



2 Crown Prince thanks former health minister for anti-COVID efforts



5 Spoils of war: Taliban put victory over US on display



13 Nibbling cats, COVID masks: First look at CES tech show



16 'Big Ben' leads Steelers past Browns in emotional sendoff



New Cabinet takes oath in heated Assembly session

Lawmakers spar in first session in weeks • MP files to grill defense minister



KUWAIT: MPs remonstrate with the speaker during a heated Assembly session yesterday. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh (See Page 3)

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Lawmakers yesterday exchanged insults and harsh words in a tension-packed National Assembly session held for the first time after a 10-week halt following the resignation of the Cabinet, forcing the speaker at one point to adjourn the meeting. The day began with members of the new Cabinet taking the oath to become members of the Assembly, based on the Kuwaiti constitution. The swearing-in was boycotted by 13 opposition MPs as a sign of noncooperation with the government.

The main exchanges took place among MPs Obaid Al-Wasmi, Mohammad Al-Mutair, Thamer Al-Suwait, Khaled Al-Otaibi, Farz Al-Daihani, Saad Al-Khanfour, Fayez Al-Jamhour and others. The day's action culminated with a grilling filed by opposition MP Hamdan Al-Azemi against Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah over allowing women to become soldiers and not taking enough actions against suspected corruption in the multibillion-dollar deal to purchase dozens of Eurofighter warplanes.

Hamdan is accusing the minister of breaching the country's traditions by allowing Kuwaiti women to join the army as soldiers. He also said that he will explain with documents the suspected corruption in the Eurofighter deal. The defense minister said he is prepared to debate the grilling right now, describing it as a grilling against Kuwaiti women. The debate of the grilling is expected to take place after two weeks.

Continued on Page 2

News in brief

OPEC+ agrees on modest hike

LONDON: OPEC and its allies decided yesterday to maintain their policy of modestly boosting oil output next month as the rapidly spreading Omicron variant has so far not heavily hit demand. The OPEC+ grouping has resisted US pressure for a wider opening of the taps in response to high energy prices fueling a surge in inflation across the world. After a short video-conference meeting, the group said it had agreed to raise output by 400,000 barrels per day in February. — AFP (See Page 8)

Apple reaches \$3tn valuation

NEW YORK: Apple became the first US company to hit \$3 trillion in market value, briefly reaching the landmark on Monday in the latest demonstration of the tech industry's pandemic surge. The iPhone maker scaled the record level near 1845 GMT, reaching \$182.88 a share before slipping back slightly. The tech giant also was the first US company to hit \$2 trillion in Aug 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic that stoked demand for personal electronics and digital services. — AFP

Old BlackBerrys will not work

NEW YORK: Nostalgic for those mobile phones with a physical keyboard? Brace yourself, because as of yesterday many models of the once-indispensable BlackBerry devices no longer work. The Canadian company has decided to pull the plug on new updates of its operating system, meaning most BlackBerrys that became synonymous with the emerging mobile digital culture of recent decades will not operate correctly after Jan 4. — AFP

Kuwait reports 1,482 COVID cases; US sets record with 1 million

KUWAIT: Kuwait yesterday said 1,482 more people tested positive for COVID-19 over the past 24 hours, taking the country's total caseload to 420,796, health ministry data showed. Some 201 more people recovered from the virus, taking total recoveries to 412,274, according to Health Ministry

Spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad. He added the recovery to positive case ratio stands at 98 percent. The death toll from the pandemic remained unchanged at 2,468, while 38 people are hospitalized with the virus, nine of whom are in intensive care, he told KUNA. Some 22,159 swab tests were conducted over the past day, taking total tests to 6,047,491.

Meanwhile, the United States reported more than one million new COVID-19 cases Monday after the long New Year's weekend, according to data from Johns Hopkins University, as the Omicron variant spreads at a blistering pace. There were 1,080,211 new cases in the country, a global record,

although the number of cases reported on a Monday is usually higher than other days because of delays in weekend tallying, especially after such a three-day holiday weekend.

Still, the figure is double the number of daily cases compared to the previous Monday. The rolling average over seven days - which experts see as more reliable - was 486,000 cases per day as of Monday evening, the university said. The new figure comes a day after top US pandemic advisor Anthony Fauci said the country was experiencing "almost a vertical increase" in COVID-19 cases, adding the peak may be only weeks away.

Continued on Page 2

Heavy rain hits Oman; eight killed in Iran

MUSCAT: Authorities in Oman reported heavy rainfall yesterday, calling on citizens to avoid heading to valleys and beaches due to rising water levels, the official Oman News Agency reported. Omani police closed several roads, including a highway in the capital Muscat, due to a significant "water accumulation", it

added. The education ministry suspended classes and exams in most parts of the sultanate.

Bad weather has affected other Gulf countries in the Gulf in recent days, with several issuing weather warnings. Torrential rainfall has hit the United Arab Emirates, including Dubai and Abu Dhabi, and caused widespread flooding in the region. Meanwhile, at least eight people have been killed in flash flooding in Iran's south due to heavy rains expected to last until later this week, state media reported yesterday. "Following the floods and rains of the past few days

Continued on Page 2



MUSCAT: This picture taken yesterday shows completely flooded cars in a parking lot outside a shopping center. — AFP

Theranos founder Holmes found guilty of fraud

SAN JOSE, California: Fallen US biotech star Elizabeth Holmes was convicted on Monday of defrauding investors in her blood-testing startup Theranos, in a high-profile case seen as an indictment of Silicon Valley culture. Holmes is a rare example of a tech exec being brought to book over

a company flaring out, in a sector littered with the carcasses of money-losing companies that once promised untold riches.

Her case shone a spotlight on the blurred line between the hustle that characterizes the industry and outright criminal dishonesty. Jurors took seven days of deliberations to reach their verdict, finding her guilty of four counts of tricking investors into pouring money into what she claimed was a revolutionary testing system. But the panel - who had listened to weeks of sometimes complex evidence - also acquitted her on four charges and could not reach a verdict on three others.

