of the United Arab Emirates' population has received at least one dose of a vaccine against COVID-19, the health ministry has said. The announcement late Friday came amid growing global concern over a new COVID variant dubbed Omicron that was first detected by South Africa.

The World Health Organization said the new variant is more infectious than the dominant, highly transmissible Delta strain, and several countries, including the UAE, have restricted travel from a number of south African countries. According to the UAE health ministry, "a total of 21,802,032 doses" of COVID vaccine have been administered in the Gulf Arab nation. "One hundred percent (of the population) have received one dose" while "90.18 percent are fully vaccinated".

The UAE - a federation of seven emirates - is home to around 10 million people, a majority of whom are expats. The energy-rich Arab country was considered as far back as July a leader in terms of population in inoculating people against COVID. In October, the UAE declared it had overcome the coronavirus crisis after recording its lowest number of infections that month. The UAE has so far recorded more than 741,000 cases of COVID-19, including 2,145 deaths. — AFP

Kuwait Speaker urges lawmakers to be bold

MADRID: Speaker of Kuwait's National Assembly Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem has affirmed that criticism of some "erroneous practices in the democratic system and examining it regularly" is not aimed at undermining the governing regime, but rather safeguarding it. Al-Ghanem, addressing the general assembly of the 143rd Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), thanked organizers who have chosen the theme "contemporary challenges in the face of democracies," as a main topic for debates during the international gathering.

The Speaker of the Kuwait parliament has indicated that it is not sufficient to address or adopt democracy with superficial rhetorical discussions.

"The matter warrants in-depth culture and intelligence," he noted, also underscoring other core issues in this respect, namely the practicing, the obstacles, the social, economic and cultural dimensions of the issue. Al-Ghanem called upon his fellow lawmakers to put aside slogans and purported "sanctities" when addressing "this file."

Masking any ruling regime, even in the cases where it has a democratic form, is the number-one hindrance in the face of the approach to renew and remedy its drawbacks, Al-Ghanem

Continued on Page 2



Kuwait Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem

First 'robotaxis' enter service in Beijing

BEIJING: It looks like a normal car but the white taxi by the curb has nobody driving it, and communicates with customers digitally to obtain directions and take payment. Beijing this week approved its first autonomous taxis for commercial use, bringing dozens of the so-called "robotaxis" to the streets of the Chinese capital.

The vehicles can only carry two passengers at a time and are confined to the city's southern Yizhuang area. An employee of the taxi firm also sits in the front of the car in case any sudden intervention is needed, but the vehicle drives itself. The rollout is a significant step forward for the driverless ambitions of Chinese tech giant Baidu and start-up Pony.ai, who were given the green light to deploy the cars on Thursday.

But it is expected to be years before the taxis operate fully without human intervention, due to regulations and safety requirements.

Continued on Page 2



BEIJING: An Apollo Go autonomous taxi is seen on a street in Yizhuang, a town of Daxing District, in the southeast suburbs of Beijing. — AFP

Indian man builds Taj Mahal replica home for his wife

BURHANPUR: A lovestruck and historically minded Indian husband has emulated the world's most famous display of marital devotion by building for his wife a replica of the Taj Mahal. The original "Monument to Love" was constructed on the orders of heartbroken Mughal emperor Shah Jahan

to house the tomb of his favorite wife, Mumtaz, in the 17th century. Anand Prakash Chouksey's beloved remains very much alive, and even helped consult on the project and his version of the marble wonder of the world, around one-third the size of the original. "My wife's only demand was for a meditation room. She's a spiritual woman," the 52-year-old businessman told AFP. "She says the dome creates a different environment and there is a lot of positive energy."

The original Taj Mahal - dubbed a "teardrop on the cheek of time" by writer Rabindranath Tagore - is in Agra south of Delhi, however the new replica is 800 kilometers away in Burhanpur. But the central

Indian city is none other than the place where Mumtaz died while giving birth to her 14th child in June 1632, having accompanied Shah Jahan to quell a local revolt. Mumtaz's body was even initially buried there too, and according to locals Shah Jahan had at first wanted to build the Taj Mahal for her on the banks of the river Tapti. "The soil structure back then was not suitable to build the Taj here that's how it was decided to be built in Agra," Chouksey explained. The city is still home to the dilapidated remains of the palace where the royals lived, including a once-beautiful hammam or bathhouse built by Shah Jahan for his wife to relax in before she died.

Continued on Page 2



BURHANPUR: School children walk past a replica of the Taj Mahal during their visit at Burhanpur in India's Madhya Pradesh state. — AFP

Local

Zain shares ambitions of youth at NUKS conference in United States

Waleed Al-Khashti: Investing in Kuwait's future generations is our top priority



CHICAGO: Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah with Waleed Al-Khashti and Zain's team at the company's booth.

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, took part in the opening ceremony of the 37th annual conference of the National Union of Kuwaiti Students in the United States of America (NUKS USA). The company is the platinum sponsor of the event, which is held in Chicago, Illinois under the patronage of HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

The opening ceremony witnessed the presence of many national figures, including the Ambassador of the State of Kuwait to the United States of America Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Communications and Relations Officer Waleed Al-Khashti.

During his opening speech, Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Communications and Relations Officer Waleed Al-Khashti said: "Every time we fly to the US and meet our youth, we are overwhelmed with feelings of pride in a generation filled with ambition, eagerness, and dedication to achieve so much for our nation."

Khashti added: "We did not allow the pandemic to be an obstacle that prevents us from taking part in this year's conference. We have always been a main partner of this event throughout the years because it is a national gathering through which we meet our students abroad, who represent our hope for the future."

Khashti continued: "I would like to take this opportunity to express my pride in Kuwait's students abroad, and further renew our support to your programs here in the US. At Zain, we strongly believe in the capabilities of our youth, and we dedicate a major part of our efforts towards youth and education initiatives as part of our sustainability and social responsibility strategy."

Khashti concluded: "Investing in the next generation is the most profitable form of investment and is a top priority for us. That's why at Zain we focus

much of our sustainability and social responsibility efforts on issues that cater to the youth. Kuwaiti is full of ambitious minds like yourselves that aspire for change, and we feel it is crucial that companies and organizations embrace these young minds to help and empower them to believe in themselves and achieve positive change."

Zain is proud to be the platinum sponsor of the conference, which makes a return after a halt of



Zain platinum sponsor of event held in Chicago

nearly two years due to the COVID pandemic. This year, Zain continues its role as a main supporter of the event for 17 years. The conference is considered the largest gathering of Kuwaiti students abroad, and Zain's support comes in line with its corporate sustainability and social responsibility strategy towards the youth and education sectors. The company is proud to have become an integral part of this event's success, through which it connects with the country's youth abroad.

Zain will be contributing to the event by organizing several unique activities and programs for the students. The company will sponsor a special sports seminar featuring many distinguished current and past Kuwaiti athletes, as well as sponsor a health seminar that will host Ministry of Health Spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad, who will share a behind-the-scenes look at the ministry's efforts to

curb the COVID outbreak last year.

Zain will take part in a special exhibition for sponsors, where the company will present available career opportunities to students, as well as showcase its leading experience in the telecom sector. In addition, Zain has prepared several surprises for students who will be visiting the event. The company is also set to host ZAINPHONIC, a special workshop that shares tips and tricks of smartphone photography, giving the students a chance to learn the best techniques for taking pro-level photos with their smartphones and helping them unleash their creativity.

Zain's presence in the event conveys its enthusiasm to interact with the future generations of Kuwaiti youth, especially those who pursue their education abroad, as the NUKS USA conference is considered the largest gathering of Kuwaitis outside of Kuwait, and welcomes students from all over the US. The event appeals to students on both intellectual and social levels and it serves as an open forum for them to exchange opinions and views regarding important domestic issues with the presence of distinguished national figures from the Kuwaiti community, including academics, media personalities, athletes, doctors, and more who fly to the US for the purpose of meeting with the students and sharing their experiences with them.

Zain sees its annual participation in the conference as part of its responsibility as a leading national company to help provide bright and enthusiastic young Kuwaitis with a great social experience, as well as listen to their ideas and experiences while pursuing their education abroad.

The National Union of Kuwaiti Students in the United States of America (NUKS USA) serves nearly 14,000 Kuwaiti students studying in the United States. The union aims, through its events and programs, to connect Kuwaiti students with each other



Zain's Waleed Al-Khashti addresses Kuwait's students in Chicago.

on one level, and with their nation and the latest updates of the Kuwaiti community on another. NUKS USA was publicized in the USA and was granted the recognition of the United States government. The achievement is considered a proud milestone for Kuwait's youth, and is a direct result of the great relations between the State of Kuwait and United States. Such a recognition is a clear reflection of the strategic relations between the two nations.

Kuwait, Arab countries ban...

Continued from Page 1

country to find a suspected case of the new strain, after Belgium on Friday. "The Omicron variant has with strong likelihood already arrived in Germany," tweeted Kai Klose, social affairs minister in the western state of Hesse.

The neighboring Czech Republic was carrying out further tests on a woman who had travelled from Namibia and was suspected to have the new variant, prime minister Andrej Babis said. The Netherlands meanwhile found that around one in 10 - 61 out of 600 - people who had arrived at Schiphol airport on Friday from South Africa were positive for COVID-19. The rest tested negative. The infected people, who flew in on two KLM flights that took off before the Dutch government announced a ban on travelers from the region, were being kept quarantined in a hotel near the airport.

"The positive test results will be examined as soon as possible to determine whether this concerns the new worrisome variant," the Dutch Health Authority said in a statement. The Netherlands on Friday became the latest in a series of European countries to tighten its COVID restrictions. The WHO said it could take several weeks to understand the variant, which was initially known as B.1.1.529, and cautioned against imposing travel curbs while scientific evidence was still scant.

South Africa has called the travel curbs "draconian" and yesterday said the flight bans were "akin to punishing South Africa for its advanced genomic sequencing and the ability to detect new variants quicker." "Excellent science should be applauded and not punished," the foreign ministry said in a statement.

The main countries targeted by the shutdown include South Africa, Botswana, Eswatini (Swaziland), Lesotho, Namibia, Zambia, Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe. US President Joe Biden meanwhile said

richer countries should donate more COVID-19 vaccines and give up intellectual property protections to manufacture more doses worldwide to stem the spread of the virus. "The news about this new variant should make clearer than ever why this pandemic will not end until we have global vaccinations," he said.

But with memories still fresh of the way global air travel helped the spread of COVID after it first emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan in late 2019, countries clamped down on the new variant. Australia became the latest to act, banning all flights from nine southern African countries. Thailand meanwhile restricted flights from eight countries, as did the United States, Brazil, Canada and Saudi Arabia. EU officials agreed in an emergency meeting to urge all 27 nations in the bloc to restrict travel from southern Africa, with many members having already done so.

The World Trade Organization called off its ministerial conference, its biggest gathering in four years, at the last minute Friday due to the new variant. Vaccine manufacturers have held out hope that they can modify current vaccines to target the Omicron variant. Germany's BioNTech and US drugmaker Pfizer said they expect data "in two weeks at the latest" to show if their jab can be adjusted. Moderna said it will develop a booster specific to the new variant.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia was among countries in the Middle East and North Africa to ban travelers from several African nations due to fears over a new coronavirus variant. The Saudi interior ministry and authorities in the United Arab Emirates said visitors from seven African countries were barred from entry. They listed the countries as South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Lesotho and Eswatini.

The Saudi ban comprises flights to and from those countries, the official Saudi Press Agency said, quoting an interior ministry official. It said, however, that foreign nationals from the seven countries could enter the kingdom if they had spent the previous 14 days in another country and comply with Saudi health protocols. The official Emirati news agency WAM said the UAE ban would go into effect on Monday and was only for travelers coming from those African countries, regardless of the airline, and included transit passengers.

First 'robotaxis' enter service...

Continued from Page 1

Developers are hoping Chinese consumers - who have embraced e-commerce, online payments and other digital solutions - will quickly get used to the sensation of travelling in a car without a driver. Pony.ai co-founder Peng Jun said the key to moving the industry forward is "policy, technology and

public acceptance".

More than 500,000 trips have already been made in Pony.ai's robotaxis during earlier testing stages, the Toyota-backed start-up said. Passengers using Baidu's "Apollo Go" cars must download an app called "Luobo kuaipao" - meaning "radish run" - and can hail a cab at one of 600 pick-up and drop-off points. Sixty-seven Baidu taxis are on the roads in Beijing charging just over two yuan (\$0.30) for a 5.9-kilometre journey. Alibaba-backed start-up AutoX and ride-hailing giant DiDi Chuxing have also been running robotaxi pilot projects in cities around the country. — AFP

Indian man builds Taj Mahal replica...

Continued from Page 1

Chouksey's story has none of the tragedy and building his new home has taken him three years — a dozen

Kuwait Speaker urges lawmakers...

Continued from Page 1

noted, stressing, "We should not be afraid when we point the finger at wrong practices; for democracy is a means not an objective; it is rather a practice and not a slogan and we ought not to turn into slaves for political paganism or legal statue even if they carry a democratic name."

Democracy is not sacred and nothing should prohibit efforts to correct or guide it where the practices are not right, he stressed further. In his lengthy address, Al-Ghanem cautioned that democracy may encounter serious threats and challenges where the society witnesses sharp polarization with parties getting embroiled in irresponsible conflicts.

less than the mausoleum that inspired it. It cost 15 million rupees (\$200,000) to build. "We used marble from Makrana to build the house, which is the same that was used to build the Taj Mahal," he said. Chouksey plans to mount an Indian flag on top of the main dome and add symbols from India's most popular religions to the four minarets surrounding his new manor. "We want to send a message of peace and religious harmony. There is a lot of hate around. Love solves all problems in life and Taj Mahal is a symbol of that." — AFP

Moreover in the shadow of this system, social media may turn into an arena for strife among intelligence agencies, ransom seekers and criminals, infested with rumors and misleading information intended to foment troubles. Setting other examples of unsound phenomena under the wings of democracy, he mentioned prevalence of the majorities at the expense of the rights of some communities. In some countries malpractices jeopardize development, Speaker Al-Ghanem added.

Moreover, he urged the conferring legislators to hold further and longer discussions and brainstorming debates to pin point issues and shortcomings that transpire under democracy. Al-Ghanem expressed readiness to host at the Kuwaiti parliament headquarters seminars to discuss and debate the challenges facing democracy - under the IPU aegis. The Kuwait parliamentary delegation, headed by the Speaker, arrived in Madrid on Wednesday to partake in the IPU conference. — AFP

Local

Kuwaiti lawmaker applauds national diplomacy for serving nation's causes

Kuwaiti delegation seeks consensus concerning Arab, Muslim nations

MADRID: Kuwaiti MP Salman Al-Hlailah, currently in Spain taking part in the 143rd Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) conference that began Friday, praised Kuwait's parliamentary diplomacy noting its paramount role for backing the State policies. MP Hlailah, Secretary of the Kuwaiti Parliamentary Caucus, affirmed in remarks on the sidelines of the convention yesterday, that the Kuwaiti diplomacy at the parliamentary level has proven effective for establishing "global unanimity" toward Arab and Islamic causes as well as just universal questions.

The Kuwaiti parliamentary caucus, chaired by National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem, has succeeded in creating fruitful cooperation among the Arab and Islamic caucuses for forming unified stances toward various issues at continental and international levels, he said. A Kuwaiti parliamentary delegation headed by Ghanem arrived in Madrid on Wednesday to participate in the IPU conference. The delegation includes Secretary of the Parliamentary Caucus Dr Hamad Al-Matar, Treasurer and MP Al-Hlailah, member of the caucus MP Usama Al-Munawer and the National Assembly Secretary General Adel Al-Loughani. The five-day convention tackles modern-time challenges facing democracy, tackling social divisions in the shadow of dwindling masses' confidence in political establishments, mounting fanaticism and dissemination of misleading information via social media.

Central institutions

Delivering the opening speech at the conference, King Felipe VI of Spain stressed that the conference is being held although the coronavirus pandemic has not concluded yet. He referred to necessary health measures taken to restore social and economic life in various countries, as well as institutional relations and cooperation amongst countries. He said the parliaments are central democratic institutions that represent citizens and nations, and their function extends to take decisions, build agreements and achieve political consensus. The conference mainly discusses "contemporary challenges facing democracy: overcoming divisions and building society" in light of a decline in public confidence in political systems, an increase in extremism and the spread of misinformation through social media.



KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali-Ghanem is seen in a group photo on the sidelines of the conference. —KUNA photos

Along with discussing the role of national parliaments in addressing these issues, MPs have a chance to exchange ideas on how to engage more meaningfully with the public and ensure that decisions are made as inclusive as possible. The conference also focuses on how to deal with threats facing MPs following the assassination of British MP David Amis last October. IPU Human Rights Commission is set to consider the cases of more than 100 MPs' deaths by several countries, including Afghanistan, Myanmar and Venezuela. The IPU will launch new tools for MPs including a regional report on sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Africa and guidelines for parliamentarians on budgeting to achieve the sustainable development goals. The five-day convention tackles modern-time challenges facing democracy, tackling social divisions in the shadow of dwindling masses' confidence in political establishments, mounting fanaticism and dissemination of misleading information via social media.

Meanwhile, Ghanem and his accompanying dele-

gation are participating in the coordination meetings of Arab, Islamic and Asian groups to share views on issues that will be discussed and unify stances regarding them. The Kuwaiti delegation is also participating in the meetings of the IPU permanent committees on the issues of sustainable development, finance, trade, democracy, human rights,

international peace and security and United Nations affairs, in addition to several sub-committees. The delegation includes Secretary of the Parliamentary Caucus Dr Hamad Al-Matar, Treasurer and MP Hlailah, member of the caucus MP Usama Al-Munawer and the National Assembly Secretary General Adel

Al-Loughani. The previous 142nd conference of the IPU was held virtually last May, with the participation of 750 MPs from 135 countries, and the next one will be held in Indonesia's Bali next March.

Seeking consensus

Ghanem had said on Friday that the Kuwaiti delegation is seeking consensus with respect to the



Members of the Kuwaiti delegation participating in the event.

"emergency topics" concerning the Arab and Muslim nations; presented by peers at the gathering. The Kuwaiti parliament speaker, in a statement after a meeting of the Islamic geopolitical group on the sidelines of the conference, affirmed that the delegation of the Kuwaiti National Assembly has been effective among the geopolitical Asian, Arab and Islamic groups. He revealed that Kuwaiti MP Matar was nominated for membership in the permanent sustainable committee during a meeting with the geopolitical Arab group on Thursday. Moreover at Thursday's meeting, there was consensus on supporting a topic proposed by Indonesia regarding the humanitarian condition of the Palestinian people. The Turkish parliamentarians, for their part, he added, proposed a term regarding fighting against terrorism and desecration of the Islamic sharia on the social media.

However, Ghanem indicated that more than one topic, proposed by a single group, could not pass in the conference, thus he had proposed merging the two issues or delaying one to the next meeting, due in Bali, Indonesia. Elaborating, he noted that there was an agreement, at a coordination meeting of the Islamic group, on choosing one of the two topics. The speaker of the Kuwaiti parliament affirmed keenness on consensus on subjects that concern the Muslim and Arab nations. —AFP

Mustafa Qamhiya: A veteran newsman

Mustafa Qamhiya has been working in the field of journalism for more than 30 years. He graduated with a degree in English Literature from Damascus University in 1984 and began his professional career at the local press department of Kuwait's Ministry of Information in 1985.



Mustafa Qamhiya

Qamhiya joined Kuwait Times in 1996 as a translator, and two years later, was made the head of the translation department. In 2001, he was promoted to the post of Local Desk Manager. For the next 10 years, Qamhiya oversaw the work of editors, reporters, translators, and photographers, delegating assignments to ensure comprehensive coverage of local events.

In 2011, he was promoted to the post of Executive Editor, leading to further administrative responsibilities. Another decade later, in 2021, Qamhiya was promoted to the post of Managing Editor to lead Kuwait Times into a new digital era, while at the same time strengthening its core print platform.

Kuwaitis in Netherlands advised to follow health precautions

BRUSSELS: Kuwait's Embassy in the Netherlands has urged Kuwaiti citizens anew to abide by renewed health precautions declared by the Dutch authorities.

The Dutch government declared late on Friday a set of new precautions to stem spread of the coronavirus, effective today. Accordingly, cafes, restaurants, markets, cultural, entertainment and sports facilities will be shut from 5 pm to 5 am.

Central markets and pharmacies will close at 8 pm, according to the measures, also calling upon citizens to maintain social distancing of 1.5 meters in public places. —KUNA

Al-Sharaa... new responsibilities at Kuwait Times

Islam Mohammad Al-Sharaa has been working in Kuwait Times since 1983. After completing an MCSE course, he joined the editorial department in 1992, going on to head the information technology department at the paper. Sharaa has covered many events inside and outside Kuwait and has met several senior IT specialists during his assignments. In 2021 Sharaa was promoted to the post of the deputy managing editor.



Islam Mohammad Al-Sharaa

Kuwait University celebrates 55th anniversary

KUWAIT: Many qualified employees in different state departments have graduated from Kuwait University, the University's Secretary General Dr Mardhi Al-Ayyash said.

His remarks came in a press release yesterday, in celebration of the university's 55th anniversary.

Celebrating the anniversary came in time with the students' return to schools after staying at home for about a year and a half, due to the coronavirus pandemic, he noted. University elections, student conferences and debates also resumed, Ayyash added.

Since its establishment, Kuwait University has always exerted efforts to provide proper education and encourage scientific research that serve the country's development requirements and the Kuwait Vision 2035, he said. Kuwait University was officially inaugurated on November 27, 1966. —KUNA



Dr Mardhi Al-Ayyash

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Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.netKuwait to
permit partial
professional sports

KUWAIT: New sports rules will be adopted in Kuwait soon, allowing football, handball, volleyball and basketball players to be dedicated to their games during a sports season, Director-General of the Kuwaiti Public Authority for Sport Humoud Flaiteh said yesterday. Distinguished individual athletes representing Kuwaiti national sports teams are also entitled to the same status in line with the imminent regulations.

Flaiteh said in a statement to the press. The move, which comes at the behest of Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, is part of the authority's 2022-2028 strategy purposed to spur young athletes to excel in their favorite games. The rules, which have capped the efforts of an ad hoc group, will enable athletes to have more time to get proper training and revamp their technical levels and full dedication to the sport, the official pointed out. However, the authority has set out clear-cut and unequivocal criteria and controls to ensure that sports clubs and federations will put the fresh regulations, once approved, in place in a proper mode, he stressed.

The rules are just a step towards the application of full professional sports in the country, he said, hoping that the plan will help Kuwaiti athletes develop their performance and participation both at home and abroad. —KUNA

Indian embassy
celebrates India's
constitution day

By Sajeev K Peter

KUWAIT: Embassy of India in Kuwait celebrated 'Constitution Day of India' on Friday, commemorating the adoption of the country's constitution. The ceremony got off to a solemn start with Indian Ambassador Sibi George paying floral tribute to the statue of Mahatma Gandhi at the embassy premises. Welcoming members of Indian diaspora and representatives of Indian associations in Kuwait, the ambassador underlined the importance of constitution of India in making India one of the biggest democracies of the world. On November 26, 1949, the constituent assembly of India adopted the constitution of India which came into effect on January 26, 1950.

"Every day, it is the constitution of India that gets celebrated when we conduct our day-to-day life in peaceful and orderly manner. Every day, it is the constitution of India that gets celebrated when we conduct our examinations all across the country to select people on the basis of merit. Its influence and impact are so deep at everything in India," the ambassador said in his opening remarks.

The ambassador noted that due to the constitution, unity in diversity can be seen across the length and breadth of India. "Today, we remember the members of the constituent assembly, its president Dr Rajendra Prasad and the chairman of the drafting committee Dr B R Ambedkar and many others who gave us this constitution. The constitution has provided India the necessary framework helping the country make achievements in diverse fields, including atomic energy, space science, agriculture, biotechnology and information technology," he said.

He concluded his speech by reading the 'Preamble of the Indian Constitution'. A video on 'Attack of 26/11', in which Prime Minister Narendra Modi paying homage to martyrs of the terror attack on Mumbai, the financial capital of India, was screened. A documentary on 'Making of Constitution of India' was screened and winners of 'Arts Exhibition' organized by the Indian Women Network (IWN) were felicitated on the occasion. An exhibition on 'Making of Constitution of India' was also jointly inaugurated by the ambassador and his spouse Joice Sibi at the embassy premises.



KUWAIT: Indian Ambassador Sibi George, Joice Sibi and others take a look at a portrait on display at the exhibition on 'Making of Constitution of India' at the Indian embassy.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Vehicles drive along a highway as Kuwait City's skyline is seen. —Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Iran official visits Kuwait,
UAE ahead of nuke talks

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah (right) meets Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri in Kuwait City on Thursday. —KUNA photos



Kuwaiti Deputy Foreign Minister Majdi Al-Dhafiri (right) meets Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri.

ABU DHABI: A senior Iranian official visited Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates last week, state media said, days before he heads for talks with world powers on his country's nuclear program. The visit by Ali Bagheri, Tehran's chief nuclear negotiator, is the first to Gulf Arab states by an official of the new government of Iran's ultraconservative President Ebrahim Raisi.

On Wednesday Bagheri, who is also Iran's deputy foreign minister, travelled to Abu Dhabi where he met Anwar Gargash, adviser to the UAE

president. The discussions focused on strengthening "ties on the basis of good neighborliness and mutual respect" and developing economic and trade links, the official Emirati news agency WAM said.

On Thursday, Bagheri visited Kuwait where he spoke of "deep ties" between the two countries, according to the official KUNA agency. Commenting on his tour, Bagheri said there was agreement to "open a new chapter" with the UAE and to "open new horizons" with Kuwait.

The United Arab Emirates downgraded ties with Iran in 2016 amid rivalry between its ally Saudi Arabia and the Islamic republic. Talks to restore the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers are due to resume in Vienna on Monday, after a suspension since June.

The deal has been gradually disintegrating since former US president Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from it in 2018. President Joe Biden's administration says it is working to return the United States to the accord. —AFP

KFH supports
first carbon offset
platform in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) signed a strategic partnership with Sidra Initiative and Green Dream Team under the umbrella of (KFH is Green) campaign. This activity comes as part of its efforts to protect environment and achieve the plantation and greening of Kuwait as part of its social responsibility.

This strategic partnership aims to spread awareness on the significance of reserving environment and plantation. The partnership comprises of several environment projects and activities in the field of tree plantation and the elimination of carbon emissions.

The partnership aims to unify efforts to increase greenery in Kuwait and encourage environment friendly initiatives. Also, through this kind of initiatives, KFH can support UN Sustainable Development Goals which are compatible with Kuwait's 2035 vision.

KFH Assistant Manager - Public Relations, Fahad Al-Saad said: This agreement represents an integral part of KFH strategy which aims to continue efforts to achieve a sustainable impact for its social initiatives and contributions, thus reflecting the bank's interest in various issues namely the environment issue. Through these initiatives, we expect KFH to be the main supporter to preserve Kuwait's environment and enhance environmental culture among society members and to encourage them to protect environment.

From his side, Shabeeb Alajmi, Green Dream Team Leader said that "A strategic partnership has been signed with KFH to support biological diversification in the State of Kuwait and increase plantation of wild trees in natural



KUWAIT: The officials attend a press conference announcing the partnership.

reserves. We thank KFH for this initiative and wish you all prosperity and success"

The founder of Sidra Initiative, Khaled Alwaqqyan expressed his pleasure in signing the strategic partnership with KFH. He said "Through this partnership we shall establish the first Carbon Offset Platform in Kuwait. We shall initially mitigate carbon emissions by increasing trees plantation and other future environmental projects will follow later"

The Carbon Offset Platform designed by "Sidra" is considered as a center to facilitate the plantation of trees by giving all individuals and institutions an equal opportunity to participate in this project.

To crown this strategic partnership among KFH, Sidra and Green Dream, KFH is participating in the initial stage of this project by planting 500 trees including 3 years maintenance, which

is the average nursing period required for the tree to be self-sufficient.

KFH plans to exert more efforts in the coming stages to plant more trees and organize similar initiatives. To this end, KFH has encouraged all its employees in addition to the voluntary team to participate in the tree plantation campaign in Abdali reserve as determined by the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources (PAAAFR).

It is worth mentioning that KFH has participated recently with the PAAAFR in supporting the tree plantation and greening campaign for the agricultural season 2021/2022. The partnership is considered as part of the tree plantation and greening campaign of Kuwait areas. Also, KFH has participated with the authority, in the opening day, in the plantation of Sider trees and participated in other events within the same campaign.



Kyrgyzstan detains 15 in 'coup plot' before vote

Thousands join global outcry over violence against women

Page 6

Page 7



ROME: French President Emmanuel Macron (L) and Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi shake hands as they hold a joint press conference after signing the Quirinal Treaty between Italy and France. —AFP

Italy, France sign 'historic' treaty

'Historic moment' to favour and accelerate the process of European integration

ROME: France and Italy on Friday drew a line under recent tensions and signed a new treaty to formalise their relations, against the background of a European Union in flux. French President Emmanuel Macron and Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi put pen to paper at the Quirinale palace of President Sergio Mattarella.

An aerial acrobatic display by both countries' air forces followed. At a press conference, the leaders of the two Mediterranean powers long bound by historical, cultural and linguistic ties emphasised their closeness but also their joint commitment to the wider EU project.

Draghi called it a "historic moment", which "intends to favour and accelerate the process of European integration". Macron said the treaty "seals a deep friendship". "Founding countries of the EU... we defend a more integrated, more democratic, more sovereign Europe," he added.

The treaty was signed just weeks before France takes over the rotating EU presidency in January, and at a time of change on the continent. Britain's messy exit and rows between the EU's liberal democracies and their eastern neighbours have roiled the bloc, while its de facto leader, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, is finally bowing out following September elections. The so-called Quirinale Treaty is wide-ranging, covering the economy and industry, culture and education, security, cross-border cooperation and foreign affairs. Macron noted the two countries had had "difficult moments", likely a reference to a diplomatic crisis in early 2019 when Italy's then populist government openly criticised the French president.

Ties improved with a new government in Rome later that year and have gone from strength to strength with the arrival in office earlier this year of Draghi, a former European Central Bank chief. Draghi thanked Macron for

handing over former members of the far-left Red Brigades group that terrorised Italy in the 1970s and 1980s. Their safe haven for decades in France had been a long-standing source of tension.

There has also been simmering irritation in Italy over feelings it has been left by European allies to face tens of thousands of migrants from North Africa who arrive on its shores each year. Draghi said both sides agreed on the need for a shared EU migration and asylum policy. Macron later had a private audience with Pope Francis, with a child abuse scandal engulfing the Catholic Church in France. —AFP

South Africa calls travel bans 'draconian and unjustified'

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa's health ministry on Friday attacked a global rush to impose travel bans to slow the spread of a new COVID variant as "draconian," unscientific and contrary to WHO advice. The new strain, named Omicron, has been blamed for a surge in cases in South Africa, but has already cropped up in Hong Kong, Belgium, Israel and Botswana.

"We believe that some of the reactions have been unjustified," Health Minister Joe Phaahla told a news conference, accusing some leaders whom he did not name of seeking a "scapegoat." Britain was the first slap a flight ban from countries in southern Africa, just hours after South Africa revealed it had detected the variant which has multiple mutations.

Austria, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and the US among others on Friday joined Britain in restricting flights from the region.

The European Commission, the executive arm of the 27-nation European Union, also proposed a complete suspension of flights to and from southern Africa until there was a "clear understanding about the danger" posed by the new variant.

However, the UN's World Health Organization (WHO) on Friday urged against travel curbs at this stage. The agency cautioned that it could take several weeks to find out whether the newly-discovered mutations made the virus more virulent or transmissible. Phaahla said that bans were "a wrong approach—it's misdirected and goes against the norms and advice by the WHO". "We feel some of the leadership of countries are finding scapegoats to deal with what is a worldwide problem," he said.

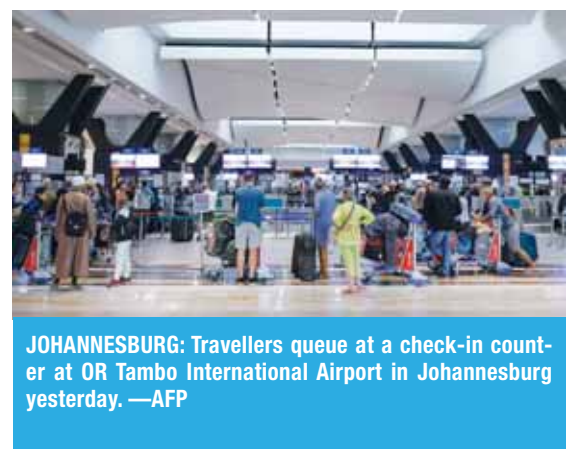
UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson spoke to President Cyril Ramaphosa in a call earlier Friday, his office said. "They discussed the challenges posed globally by the new COVID-19 variant, and ways to work together to deal with it and reopen international travel," a Downing Street spokesperson said in a statement. "The Prime Minister commended South Africa's rapid genomic sequencing and leadership in transparently sharing scientific data".

'Emotions not rationality'

Comparing daily infections in South Africa and some European countries, the minister Phaahla said the ban "really doesn't look scientific". He said it was ironic that "some of the countries... now reacting in this draconian manner" had infection rates of upwards of 50,000 new cases per day. That compares to South Africa which reported nearly 3,000 daily cases on Friday, up from around 300 daily cases two weeks ago. "That kind of reaction is knee-jerk and panic," he said. Such responses could prompt countries to shy away from reporting new findings, he warned.

"It's a very counter-productive reaction because what it says is if you have the capability to do genomic sequencing and have high level of efficiency... those capabilities must be driven underground," said the minister. People will "feel that it is a risk to disclose" their findings, he argued. Tulio de Oliveira, a leading virologist who announced the discovery of the Omicron variant, slammed the "radical decision" to halt flights. "Sometimes one gets punished for being transparent, and doing things very quick," he told the same news conference.

He said he did not believe travel bans were effective, citing the US, the first country to have imposed



JOHANNESBURG: Travellers queue at a check-in counter at OR Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg yesterday. —AFP

a travel ban on China at the onset of the pandemic, but ended up with the highest numbers of infections. "So scientifically it (does) not make much sense. A lot of time people take decisions based on emotions not rationality," he said. The restrictions have sent shockwaves through South Africa's tourist industry, which has been looking to visitors from the wealthier northern hemisphere to bring in desperately-needed income.—AFP

Algerians vote in polls to seal post Bouteflika 'change'

ALGIERS: Algerians began voting yesterday in local elections seen as key in President Abdelmadjid Tebboune's push to turn the page on the two-decade rule of late president Abdelaziz Bouteflika. But despite official campaigns urging Algerians to "make their mark", the vote for municipal and provincial councils has sparked little public interest. The election is the third vote in Algeria under Tebboune, who has vowed to reform state institutions inherited from Bouteflika, an autocrat who ruled the country for two decades.

Observers are predicting a low turnout, as with the poorly attended elections since Bouteflika was driven from power by the Hirak pro-democracy protest movement in April 2019. The North African country's rulers are trying to "impose their will despite the embarrassing results of previous elections", said analyst Mohamed Hennad. Polling stations opened at 8:00 am (0700 GMT) and are scheduled to close at 7:00 pm. More than 23 million people are eligible to vote, with 15,230 candidates standing and results expected today.

Tebboune, members of his family as well as the army's chief of staff and other government officials were among the

first to vote. Campaigning had been muted despite calls by authorities on Algerians to take part if they "want change" and "institution building". "Nothing will change," said Omar, an engineer who said he would not cast a ballot. Yacine, a teacher, said he would be voting for rivals of the current Algiers mayor "even if I have no illusions" that they will be better.

'Facade'

Tebboune was elected in a contentious, widely boycotted 2019 ballot months after Bouteflika stepped down under pressure from the army and Hirak rallies.

He has vowed to break with local and regional elections marred by widespread claims of fraud in the era of Bouteflika, who died in September at the age of 84. In a televised interview on Friday, Tebboune, a former prime minister under the late autocrat, called on Algerians to participate actively in the vote. "If the people want change it is time they do something about it themselves by voting," he said.

Algeria's local assemblies elect two-thirds of members of the national parliament's upper house, with the president appointing the remainder. Redouane Boudjemaa, a journalism professor at the University of Algiers, said the vote was simply "an attempt to clean up the facade of local councils by changing their members, to benefit the ruling class". "Politics at the moment is limited to slogans proclaiming that the country has entered a new era, while all

indicators point to the contrary."

'No vision'

Tebboune pushed through an amended constitution in November 2020, approved by less than 24 percent of the electorate, and oversaw a parliamentary election that saw just 23 percent of voters take part. His rule has seen a crack-down on journalists and Hirak activists, even as he has packaged major policy moves as responses to the calls by the protest movement for reform.

He has also faced a diplomatic crisis with Algeria's colonial ruler France and is embroiled in a diplomatic crisis with neighboring Morocco, with which Algiers severed diplomatic ties in August over the disputed territory of Western Sahara. Boudjemaa said the main issue at stake was the "huge economic and social challenges of the coming year". "Several indicators show that the pouvoir (ruling elite) has neither the vision nor the strategy to respond to the crisis," he said.