Continued on Page 2



SAN JOSE, California: Elizabeth Holmes walks outside the federal court after she was found guilty in her fraud trial on Monday. — AFP

Local

Crown Prince thanks ex-health minister for anti-covid efforts

Amir congratulates Ghais for OPEC Secretary General post

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday the former Minister of Health Dr Basel Humoud Hamad Al-Sabah. His Highness the Crown Prince lauded the ex-minister for shouldering his responsibilities devoutly and sincerely, expressing appreciation for all the efforts he had exerted to cope with repercussions of the pandemic for serving the dear homeland while being in office. He expressed good wishes to Sheikh Basel after his service.



Ghais attributes OPEC's top post to Kuwait's status

In other news, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of congratulations yesterday to Haitham Al-Ghais on being appointed as the Secretary General of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables.

Ghais had said on Monday that OPEC's decision to select him as Secretary General mirrors his country's prestigious status. Ghais made the statements to the press after a special meeting of the Conference of the Organization where he was appointed by acclamation as OPEC chief for a three-year term. Ghais, a veteran of the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) and Kuwait's OPEC Governor from 2017 to June 2021, currently serves as Deputy Managing Director for International Marketing at KPC. He thanked His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah for their unlimited support, and confidence in him to represent Kuwait in this key post.

He pointed out that selecting him unanimously by the 13 member countries of OPEC is the result of strenuous efforts and tireless work over about three months that were led by Deputy Prime Minister, and Minister of Oil, Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy Dr Muhammad Al-Faris. He said that he would start his duties early August, noting that he would offer aspirations and ideas, in coordination with the member states, that aim to revive the OPEC and overcome the future challenges to maintain balance and stability of the oil markets. He said that the challenge in the long run is to look at the region's role in discussions related to climate



KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets former Minister of Health Dr Basel Al-Sabah. — KUNA

change and other topics, stressing his endeavors to meet aspirations of all OPEC member states. Earlier, Minister Faris announced that all OPEC member states supported the appointment of

Kuwait's candidate as the organization's new chief. Ghais has a 30-year experience in the global oil markets and oil industry, and took part in several conferences. — KUNA

Zain holds third COVID vaccination campaign for staff

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, held a third COVID-19 vaccination campaign for its staff at its main headquarters in Shuwaikh in collaboration with the Ministry of Health. The company provided the booster shot of the COVID-19 vaccine to its employees with the aim of supporting the nation's efforts in immunizing the community during the present time.

Zain considers itself an active partner of the Ministry of Health and other institutions in protecting the local community against the threats of the pandemic. Since the early days of the crisis, Zain was keen on effectively responding to the efforts of various authorities in the nation by supporting initiatives and programs that contributed to lessening the health, economic, and social impacts of the pandemic.

The third internal vaccination campaign came as a continuation of the first two campaigns Zain held back in June and July of last year, where a large number of staff received their vaccinations at the company's main headquarters. The Ministry of Health's team was present a third time to administer booster shots in an effort to reinforce the immunity of the largest number of interested employees.

Zain expressed its utmost appreciation and gratitude to the Ministry of Health's officials for



KUWAIT: Zain officials with the Ministry of Health's team during the vaccination campaign.

responding to its call to conduct the three internal vaccination campaigns, as well as for their keenness on being present at the company's main HQ to coordinate the campaign efficiently. Zain hopes such initiatives would contribute to imprinting a positive impact in strengthening social immunity and supporting MOH's efforts in protecting the community from the pandemic.

Throughout the past two years, Zain has showcased the spirit of responsibility as a leading

national company by making its human and tech resources available to shoulder the public sector and maintain the nation's wellbeing. The company also launched numerous social awareness campaigns aimed at elevating the health and safety of the community. Not only that, but Zain was also keen on continuing its support of social, educational, and cultural initiatives - which it has always been a top supporter of - in a virtual format this time to adhere to official health measures and

guidelines to keep everyone involved safe.

Zain's tireless efforts have extended throughout the year, where it has launched its own social initiatives, supported existing health and social programs, in addition to handling the crisis, all under its corporate sustainability and social responsibility strategy. Being one of the biggest private sector leaders in the country, Zain was keen on reflecting its role by supporting the public sector, especially during crises which show the nation's true soul.

New Cabinet takes oath in heated...

Continued from Page 1

A vote held to approve the minutes of the Assembly clearly shows that the strength of the opposition has shrunk substantially to around 25 members, down from 31, because three opposition members became ministers and voted with the government, in addition to MPs Wasmî and Daihani. At the end of the session, Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said that due to the resignation of the former Cabinet, all eleven grillings on the agenda in addition to the decision regarding delaying grillings against the prime minister will be automatically removed.

Kuwait reports 1,482 COVID cases; US...

Continued from Page 1

The heavily mutated Omicron strain - the most transmissible to date - accounted for around 59 percent of US cases in the week ending Dec 25, according to government modeling. Fauci said the experience of South Africa - where the strain was first detected in late November and peaked quickly, then subsided nearly as speedily - offered some hope.

Rates of death and hospitalization in the United States have been lower in recent weeks than during previous COVID surges. With 9,382 deaths over the past seven days, the nation's death toll has fallen by 10 percent, week on week. In the last seven days, the country has recorded 3.4 million cases according to Johns Hopkins data. The US record during previous waves was 258,000 cases per day, for the week of January 5 to 11, 2021.

On Monday, the US Food and Drug Administration approved Pfizer's COVID-19 booster shot for children as young as 12 ahead of the reopening of schools following the holiday break. COVID-19 has killed at least 5,441,446 people glob-

ally since the outbreak emerged in Dec 2019, according to an AFP tally compiled from official sources on Monday. Taking into account excess mortality linked to COVID-19, the World Health Organization estimates the overall death toll could be two to three times higher.

Also, Cypriot authorities were meeting yesterday to consider new restrictions to rein in a COVID infection rate that is now the highest in the world per capita. Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades was to meet with scientific advisers to discuss measures that could include a delayed start to the new school term and restrictions on church gatherings as the island prepares to mark Epiphany, a key date in the Greek Orthodox religious calendar, tomorrow.

Like other European countries, the Mediterranean island has been hit by a surge in cases of the highly contagious Omicron variant of the coronavirus. According to AFP figures, Cyprus recorded the world's highest COVID infection rate per 100,000 inhabitants over the past seven days. It was top with 2,505 cases per 100,000 inhabitants, followed by Denmark (2,117), Ireland (1,946), Greece (1,762) and France (1,680). Last week, Cyprus registered five consecutive daily record highs culminating in a New Year's Eve spike of 5,048 in a population of around one million. Monday's caseload of 5,024 neared that record. — Agencies

Theranos founder Holmes found...

Continued from Page 1

"The guilty verdicts in this case reflect Ms. Holmes' culpability in this large-scale investor fraud and she must now face sentencing for her crimes," US Attorney Stephanie Hinds said in a prepared statement read outside the courthouse by a representative. Holmes made no comment as she left the court when asked if she intended to appeal.

The 37-year-old now faces the possibility of 20 years behind bars for each conviction. She remains at liberty ahead of another hearing on the terms of her bail next week. No date was set for sentencing. Holmes had vowed to revolutionize health diagnos-

tics with self-service machines that could run an array of tests on just a few drops of blood, a vision that drew high-profile backers and made her a billionaire by the age of 30.

She was hailed as the next tech visionary on magazine covers and collected mountains of investors' cash, but it all collapsed after Wall Street Journal reporting revealed the machines did not work as promised. Prosecutors spent 11 weeks presenting over two dozen witnesses, as they painstakingly laid out their argument that Holmes knew her technology fell short, and deliberately misled investors and patients.

She personally put the logos of pharma giants Pfizer and Schering-Plough onto Theranos reports hailing the company's blood-testing technology, which were then shared with investors. That was done without the firms' permissions, and was a key piece of the prosecution's argument that she purposely tried to inflate Theranos' credibility in order to win backers. — AFP

Heavy rain hits Oman; eight...

Continued from Page 1

in the southern regions of the country, we have seen an increase in casualties and deaths," spokesman for the national rescue service Mojtaba Khaledi said, quoted by state news agency IRNA. "So far eight people have died and two are still missing," Khaledi said, adding that 14 others had been injured.

Five of the deaths occurred in Fars province, local crisis management official Rahim Azadi told the state news agency. A local official had said Monday that at least two people were killed in flash flooding in the province. Heavy rain damaged "agriculture, infrastructure, urban and rural housing", Azadi said. Iran's Red Crescent has provided "emergency accommodation for more than 3,000 people, and over 20,000 have received relief assistance", its head of rescue and emergency operations Mehdi Valipour told state television.

"Houses have been flooded and infrastructure such as roads and communication systems have been damaged," he said, adding that more than 500 teams were providing assistance in parts of the country's south and east. Pictures published by the Red Crescent showed its personnel setting up tents in sports halls and assisting cars trapped on flooded roads or stuck in snow-covered mountain areas. Relief operations were underway in 87 cities across more than half of Iran's 31 provinces, it added.

Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi has asked local authorities in Fars, Hormozgan, Kerman and Sistan-Baluchestan provinces to use "all their resources and capacities" to aid residents, IRNA reported. President Ebrahim Raisi instructed Energy Minister Ali Akbar Mehrabian to inspect flood-hit areas in Sistan-Baluchestan and Hormozgan provinces, it added. The weather system is expected to last until Friday, an official from Iran's meteorological agency told state television.

Largely arid, Iran has endured repeated droughts over the past decade, but also regular floods. In 2019, heavy flooding in the country's south left at least 76 people dead and caused damage estimated at more than \$2 billion. Scientists say climate change amplifies droughts and that their intensity and frequency in turn threaten food security. — AFP

Cabinet takes constitutional oath at National Assembly

Parliament elects committees' members, approves letters



KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem attends the parliament's session yesterday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat and KUNA



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah takes the constitutional oath at parliament yesterday.



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



Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Mansour Al-Sabah takes the constitutional oath.



Deputy Prime Minister and Oil Minister Mohammad Al-Fares takes his oath.



Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Ali Al-Mousa takes the constitutional oath.



Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah takes the oath.



Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Minister of State For Communications and Information Technology Affairs Dr Rana Al-Fares takes her oath.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister and his Cabinet swore in and took the constitutional oath at the start of the National Assembly's ordinary session yesterday, to commence work as part of the assembly according to article 91 of the constitution. Several opposition members of parliament walked out of the session in protest to government's constitutional oath procedures. Article 91 of the constitution states that before taking up his functions at the Assembly or at its committees, a member of the National Assembly shall, at a public meeting of the Assembly, take the constitutional oath. An Amiri order on November 23 decreed the appointment of His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah as Prime Minister and tasked him with forming new Cabinet. Last week, an Amiri decree was issued appointing the new Cabinet of 15 ministers, headed by Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

Later, the National Assembly elected committee members to occupy vacancies for the second regular session of the 16th legislative term. The parliament recommended MP Khalil Al-Saleh as a complementary member in the Committee for Internal Affairs and Defense and MP Nasser Al-Dousari as a complementary member in the Legislative and Legal Affairs Committee. Kuwait's Parliament named MP Osama Al-Shaheen as a member in the Public Utilities Committee and MP Mubarak Al-Hajraf in the Environmental Committee. It also elected MP Hmoud Al-Azmi a member in the Parliamentary Budgets and Final Accounts Committee.

Assembly OKs letters

Furthermore, the National Assembly agreed on several letters in its regular session. The parliament agreed to delegate Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem to talk MP Yousef Al-Fadhala out of resignation. The National Assembly approved a request by MP Saleh Al-Mutairi to assign a committee to

study recent murders and find solutions "to this phenomenon" from legal, religious, social and psychological perspectives. Also during the session, the parliament approved MP Abdulaziz Al-Saqabi's request to build labor towns and ensure workers' rights in line with relevant international conventions.