The analyst Hennad said the elite in power since Algeria's independence from France in 1962, was using slogans around change to impose its agenda, without truly engaging other political forces. Despite a declared boycott by the opposition Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD), party activists are standing on independent lists, setting up a showdown with the rival Front of Socialist Forces (FFS) in the Kabylie region that often sees significant abstentions. —AFP

CONDOLENCES

The Owners,
Management and Staff of



**Al-Rashed International
Shipping Co KSCC**

extend their heartfelt
condolences to the family of



K.S. Sankaran
for his sudden and untimely
demise on 26th November.

Sincere prayers to the management and staff of
AFCONS Infrastructure Ltd
Mumbai
for their irreplaceable loss

May his soul Rest in Peace

Europe scrambles for COVID control with boosters, jabs for children

Merkel urges her successor government for ‘more contact restrictions’

PARIS: Europe scrambled to regain control over a resurgent coronavirus as governments urged adult boosters and jabs for young children in a sign of growing unease over a pandemic that has killed 1.5 million people on the continent. Berlin, Paris and Lisbon were among capitals weighing tighter COVID restrictions and broader vaccination campaigns as surging cases and the encroaching winter threaten to undo hard-won gains against the virus over the summer.

In the Czech Republic, President Milos Zeman returned to hospital just hours after being released to name a new prime minister as he tested positive for COVID-19. With governments already struggling to cope with the more infectious Delta variant, the discovery of a new and troubling strain in South Africa was a stark reminder that the fight against COVID-19 is far from won.

Britain, in response to the new variant, said Thursday it would ban travel from six southern African countries: South Africa, Namibia, Lesotho, Eswatini, Zimbabwe and Botswana. British Health Secretary Sajid Javid said scientists were “deeply concerned” about the new variant as it “may be more transmissible” than Delta and current vaccines less effective against it.

In Germany, outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel urged more stringent controls. France stepped up booster shots, and the European Union’s medicines

agency gave the green light to a vaccine for five-year-olds. Even countries with relatively high rates of vaccination are now tightening COVID-19 measures that had only recently been relaxed.

Merkel implored the new government succeeding her to take quick, decisive measures as the country reported a record 351 COVID fatalities in the past 24 hours, taking the official death toll since the start of the pandemic past 100,000. Warning that “every day counts”, Merkel urged her successor government for “more contact restrictions”.



Encroaching winter threatens to undo hard-won gains

Booster bolster

Germany has had to call on hospitals elsewhere in the EU for help as some clinics face overload. The country last week began requiring people to prove they are vaccinated, have recovered from COVID-19 or recently tested negative before they can travel on public transport or enter workplaces.

Several of the worst-hit areas have cancelled Christmas markets and barred the unvaccinated from bars, gyms and leisure facilities. Germany’s Covid-19 crisis has in part been blamed on its relatively low vaccination rate of about 69 percent, compared to other Western European countries such as France, where it is 75 percent — even though new cases hit a seven-month high on Wednesday.

A German campaign for booster shots has been marred by supply and logistics snags. In Paris,



LYON: A patient receives a dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech (Comirnaty) COVID-19 vaccine, in the Lyon Gerland vaccination center, yesterday. —AFP

Health Minister Olivier Veran said COVID-19 booster shots would be accessible to all adults starting this weekend. From January 15, people over 18 would need to show proof of a top-up vaccine dose to maintain a valid COVID pass, which is required to enter restaurants, bars, gyms and other public venues. Adding pressure, the EU Commission recommended that the bloc’s vaccination certificate should become invalid once the holder’s latest dose is more than nine months old.

Elsewhere in Europe, the streets of the Slovak capital Bratislava were deserted as a new partial COVID lockdown came into effect. Even Portugal, which has an 86-percent vaccination rate, said it would impose work from home in the New Year and

close bars and discotheques. Belgium, which reimposed tougher curbs only last week, has seen an uptick far worse than projected, Prime Minister Alexander De Croo said.

The Czech government earlier Thursday implemented a 30-day state of emergency, which includes closing Christmas markets as well as nightclubs. Hospitals in the east of the country are reaching capacity, and some have begun moving patients across the country by helicopters and ambulances.

The spiking cases see Europe re-emerge as the pandemic’s epicentre, with the continent battling sluggish vaccine uptake in some nations, the highly contagious Delta variant, colder weather sending people indoors and the easing of restrictions. —AFP

Macron slams ‘not serious’ Johnson after tragedy

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron hit out at British Prime Boris Johnson on Friday over a tweeted letter, accusing him of being “not serious” after 27 migrants died crossing the Channel. Johnson sparked fury in France after writing a private letter to Macron on Thursday evening proposing five ways to stop migrants crossing from France to Britain, then publishing it in full on his Twitter account.

“I am surprised by methods when they are not serious. One leader does not communicate with another on these questions on Twitter, by public letter... No, No,” Macron told a press conference in Rome. Relations between the two neighbors were already seen as their most tense in decades following a series of disputes over Brexit, but the personal criticism of Johnson represents a further turn for the worse.

French fishermen also began a temporary blockade of cross-Channel ferries and trains on Friday to protest against Britain’s new licensing process which they see as obstructing their work. Analysts say the lack of trust and goodwill between Paris and London will make it more difficult to mount a coordinated response to the growing numbers of people seeking to cross the narrow but treacherous waterway separating the countries.

In response to Johnson’s letter, French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin cancelled planned talks with his British counterpart Priti Patel on Sunday, informing her that she was no longer invited to a meeting with other European ministers. In a message seen by AFP, Darmanin told Patel the letter was a “disappointment” and “making it public made it even worse.” “We consider the British Prime Minister’s public letter to be unacceptable and contrary to the discussions we had with our counterparts,” a French source close to Darmanin told AFP, asking not to be named.

‘Threadbare’

Johnson wrote that he had “long been profoundly concerned” about a tragedy in the Channel and “such a catastrophe has now happened” following an accident on Wednesday in which 27 people drowned when their inflatable boat sank. As well as reiterating their request to send British security forces to France for joint patrols – a sensitive issue for Macron – he also asked France to immediately start taking back all migrants who land in England. A spokesman for Johnson said he had no regrets about making the letter public, saying the public “would rightly want to know what we are looking at in terms of trying to solve this problem”.

Speaking to the BFM TV channel, government spokesman Gabriel Attal called the letter “threadbare in its substance and completely inappropriate in its style”. The idea of sending back migrants to France “is obviously not what we need to resolve this problem”, he added. “You could ask now whether Boris Johnson regrets leaving Europe because as soon as there’s a problem he considers it Europe’s job to solve it,” he said, targeting Johnson’s role as a key architect of Brexit. Macron said Sunday’s meeting in the port of Calais with German, Dutch and Belgian interior ministers, as well as the European Commission, would go ahead without the UK. — AFP

Thousands join global outcry over violence against women

MEXICO CITY: Thousands of protesters hit the streets of Europe and Latin America to demand an end to violence against women, with police in Turkey firing teargas to disperse the demonstrators. The rallies took place to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, with thousands marching through Mexico City, Madrid and Barcelona, while others gathered in Paris and London.

There were also rallies in countries including Chile, Venezuela, Bolivia, Uruguay and Guatemala. “They didn’t die. They killed them,” read one of the banners at the march in Mexico, a country where around 10 women are murdered every day. Across Latin America and the Caribbean, at least 4,091 women were victims of femicide in 2020, according to the regional commis-



MEXICO CITY: A woman walks in front of a graffiti before a demonstration on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women in Mexico City. —AFP

sion of the United Nations.

Tensions flared in Mexico City when a small number of hammer-wielding protesters tried to grab shields from police officers, who repelled them with smoke bombs. Things also turned ugly in Istanbul as riot police fired tear gas to break up

On Ukraine frontline, soldiers vow ‘worthy response’ to Russia

TALAKIVKA: Hands on his machinegun, a Ukrainian soldier scans the grey steppe towards the positions of pro-Russian separatists in his country’s war-scarred east. The 21-year-old, who goes by the nom de guerre Zhura, says he is ready if Russian President Vladimir Putin decides to send troops across the border. “I cannot rule out the possibility of the start of full-scale onslaught,” he says, wearing a green balaclava, helmet and bulletproof vest.

Western governments and independent researchers say Moscow has been moving arms and troops towards the Ukrainian border in recent weeks, with Washington saying it has “real concerns” over the troop build-up. If Russia decides to take action, Zhura says he and his battle-hardened compatriots will fight back. “We will give a worthy response to the enemy.” Speculation has been rife of new moves in the longstanding

conflict between Russia and its ex-Soviet neighbor, though Moscow has denounced reports of an invasion plan as Western “hysteria”.

President Volodymyr Zelensky said Friday that Ukraine was “entirely prepared for an escalation”. “We need to depend on ourselves, on our army. It is powerful,” he told a press conference. Zhura says the area of the frontline where he is deployed, near the village of Talakivka in the eastern Donetsk region, has been relatively calm in recent weeks. “But it’s only here,” he said. “In the direction of another brigade, shelling is heard every day and it is quite strong.”

Ukrainian forces are spread along a frontline that stretches along two separatist regions, Donetsk and Lugansk, that broke from Kiev’s control after Russia annexed the peninsula of Crimea in 2014. Though full-scale fighting has subsided, there are regular skirmishes along the front,



KIEV: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky holds a press conference in Kiev. Zelensky said Friday Ukraine was ready to take on Russia if Moscow decides to move troops across the border, amid growing Western concern over a new Russian military buildup. —AFP

with more than 60 Ukrainian soldiers killed this year. The new buildup of forces follows a similar surge in the spring, when Russia gathered around 100,000 troops on Ukraine’s borders.

Moscow later announced a draw-down, and some experts at the time said the troop movements may have been posturing ahead of Putin’s high-profile

summit with US President Joe Biden in June. Armed with a Kalashnikov rifle, another Ukrainian soldier takes part in a shooting exercise a few kilometres away from Zhura’s position. “It’s pretty quiet right now, but it may be the calm before the storm,” 21-year-old Anatoliy, from the western region of Chernivtsi said. — AFP

Riot police deployed after violent demo in Iran’s Isfahan

TEHRAN: Riot police were deployed Saturday after a number of arrests in the Iranian city of Isfahan, witnesses and state media said, a day after violent protests over the drying up of a lifeblood river. Security forces fired tear gas during clashes Friday with stone-throwers at the protest by around 500 people in the bed of the Zayandeh Rood river that crosses the central city, Fars and ISNA news

agencies said.

Security forces made “a limited number of arrests”, according to the province’s police chief. “The situation is calm in the Zayandeh Roud riverbed and the streets are empty, but I heard riot police were deployed on the Khadjou bridge,” said a resident who works in the area.

The demonstration on Friday was the latest in a series in Isfahan, a tourist magnet due to its majestic mosques and heritage sites, including a historic bridge that crosses the dried-up river. But it was the first to turn violent.

The riverbed has been the gathering spot for farmers and other people from across Isfahan province protesting the lack of water since November 9. Drought is a cause, but they also

accuse the authorities of diverting water from the city to supply the neighbouring province of Yazd, which is also desperately short on supplies.

“I used to walk along the riverbed with friends but today the riot police are deployed in large numbers near the Khajou bridge and they are asking people to avoid the area,” said a woman in her 50s who was contacted by phone.

During the clashes on Friday, some people set fire to objects in the city, Fars and ISNA reported. “After the farmers left, the opportunists and counter-revolutionaries were left behind, which made it easy for the security apparatus, especially the police, to identify and arrest those who destroyed public and state property,” Isfahan police chief Mohammad-Reza Mirheidari said on television. — AFP

International

Kyrgyzstan detains 15 in ‘coup plot’ before vote

Today’s vote will see 21 parties competing for 90 seats in single-chamber parliament

BISHKEK, Kyrgyzstan: Security services in Kyrgyzstan said Friday they had arrested 15 people in connection with an alleged coup plot as tensions build ahead of parliamentary elections this weekend. The poor, mountainous nation of 6.5 million people has seen repeated political chaos since gaining independence with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

On Friday, the state committee for national security said it had detained 15 people who were part of a plan to get “1,000 aggressive young people” to protest the results of the vote. “After the announcement of the results of the upcoming parliamentary elections...this group planned to organise mass protests in (the capital) Bishkek and subsequently to aggravate the situation, provoking clashes with the forces of law and order and further violent seizure of power,” a statement said.

Security services “obtained irrefutable evidence of the criminal activity of a group of persons under the leadership of certain destructive political forces, including deputies of the (parliament) and former high-ranking officials.”

Without naming the detained, the committee also said it had “found and seized firearms, ammunition and drugs” in a raid on the alleged group’s office. Kyrgyzstan, which has seen three presidents overthrown since its independence from the Soviet

Union, hopes to avoid further instability after leader Sadyr Japarov rose to power on the back of protests over claims of vote-buying last year. The vote today will see 21 parties and hundreds of district candidates competing for 90 seats in the single-chamber parliament.

Independent candidates excluded

After rising to the presidency from a prison cell during the last post-vote crisis, Japarov pledged to hold free and fair elections. But electoral authorities have already excluded one candidate and fined another, both of whom are regarded as independent voices in the outgoing parliament.

The president was serving a sentence for hostage-taking prior to his release amid the protests over alleged vote-buying by pro-government parties last year. He has insisted that the charges were a punishment for his campaign to nationalise a key gold mine upon which the largely resource-poor economy depends.

The new administration moved in May to seize the Kumtor mine from the Canadian company that controlled it, Centerra Gold, citing environmental violations. Centerra, whose operations at Kumtor accounted for 12.5 percent of Kyrgyzstan’s gross domestic product in 2020, has denied the claims and is contesting the seizure in an international court.

himself the pain of the daily commute.

“Not many people can afford to waste their time on public transport,” he said. Private vehicle registrations have tripled in the last 15 years—there are now more than 13 million on the capital’s roads, government figures show.

The consequences are felt year-round, with Delhi road users spending 1.5 hours more in traffic than other major Asian cities, according to the Boston Consulting Group. But come winter the daily inconvenience escalates into a full-blown public health crisis, as prevailing winds slow and the thick blanket of haze settles over the city sees a surge in hospital admissions from residents struggling to breathe.

Vehicle emissions accounted for more than half of the city air’s concentration of PM2.5 — the smallest airborne particles most hazardous to human health—at the start of November. Delhi’s Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) said.

‘It made more sense’

A study from the centre last year showed the capital was experiencing a steady decline in public transit ridership. Infrastructure has improved since the turn of the century, when Delhi inaugurated the first links in an underground rail network that now spans more than 250 stations and stretches into neighbouring satellite cities.

But the CSE said long distances between metro stops and residential areas was pushing commuters to switch to private vehicles. “The Metro is convenient but I still had to take an auto-rickshaw or

cial package tours involving the city—a major commercial and tourism hub—would be cancelled.

Six Shanghai hospitals have also suspended outpatient services. “China has accumulated lots of experience in ‘dynamic zero-Covid’, so our strategy won’t change,” said Zhang Wenhong, head of the Shanghai Covid prevention expert task force, at a Thursday briefing.

He warned that this could become a “normalised anti-epidemic situation that we may encounter again” in the future. Around 100 kilometres away, Suzhou — which has a population of some 13 million people — closed down tourist attractions and required residents to provide negative test results to leave the city.

Authorities in Beijing are on high alert for any potential outbreaks in the lead up to February’s Winter Olympics, which will see an influx of foreign athletes, media and officials. All schools were closed in the small satellite city of Xuzhou, which also stopped its two million residents from heading out of the city on bus services, after a close contact of one Shanghai patient was found there.

A university campus in neighbouring Hangzhou was put under lockdown after a staff member was discovered to be a close contact

‘More hats than heads’

An AFP reporter gained a first-hand glimpse of how Meddings’ troops have taken a grassroots approach to tackling the identification problem. A British officer who gave his name as Charlie walked over to five men from an authorised armed group, who were sipping tea under the shade of a tree,

force are all deployed to the region. But identifying friend from foe is a key task—all the militias tend to wear headscarves, wield AK-47s and travel in pick-up trucks. Lieutenant-Colonel Will Meddings, head of Britain’s contingent of UN peacekeepers, compares the situation to a jigsaw puzzle.

Even among foreign forces, identification can be a problem. Earlier this month, Estonian troops with the French-led Barkhane anti-jihadist operation accidentally fired on British personnel deployed in the same mission.

Delhi’s roads worsen India’s toxic smog crisis

NEW DELHI: After decades commuting on New Delhi’s parlous roads, office worker Ashok Kumar spends more time than ever stuck in the gridlock that packs the Indian capital’s thoroughfares and pollutes the city. The sprawling megacity of 20 million people is regularly ranked the world’s most polluted capital, with traffic exhaust a main driver of the toxic smog that permeates the skies, especially in winter.

Delhi’s patchwork public transport network struggles to cater for a booming population, with long queues snaking outside the city’s underground metro stations each evening and overloaded buses inching their way down clogged arterials.

“When I came to Delhi, the air was clean because there were hardly any cars or bikes on the roads,” Kumar told AFP while waiting for a ride home outside the city’s main bus terminal. “But now everyone owns a vehicle.”

Kumar spends nearly four hours each day in a “gruelling journey” to and from his home on Delhi’s far southern outskirts, alternating between commuter buses, private shared taxis and rickshaws. Even at the age of 61, Kumar is hoping to save enough money to buy his own scooter and spare

Flights cancelled, schools shut over COVID-19 in Shanghai

SHANGHAI, China: Hundreds of flights were cancelled, some schools shut and tour groups suspended on Friday after three coronavirus cases were reported in Shanghai, as China continues its strict zero-COVID policy.

Beijing has largely succeeded in controlling the spread of the coronavirus within its borders through travel restrictions and snap lockdowns, but frequent domestic flare-ups have tested its no-tolerance strategy in recent months. The three positive cases are friends who travelled to the nearby city of Suzhou together last week, Shanghai health authorities said at a press conference Thursday evening—adding that all had been fully vaccinated.

Over 500 flights from Shanghai’s two major airports were cancelled on Friday, data from flight tracker VariFlight showed. The Shanghai government also instructed that all cross-provin-

In Mali’s northeast, militias thrive in state’s absence

MENAKA, Mali: Security forces in the Menaka region of northeastern Mali are struggling with a kaleidoscope of militia groups as they strive to bring order to the violence-torn area. Almost every important armed group in Mali has a foothold in Menaka, from the so-called Islamic State group to Al-Qaeda affiliates and former Tuareg rebels.

The chaos dates back nine years, when a separatist rebellion in northern Mali spiralled after it was commandeered by jihadists. Malian troops, UN peacekeepers, French soldiers and more recently special forces from the Takuba international task



BISHKEK: A man sits in a car near a campaign poster of candidates in the upcoming parliamentary election in Bishkek. —AFP

Japarov’s critics have said the head of state is repeating the mistakes of his predecessors by arresting potential rivals after overseeing constitutional changes that strengthened his position. Kyrgyzstan hosts a Russian military base and looks to next-door China for loans and investments.