A letter by MP Adnan Abdulsamad was also blessed by the parliament to issue a new law to establish a public company to observe increase of meat prices and combat commodities' monopoly. The National Assembly examined letters by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in which he expressed his appreciation and gratitude for the MPs for congratulating him for his first anniversary of assuming power and his safe return to the country after a private vacation. The parliament also agreed on several letters tackling interior affairs and laws.

Grilling request

Also during the session, MP Hamdan Al-Azmi



Minister of Commerce and Industry Fahad Al-Shuraian takes his oath.



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



Minister of Justice Jamal Al-Jalawi takes the constitutional oath.



Minister of Finance Abdulwahab Al-Rushaid takes the constitutional oath.



Minister of Education Dr Ali Al-Mudhaf takes his oath.

filed a request to grill the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah. The grilling motion is mainly based on five aspects. They encompass "enrolling women in army", "ignoring State Audit Bureau's remarks on a Eurofighter deal", "failing to cooperate with regulatory agencies or replying to parliamentary queries", "failing to safeguard state-owned lands", and "non-compliance with Cabinet decrees on recruitments".

The motion is based on Article 100 of the

Kuwaiti Constitution, which allows MPs to address grilling requests against the prime minister and Cabinet ministers in their capacities as such. Meanwhile, Speaker Ghanem announced he has received the interpellation request from Azmi against the defense minister, noting that it will be considered during the coming ordinary sitting. In the meantime, the defense minister said at the end of the parliament debate that he stands prepared to refute the aspects of the motion. — KUNA

On the occasion of the

60th
1961-2021
ANNIVERSARY



Subscribe or renew your subscription
KD 20 instead of KD 30 for 1 year

For individuals only

Tel: 24833199 ext.: 163-325-353- 354 or 66500982



kuwaittimes.net

Banquet, wedding halls see booking cancellations

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Amid a rise in the number of coronavirus cases in the country, celebrations for birthdays, weddings and anniversaries have been called off from Jan 9 till Feb 28, as per an order by the government. The decision triggered cancellations of numerous events and activities scheduled for January and February, including programs related to Hala February.

"This is for our safety and we need to follow the rules," said Melody, marketing officer at a four-star hotel in Kuwait City. "I have several bookings for January and February. These are all paid bookings; some of them were cancelled, but some called to tell us to wait and hold the money until Kuwait reallows functions and activities. We cannot blame the government for this decision, although it will again have a huge impact on our sales revenues," she said.

The Cabinet announced on Monday that all indoor social gatherings will be suspended from Jan 9, 2022 until Feb 28, 2022 amid a rise in coronavirus cases in the country. The Cabinet also decided that from yesterday, all passengers arriving to Kuwait must provide a negative PCR test taken 72 hours prior to arrival.

"At our hotel, we have several reservations, but no cancellations yet. I have functions organized by some Filipino organizations and some religious gatherings. Half the amount was paid upon reservation with the other half to be paid one day before the event. Some reservations were made by phone without payment, so those are on the waitlist," Abdulwatif, a banquet manager, told Kuwait Times.

Some who had planned to celebrate birthdays and anniversaries in January and February also decided to cancel. "I was planning to grandly celebrate my 50th birthday on January 13, but what to do? Let's follow the rules - you know the consequences if you do not. I will try to enjoy my 50th with my closest family and friends at home instead," Marissa said.

Kuwait has urged its citizens to leave several European countries including Britain, France and Germany because of a surge in cases of the Omicron coronavirus variant. In a series of statements overnight Sunday, the state also warned Kuwaitis, often big spenders abroad, to avoid travelling to these countries. The foreign ministry said they should "delay their trips" generally and, in particular, to France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Spain and Italy.

Indian embassy changes premises for consular services

KUWAIT: The Embassy of India in Kuwait released the following statement to announce change of premises for consular, passport and visa services. Consular, Passport, Visa (CPV) services at the Embassy Outsourcing Centers will operate from the following new premises as of January 11, 2022 as per the timings indicated:

- Sharq: Third floor - Jawahara Tower, Khalid Ibn Al-Waleed St, Kuwait City.
- Jleeb Al-Shuyouk (Abbasiya): Mezzanine floor, Olive Supermarket Building, Jleeb Al-Shuyouk, Kuwait.
- Fahaheel: Al-Anoud Shopping Complex, Mezzanine floor, Mecca Street, Fahaheel, Kuwait.

Timings: Saturday to Thursday: 08:00 - 12:00, 16:00 20:00. Friday: 16:00 20:00.

The new premises will be officially opened on January 10 at 10:00 at Sharq, 11:00 at Jleeb Al-Shuyouk and 12:00 at Fahaheel.

All applications for passports, visas and other consular services including attestation of the consular documents will be received at the new premises starting from 08:00 on January 11. There will be no attestation services at the Embassy premises from January 11. Death cases will continue to be registered at the Embassy premises during normal working hours and also after office hours in case of emergency.

More details will be made available on Embassy's website (<https://indembkwt.gov.in>) and social media platforms. A special online briefing on the new outsourcing centers is scheduled at 19:00 on January 9 on Zoom. (Meeting Code: 940 7864 2098 - Meeting ID: 313280). Information can also be obtained from Embassy's twelve (24x7) Whatsapp Helpline Numbers. In case of any further assistance, queries and suggestions, an email can be sent to cons1.kuwait@mea.gov.in.

Public Works Minister briefs Cabinet on emergency teams' efforts during rain

Ministers applaud efforts to ensure people's safety



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah (center) chairs the Cabinet's meeting. —KUNA

KUWAIT: Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Ali Hussein Al-Mousa briefed the Cabinet during its meeting on Monday on the heavy rains witnessed by the country on Sunday and the consequences of the accumulation of large amounts of water in main streets, highways and underpasses. The minister also spoke about the emergency teams' great efforts aiming to ensure the safety of citizens and residents and preserve public and private properties, Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah said after the meeting. The Cabinet thanked the continued sincere efforts made by the concerned bodies to deal with heavy rains.