Experts say it is unclear however how much trust the new government enjoys from Russia, whose leader Vladimir Putin described the street protests and sudden overthrow of then-president Sooronbay

Jeenbekov as a “misfortune”.

Russian ambassador Nikolai Udovichenko said Thursday that draft legislation promoting use of the state language, Kyrgyz, would lead to “a reduction in the scope of application of the Russian language, enshrined in the Constitution as official, and the narrowing of the rights of Russian-speaking citizens”. The deputy chairman of Kyrgyzstan’s cabinet, Edil Baisalov, tweeted Friday the legislation was not final and that there was “no need to politicise this issue”. —AFP

Flood damage exposes Kinshasa’s unbridled urbanization

KINSHASA: The water transformed a main road into a ravine. It gutted homes, exposing their innards to the world. It left a school playground teetering on the edge of a precipice.

These images come from Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo, where a population influx combined with scant urban planning has exposed many poor people to the impacts of extreme weather.

Millions of people have moved into the city in recent years, although the exact numbers are unknown as no census has been conducted for more than 30 years.

According to some estimates, the city is home to at least 12 million people, a doubling in two decades, out of a national population of some 90 million.

Many have built homes in areas where there has been little planning oversight, especially on hillsides where drains and channels are needed to cope with runoff during the rainy season.

In November 2019, forty Kinshasans died after heavy rains caused flooding and landslides — but two years later, the problems posed by extreme rainfall remain.

Abyss

At the top of a cliff in Kinshasa’s southern district of Mont-Ngafula, disused water pipes hang in a void and residents must battle through a gully of shifting sand to reach the neighbouring district.

Floodwater dug out an asphalt avenue, replacing it with an abyss at least 15 metres (50 feet) deep, separating the University of Kinshasa from a Jesuit-run library, one of the biggest in Africa.

Widowed mother-of-seven Esperance Tsimba, 57, saw the earth swallow her shop and livelihood as the rains fell. “I lost my business. Since then, it has been hard to send my children to school”, she said. Local residents are building dykes to protect their homes, piling up sandbags in the hope of slowing the landslide and diverting rainwater flows.

They staged a protest to demand action from the authorities, blocking Highway 1, which crosses the town, said resident Magloire Kangondi.

The authorities sent in a Chinese-owned construction vehicle, which has started to smooth out the sand on the road downstream.

But locals are worried that work will stop at a temporary fix, and not address the underlying problem.

“This isn’t the first time that they’ve repaired the road — it’s been done several times without success,” said Sylvain Nsumbu, headmaster of a primary school whose wall had fallen into the abyss.

Nsumbu said children as young as four had to cross the ravine to attend a kindergarten and that some parents even preferred not to send their offspring to school.

Christel Bulembi, an environment management specialist and community leader in the neighbourhood of Ngansele, said the solution was for the authorities to dig at least one rainwater retention pit to minimise the damage caused by runoff onto the road.

The state “must accept its responsibilities” by having allowed the neighbourhood to urbanise, and would win the local population’s support by doing so, Bulembi suggested. —AFP



NEW DELHI: Photo shows people commute along a street amid smoggy conditions in New Delhi. New Delhi, the sprawling megacity of 20 million people is regularly ranked the world’s most polluted capital, with traffic exhaust a major driver of the toxic smog that permeates the skies, especially in winter. —AFP

shared taxi from the station to my home,” Sudeep Mishra, 31, told AFP.

Mishra’s daily commute was a 50-kilometre (30-mile) return journey, including the two kilometres he had to navigate between the nearest station and his home—now all done on a second-hand motorbike.

“It was a hassle and expensive as well,” said Mishra, also a white-collar worker. “It made more sense to buy my vehicle to save time and money.” Experts say this poor last mile connectivity is a particular issue for women, who often have to choose between private transport or risking a walk on dark and unsafe streets. —AFP



SHANGHAI: Police officers and medical staff members wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) are seen outside a residential area that is under restrictions following a recent coronavirus outbreak in Shanghai. —AFP

of a confirmed case, state media reported. With the leadership determined to host a Covid-free Olympic Games, Beijing’s Olympic Park has already been sealed off as part of the event’s “closed-loop” bubble, state media reported. —AFP

their assault rifles beside them. He calmly asked them a few questions about who they were. The men, who appeared to pose no threat, replied that they were on watch to “stop jihadists from coming.”

The region’s officially designated armed groups hold a weekly meeting in the town of Menaka. These groups are former rebels who took up arms in 2012 before signing a peace agreement with the government in 2015. They now operate with official licence.

The region’s governor, Mohamed Maiga, said the groups operate independently but use the weekly meeting to exchange information and glean intelligence about the patchwork of territorial control in the sparsely inhabited region.

Within the constellation of militias in Menaka, alliances are brittle, and there is often a hazy line separating jihadists from other armed groups. “There are more hats than heads,” said Francisco Osler De Almeida, the local head of the UN’s MINUSMA peacekeeping mission. —AFP

Business

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2021

Boursa Kuwait joins ‘Orange the World’ campaign to end violence against women

The exchange lit up its building in orange to support United Nations initiative

KUWAIT: Boursa Kuwait lit up its office building in orange to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women designated by the United Nations, in collaboration with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development, the Women's Research and Studies Center in the College of Social Sciences at Kuwait University, and Soroptimist Kuwait.

The 16 days of activism against violence against women and girls is an international campaign that takes place each year. It commenced on 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, until 10 December, Human Rights Day. Activists at the first Women's Global Leadership Institute began this initiative in 1991, which is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year.

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 5 - Gender Equality - 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".

COVID-19 has exacerbated all the risk factors for violence against women and girls (VAWG), including unemployment and poverty, and reinforced many of the root causes such as gender stereotypes and harmful social norms, with the most marginalized women, including women with disabilities, refugees or indigenous women amongst others, at disproportionate risk, facing greater barriers in accessing services and justice. Under the leadership of the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, the United Nations Secretary-General's UNiTE to End Violence against Women campaign (UNiTE Campaign), calls for global action to increase awareness, galvanize advocacy efforts and share knowledge and innovations. Governments, civil society, women's organizations, young people, the private sector, the



Mae Al-Hajjaj



Naser Al-Sanousi



Dr Lubna Alkazi



Susanne Mikhail

media and the UN must join forces to address the global pandemic of violence against women and girls.

This year's theme, Orange the World: END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN NOW, will mobilize all UNiTE networks, civil society and women's rights organizations, the UN system, the Action Coalition on Gender-Based Violence, government partners, schools, universities, private sector, sports clubs and associations and individuals to advocate for inclusive, comprehensive and long-term strategies, programs and resources. The campaign also aims to prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls in public and private spaces, highlight effective strategies and interventions, and promote the leadership of women and their meaningful participation in policy and decision-making.

Commenting on Boursa Kuwait's participation in the UN initiative, Naser Al-Sanousi, Marketing and Communication Director at Boursa Kuwait, said, "Boursa Kuwait joins organizations from all over the world and partakes in the 30th anniversary of the "Orange the World" campaign and the United Nations' 16 Days of Activism to End Violence against Women. Through our participation, we want to highlight the importance of eliminating violence against women and girls and promote the leadership of women and their meaningful participation in policy and decision-making."

In welcoming the lighting of iconic Kuwaiti buildings in orange to mark the 16 Days of Activism to End

Violence against Women, Susanne Mikhail, UN Women Regional Director for the Arab States said, "Ending violence against women is everyone's business. It is inspiring to see the government, the private sector and civil society coming together in Kuwait to step up, taking this clear stand and demanding an end to violence against women now. The Orange the World Kuwait campaign is a powerful call for action for decision-makers, corporate leaders, and community influencers to work together to prevent violence against women and girls wherever it occurs."

Dr Lubna Alkazi, Director of the Women's Research and Studies Center in the College of Social Sciences at Kuwait University, also commented on Boursa Kuwait's participation in the campaign, saying, "I am pleased to see Boursa Kuwait support the Orange Kuwait campaign and lighting its building in orange, confirming the company's continuous efforts to support and empower women through sustainable development. It is worth noting that Boursa Kuwait was the first exchange in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to ring the bell to empower women on International Women's Day and one of the signatories of the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) 'Statement of Support.'"

Mae Al-Hajjaj, President of Soroptimist Kuwait, also hailed Boursa Kuwait's involvement in this initiative, saying, "We are all required to stand up against violence in all its forms, believing in fairness, integrity and good conduct towards all. Soroptimist Kuwait

has adopted the Orange the World initiative and its efforts towards the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls. I would like to thank Boursa Kuwait for their participation and support, and look forward to more collaborations in the future."

Boursa Kuwait is a champion of women's empowerment and is a true pioneer in the inclusion of women in the workforce. The company has been involved in several initiatives dedicated to empowerment and inclusion and was the first stock exchange in the GCC to participate in the 'Ringing the Bell for Gender Equality' initiative, which it has participated in for the past four years.

Reaffirming the company's commitment to promoting and enhancing diversity and inclusion in the workplace, Boursa Kuwait signed the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) 'Statement of Support,' which aims to deliver on the critical role businesses can play in the attainment of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals outlined in the Agenda 2030.

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.

Lebanese currency drops to new low

BEIRUT: The Lebanese pound sank to a new low on the black market Friday, with no end in sight to the economic and political crisis plunging ever growing numbers into poverty. According to websites monitoring the black market rate, the pound was trading at 25,000 to the dollar, or nearly 17 times less than its official peg value of 1,500.

The new record, topping a previous low of more than 24,000 earlier this week, adds to the troubles of the newly-formed Lebanese government, which has failed to meet for more than a month amid a festering diplomatic crisis with Gulf countries. Lebanon's much-reviled political barons are also divided over the fate of the judge probing the deadly August 2020 Beirut port blast, which was widely blamed on government negligence and corruption.

With the currency losing more than 90 percent of its value in two years on the black market, the purchasing power of Lebanese is plummeting, and the minimum monthly wage of 675,000 pounds is now worth just \$27. According to the United



BEIRUT: The Lebanese pound sank to a new low on the black market Friday.

Nations, four in five Lebanese are now considered poor. The World Bank estimates it may take Lebanon nearly two decades to recover its pre-crisis per capita GDP. The energy ministry on Friday also raised the prices of petrol, diesel fuel and cooking gas, according to the state-run National News Agency.

Fuel prices in Lebanon are adjusted regularly to reflect fluctuations in the exchange rate. Filling a vehicle's fuel tank now costs more than the minimum monthly wage. —AFP

consumers' daily lives.

A mammoth New York debut in June for Didi Chuxing was quickly overshadowed by an investigation by the Chinese cyber watchdog on the grounds of cybersecurity, launched just days after the listing.

Bloomberg reported Friday that Chinese regulators now want Didi's executives to take the company off the New York Stock Exchange over worries about sensitive data leakage, citing people familiar with the matter. The report added that privatization or a share float in Hong Kong are among options.

The Cyberspace Administration of China, which oversees data security, has directed the company to work out the details subject to government approval, the sources said.

The move is a further blow to Didi, which raised \$4.4 billion in its New York IPO-making it the largest US IPO by a Chinese firm since Alibaba in 2014. The ride-hailing firm has been hit especially hard by the state's clampdown on tech companies, with its service ordered off app stores in July and government agencies launching on-site inspections at its offices over "national security" fears.

Founded in 2012 by Cheng Wei-a former executive at Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba-Didi has dominated the local ride-hailing market since it won a costly turf war against US titan Uber in 2016.

The app claims to have more than 15 million drivers and nearly 500 million users, and is often the fastest and easiest way to call a ride in crowded Chinese cities. Bloomberg added Friday that it was possible the delisting would form part of a raft of punishments for Didi, after it infuriated Chinese officials by plowing ahead with its US IPO despite pushback from Beijing. — AFP

On 'Black Friday,' many US consumers have already shopped

WASHINGTON: "Black Friday" has kicked off in the United States with companies offering a new batch of "doorbuster" sales and promotions to early holiday shoppers, but online data show that consumers have been spending big for weeks. The day after the US Thanksgiving celebration is the traditional start to the holiday shopping season, and normally sees Americans line up outside stores before they open to clinch deals on popular items.

After the pandemic subdued last year's spending, anticipation is high this year since millions of people have returned to jobs lost to business restrictions while vaccines have reduced the threat from COVID-19. Before retailers opened their doors early Friday morning, e-commerce shoppers in the United States had already spent \$76 billion since early November, up more than 20 percent from the year-ago period, according to data from software company Adobe.

The jump has added to companies' optimism about the season, suggesting some shoppers heeded calls from chains to purchase items early this season after port backlogs and other supply chain problems prompted worries about shortages of popular goods. Toys led the buying spree, with Adobe pointing to actions by "anxious parents increasingly aware of supply chain challenges."

The National Retail Federation projects overall spending could rise as much as 10.5 percent to \$859 billion. Nonetheless, out-of-stock listings online are up 261 percent compared with two years ago, according to Adobe.

Inflation a concern

Retailers and market watchers are broadly opti-



WASHINGTON, US: Black Friday shoppers leave a Best Buy store in Washington, DC, on Friday. Known as Black Friday, the day after Thanksgiving marks the beginning of the holiday shopping season. —AFP

Beijing asks ride-hailing giant Didi to delist from US

BEIJING: Regulators in China have asked ride-hailing giant Didi to draw up a plan to delist from the United States over data concerns, a report said Friday, as Beijing continues its tight scrutiny of domestic tech giants. Over the past year, several of the country's biggest companies-including Alibaba, Tencent and Meituan-have been swept up in a regulatory crackdown that has clipped the wings of major internet firms wielding massive influence on



BEIJING: This file photo shows a driver opening the Didi Chuxing ride-hailing app on his smartphone in Beijing. — AFP

Business

Ottawa 'disappointed' by US move to double Canadian lumber tariffs

Long expected decision could further drive up prices in US

OTTAWA: Washington will double compensatory and anti-dumping tariffs on Canadian lumber, a move long expected but that has nonetheless disappointed Ottawa and could further drive up prices in the United States. Most Canadian companies that export softwood lumber to the United States will have to pay 17.9 percent duties, up from the current 8.99 percent, according to documents from the US Commerce Department and the Canadian government.

"Canada is extremely disappointed that the United States has decided to increase to 17.9 percent the unfair duties it imposes on most producers of Canadian softwood lumber" and "calls on the United States to put an end to it," said Canadian international trade minister Mary Ng in a statement.

When contacted by AFP for comment, the US Department of Commerce did not respond.

The decision will go into effect once it has been published in the Federal Register, the official list of US federal rules and public notices, which could happen next week. The tariffs are reviewed annually, and Washington had published preliminary results in May. The Quebec Forest Industry Council (QFIC) expects "additional upward pressure on the North American price of wood as well as on the Quebec forest industry," according to a press release.

"US consumers are the ones paying the price," QFIC CEO Jean-Francois Samray said, indicating

that "the United States cannot meet its domestic demand."

The US National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) is concerned that "doubling the tariffs will only exacerbate market volatility, put upward pressure on lumber prices and make housing more expensive." "Home builders are grappling with lumber and other building material supply chain bottlenecks that are raising construction costs," the association said. Lumber prices have surged since the start of the pandemic. The United States is currently experiencing its worst inflationary surge in 30 years.

The US Lumber Coalition, on the other hand, welcomed the "commitment to strongly enforce the US trade laws against unfairly traded Canadian lumber imports."

The dispute over lumber tariffs has plagued relations between Washington and Ottawa for 35 years.

US producers accuse their Canadian counterparts of selling wood below the market price to promote exports. The case was brought before the World Trade Organization (WTO), which ruled in favor of Canada in August 2020, but the United States appealed the decision the following month.

The United States and Canada are bound, along with Mexico, by a trade agreement: the USMCA free-trade bloc, which replaced NAFTA on July 1, 2020. Canada is the world's largest exporter of softwood lumber, according to the country's government. The United States is its largest market. — AFP



OTTAWA: Most Canadian companies that export softwood lumber to the United States will have to pay 17.9 percent duties, up from the current 8.99 percent, according to documents from the US Commerce Department and the Canadian government. — AFP

Why are so many energy providers going bust in UK?

LONDON: Britain's domestic energy providers suffered a string of bankruptcies in recent months, with Bulb the latest to see the lights go out this week. The number of UK suppliers has almost halved since August, ravaged by sky-high global wholesale costs and local factors like the so-called energy cap.

Soaring fuel bills are also translating into surging inflation, which makes it increasingly hard to pass on spiraling costs to consumers as the cold winter approaches.

What is UK sector impact?

A total of 25 British suppliers have gone bust since August, plagued by surging wholesale prices for gas and electricity. The dramatic collapse has left just 28 providers still standing, according to regulator Ofgem.

The nation's seventh-biggest supplier, Bulb, went bust on Monday, triggering special intervention to protect the near 1.7 million households it serves. The government has set aside nearly £1.7 billion (\$2.3 billion, 2.0 billion euros) to ensure Bulb stays on.

Under a separate bankruptcy process, customers from other smaller failing suppliers have been taken on by larger rivals. Analysts fear consumers will ultimately pay via even higher fuel bills-hurting the poorest households the most.

Why is UK so hard hit?

Europe has also been adversely affected as energy prices have vaulted higher on resurgent post-pandemic demand, the arrival of the colder northern hemisphere winter, and stubborn fears over key Russian supplies. Some providers have also gone bust or restructured activities in France and Germany.

However, Britain is more vulnerable due to its greater reliance on natural gas and insufficient gas storage facilities. The government is meanwhile



LONDON: Many Britons are turning down their thermostats to save money in the face of soaring energy costs. — AFP

seeking to ramp up renewable and nuclear power to help meet its 2050 net zero carbon target.

Yet recent calm weather has hampered output from its growing wind sector. "The UK is more dependent on gas for power generation than many European countries and is also less integrated into a supranational energy market," said economics professor Veronika Grimm at Nuremberg's Friedrich-Alexander University. "In Europe, for example, price increases were cushioned by the common electricity market-but here, too, the burdens were noticeably high," she told AFP.

Liberalization to blame?

The liberalization of Europe's domestic energy market in recent decades, particularly in Britain in the 1990s, has been highlighted by experts as a key factor behind the turmoil. That stimulated competition and encouraged many new smaller entrants, who lacked the financial clout to survive sky-high wholesale costs on a sustained basis. "There has been a very strong focus on competition and market entries," added Grimm.

"Now there are many small companies in the market that cannot cope with temporary pressures such as the current price increases."

Britain's energy providers have also been hurt by government moves to cap prices in an attempt to ease consumer pain. Ofgem in October raised the energy cap, which limits providers' standard variable tariffs, and this is set to rise even higher in April. — AFP

Telecom Italia CEO resigns after KKR buyout bid

VENICE: Telecom Italia Chief Executive Luigi Gubitosi has resigned, news reports said Friday, amid increasing pressure on the top management by shareholders, including France's Vivendi. The departure of Gubitosi, who has been at the helm of the struggling telecom company since May 2018, comes in the wake of a nearly 11 billion euro buy-out offer from US private equity firm KKR.

TIM's current president, Salvatore Rossi, will take on Gubitosi's duties in the interim, reported Italian news agency AGI. A former executive of Fiat and Alitalia, Gubitosi in recent years has not been able to reverse the declining share price of Italy's largest telecom firm.

The move came nearly a week after

the "friendly" public tender offer by New York-based Kohlberg Kravis Roberts, for the entire share capital of TIM. KKR said its offer would be for an initial .505 euros per share, valuing the Italian operator at around 10.8 billion euros (\$12.2 billion).

TIM's board met on Friday for six hours, AGI said, after calling an emergency meeting Sunday. It said then that KKR's proposal was subject to about four weeks of due diligence and would require the backing of a majority of shareholders. Any buyout of TIM would need the approval from Italian government stakeholders, as TIM's network is considered a national strategic asset.

KKR already has a 37.5 percent stake in FiberCop, a joint venture with TIM and Italian internet provider Fastweb to provide fiber optic broadband across Italy. TIM's management has been increasingly dogged by shareholder discontent, the largest of which is from Vivendi, over disappointing company results and flagging shares, according to recent news reports. — AFP

New German govt faces public spending paradox

BERLIN: Germany's new government has pledged to spend big on the economy, climate change and social security-but without raising taxes or taking on more debt, leaving many asking where the money is going to come from. "We have decided that this will be a decade of investments," future chancellor Olaf Scholz said on Wednesday as his Social Democrats (SPD) presented their coalition deal with the Greens and the liberal FDP.

But Scholz, who is finance minister in Angela Merkel's outgoing coalition between the SPD and the conservatives, also admitted that "the modernization of our country will not come for free".

The new government faces some tough challenges as it prepares to take office in December, from meeting the Paris climate agreement to safeguarding the economy as the country is engulfed by a fourth coronavirus wave. Economists predict that to meet these challenges, the country will have to spend around 50 billion euros a year, as well as pouring extra cash into pensions and health insurance to cater for an ageing population.

The center-left SPD and the Greens had initially pushed for more flexibility on fiscal policy. But the pro-business FDP, which takes a tough stance on public finances, did not budge. And it will be the FDP's hawkish leader, Christian Lindner, in charge of the finance ministry in the new government.

Debt brake

Lindner is unlikely to be welcomed with open arms in Europe as the EU 27 embark on reform of the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP), which dictates the bloc's rules on debt and public deficits. The coalition contract states that the SGP must be made "simpler" and must guarantee "a sustainable level of debt"-hardly a sign of any "readiness to soften the pact", according to Holger Schmieding, an analyst for Berenberg Bank. The agreement also pledges a return to the so-called debt brake-a rule enshrined in the constitution that limits Germany's public deficit to 0.35 percent of GDP that was lifted to help fight the coronavirus pandemic-as soon as 2023.

"We know what we want and we know exactly how to pay for it," insisted Robert Habeck, co-leader of the Greens, expected to head a new "super ministry" in charge of climate and the economy.

Germany has taken on 370 billion euros of new debt during the pandemic, and public debt has risen from 59.7 percent of GDP to a predicted 75 percent this year. Tax revenues in the coming year could yet be crimped by further shutdowns over a raging fourth wave of the pandemic. Germany's Bundesbank is now expecting output to be flat in the fourth quarter.

For the full year, the government forecasts that GDP will come in at 2.6 percent rather than the 3.5 percent previously predicted. Analysts believe that the coalition could take advantage of the eased debt rule in the coming year to make their investments. If the debt brake is reapplied in 2023, the government still has one year to take a "a big sip from the bottle", said Jens Boysen-Hogrefe, an economist at the




BERLIN: Christian Lindner, the head of Germany's Free Democratic Party (FDP), who will become finance minister in the new government, is expected to keep his tough stance on public finances. — AFP

IFW Institute in Kiel.

'Squaring a circle'

This will be enabled partly by "new accounting rules for energy and climate funding", whose deficits will no longer count towards the debt brake, Boysen-Hogrefe added. The coalition also plans to allocate additional resources to energy and climate spending "from previously budgeted and unused funds". Other tricks will include increasing the repayment period for loans taken out during the pandemic from 20 to 30 years, and tweaking the methods used to calculate debt to allow more borrowing.

But Jens-Oliver Niklasch, an economist at the LBBW bank, said the parties would eventually have to "square a circle" to make the numbers add up. Ahead of September's election, economist Marcel Fratzscher, president of the Berlin-based DIW economic research institute, told AFP he believed it would be "impossible to return to the debt brake without massive tax increases". — AFP



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Business

KPMG sets up China Business Desk in Kuwait to support Chinese investors

Desk to position KPMG strategically to best advise Chinese investors in Kuwait

KUWAIT: In the spirit of enabling Chinese investors to do 'business better' in Kuwait, KPMG in Kuwait announced the launch of the China Business Desk in a hybrid seminar. The China Business Desk in Kuwait came as a welcoming addition after the already-operational China Business Desk in the UAE, strategically positioning KPMG to best advise Chinese investors who are either running a business or are planning to expand it in the Middle East and South Asia (MESA) region but may not be aware of the nuances around its accounting and regulatory policies.

Dr Rasheed Al-Qenae, Managing Partner, KPMG in Kuwait and MESA Head of Tax, said, "The business desk will not be limited to Tax and will extend services across various functions such as Audit and Deal Advisory, among others, to any investor from China in pursuit of establishing business in Kuwait as well as the Gulf region." He further added that the China Business Desk is aligned with the considerations of China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative and is hopeful that it will help drive positive economic activity in the foreseeable future.

While Kuwait's recent emergence as a key target market for Chinese investors, driven by surging collaboration between businesses from both the countries in mega projects across sectors, is highly likely to help the Gulf nation navigate toward a diverse

economic landscape, overcoming the challenges in terms of the tax and regulatory requirements might be a tall order for Chinese investors who may not be adequately educated about the same. However, given the experience and understanding of the regional policies vested in the China Business Desk, it will look to support those investors and, hopefully, serve as an effective tailwind for Kuwait's Vision 2035.

"The China Business Desk will definitely allow us to better deliver our expertise in the local legislation and practices to our Chinese clients, helping them get a clearer picture with regards to local business and regulatory landscape and equip them to make better business decisions when operating in the country," said Zubair Patel, Partner and Head of Tax & Corporate Services, KPMG in Kuwait.

The event stressed on the fact that KPMG in Kuwait's China Business Desk comprises a team of seasoned Chinese nationals that has been working in Kuwait and, considering its in-depth knowledge of how the Chinese and Kuwaiti markets work, is best suited to advise Chinese investors and facilitate increased ease of doing business, brushing aside any cultural, language or communication barriers that may otherwise arise when investing in a Middle Eastern country such as Kuwait.

Hanan Tariq, Director, Tax & Corporate Services,



KPMG in Kuwait, said, "The goal of the seminar was to provide an all-inclusive platform for Chinese and Kuwaiti businesses to promote fruitful business conversations and boost further economic growth and prosperity in both the nations."

In the face of changing times, the event was conducted using a hybrid model, wherein about 100 delegates from both China and Kuwait participated either online or in person at the Al-Bidaa Ballroom in Four Seasons Hotel, Kuwait.



KUWAIT: (From left) Yasmin Saleh, Omar Al-Ayoub, Essa Al-Yousifi, Aref Al-Yousifi, Dr Abdullah Al-Yousifi, Dr Adel Al-Yousifi, Adnan Al-Sayegh, Anushad Ali, Li Junbo, Osama Yousef and Mohammad Ifran.

Easa Husain Al-Yousifi & Sons hosts event to discuss advantages of 'Huawei IdeaHub'

KUWAIT: Easa Husain Al-Yousifi & Sons Co hosted an exclusive event to discuss how 'Huawei IdeaHub,' which was launched in 2020 at the height of the pandemic, has helped many sectors in Kuwait advance their workforce and operations. Dr Adel Al-Yousifi, Senior Vice-Chairman: Easa Husain Al-Yousifi is keen to keep pace with changes in the world of technology.

Essa Al-Yousifi, General Manager of Al-Yousifi Enterprise Solutions: The new screens help companies' digital transform all their operations. Easa Husain Al-Yousifi and Huawei launched new smart screen 'Huawei IdeaHub' back in 2020 within the framework of their close partnership to support the business sector in the Kuwaiti market meeting the needs of companies and individual customers, and keep pace with the digital transformation plans witnessed by all sectors in the country.

Easa Husain Al-Yousifi and Huawei set up the various models of the screen, including the latest model - Huawei IdeaHub Board - in a large ceremony held at the Radisson Blu Hotel, in the presence of the Chairman, Dr Abdullah Al-Yousifi, Senior Vice-Chairman Dr Adel Al-Yousifi, and Vice-Chairman and CEO Aref Al-Yousifi.

Among the attendees was General Manager of Al-Yousifi Enterprise Solutions Essa Al-Yousifi and General Manager of Electronics in Best Al-Yousifi Wael Deeb, and company officials. In addition to representatives were major private and government sectors.

Easa Husain Al-Yousifi and Huawei officials introduced the attendees to the most prominent advantages of the Huawei IdeaHub, which comes with exceptional specifications that help companies increase their efficiency in the workforce with Huawei IdeaHub, as it incorporates Projection, Whiteboard, Knowledge, Office and Conferencing.

Dr Adel Al-Yousifi welcomed the attendees at the ceremony, stressing the keenness of Easa Husain Al-Yousifi & Sons Co, to provide exclusive products in its showrooms, that help meet their needs and keep pace with changes in the world of technology. For his part, Essa Al-Yousifi, said that the company is keen to keep pace with technological developments and provide the best products in the local market, indicating that the new smart screen from Huawei reflects its commitment to helping its



KUWAIT: (From left) Muhammad Ifran, Li Junbo, Omar Al-Ayoub, Hussein Dashti and Osama Yousef.



business partners enhance productivity and increase their success at all levels.

Dr Adel Al-Yousifi added in his speech during the ceremony that Huawei IdeaHub helps small, medium and large organizations and institutions, ministries and various government sectors imple-

ment digital transformation plans, which is one of the basics within the framework of the "Kuwait 2035" development plan.

He added that the close partnership between Easa Husain Al-Yousifi & Sons Co, and Huawei helps to launch exclusive products in the company's exhibitions and meet the needs of customers from all sectors, stressing that the coming period will witness the launch of many new products that live up to the aspirations of customers, and suit their needs, and prepare them to develop their businesses and increase their profitability. Huawei officials expressed their happiness with the partnership linking the company with Easa Husain Al-Yousifi & Sons Co stressing that the coming period will witness the launch of many products that suit the needs of the customer community and various customers in the local market.



Spain approves 2022 budget

MADRID: Spain's fragmented parliament passed the government's 2022 budget, boosting the stability of Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's minority coalition government. Lawmakers voted 188-158 in favor of the budget, which includes a record 240 billion euros (\$340 billion) in spending next year as the government seeks to spur activity in an economy badly hit by the coronavirus pandemic.

It includes 27.6 billion euros from the European Union's economic recovery

fund. Spain is one of the main beneficiaries of the fund, with the country set to collect a total of 140 billion in grants and loans from it over six years.

In a tweet sent just after the budget was approved, Sanchez said the spending plan will "spur the recovery and the modernization of our country". The approval of the new budget secures the survival of government until the end of its mandate in late 2023 since if Sanchez's administration lacks support for a budget next year, it can extend the 2022 spending plan for another year. By contrast neighboring Portugal will hold early elections on January 30 after parliament earlier this month rejected the minority Socialist government's 2022 budget bill. —AFP

Burgan Bank offer on 'Ghostbusters' for free at Grand Cinemas!

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank, in collaboration with Grand Cinemas, announced yesterday that its Youth Account holders will be offered the exclusivity to watch the new movie "Ghostbusters" for free at the luxurious movie theatre of Grand Cinemas located in Al Hamra Luxury Centre. The movie screening will be held on Thursday December 2nd, 2021, wherein each customer is entitled to 2 free tickets on one of the three shows, at 2 pm, 5 pm or 8 pm.

To book the free seats, Youth Account holders are required to visit

Grand Cinemas box office in Al-Hamra Luxury Centre and present their Youth ATM card starting today. The bank strives to reward its Youth Account holders with exclusive offers that fit their lifestyle. The Youth Account is dedicated to young individuals, between the ages of 15 to 25, and who seek to attain a successful future. Furthermore, account holders receive an ATM card which entitles them to discounts at selective merchants along with an exclusive discount at Grand Cinemas Theatres.

NCM Investment awarded 'Most Trusted Forex Broker 2021'

KUWAIT: With a new and impressive achievement amongst the investment companies, NCM Investment won a new award that is added to the company's rich list of already existing ones over the past years, as it secured the title of the "Most Reliable Forex Broker of the Year 2021" from World Business Outlook.

NCM Investment gaining this prestigious award from World business Outlook, which is a world-leading magazine, is the culmination of the company's journey and exceptional successes at various levels during 2021, confirming once again its well-established position as one of the top leading investment and online trading company in Kuwait and the region.

NCM Investment stated that the World Business Outlook Foundation honored the company's team, led by the Chief Financial Officer, Thayar Sharif, who also received the award for the "Best regional CFO 2021". Thayar Sharif in his statement said that, "Receiving this international recognition from a world reputable organization such as the World Business Outlook is evidence of the ability and efficiency of the company's team in providing advanced, innovative services and products. We are pleased with this honor, as we are always amongst the first companies present in international economic and financial forums. It is the second award that the company receives during this year, as we had won the award for the "Best certified online broker in GCC" at the Dubai Forex Expo 2021, held last September."

Sharif further in his statement said that NCM Investment receiving the award for the most reliable forex broker is something to be proud for the company and all of our employees, as maintaining customers' trust and loyalty despite the increase in fake companies and fraud cases is not that simple. Digital transformation of cutting edge techniques met NCM's ambitious target to become climate positive during pandemic. Since the first day of its establishment, we have had the ability to maintain this trust and support it with credibility and safety, which has continued over the years. NCM Investment has worked for more than a decade where professionalism, efficiency, and trust are still the basic building blocks in the continuation of its business till this day."

NCM concluded in its statements by thanking the team of professionals working in it, especially with their recent efforts after the opening of customer service for 24/6 and the new update of the NCM Investment application for smartphones, which became very popular and contributed to increasing the number of users and facilitating all operations related to online trading.

It is worth noting that World Business Outlook is an online and printed magazine that provides assessments, analyzes, and comprehensive coverage of the financial industry, international business, and the global economy. Its awards are based on numbers, financial data, approved growth rates, and globally recognized technical standards to measure the stability of the performance of specialized companies.



Thayar Sharif

Lifestyle | Features

SOWETO'S VETERAN ICE-CREAM TRUCK KEEPS GENERATIONS SMILING



The owner of an ice cream truck, Sipho Mtshali, sits in his truck in Soweto.



A customer buys ice cream from Sipho Mtshali's ice cream truck in Soweto.

The melody of Sipho Mtshali's ice-cream van has drawn hoards of Soweto children since South Africa's violent apartheid years, running over for creamy soft servings. Decades later, it still is going. He has worked "Monday to Monday" for the past 45 years, driving through the hilly township that was once home to South Africa's first black president Nelson Mandela.

Even during the violent liberation struggle that rocked Soweto during the 1970s, he sold icecream. Only the winter weather occasionally stops him. "If it's cold, you get the rest," said Mtshali, a 63-year-old father born and raised in Soweto, where students once rose against white-minority rule in 1976. But politics have never been his thing. "I have seen people grow from the ice-cream car," he said, remembering that prices were lower during apartheid, which officially ended in 1994.

Today he charges eight rand (\$0.50) for a swirl serving of strawberry or vanilla. Add a couple of rand for a sprinkle of hundreds-and-thousands or

another crunchy topping. Mtshali fondly recalls the round baby faces of his first customers, now adults, who today send their children to his van, coins in hand. "They were young when we started," he said, serving some people directly into their cars as they ride past.

Under a bright summer sun, Mtshali drives slowly past small identical brick and iron-roofed houses built for black laborers on the outskirts of Johannesburg during apartheid. He has to cut the engine to switch on his Italian ice-cream machine. "Can't do both at the same time," he muttered, blades churning in the background. A small technical glitch that does not impact his passion for the smiles he brings. "As long as I'm alive I'm gonna do it," he said. "Everybody is happy with ice-cream." —AFP



Sipho Mtshali sells ice cream to customers in Soweto. —AFP photos

Pantheon: Resting place of France's great and good



In this file photo, French US-born dancer and singer Josephine Baker poses during the automobile elegance contest at the Bois de Boulogne waterfall, near Paris. —AFP

Josephine Baker, the French-American dancer and singer who fought in the French Resistance and later battled racism, will become the first black woman to enter the pantheon, France's most hallowed resting place, on Tuesday. The domed mausoleum in the heart of Paris, modeled on the Pantheon in Rome, holds the remains of legendary figures in France's history from the worlds of politics, culture and science. Seventy men including the philosophers Voltaire and



This undated file photo shows French US-born dancer and singer Josephine Baker in her property at Les Milandes Castle, Dordogne. —AFP

Jean-Jacques Rousseau lie next to literary luminaries such as Alexandre Dumas, Emile Zola and Victor Hugo. Only five women before Baker were allowed through its grand portals, which are crowned with an inscription proclaiming: "To great men from a grateful nation."

Camus refusal

The declaration has long been a red rag to feminists,

who see it as deeply sexist and regularly protest to have it changed. Simone Veil, a former French minister who survived the Holocaust and fought for abortion rights, was the last woman to be admitted in 2018. She joined the scientist Marie Curie, Resistance heroes Genevieve de Gaulle-Anthonioz, Germaine Tillion and Sophie Berthelot, who was buried alongside her chemist husband Marcellin Berthelot.

The French president decides who has the right to be



laid to rest there. President Emmanuel Macron rejected a campaign earlier this year to rebury the French poet Arthur Rimbaud there, both to honor his work as a poet and his newfound fame as a gay icon. However, descendants can overrule the president, as happened when the family of existentialist writer Albert Camus thwarted a bid in 2009 by then-president Nicolas Sarkozy to move his remains to the Pantheon. Veil's admission prompted a sharp rise in visitors to 860,000 a year, but a far cry from the millions who flock to the Eiffel Tower. —AFP

Josephine Baker to be first black woman immortalized in Pantheon

Josephine Baker, the French-American dancer, singer and actress who mesmerized France with performances mocking colonialism and later joined the French Resistance, will become the first black woman to be immortalized in France's Pantheon mausoleum Tuesday. Baker will be just the sixth woman to join the around 80 great national figures of French history in the secular temple on Paris's Left Bank.