Furthermore, the Cabinet followed up on the developments of the global epidemiological situation of coronavirus and Minister of Health Dr Khaled Al-Saeed briefed the ministers on the latest happenings on health situation in the country. The Cabinet demanded abiding by health requirements to make coronavirus indicators under control. It also advised people to take rapidly a booster shot of the anti-coronavirus vaccine to avoid this current wave of the pandemic, the minister added. Moreover, the government assigned Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs, in coordination with the Ministry of Health, to accelerate taking a decision on the draft law amending some provisions of Law No. 8 of 1969 regarding preventive health precautions against communicable diseases.

Government's program

In line with the article 98 of the Constitution, the

Kuwait oil price up as OPEC+ stick to output hike policy

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti crude oil went up Monday by 65 cents to \$79.70 per barrel (pb), compared with \$79.05 pb on last Friday, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said Tuesday. Globally, the Brent crude was up \$1.20 to \$78.98 pb and West Texas Intermediate also went up by 87 cents to \$76.08 pb.

The OPEC's daily basket of crude rose by three cents to reach \$78.00 per barrel on Monday, compared to \$77.97 pb last Friday, the cartel said Tuesday. The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) said on its bulletin that the average monthly rate of the basket hit \$69.89 pb in December. The OPEC+ alliance decided, at its 23rd ministerial meeting on December second, to maintain the current output plan, designed to increase the oil production gradually, with the conferees having decided to pursue increasing oil supplies by some 400,000 bpd. The conferees had also underlined the paramount significance of utter compliance and compensation mechanism for the alliance's member states.



Ali Al-Mousa

Development on the program. They said the government's work program confirms keenness to move forward to take all necessary measures to enhance economic growth, financial sustainability, social development and health care that enhance the prosperity of citizens through implementing reform programs and launching national strategies. The Cabinet approved the program and tasked the Deputy Prime Minister with submitting it to the National Assembly.

At the onset of the meeting, representative of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, briefed the Cabinet during its weekly meeting on Monday of the outcomes of his visits to Bahrain and Qatar. During the visits to the two countries, he delivered two written letters from His Highness the Amir to Bahrain's King Hamad bin Issa Al-Khalifa and Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani on the deep-rooted relations

Cabinet reviewed the program of the 16th legislative term for 2021/2022-2024/2025. It reviewed the visual presentation by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Oil and Minister of Electricity and Water and Sustainable Energy, and Secretary-General of Supreme Council for Planning and

between Kuwait and Bahrain, and Kuwait and Qatar, and their peoples as well as means of developing and promoting these ties.

Escalation against civilians

Meanwhile, the Cabinet condemned and denounced in the strongest terms the Houthi militia's continued attempts aiming to target Saudi Arabia's security through three drone attacks on its southern area. The ministers said that the continuation of these aggressive practices and escalation against civilians and civil areas, security of Saudi Arabia and the stability of the region constitutes a flagrant violation of the rules of international and humanitarian law. The Cabinet said such attacks require a rapid and decisive action from the international community to deter these threats and hold the perpetrators accountable. It affirmed Kuwait's full support to the sisterly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in all measures it takes to preserve its security, stability and sovereignty.

The Cabinet further condemned Houthi militias' blatant violations in Yemen with missile attacks on a popular market in Usaylan District of Shabwa governorate, eastern Yemen, after the Yemeni government forces had declared that it recaptured the area. The attacks left many civilians killed or wounded and caused serious damage to some civilian areas. In addition, the Cabinet deplored the piracy and hijacking of the UAE-flagged cargo ship Rawabi off the port of Hodeidah in the Red Sea. The ship carries equipment to operate the Saudi field hospital in the Yemeni island of Socotra. — KUNA



The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies, known as OPEC+, decided yesterday to proceed with a production hike of 400,000 barrels per day (bpd), keeping their current policy of slight monthly increases in output. The monthly increase of 400,000 bpd will begin in February as previously agreed on, said an OPEC+ statement, describing it as a measure aiming to protect the "stability" of the global oil market. The decision to proceed with the production hike, taken in a meeting on Tuesday, is based on the current needs of the global oil market, added the statement, amid worries over what effects the COVID-19 Omicron variant may have on energy demand. Yesterday's meeting came ahead of the next talks slated for February 2, where existential conditions in the oil market will be reassessed, added the statement. —KUNA

Kuwait Municipality to enforce gatherings' ban

KUWAIT: Kuwait Municipality Director General Ahmad Al-Manfouhi yesterday issued a resolution banning the holding of gatherings in closed places effective Sunday, in line with the Cabinet's decision in this respect. The municipality affirmed in a statement that the holding of weddings in tents and hotels has been barred. The ban also applies to gatherings at condolence halls at cemeteries, it said, re-affirming that precautions against COVID-19 must be observed at commercial stores as well. —KUNA

Pakistan envoy sends New Year greetings

KUWAIT: Ambassador of Pakistan to Kuwait Syed Sajjad Haider released the following message on the occasion of the new year:

"As 'New Year' marks a new beginning, therefore I convey my profound good wishes on commencement of 2022 with the belief that it will augur well for the world. The upcoming 2022 will surely bear witness to the fact that we have decisively turned a page in our history and have embarked upon our journey afresh with the resolve to overcome the divisive hazards of COVID-19 pandemic and other conflicts.