She will also be the first showbiz figure to be honored with a symbolic spot in the secular sanctuary, final resting place of a long list of luminaries from the worlds of politics, culture and science, including Victor Hugo, Emile Zola and Marie Curie. The "pantheonisation" of the world's first black female superstar, who campaigned for civil rights alongside Martin Luther King, caps years of campaigning by her family and a group of intellectuals for her to be given the rare posthumous honor.

French President Emmanuel Macron in August finally granted the request "because she's a woman who was born black and American in a closed society... who became the incarnation of the Enlightenment values of the French Republic throughout her life," his office explained this week. "She's a woman whose whole life was dedicated to the twin quest for liberty and justice," an official at the presidency added.

'France made me'

Born Freda Josephine McDonald into extreme poverty in Missouri in 1906, Baker left school at 13. After two failed marriages - she took the name Baker from her second husband - she managed to land herself a place in one of the first all-black musicals on Broadway in 1921. Like many black American artists at the time, she moved to France to escape racial segregation back home.

The woman nicknamed the "Black Venus" took



In this file photo, US-born dancer and singer Josephine Baker performs during her show for the French-US gala at Versailles Castle, outside Paris. —AFP

Paris by storm with her exuberant dance performances, which captured the energy of the Jazz Age. One of the defining moments of her career came when she danced the Charleston at the Folies-Bergere cabaret hall, wearing only a string of pearls and a skirt made of rubber bananas, in a sensational send-up of colonial fantasies about black women. A singer and actress as well as dancer, she adopted France wholeheartedly, taking French nationality upon her marriage to industrialist Jean Lion in 1937.

She would go on to divorce him and remarry twice more, adopting 12 children along the way. At the outbreak of World War II, she joined the French Resistance against Nazi Germany, becoming a lieutenant in the Free French air force's

female auxiliary corps. She became a spy for France's wartime leader-in-exile General Charles de Gaulle and used her people skills and contacts to get information on the plans of Italian fascist leader Benito Mussolini. "France made me who I am," she said later. "Parisians gave me everything... I am prepared to give them my life."

'True anti-racist'

Throughout her life she fought discrimination, adopting children from different ethnic backgrounds to form a "rainbow" family at her chateau in southwest France. Pascal Bruckner, a novelist who campaigned for her to be given a coveted spot under the famous dome of the Pantheon, said Baker "is a symbol of a France that is not racist." "Josephine Baker is a true anti-racist, a true anti-fascist," he told AFP in an interview earlier this year. Baker died on April 12, 1975, aged 68, from a brain haemorrhage, days after a final smash-hit cabaret show in Paris celebrating her half-century on the stage.

She is the second woman to be inducted by Macron into the Pantheon after former minister Simone Veil, who survived the Holocaust to fight for abortion rights and European unity. Macron's former mentor and predecessor Francois Hollande had refused calls to immortalize Baker in the former church, which was transformed into a temple to "great men" after the French Revolution. "He thought it was a daft idea," one of Macron's advisors confided.

In a sign of the affection in which Baker is still held in honor her, there was no public criticism of the decision to honor her, including from far-right commentators that are generally scathing of anti-racism gestures. A symbolic tomb will be carried into the Pantheon by members of the French air force, a nod to her role in the wartime Free French air force. Baker's remains will however remain in Monaco, where she is buried. —AFP

Iran's militia unveils George Floyd game

Iran's Basij militia has unveiled a video game whose hero is George Floyd, the Black man who was murdered by a white police officer in the US last year. In the "Nejat-e-Azadi" (Defend Freedom) 3D game, developed by the Basij's IT department, the player must overcome obstacles and side-step enemies across 30 levels of difficulty.

Iran's Saheb News, which is close to the Basij — a volunteer Islamic militia loyal to the establishment - said the game was presented Tuesday during a digital production conference it held in Tehran. The killing of 46-year-old Floyd in May 2020 sparked America's biggest demonstrations for racial justice in decades. Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin, a 45-year-old white man, was sentenced to more than 22 years in prison for killing Floyd by kneeling on his neck for nearly 10 minutes.

He and three colleagues had arrested Floyd on suspicion of having passed a fake \$20 bill in a store in Minneapolis. They handcuffed him and pinned him to the ground in the street. "Today, the only place where the United States can still present its defeats as victories is on the internet," Basij head Gholamreza Soleimani, who was present for the event, was quoted as saying. There are at least 32 million gamers among Iran's population of over 80 million, according to a report from the Iran Computer and Video Games Foundation. —AFP

Lifestyle | Gossip

‘FROM RWANDA TO HOLLYWOOD’: KIGALI STYLE GOES GLOBAL



Ysolde Shimwe, co-creator of Uzuri K&Y shoe brand, speaks during an interview at the factory in Kigali. —AFP photos



Joselyne Umutohiwase, fashion designer and entrepreneur, and also founder of Rwanda Clothing, inspects production of her collection in Kigali.



Joselyne Umutohiwase, fashion designer and entrepreneur, and also founder of Rwanda Clothing, pose next to her collection in Kigali.



Matthew Rugamba (right), a 32-year-old Anglo-Rwandan fashion designer and entrepreneur, inspects production at House of Tayo in Kigali.



A manual laborer works on a shoe at the Uzuri K&Y factory in Kigali.

Matthew Rugamba knew his Rwandan fashion label had arrived when Junior Nyong'o, the brother of Oscar winner Lupita Nyong'o, attended the world premiere of "Black Panther" in a three-piece suit designed by him. Hours after the glitzy event in Los Angeles, the website for Rugamba's brand House of Tayo exploded as enquiries flooded in from around the globe for his high-end creations. "It changed the perspective," the 32-year-old told AFP, still stunned by the turn of events that propelled his "made-in-Rwanda" label to a Hollywood red carpet.

"For so many years we have been telling people our fashion is good... but sometimes you need moments like that to really take it to the next level," said Rugamba, who holds dual Rwandan and British nationality. Kigali has yet to reach the heights of Africa's fashion hub Lagos, but the capital of the small landlocked nation of 13 million hosts its own fashion week and draws a devoted clientele, comprising wealthy locals, expatriates, members of the diaspora and tourists.

"I like the way they tailor the clothes, the way they design their clothes, I like the simplicity of it as well," said Emmanuel Safari, a lawyer and frequent visitor to the House of Tayo boutique located in an upscale Kigali neighborhood. "The clothes, you put them on and you feel good!" Some Rwandan labels have even attracted the attentions of President Paul Kagame, who was pictured wearing a shirt by bespoke Kigali brand Moshions.

'Change the narrative'

But what is "Kigali style"? "It pops but it's not flashy," according to Jean-Victor Brun, a 50-year-old Haitian-American who came to Rwanda to develop projects in new technologies. "Modern, ethnic, and rooted in the identity of our country," says Joselyne Umutohiwase, founder of Rwanda Clothing.

Identity is at the heart of many Rwandan brands, which excel in producing bespoke clothing - drawing on a tailoring tradition that dates back decades. For instance, Umutohiwase, who employs 45 people, incorporates the geometric designs characteristic of imigongo art - a style of painting which uses cow dung and natural pigments - into her creations. Similarly, the beadwork found on royal headdresses and other traditional items finds its way onto jacket lapels, while Rwandan shoe label Uzuri K&Y borrows from the country's weaving traditions to create braided sandals.

The brand's co-founder Ysolde Shimwe said young designers like her were keen to change Rwanda's image, 27 years after the 1994 genocide killed more than 800,000 people, mainly Tutsis. "Ten years ago when you Googled Rwanda you only saw machetes, people killing each other and hungry kids in the streets," she told AFP. "We as designers in Rwanda are also contributing to change the narrative of Rwanda and mostly to changing how people perceive Rwanda, because we are more than that, we are more than our historical background."

Bullish prospects

Rwanda's fashion industry has also received a helping hand from the government, which in 2016-17 massively hiked import taxes on second-hand clothing - mainly from the US and Europe - to promote local manufacturers. The move, which saw duties multiply more than tenfold, effectively imposed a moratorium on trade involving the sale of secondhand clothing from the West at low prices to East African consumers.

Simultaneously the government allowed designers to import fabric tax-free, giving the nascent industry a boost, said Umutohiwase. But, with more than 80 percent of the population living in rural areas, according to the World Bank, many Rwandans cannot afford these homegrown brands. Umutohiwase, whose prices range from around \$70 (60 euros) for a shirt to \$80 (70 euros) for a dress, told AFP the small market size presented big challenges.

Moreover, the devastation wrought by the genocide has also contributed to a huge skills shortage in the country, said designer Shimwe. "Eight years ago when we wanted to start a shoemaking brand we could not necessarily find skilled labor, there was literally nobody that had experience or had shoemaking skills," she said. But in a sign of the industry's bullish growth prospects, some of the nearly 1,100 staff trained by her have since gone on to found their own labels, she said. "It's a great cycle that we have been able to create." —AFP

Irish jockeys have whip hand in groundbreaking mental health app

Irish jump racing legend Ruby Walsh gave no quarter to his rivals but in retirement he has overseen the introduction of a groundbreaking app that helps jockeys battling mental health issues. The 42-year-old 12 time Irish champion jockey - who is chairman of the Irish Injured Jockeys Fund (IJJF) - says it is not "a cure" but "a significant step to encourage the right behaviors". Leafyard, a free mental health app for Ireland-based professional and amateur jockeys, provides tools, activities and support to help with general mental health concerns.

It was developed by the IJJF with the support of Irish racing's governing body, the Irish Horseracing Regulatory Board (IHRB). The app came about due to alarming findings in research commissioned by the IHRB in 2019/20 into mental health problems among jockeys, which produced significant results when compared to other sports. Injured jockeys were 46 times more likely to meet the criteria for depression than non-injured jockeys and reported higher levels of dissatisfaction, which is associated with distress and generalized anxiety.

Down the years other factors cited apart from injury affecting their mental well-being have been burnout, career dissatisfaction, impending retirement as well as dieting in battling to make the weight. Walsh, who suffered a litany of injuries during his career, even having his spleen removed - said the findings came as no surprise to him. "I was upset, not shocked as I know how tough a sport it is," he told AFP in an interview. "I do not live under a rock, I read the papers and I know how big mental health problems in society are."

"All sport is a reflection of society. This is a significant step to encourage the right behaviors." Society too played a role in what was the best form of helping jockeys. Walsh - who is the all-time record winning jockey at jump racing's showpiece, the Cheltenham Festival, with 59 victories - says he favored talking about his problems when he was riding. "I am 42, quite possibly of an older generation, but also everyone's background and circumstances are different," he said.

"I always felt I had people to talk to, be it my parents, wife and friends. "Fortunately I had an awful lot of people to share thoughts and opinions with and to seek advice from. "I was always of the opinion that talking and getting things off your chest was the best way to sort it out." That did not extend to the jockeys' changing room. "My colleagues were friends outside," he said. "The jockeys' room is no different to work environment colleagues - while you are friendly, they are still competitors. "So expressing my fears was not for me. Still, it doesn't mean I didn't have them."

'A better place'

He says the younger generation are more reticent in person to person contact and talking about issues affecting them. "We live in a very different world where a lot do not talk," he said. "They text, tweet, or use Instagram and Facebook to communicate. "Society has definitely changed. People do not seem to talk generally and certainly not as much about emotions, problems and issues. "Therefore developing an app definitely fits in with society today." Walsh - a two-time winner of the Grand National, most memorably on Papillon in 2000, trained by his father Ted - said the app was not a medical service, more a facilitator to help give "simple help".

"It's designed to identify people who may need one-on-one therapy and to find people who may be really struggling with mental health. "It directs them to a better place... It is to help them live better, to be well hydrated, and have healthy sleep patterns." Walsh hopes the success of the app - he says he is "delighted so many riders are using it" - will encourage racing authorities in other countries to introduce it. "I am hoping those in high enough positions have an open mind," he said. —AFP

'LOVE AND HATE': BOLLYWOOD IN SPOTLIGHT OF 'CALL MY AGENT' SPINOFF

The director behind a biting look at India's entertainment industry says the backroom dealings and bold personalities of Bollywood have proven a rich target for satire. Shaad Ali's latest venture is a local adaptation of a runaway hit Netflix series that follows four hapless French talent agents as they wrangle and coddle their celebrity clients.

"Call My Agent: Bollywood" trades Paris for Mumbai, the sprawling port city home to India's most lucrative production houses and its most famous megastars. Ali's is the third makeover for the Emmy award-winning "Dix Pour Cent" - a nod to the traditional 10 percent cut taken by agents in the movie business - after earlier incarnations in Britain and Turkey. "It was very easy for me to be seduced by the show," he tells AFP, crediting a career spent observing the conduct of actors, their entourages and his fellow filmmakers for inspiration.

But getting the show from the script to the screen was tough, with last year's COVID outbreak in Mumbai upending the production schedule. One French critic branded Ali's version a "disaster", while Indian reviewers have also given hostile verdicts. But Ali, who before this was



Bollywood actors and cast members (left to right) Rajat Kapoor, Aahana Kumra, Ayush Mehra, Soni Razdan posing for pictures with director Shaad Ali (top) during the promotion of the Indian drama web series 'Call My Agent: Bollywood' which is based on the French TV series 'Dix Pour Cent', in Mumbai. —AFP

best known for romantic dramas starring some of Bollywood's most recognizable male heart-throbs, says he has remained "peacefully unaware" of the bad press.

"I keep hearing from people that there are mixed reactions - some love it, some have hated it - which I prefer," he says. "I don't like in-between

reactions... that's what is scary." Nor has he shied away from poking fun at the airy and sometimes oblivious personalities often found in any celebrity milieu. "My intention was never bad, and I am part of (the industry) really, so if I am making fun, I am included in that," he says. "All the celebrities who appeared on the show were very

supportive in making fun of each other... it was just natural."

'We're self-absorbed'

Lead actress Aahana Kumra plays the headstrong Amal, one of four celebrity talent managers fighting to keep their flailing agency alive after the sudden death of its founder. Pushed into the role by her own agent, Kumra became an obsessive fan of the original French series, which even prompted her to take a critical look at her own industry. "We're self-absorbed," she tells AFP. "That is the nature of the job - we are so about ourselves that we completely forget that there is an agent who has a life of their own."

A recurring subplot through "Call My Agent" is Amal's relationship with another woman, culminating in an onscreen kiss - a rarity in Indian cinema and television, where prevailing mores keep depictions of romantic intimacy at a minimum. Kumra believes India is moving towards more candid portrayals of same-sex relationships and was indifferent to the prospect of criticism from audiences. "For me all that really matters is what my parents think of a certain performance," she says. "It is really nice to hear from them that they were very happy to see it." —AFP

'HUMAN ZOOS' WERE VECTORS FOR RACISM, BELGIAN EXHIBITION SHOWS



Photo shows a craniograph and skull measurement at the Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA) during the temporary exhibition 'Human Zoo The age of colonial exhibitions' in Tervuren. —AFP photos



Photo shows an ivory bust at the Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA) during the temporary exhibition 'Human Zoo The age of colonial exhibitions' in Tervuren.



Photo shows plaster casts from 'Live Congolese' by the artist Arsene Matton in 1911 at the Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA) during the temporary exhibition 'Human Zoo The age of colonial exhibitions', in Tervuren.

In the late 19th to early 20th centuries, recreated African villages were set up across Europe as amusement parks that served to extol the supposed cultural superiority of colonizing empires. They were also powerful vectors for racist stereotyping, as a Belgian museum show under way illustrates.

"Human Zoo: The age of colonial exhibitions" at the Africa Museum outside Brussels until March next year has resonance, because its buildings are on the site where Belgium's King Leopold II in 1897 reconstructed three "Congolese villages" on royal grounds. At the time, the Belgian Congo - today the Democratic Republic of Congo - was Leopold's private property and 267 men and women were taken from it by force to be put on show in Brussels' World Fair, made to sit in front of the dwellings. Seven of them died, from cold or sickness.

That episode features in the museum's exhibition, which displays 500 items and documents showing what indigenous peoples suffered under various colonial powers. The old ethnographic displays were designed to "show the other as primitive" and to "manufacture the 'savage'" to "reinforce the superiority of whites," the organizers explained. Measurements of skulls - craniome-

try - were used to support theories of "inferior races". The curators of the show estimate that the "industry" of putting human beings on display lured in around 1.5 billion people

them owed part of their existence to "freak shows" where individuals with physical abnormalities - gigantism, dwarfism, or women with beards among others - were pre-

vious public the impression of visiting real African villages. While Germany and France had already hosted their own "villages", Belgium got its first in 1885, near Antwerp, with 12 Africans.

Twelve years later their number grew 20 times bigger, and the colonial section of the World Fair in Brussels' satellite town of Tervuren attracted a million visitors. Over and over again, "the same message was repeated thousands of times, and the public ended up truly thinking that the African was a cannibal, inferior, dirty, lazy," one of the curators, Maarten Couterien, told AFP. "And these stereotypes still exist today - proof that the colonial propaganda worked."

In the final part of the exhibition, the issue of how this racist denigration persists in everyday language challenges visitors with clichéd phrases written in big letters on a white wall. "I love black people!" - "Oh, you did better than I expected" - "The apartment's already rented". For Salome Ysebaert, who conceptualised the museum's exhibition, such comments appear inoffensive and banal, but in reality are "microaggressions" revealing that racism is still lurking in minds, more than 60 years after the last "human zoo" in Brussels closed, in 1958. —AFP



Photo shows plaster casts from 'Live Congolese' by the artist Arsene Matton in 1911 at the Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA) during the temporary exhibition 'Human Zoo The age of colonial exhibitions.'

between the 16th century and 1960 to gawk.

'Freak show' roots
The reconstructed villages and the human "specimens" displayed in

sented as spectacle by circus owner PT Barnum among others. In Europe, the "human zoos" reached their peak popularity from the 1880s after new colonial conquests. Imported exotic decors gave a curi-

Party like it's 1919? Rio hopes for Carnival comeback



Viradouro's Samba Queen Erika Januza dances on a dais during Viradouro samba school's rehearsal, in view of the upcoming 2022 carnival, in Niteroi, Rio de Janeiro state. —AFP

The sequins are swirling, the bass drums are booming: after being canceled by COVID-19, carnival is back - at least at Rio de Janeiro's samba schools, which hope to put on the party of the century in three months' time. The iconic Brazilian beach city's elite samba schools have started holding rehearsals again, hoping authorities will let carnival festivities go ahead from February 25 to March 1.

The schools want 2022's comeback carnival to be the biggest since 1919, the year Rio residents joyfully reembraced life after the devastation of another pandemic, the Spanish flu. That carnival has gone down in history as one of the all-time legendary parties. Now, the situation looks similar. After canceling carnival this year because of COVID-19, authorities say a recent plunge in cases could make next year's edition possible.

The reigning champions of Rio's carnival parade competition, the Viradouro samba school, even chose the 1919 carnival as the theme of their comeback parade. At a recent rehearsal, school members hugged joyfully on the dance floor and belted out the music, mostly without face masks. As the school's "drum-corps queen" shimmied in a gold-fringed miniskirt, the veteran head of the drummers, Moacyr da Silva Pinto, led some 50 percussionists through a booming rehearsal, a loud whistle around his neck.

"We're going to have the greatest carnival since 1919," said Pinto, a spry 65-year-old. "In Rio de Janeiro, samba is enmeshed in our lives, just like football and the beach." Attendance at the rehearsal was restricted because of COVID-19. But that did not dampen the mood. "This is a cry of freedom, of coming home," said 35-year-old Leonina Gabriel. "It's infinite happiness: we can take off our masks, we're vaccinated."

Lingering uncertainty

Authorities, however, are more cautious. They say holding carnival will depend on the pandemic outlook. The event is a potential epidemiologist's nightmare: more than two million tourists usually descend on Rio for the festivities, partying at close quarters.

The virus has claimed more than 600,000 lives in Brazil - second only to the United States. But the devastation has receded in recent months. With more than 60 percent of Brazil's 213 million people now fully vaccin-



Musicians and singers perform during Viradouro samba school's rehearsal, in view of the upcoming 2022 carnival, in Niteroi, Rio de Janeiro state. —AFP

ed, the average daily COVID-19 death toll has fallen from more than 3,000 in April to around 200. Confident, samba schools have kicked the carnival machine into high gear, churning out thousands of glittering costumes and fleets of floats.

At "Samba City," the huge port-district yard where each school has a hangar to prepare, carpenters,

welders and costume designers are working full-steam. "Rio's carnival is a giant industry that supports many families," said Marcus Ferreira, a creative director at Viradouro. One of those families is Simone dos Santos's. Dos Santos, 46, Viradouro's head seamstress, said she had to find whatever work she could to scrape by when the carnival economy ground to a halt. "The pandemic was very hard for all of us," she said.

Bolsonaro against

In Rio, where more than 95 percent of adults are vaccinated, authorities recently lifted the requirement to wear masks outdoors. But experts urge caution, given the risk of a new wave of COVID-19. Countries such as Austria and Germany have vaccinated a higher percentage of their populations than Brazil, but are currently reeling from the virus, leading public health institute Fiocruz warned recently. "It worries me to see Brazil talking about resuming carnival. Those conditions are extremely likely to increase transmission" of the virus, World Health Organization official Mariangela Simao said this week.

President Jair Bolsonaro said Thursday he was against a resumption, a rare nod to social distancing measures from the far-right leader. "As far as I'm concerned, we shouldn't have carnival," he said. Rio Mayor Eduardo Paes, a self-declared carnival lover, said the event would go ahead "if conditions allow." That appeared to walk back earlier statements in which he vowed a restriction-free carnival, joking: "I'd be the first one to break the rules." An early test of the health situation will come in January, when Rio hosts its annual New Year's celebrations on Copacabana beach, a party that usually draws three million people - also canceled last time because of COVID-19. —AFP

Boys not girls more prone to physical, psychological abuse in sport: Study

Three-quarters of children have faced abuse in sport and boys are more likely to be victims than girls, a study of more than 10,000 individuals in six European countries released yesterday shows. The most common form of abuse suffered by children taking part in sport outside of school was psychological, ranging from a lack of praise to humiliating treatment, the European Union-funded study shows.

Nearly two-thirds of those polled for the Child Abuse in Sport: European Statistics (CASES) study said they had suffered psychological abuse while 44 percent had experienced physical violence. The report's lead author, Professor Mike Hartill of Edge Hill University in England, said the findings show those who govern sport in Europe have done "too little" to safeguard children in sport and must do "far more than producing policy".

"Our findings are obviously of great concern. We have seen a number of high-profile cases of child abuse in sport in recent times, but this research helps us to understand the scale of the problem more clearly," Hartill said. The study, led by Edge Hill University and the University of Wuppertal in Germany, questioned individuals aged between 18 and 30 who had taken part in sport when they were under 18.

The highest incidence of abuse was among children who had competed internationally - 84 percent at that level had experienced some form of abuse. Hartill, a specialist in the sociology of sport, said the absence of praise or encouragement was often cited as a form of abuse. "Withholding praise from children can be damaging. You can imagine that it could go from a mild occurrence to it being used as grooming for more serious abuse," he said, speaking at a symposium to launch the study at the headquarters of World Athletics in Monaco.

Total of 10,302 individuals were questioned in Austria, the Wallonia region of Belgium, Germany, Romania, Spain and Britain. They were asked to complete an online questionnaire distributed by polling company Ipsos MORI, with interesting answers triggering further questions from researchers. The highest prevalence of abuse was in Belgium at 80 percent while the lowest was in Austria (70 percent). Across all countries, with the exception of Austria, boys were significantly more likely to experience violence.

'Too little done'

Co-author Professor Bettina Rulofs said one finding in particular had surprised the researchers: "It is remarkable to have more males in the category of contact sexual violence than girls." The authors said the report showed that many sports bodies had failed to widen their policies beyond safeguards against sexual violence to take in psychological issues.

Hartill said: "Unfortunately, these findings indicate a sector that has done too little to address deep-rooted issues within sports. "Those that govern sport in Europe must do far more than producing policy. The problem is ultimately rooted within the nature of the relationships between adults and children within sport." However, the report did find that the incidence of abuse in sport was lower than in wider society and it also noted that 85 percent of adults reported having a positive experience through sport as children. —AFP

Sports

PSG look to bounce back as French fans' behavior under scrutiny

Attacking trio scored only 11 times in 28 league appearances

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain visit Saint-Etienne today looking to end a week which saw a tame defeat by Manchester City on a high note, while ongoing trouble in the stands has put French football fans under added scrutiny.

PSG have endured a turbulent few days, with coach Mauricio Pochettino linked with a possible move to Manchester United at the end of the season. The capital giants' 2-1 loss to Man City at the Etihad on Wednesday has also left them at the mercy of the Champions League last-16 draw, with top spot in their group wrapped up by the Premier League champions.

Pochettino and PSG sporting director Leonardo have battled away rumors of the Argentinian coach being close to the exit door. But the former Tottenham boss will be hoping to see a better performance from his star-studded side at Saint-Etienne after an underwhelming start to the campaign.

"We have to improve," Pochettino said after the City defeat. "I am happy in the process. Things are better than one month ago and much better than two months ago. Little by little the team is going to improve."

Pochettino arrived at the Parc des Princes in January tasked with finally delivering PSG a maiden Champions League title. But they lost out to City in last season's semi-finals and despite a raft of high-profile signings, including Lionel Messi, could now face the likes of Liverpool, holders Chelsea or Bayern Munich in the last 16 this term.

PSG are well on their way to reclaiming the

Ligue 1 crown with an 11-point lead over Nice at the top of the French top flight. Despite boasting a front three of Kylian Mbappe, Messi and Neymar, performances have been inconsistent, though, with many league wins courtesy of late goals.

The attacking trio have scored only 11 times in 28 league appearances between them, with seven of those goals coming from Mbappe. Second-bottom Saint-Etienne should be more forgiving opponents than City, although Les Verts are on a four-game

“We have to improve”

unbeaten run after back-to-back wins.

Crowd violence in spotlight

French football chiefs held crisis talks earlier this week with government ministers to identify ways to combat the wave of violence that has rocked Ligue 1. Last weekend saw Marseille winger Dimitri Payet struck by a bottle thrown from the stands for the second time this season, with his team's match at Lyon abandoned. He was also hit by a bottle during



MANCHESTER: Paris Saint-Germain's Argentinian head coach Mauricio Pochettino gestures on the touchline during the UEFA Champions League Group A football match against Manchester City at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester, north west England, on Wednesday. —AFP

a game at Nice, who were docked a point, in August. Last week, Marseille were ordered to play their next home game behind closed doors after trouble against PSG. "We can't let players get attacked like that," said French sports minister

Roxana Maracineanu. "Such acts must at least result in the automatic stoppage of matches." Lyon have been ordered to play their next Ligue 1 home game behind closed doors, with authorities to decide on any further sanctions by December 8. —AFP

News in brief

West Brom held

LONDON: West Bromwich Albion lost ground in the race for automatic promotion to the Premier League after they were held to a goalless draw at home to Nottingham Forest on Friday. Albion had to play the final 20 minutes a man down after Republic of Ireland midfielder Jayson Molumby was sent off for a second bookable offence. There were jeers at the final whistle from some home fans following the Baggies second successive goalless draw, with Valerien Ismael's side now having scored just two goals in six games. This result meant Forest had now lost just once in 13 games. It also left West Brom third in the Championship table, seven points adrift of second-placed Bournemouth, with only the top two at the end of the regular season guaranteed promotion to English football's lucrative top flight.

Kuwait defeat Palestine

BAGHDAD: Kuwait beat Palestine 2-1 on Friday in a game held in Iraq's Basra governorate as part of the fourth round of Group A of the West Asia Football Championship. Kuwait's Sayed Yusuf and Saleh Al-Benai netted in the 30th and 77th minute, while Palestine's Khaled Al-Nabrisi scored in the 53rd minute. Kuwait's team tops Group A with seven points followed by Iraq with six, Bahrain with four and Palestine with three. Group A matches are held in Basra while the games of Group B, which includes Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and the UAE, are played in Iraq's Irbil.

Azmi wins bronze

TUNIS: Yaqoub Al-Azmi of Kuwait won on Friday the bronze medal in the 400-meter race during the 8th Arab junior athletics championship, hosted in Rades, nearly 10 km southeast of Tunis. Treasure of Kuwait Athletics Association (KAA) Faisal Al-Dasm congratulated Azmi on the win which came in the second day of the championship. "Despite the challenging conditions brought about by the coronavirus pandemic, the performance of the Kuwaiti athletes lived up to our expectations," he said. Opened on Thursday, the championship brought together 391 athletes from 15 Arab countries.

Ice queen sets record

SOCHI: Russian teenager Kamila Valieva shored up her status as favorite for women's figure skating gold at the upcoming Beijing Winter Olympics with a record-breaking short program on Friday. The 15-year-old, competing at the Russian Grand Prix, earned a score of 87.42 points for her opening routine on the Sochi ice - shattering the previous mark (85.45) by almost two points. The 2020 world junior champion now holds a full hand of records, adding this to her best ever scores in the free program (180.89) and total (265.08) at Skate Canada in October.

Rangnick at Man Utd 'not good news' for rivals: Klopp

LONDON: Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp says Ralf Rangnick's expected arrival at arch-rivals Manchester United is "not good news for other teams" due to his vast experience and ability to organize teams.

Klopp's fellow German is set to be installed as United interim manager until the end of the season following last week's sacking of Ole Gunnar Solskjaer after a terrible run of results. Rangnick, the former Hoffenheim, Schalke and RB Leipzig boss, is credited with influencing the pressing style of Klopp and Chelsea manager Thomas Tuchel.

"Unfortunately a good coach is coming to England, that's how it is, to Manchester United," Klopp said Friday on the eve of Liverpool's match against Southampton. "Ralf is obviously a really experienced manager. He built most famously two clubs from nowhere to proper threats and forces in



Ralf Rangnick

Germany with Hoffenheim and Leipzig. United will be organized on the pitch, we should realise that — that's obviously not good news for other teams."

Rangnick's legal representative earlier confirmed to AFP subsidiary SID that the final points of a deal to take the current head of sports and development at Russian club Lokomotiv Moscow to Old Trafford were being finalized.



LISBON: In this file photo taken on November 15, 2021 Portugal's forward Cristiano Ronaldo reacts at the end of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 qualification group A football match between Portugal and Serbia, at the Luz stadium in Lisbon. —AFP

Italy, Portugal in same World Cup playoff bracket

PARIS: European champions Italy and Portugal could meet for a place at the 2022 World Cup after being drawn in the same playoff path on Friday. The Azzurri and Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal both finished second in their qualifying groups, behind Switzerland and Serbia respectively.

Italy will host North Macedonia in the playoff first round in March, with Turkey visiting Portugal, before the winners face off for a spot at next year's finals in Qatar. The draw means that one of the last two European Championship winners will not be at the next World Cup. Portugal won the Euro 2016 title.

The winners of Portugal's match with Turkey will host the final-round game in Path C. "It's a very difficult draw for us," said Italy coach Roberto Mancini. "North Macedonia is a very good team, and if we win we have to play away." Italy — who beat England on penalties in the Euro 2020 final earlier this year — are hoping to banish the memories of their playoff heartache from four years ago when they lost to Sweden and failed to qualify for the World Cup for the first time since 1958.

Portugal have featured at every major championship since missing out on the 1998 World Cup. They only narrowly missed out on automatic qualifi-

cation when Aleksandar Mitrovic's late goal snatched a 2-1 win for Serbia in the two teams' last group match. Portugal coach Fernando Santos said all the focus now was "to beat Turkey".

"It's the important match to go through to the final and to win it. We now have to prepare well to be at a good level in March," he said. "Sometimes they (Turkey) play well, other times not. They're a team that always present difficulties, but I'm totally convinced that we'll be going to the World Cup."

Elsewhere in the playoffs, British rivals Wales and Scotland could play each other in the final of Path A. Scotland will welcome Ukraine to Glasgow in their semi-final game. Wales take on Austria in Cardiff, with the winners to have home advantage in the final. The Welsh are hoping to play in the global showpiece for the first time in 64 years, while Scotland have not qualified since 1998.

"We've given ourselves a great opportunity," said Wales manager Robert Page. "It was in 1958 that we last qualified for the World Cup finals and through the playoffs again, so the incentive is there for us. We worked ever so hard to get that runners-up position in the group and earn that home draw, and we've had the luck of the draw that if we win that semi-final we will also be home for the final, so there's everything to play for."

Russia face Poland in the Path B semi-finals, with the winners to host Sweden or the Czech Republic. The Russians, who reached the 2018 quarter-finals as the host nation, have only ever lost one World Cup qualifier at home — against Germany in 2009. — AFP

Premier League open to regulator but warn of 'radical' proposals

LONDON: Premier League chief executive Richard Masters says the organization are open to an independent regulator, but he labelled some parts of a fan-led review of football governance as "too radical".

The British government commissioned the ground-breaking review, which this week recommended the creation of an Independent Regulator for English Football. Additional support for English lower league teams via a "solidarity transfer levy" on deals between Premier League clubs or signings from overseas was also suggested. While the report did not recommend the percentage, a 10 per cent tax was used as an example.

"We are open to an independent regulator and we want to discuss the detail of that with Government going forward," Masters told BBC Sport. "Government has backed it. I think to push back on the concept of an independent regulator at this moment in time would be wrong. But, as I said, there's a whole package of things. It's what the regulator is able to do and the power at its disposal that we need to talk about." Aston Villa chief executive Christian Purslow insisted there was a danger you risked "killing the golden goose if we overregulate a highly successful financial and commercial operation".

And Masters added: "Well, I think that's what we need to be careful of, the unintended consequences. I mean look across the 47 recommendations. The Premier League is a proud and significant contributor to the rest of football. We give away 15 per cent of our revenue already. Over the next three years we've committed to government that we'll invest over £1.6 billion into the football pyramid, into community and good causes. That's a huge investment. One of the ideas is a levy on transfer fees. It's a radical idea. In reality, it is radical because there is a levy already."

Masters hit back at the Football League's request to be given 25 percent of all pooled broadcast revenue. "That would be a disaster. Value has to be retained where it is generated otherwise that value can't be generated," he said. "Premier League clubs have to be able to attract the best players, talent and managers and create that incredible competitiveness." — AFP

Sports

Leverkusen plan to keep hold of in-demand teenage star Wirtz

Chelsea, Liverpool, Man United, Arsenal, Bayern Munich tracking midfielder

LEVERKUSEN: Florian Wirtz only turned 18 last May and is already attracting the attention of Europe's top clubs with eye-catching performances, but Bayer Leverkusen have plans in place to keep hold of their rising teenage star. Wirtz's deft chip set up Moussa Diaby's late winner in Thursday's 3-2 victory over Celtic to put Leverkusen in the Europa League's last 16.

Wirtz's ascendancy has been nothing short of meteoric since Leverkusen signed him from the Cologne Under-17 team in January 2020. His seven goals and nine assists in 16 games for Leverkusen this season speaks volumes. "I have learnt so much - the (senior) game is so different to youth football," the teenage attacking midfielder told AFP. "Against big clubs like Celtic, you have to prove yourself on a different level."

"When you manage to make a comeback like that," he added as Leverkusen scored two late goals against the Scottish giants, "it gives you some momentum which we want to carry into the Leipzig game on Sunday."

Leverkusen, who are fourth in the Bundesliga and on course for the Champions League next season, have a history of losing talent to bigger clubs. Michael Ballack was 25 when he left on a free transfer for Bayern Munich in

2002, then went onto captain Germany and star for Chelsea.

Kai Havertz, still only 22, joined the Blues for 80 million euros (\$90 million) in September 2020, then scored the winning goal for Chelsea in last season's Champions League final. Having seen Havertz's shine in the Premier League, Wirtz knows he is already on the path to similar success.

"Every small boy dreams of playing

2020. Just weeks before Havertz's Champions League heroics in Lisbon, Wirtz marked his 18th birthday by signing a contract extension with Leverkusen until 2026.

"He has a really long contract - that's good - but it's also about (giving him) the feeling, that this is the best place to develop," said Leverkusen sports director Simon Rolfes. "We have other young players who can reach a world-class level" such as the 22-year-old Diaby "and we want to keep them as long as possible, so they grow together - here in Leverkusen."

Leverkusen's Barcelona-born CEO Fernando Carro sees it as his job to be able to offer Wirtz the chance to be successful and win titles with Leverkusen. "We want to create the resources and build a team with sporting success so that he will stay a long time," Carro told AFP.

Chelsea, Liverpool, Manchester United and Arsenal, plus German giants Bayern Munich, are all reportedly tracking Wirtz. Rolfes raised an eyebrow when he saw the lengthy list of scouts who watched the win over Celtic. He is, however, realistic. "I'm not afraid of success and if one of our players goes to one of the top five clubs in the world, that is a successful story," he added.

Wirtz could be a name to watch at next year's World Cup. After helping the



LEVERKUSEN: Leverkusen's German forward Florian Wirtz looks on during the UEFA Europa League Group G football match against Celtic in Leverkusen, western Germany, on Thursday. — AFP

German juniors win the Under-21 European Championship in June, Wirtz made his senior debut in September's 2-0 win over Liechtenstein. He then set up Timo Werner's goal during a 4-0 win over North Macedonia in October which punched Germany's ticket to the World Cup finals.