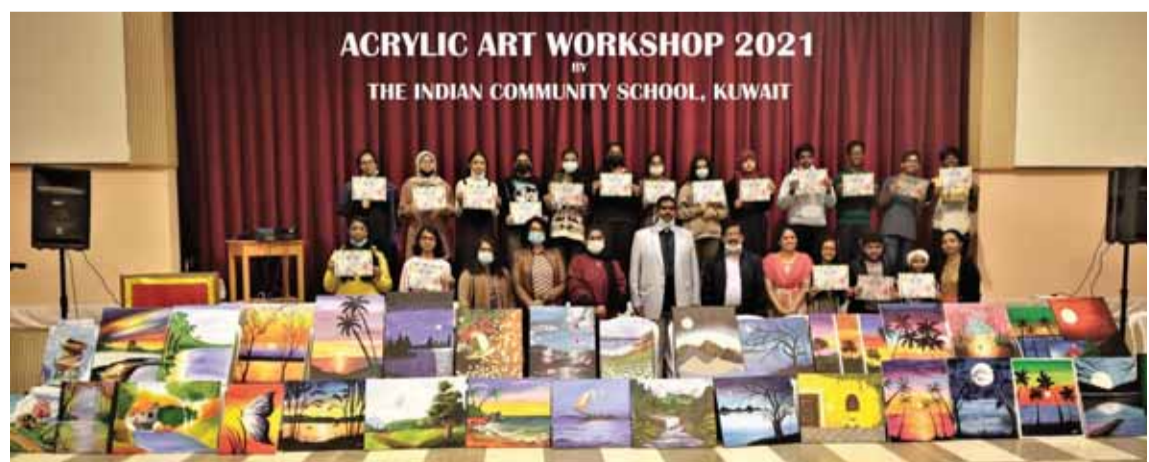
"The dawn of 2022 will surely make us candidly reflect on the year gone by, with a view to analyze the high points and shortcomings we experienced in our lives. The tidings of the New Year will instill in us the prudence to fine tune tenets of our existence and fill them with spirit of tolerance and fortitude.

"Let us make a resolve that the inception of 'New Year' will not just be restricted to change of another year in the calendar, but we shall collectively work to make the planet earth a peaceful place to live; a place with religious harmony, peaceful co-existence and respect for other human beings.

"The 'New Year' always brings a lot of hope and positivity to us. At the same time, we also need to focus on our responsibilities to counter the challenges being faced by the world. As our first priority, we should wholeheartedly play our part to eliminate the pandemic from the globe by maintaining the health protocols. In the end, I would once again like to extend my best wishes and felicitations for the new year. I pray that the coming year brings health, happiness and prosperity for everyone."



Pakistan's Ambassador
Syed Sajjad Haider



ICSK Senior hosts acrylic painting workshop

KUWAIT: The Indian Community School, Kuwait - Senior hosted a painting workshop recently to showcase students' artistic talents. "Vincent Van Gogh once said, 'If you hear a voice within you saying you cannot paint, then by all means paint, and that voice will be silent.' It is with this resonating thought that the Indian Community School, Kuwait - Senior embarked on a journey to hone the latent creative abilities in each budding artist," the school wrote in a press statement. The four-day acrylic painting workshop was organized by ICSK Art Department which gave hands-on experience to the students to go beyond their horizons to explore and

create something new, it added. The workshop was conducted from 27th to 30th December 2021 at ICSK Senior Branch.

The first day of the workshop was inaugurated by Susan Rajesh Pothen, Vice Principal - ICSK Senior and Mini Shaji Joseph, Deputy Vice Principal - ICSK Senior. A large number of students participated. Each student was given an opportunity to create two canvas paintings. Students were taught a wide range of skills, including pencil shading, canvas painting, color mixing and many more.

On the last day of the workshop, certificates were distributed to the participants by K Gangadhar Shirsath, Principal - ICSK Khaitan. Best canvases will be displayed in the school, ICSK added. "A carefully designed curriculum ensured that the students not only learned basics of art and craft but were able to express themselves freely," it noted in the press release. The event served as a platform for young minds to transcend the boundaries of their inherent aesthetic potential, it concluded.



Snowstorm batters US east, piling onto holiday chaos

Delhi imposes weekend curfew amid surge in COVID cases

Page 7

Page 6



GHAZNI: (Left) In this picture taken on Nov 13, 2021, Taliban fighters stand next to destroyed armored vehicles displayed along a road. (Right) Boys play on a destroyed armored vehicle. —AFP photos

Taliban put victory over US on display

Children clamber around and over destroyed American armored vehicles

GHAZNI, Afghanistan: In the governor's compound of Afghanistan's Ghazni province, a new exhibit is unveiled before a rapt audience of Taliban fighters - sections of blast walls from a former US military base. One concrete slab is inscribed with the names and regiments of US troops who served in the province during America's longest war. Like soldiers throughout history, US troops regularly daubed their names on the walls of bases and fixed positions they occupied.

But now the towering block is on public display - being used to bolster the Taliban's narrative of toppling US-led forces after 20 years of fighting. "We have to show this so that Afghans, the world, and future generations know that we beat the Americans," Taliban provincial culture chief Mullah

Habibullah Mujahid told AFP. "Even if they called themselves the greatest power in the world."

Taliban forces took the city of Ghazni - 150 km south of Kabul - three days before the capital fell on Aug 15. The region has 3,500 years of rich recorded history, and the Taliban are now busy writing the latest chapter with proof of their military triumph. The propaganda push comes as Afghanistan's new rulers struggle to evolve from an insurgency to a governing power in a country on the brink of economic collapse, with the UN estimating more than half the population is facing acute hunger.

On roads outside the city of nearly 200,000, another informal exhibition to the Taliban victory has been erected. Rusting hulks of destroyed American armored vehicles are on display, their

weapons removed, their tyres flat and frayed. Children clamber around and over the wreckage, which also features skeletons of abandoned Soviet tanks from the decade-long occupation of Afghanistan.

That invasion ended in humiliation for the Soviets, and - alongside the defeat of British troops in the 19th century - Afghans are quick to remind visitors that the country has now triumphed over three foreign empires. "We are proud of our achievement when we see this," said 18-year-old Taliban fighter Ozair, who like many in the country goes by only one name. "We showed that Afghans born here could beat America, a powerful country," he added, surveying the crumpled humvees and charred personnel carriers.

Reminders and relics of two decades of the US-led occupation of Afghanistan are scattered across the nation - some of them usable. Much military hardware gifted to Afghan police and armed forces fell into the hands of the Taliban in the last chaotic days of the US-backed government. The windfall of weapons, vehicles and uniforms has given the new rulers of Kabul tangible spoils of victory.

But curating those trophies into a credible homage to the Taliban's return to power remains a challenge. Standing at the blast walls, Mullah Habibullah Mujahid boasted that the 20 or so names inscribed included "important commanders and generals" killed in combat. The ranks listed, however, were all junior - and none of the names feature on databases of Americans killed in the war. —AFP

Canada court awards compensation over jet downed by Iran

TORONTO: A Canadian court has awarded more than \$80 million in compensation to the families of six people who died when Iran shot down a Ukrainian airliner almost two years ago, according to a decision made public Monday. Ukraine International Airlines flight PS752 was shot down shortly after take-off from Tehran on January 8, 2020, killing all 176 people aboard - including 85 Canadian citizens and permanent residents.

Three days later, the Iranian armed forces admitted to downing the Kyiv-bound plane "by mistake". Ontario Superior Court Judge Edward Belobaba had previously ruled that the strike on the civilian aircraft "constituted terrorist activity", paving the way for bereaved families to seek compensation. In the decision publicly shared Monday, he awarded the plaintiffs \$107 million Canadian dollars (\$83 million), plus interest.

It was unclear how the money would be collected from Iran, but Belobaba said he was "satisfied that some level of enforcement may well be possible and some level of deterrence may well be achieved". "(The plaintiffs' counsel said) viable Iranian-owned assets and investments remain accessible not only in Canada but worldwide," the judge wrote in his decision. Contacted by AFP on Monday evening, the plaintiffs' lawyer Mark Arnold did not immediately respond.

In a statement posted online Monday, the lawyers argued for Canada's jurisdiction over the compensation. "In 2012, the Justice for Victims of Terrorism Act and the State Immunity Act were amended to permit such claims to be brought against foreign states designated as state sponsors of terrorism," lawyers Mark Arnold and Jonah Arnold said. "Canada designated the Islamic Republic of Iran as such a state."

In May, the same judge concluded that Iran had committed a "terrorist" act by shooting down the Ukrainian aircraft. Tehran denounced that ruling, saying it had "no basis" and insisting that the Canadian court lacked the authority to render such a decision. The plaintiffs had asked for \$1.5 billion Canadian dollars in damages. In a final report in March, the Iranian Civil Aviation Organization (CAO) said its air defense systems were on high alert for a US counter-attack after Tehran fired missiles at a military base in Iraq that was used by US forces.

The Islamic republic had just attacked a US base in Iraq in response to the killing of General Qassem Soleimani, and was expecting a response from Washington. Ukraine denounced the report as a "cynical attempt to hide the real causes" of the tragedy, while Ottawa said the report was "incomplete" and lacked "hard evidence". A group of countries led by Canada said in June that they had filed an action against Iran to seek compensation for the families of the victims. —AFP

Tear gas fired at Sudan rally as thousands march

KHARTOUM: Sudanese security forces fired tear gas yesterday at anti-coup protesters in Khartoum chanting slogans against the military days after the resignation of the country's civilian premier, witnesses said. Protesters shouted "No, no to military rule" and called for the disbandment of Sudan's ruling council headed by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, who led an Oct 25 coup that derailed a transition to civilian rule.

Thousands of protesters gathered across Sudan, including in Khartoum and its twin city of Omdurman as well as the eastern city of Port Sudan and the South Darfur capital of Nyala. Demonstrators in east Khartoum "burnt car tyres and built rock barricades on the streets," witness Sawwan Salah said. Other protesters urged the military "to go back to the barracks."

Streets leading to the presidential palace and army headquarters were sealed off amid a heavy presence of troops, riot police and paramilitary units, the witnesses said. Pro-democracy activists have stepped up calls for demonstrations since the October coup which saw then-prime minister Abdalla Hamdok and cabinet ministers detained. The coup has triggered mass demonstrations and a bloody crackdown that has left at least 57 people dead and hundreds wounded, according to the independent Doctors' Committee. At least 13 women have allegedly been raped during the unrest, according to the United Nations.

On Nov 21, Burhan reinstated Hamdok in an agreement promising elections in mid-2023, but the protest movement slammed the deal as a "betrayal" and has kept up its protests. Late Sunday, Hamdok announced that he was stepping down, saying he had tried to prevent the



OMDURMAN: Sudanese demonstrators burn tyres during a protest demanding civilian rule in Khartoum's twin city yesterday. —AFP

country "from sliding toward disaster" but that it was now at a "dangerous crossroads threatening its very survival".

'Urgent action'

Arab League chief Ahmed Aboul Gheit said yesterday that he "respects" Hamdok's decision and called for "urgent action" to resolve the crisis. UN chief Antonio Guterres "regrets that a political understanding on the way forward is not in place despite the gravity of the situation in Sudan", UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Monday. Sudan has been navigating a fragile transition towards full civilian rule since the April 2019 ouster of veteran president Omar al-Bashir following an unprecedented wave of youth-led protests.

Earlier on Monday, prominent MP Mohamed Anwar Sadat had announced "an imminent decision to release" Shaath and deport him. Shaath, 50, was a figure of the 2011 uprising in Egypt and the coordinator of the Egyptian chapter of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement against Israel. He was arrested in July 2019 and faced charges of aiding a terrorist organization.

In April 2020, he was placed on Egypt's terror list alongside 12 other people. In December, five human rights groups called on French President Emmanuel Macron to pressure Egypt to release Shaath. Macron had previously addressed his detention in a news conference in Paris with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in Dec 2020. Rights groups say Egypt is holding some 60,000 political prisoners, many facing brutal conditions and overcrowded cells. Egypt ranks in the lowest group on the Global Public Policy Institute's Academic Freedom Index.