Having trained alongside childhood

heroes like Thomas Mueller and Manuel Neuer, Wirtz sees being involved in the Germany set up as a "huge honor". His goal is to be on the plane to Qatar next November. "It's one of my biggest dreams to play at a World Cup for Germany, I hope I get a few more games and it'd be a highlight to be there." — AFP

Bucks roll over short-handed Nuggets

LOS ANGELES: Giannis Antetokounmpo had 24 points, 13 rebounds and seven assists as the Milwaukee Bucks went wire-to-wire to capture their sixth consecutive victory with a 120-109 win over the Denver Nuggets on Friday.

Pat Connaughton poured in 20 points and Khristian Middleton added 17 for the Bucks, who are now four games above the .500 win mark. Jrue Holiday scored 16 points, Bobby Portis tallied 11 and Grayson Allen finished with 10. "I feel like it's just comfortable," Holiday said. "We went through some struggles and that helped us to kind of find a place."

Aaron Gordon scored 18 points and nine rebounds for Denver, who lost their sixth straight. Will Barton tallied 17 points and nine rebounds while Facundo Campazzo had 16 points as Denver fell behind by 20 points in the second half and shot just 17 of 47 from beyond the arc. The Nuggets were missing Nikola Jokic (right wrist sprain), Michael Porter Jr (back), Jamal Murray (knee), Bones Hyland (ankle) and PJ Dozier (ACL).

Jokic missed his fourth straight game for the Nuggets, who trailed by 11 at the end of the first quarter, and at the half. Denver cut the lead to five in the third quarter before Milwaukee compiled a 20-point lead late in the fourth. The Nuggets tried to chip away but never got closer than 12 points the rest of the way.

In New York, all-star guard Devin Booker scored 32 points as the Phoenix Suns beat the New York Knicks 118-97 to extend their win streak to 15 games, equaling the club's second-longest win streak. Chris Paul had 14 points and 10 assists for the Suns, who improved to 16-3. The franchise record of 17 straight wins was set during the 2006-07 season.

Elsewhere, Reggie Jackson scored a team-high 21 points, Terance Mann delivered 16 points and 10 rebounds, and the Los Angeles Clippers routed the hapless Detroit Pistons 107-96. Eric Bledsoe busted out of a slump to score 15 points for the Clippers, who have won just three of their last seven games. Bledsoe had been averaging just 5.2 points over the previous five games.

Bledsoe ends slump

"To have a comfortable lead was good," coach Tyronn Lue said. "We made some shots, did a good job of getting to the paint and made the right play. We had 16 assists in the first half, so moving the basketball was good to see."

Paul George added 12 points, Ivica Zubac finished with 10 points and 13 rebounds and Isaiah Hartenstein had 10 points and five rebounds for the Clippers. Jerami Grant had 20 points, 10 rebounds and three assists for the Pistons, who dropped their fifth straight.

Detroit welcomed back center Isaiah Stewart, who was slapped with a two-game ban by the league for an altercation with Lakers star LeBron James on Sunday. Stewart finished with four points and 12 rebounds in 27 minutes of playing time.

In the late game, DeAaron Fox scored 34 points and Buddy Hield had 25 off the bench as the Sacramento Kings outlasted the Los Angeles Lakers



DENVER: Giannis Antetokounmpo #34 of the Milwaukee Bucks and two young fans pose for a photo after a game against the Denver Nuggets on Friday at the Ball Arena in Denver, Colorado. — AFP

141-137 in triple overtime. James finished with a team-high 30 points for the Lakers. Also, Atlanta Hawks rolled to a 132-100 lopsided win over the host Memphis Grizzlies, who lost Ja Morant in the first quarter with a sprained knee. —AFP

Red Bull Bar Bahr announces triumphant return

KUWAIT: Kuwait's premier land and sea race, Red Bull Bar Bahr, is set to take off once again next month. The race combines two of Kuwait's most beloved sports into a single, exciting tournament. The 2021 Edition of Red Bull Bar Bahr takes place on December 3, 2021, at Al-Khiran in Kuwait.

Red Bull Bar Bahr is a competitive relay race that begins with a quad bike first half on land, and then continues, once that is complete, into the sea with the use of jet skis. The race has attracted many local star and championship winning athletes. Among them are Mohammed Burbayea, Fahad Al Musallam, Mishary Bushaiba, Mohammad Al Baz, and many more. The unique aspect of the race is the combining of major sporting disciplines, and the relay aspect, which gives fans the opportunity to watch both sports take the stage towards a shared goal.

Teams of two racers compete for the best overall time and first position. The race begins with the quad racers at the starting line, and away from their bikes. Once the race begins all quad racers run on foot to their quads and take off through the obstacle-laden closed-course circuit. There they will face man-made mounds, dirt, mud, and various obstacles along the way. Upon completing the course, they will find themselves on the shore, where they will disembark and hand over the keys to their partner's jet ski.

From there the jet ski racers will rush into the sea, mount their watercraft, start their engines, and finish the race. The jet ski section is no less grueling, and all competitors expect a tough battle all the way to the finish line. Both members of every team will have their skills put to the test, regardless of experience. There will be strict safety measures in place during the racing tournament. All team members must wear a full-face helmet at all times, and have a valid driving license for the vehicle they will be riding at the time of the event.



Admittance for spectators is free for all those who wish to attend. There is no sign-up requirement, or registration of any kind needed. Simply be present at the location on the day of the race and have a good time. Teams that are looking forward to participating should feel free to sign up at the official

webpage: <https://www.redbull.com/mean/events/red-bull-bar-bahr/> Team registrations are currently open to all. This year, the proud sponsors of Red Bull Bar Bahr are the Basel Al Salem Al Sabah Motor Racing Club, Voss Water, Room Service, and Kuwait Times.

New COVID variant throws sport in South Africa into turmoil

JOHANNESBURG: South African sport was thrown into turmoil on Friday following the announcement of travel bans following the discovery of a new strain of coronavirus in the country. Two rounds of matches in the United Rugby Championship were postponed, with two teams from Wales, one from Ireland and one from Italy all trying to return home.

There were numerous withdrawals from a professional golf tournament in Johannesburg, while two other tournaments in South Africa were negatively affected. The Netherlands played a rain-hit one-day international against South Africa but the rest of their cricket tour of South Africa was in jeopardy.

The British government announced on Thursday that South Africa had returned to the 'red list' because of the spread of the new strain of the virus, B.1.1.529. Travelers from South Africa, including returning nationals, will face a mandatory two-week quarantine period, while flights have been halted. This was followed on Friday by a travel ban by several European Union countries.

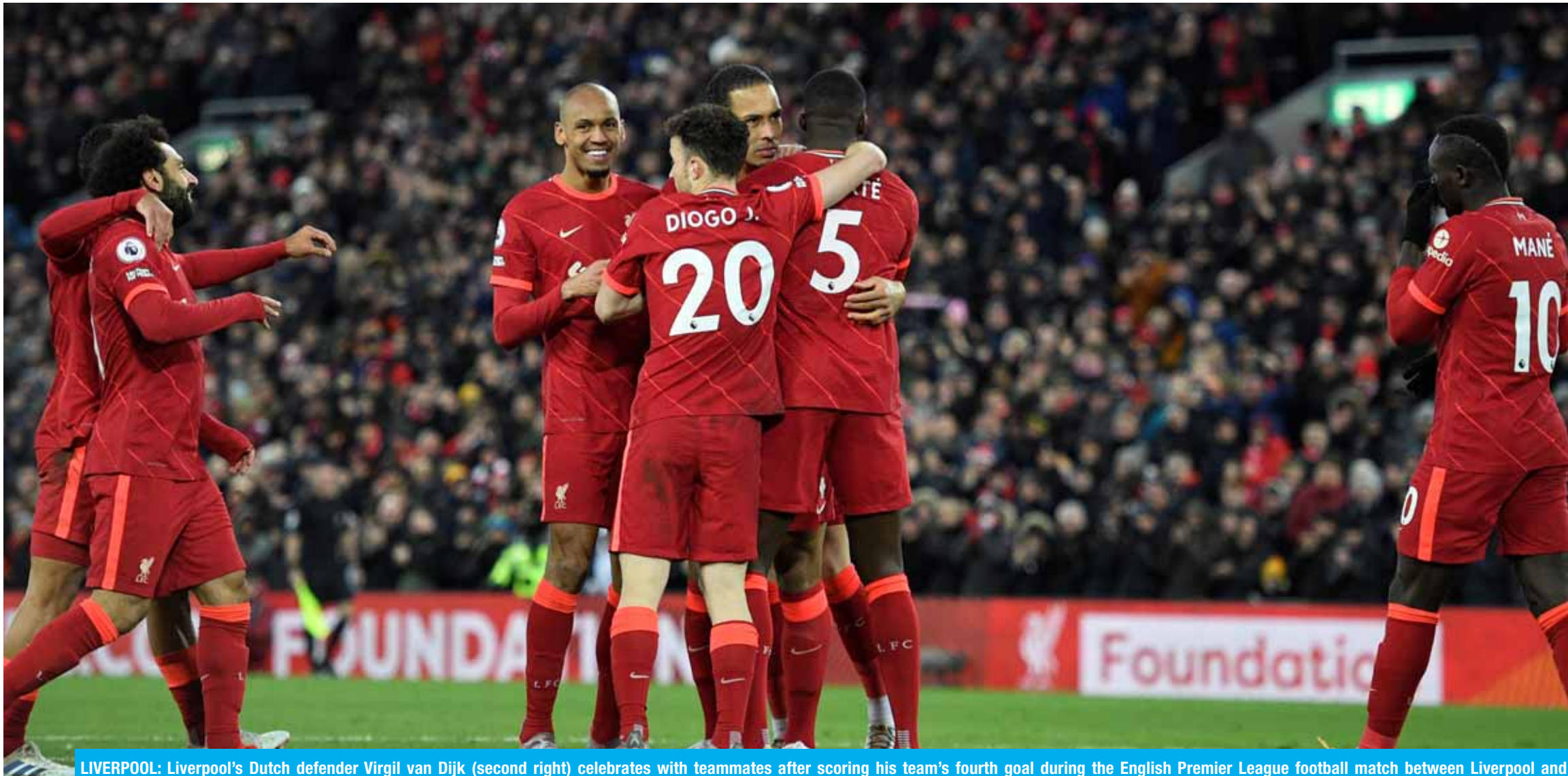
Two Welsh rugby teams, the Cardiff Blues and the Llanelli Scarlets, announced that they were withdrawing from scheduled fixtures in the United Rugby Championship and were making plans to return home as soon as possible. The United Rugby Championship (URC) later announced that all four matches that were scheduled for South Africa yesterday and today had been postponed, as well as fixtures for the following weekend.

Munster from Ireland and Italian team Zebre had also arrived in South Africa and the URC said arrangements were being made for all four of the visiting teams to return home as soon as possible. Sixteen British players withdrew after the first round of the Joburg Open golf tournament, the first event of the new DP World Tour, and were expected to fly back to Britain to avoid having to spend time in quarantine.

The Joburg Open was co-sanctioned with South Africa's Sunshine Tour and organizers announced that it would continue as an event carrying World Tour points. But next week's South African Open will lose its World Tour status and be played only as a Sunshine Tour event, while the Alfred Dunhill championship the following week, which was also due to be a co-sanctioned event, has been cancelled.

The Netherlands cricket team played the first of three scheduled one-day internationals against South Africa in Centurion on Friday but a joint statement from the boards of the two countries indicated that the touring team would return home as soon as possible. But the fate of the tour had not yet been decided because it was "highly unlikely that the visiting team will be able to fly out of South Africa over the weekend."

This opened the possibility that the planned second match, at the same venue today, might take place. The third match was scheduled for Johannesburg on Wednesday. The statement said a final decision on the remaining matches was expected "in the next 24 to 48 hours". — AFP



LIVERPOOL: Liverpool's Dutch defender Virgil van Dijk (second right) celebrates with teammates after scoring his team's fourth goal during the English Premier League football match between Liverpool and Southampton at Anfield in Liverpool, north west England yesterday. — AFP

Liverpool rout Saints, Arsenal cruise

Liverpool move second ahead of leader Chelsea's clash with Man United

LONDON: Liverpool crushed Southampton 4-0 yesterday to put pressure on Premier League leaders Chelsea, while Arsenal got back on track with a 2-0 win over Newcastle as Eddie Howe suffered his first defeat as Magpies manager. Diogo Jota scored twice for Jurgen Klopp's side to warm the Anfield faithful on a bitterly cold afternoon.

Liverpool's third consecutive victory in all competitions since losing at West Ham moved them into second place. The Reds sit one point behind Chelsea, who host Manchester United tonight. Third-placed Manchester City would go back above Liverpool if they beat West Ham tonight.

Liverpool needed just two minutes to take the lead when Sadio Mane played in Andrew Robertson and the Scot's cross was perfectly weighted for Jota to finish from close range. Jota netted again in the 32nd minute with a simple finish from Mohamed Salah's pass for his eighth club goal this term.

Having scored at least two goals in 17 successive matches in all competitions, Liverpool refused to take their foot off the gas. Thiago Alcantara had ended a lengthy goal drought in the midweek Champions League win over Porto and the Spain midfielder was back on the scoresheet in the 37th minute when his shot deflected in off Lyanco.

Virgil van Dijk bagged Liverpool's fourth in the 52nd minute, the Dutch defender volleying his first goal in 14 months from Trent Alexander-Arnold's corner. Arsenal saw their 10-match unbeaten run in all competitions come to a painful end in last weekend's 4-0 thrashing at Liverpool. But second-half goals from Bukayo Saka and Gabriel Martinelli at the Emirates Stadium made it four wins from their last five league games. Written off after their poor start to the season, Mikel Arteta's side are fifth, level on points with fourth-placed West Ham, as they chase a berth in next season's Champions League.

"I'm happy with the points after losing to Liverpool. You have to win straightaway," Arteta said.

Gerrard makes his mark

Howe was in charge in person for the first time after missing last weekend's 3-3 draw against Brentford due to a positive coronavirus test. While the Saudi-led consortium that recently bought Newcastle have spoken about emulating the success of Manchester City and Paris Saint-Germain under Middle Eastern ownership, Howe's only focus is saving the Magpies from relegation.

Former Bournemouth boss Howe will need to drag much-improved performances from his winless



First defeat for Howe at Newcastle

team if they are to avoid a catastrophic slide into the Championship. Already languishing five points from safety, bottom of the table Newcastle face crucial games against fellow strugglers Norwich and Burnley over the coming week.

"The game was decided in the incident with Callum Wilson and the penalty - a tough call against us - then they scored in the aftermath," Howe said. "Momentum in football is so important. We need to get that win as quickly as we can."

Steven Gerrard earned his second successive win since taking charge of Aston Villa as the former



LONDON: Arsenal's Norwegian midfielder Martin Odegaard (center) controls the ball during the English Premier League football match between Arsenal and Newcastle United at the Emirates Stadium in London yesterday. — AFP

Rangers boss masterminded a 2-1 victory at Crystal Palace. Exposing Palace's set-piece weakness, Villa went in front after 15 minutes when Matt Targett fired home for his first league goal since 2019 after the hosts failed to clear Ashley Young's corner.

Villa's Douglas Luiz escaped a red card in the 72nd minute for a late tackle on Cheikhou Kouyate, the midfielder initially being sent off before the

decision was overturned after a VAR check. John McGinn compounded Palace's frustration in the 86th minute as he grabbed Villa's killer second from Anwar El Ghazi's pass. Marc Guehi's 95th-minute goal was little consolation for Palace. Dean Smith, the man Gerrard replaced at Villa, remains unbeaten as Norwich boss after the second-bottom Canaries drew 0-0 with Wolves at Carrow Road. — AFP

Polii, Rahayu grab spot in Indonesia Open finals

JAKARTA: Olympic badminton gold medalists Greysia Polii and Apriyani Rahayu secured a spot in the Indonesia Open finals after defeating Thailand's Jongkolphan Kititharakul and Rawinda Prajongjai in two straight sets yesterday. The Indonesian women's double beat the Thai pair 21-18, 21-14 in 58 minutes in the tournament held in the resort island Bali.

They will now face Japan's Nami Matsuyama and Chiharu Chida, who bagged the Indonesia Masters title last week. Natsuyama and Chida went through to the finals after scoring a victory against South Korean Baek Ha-na and Lee Yu-rim.

In men's doubles, the world number one Kevin Sanjaya

Sukamuljo and Marcus Gideon also netted a spot in the finals after defeating India's Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty 21-16, 21-18 in a 44-minute game.

"We played better today, we attacked since the beginning and we pushed for a fast game because we know this Indian duo are strong and powerful," Gideon said after the match. The Indonesian duo, affectionately known by their fans as "The Minions", will face Japan's Takuro Hoki and Yugo Kobayashi.

In men's singles, Danish badminton ace Viktor Axelsen is through to the finals after defeating Indonesia's Jonatan Christie. The world number two, who is favored to win the men's singles title, beat Christie



NUSA DUA: Indonesia's Greysia Polii (left) and Apriyani Rahayu (right) hit a return against Thailand's Jongkolphan Kititharakul and Rawinda Prajongjai during their women's doubles semi-final badminton match at the Indonesia Open. — AFP

21-19, 21-15. "It was a tough game for me, Jonatan is a tough competition and I respect him," the Olympic gold medalist said after the match.

The Indonesia Open takes place from November 23-28 and the season-ending BWF

Tour finals run December 1-5. Tour badminton has been badly hit by the pandemic, with recent games being the first tournaments in Asia in almost a year and taking place without fans in a COVID-secure bubble. — AFP

Police search Juve offices over suspected transfers

MILAN: Italy's financial police have searched Juventus' offices in a probe into player transfers, with prosecutors looking into potentially false information on the Serie A club's balance sheets. In a statement released late on Friday, the Turin public prosecutors office said they were investigating deals that took place over the past three seasons, and the way annual financial results between 2019 and this year had been formulated.

Juve are being investigated for making false communications to investors and issuing invoices for non-existent transactions, prosecutors said. According to Italian media six Juve directors are under investigation, including chairman Andrea Agnelli, vice-chairman and former player Pavel Nedved, and

former sporting director Fabio Paratici, who is now at Tottenham Hotspur.

News Agency ANSA claimed yesterday morning that prosecutors were also looking into the club's dealings with Cristiano Ronaldo, who arrived to great fanfare in the summer of 2018 and fled to Manchester United in August.

Last month the Italian Football Federation (FIGC) launched an investigation of its own into a series of suspicious transfers, with the majority of the deals under the microscope involving Juve. The operations are suspected of being carried out with the aim of inflating the value of certain players for accounting purposes, or using player exchanges to help balance the books.— AFP