Activists online had urged demonstrators to head to the presidential palace in Khartoum "until victory is achieved", according to the Sudanese Professionals Association, an alliance of independent trade unions that was instrumental in the anti-Bashir protests. Last month, Burhan issued a decree allowing security forces to arrest individuals "over crimes related to the state of emergency", effectively banning street protests.

Security forces are allowed to enter and search "any building or individual" and impose "surveillance of any property and facility". Since the coup, authorities have often disrupted internet services and communication lines to make it more difficult for activists to organize protests. —AFP

Egyptian-Palestinian freed after more than two years in prison

CAIRO: Egypt's prosecution ordered the release of Egyptian-Palestinian activist Ramy Shaath on Monday after almost two and a half years in detention, a judiciary source told AFP. The source said that Shaath, the son of veteran Palestinian politician Nabil Shaath, "has been released by the prosecution". There were no further details. His wife, French national Celine Lebrun, told AFP: "I heard about the decision but according to what I know he is not yet out." She added that she would release a statement once he is confirmed to be free. Lebrun was deported from Egypt shortly after her husband's arrest.

The decision to release Shaath comes almost a month after an Egyptian court freed researcher Patrick Zaki whose detention in 2020 sparked international condemnation. Zaki was freed on December 7 but still faced charges of "spreading false news", "harming national security" and "incitement to overthrow the state", among others. He had been referred to trial in September before an exceptional state security court for an article containing excerpts from his personal diary recounting the discrimination faced by the country's Coptic Christian minority. —AFP



Ramy Shaath

International

Snowstorm batters US east, piling onto holiday chaos

Biden temporarily stranded on Air Force One

WASHINGTON: After a bruising holiday week of flight cancellations and record surges in COVID-19 cases, a powerful winter snowstorm Monday further snarled US transport, shuttering the federal government and bringing Washington to a standstill. The storm packed an unexpectedly fierce punch and appeared to have caught much of the capital city off guard, temporarily stranding US President Joe Biden on Air Force One and dumping up to 23 cm of snow on Washington.

Many Americans have been scrambling to return home after the Christmas and New Year period, with thousands of flights cancelled due to bad weather and airline staffing woes blamed in part on rising coronavirus infections among crews. More than 4,900 flights Monday, the first workday of 2022, were cancelled globally as of 8:30 pm (0130 GMT Tuesday), including 3,173 flights within, into or out of United States, according to flight-tracking website FlightAware.

The latest cancellations - along with 6,775 US flight delays Monday - compounded holiday travel misery. While much of the US Mid-Atlantic was caught in the bad weather, conditions were acute in the capital and neighboring states of Maryland and Virginia, where accumulation in some spots topped 12 inches, according to meteorologists who described it as the region's biggest snowstorm in at least two years.

"This is a heavy snow," said Mayor Muriel

Bowser of Washington, where plows scrambled to clear snow, trees and power lines tumbled, the US Senate postponed votes and health officials cancelled COVID testing. "If it is not absolutely necessary for you to go out, stay home and off the roads," she warned. Airports were experiencing blizzard conditions, with authorities at Washington and Baltimore airports reportedly ordering temporary ground stops during a midday whiteout.

Biden himself was snowed in aboard his presidential aircraft after landing at Joint Base Andrews near Washington, with deboarding delayed by half an hour so the tarmac could be plowed. The winter blast offered a distraction from Washington's endless political divides: in bucolic scenes, children were seen sledding on Capitol Hill, while adventurers cross-country skied on the National Mall.

'I need to go home!'

But for everyday passengers, holiday travel morphed into a nightmare. "Hey @SouthwestAir can you stop cancelling every single flight out of DCA (Washington National Airport)? I need to go home!" passenger Kyle Hughes wrote on Twitter. Federal workers in and around the capital were told to stay home. But with telework becoming routine during the two-year coronavirus pandemic, it was unclear how much of the government would be affected.

Schools around the region were also closed due to snow. Airports in Chicago and Atlanta - major



WASHINGTON: A man tries to cross a street with a double baby stroller during a snowstorm on Monday. — AFP

transit hubs - as well as Denver, Detroit, Houston and Newark were hard hit over the weekend. By Monday the east coast airports in New York, Washington and Baltimore were scrapping the most flights. A woman named Kayla described her own ordeal Sunday: "I was supposed to get home at 10:30 yesterday morning and at this point I've had 3 flights cancelled and one delayed to the point where

I missed my connection."

Around the world, air traffic has suffered snarls over the holidays because of airline staffing issues linked to the spread of the highly contagious Omicron coronavirus variant. Many pilots and flight attendants have called in sick after testing positive or being forced to quarantine due to contact with someone who has the virus. —AFP



Schools around region closed due to snow

S Africa parliament fire contained, suspect in court

CAPE TOWN: A fire that devastated South Africa's parliament was finally contained yesterday after a two-day battle, firefighters said, as a man appeared in court to face charges of starting the blaze. Flames broke out in the Cape Town complex before dawn on Sunday, spreading to the National Assembly, whose roof collapsed, and threatening national treasures housed in an older section. The blaze was initially declared under control on Monday but then flared up again, fanned by strong winds.

"Firefighters managed to contain the fire just before 12:00 last night," spokesman Jermaine Carelse told AFP. There were fresh flames again early Tuesday, he added, which firefighters extinguished. "We currently have four fire engines on scene with approximately 20 staff members that will monitor the situation throughout the day."

A 49-year-old man, Zandile Christmas Mafe, was arrested in the complex on Sunday. He appeared briefly in court yesterday to answer charges of breaking into and "setting fire to parliamentary buildings" and intention to steal property, including "laptops, crockery and documents". Bearded and dressed in a grey shirt with knee-length shorts, he removed his mask on arriving in court and turned to present his face to the TV cameras and press photographers.

His attorney, Luvuyo Godla, who is defending him pro bono, said the defendant pleaded not guilty, while

prosecutors argued against granting him bail. He was remanded in custody until January 11 pending further inquiries, which depend on when investigators can gain access to the building.

Catastrophe

No casualties have been reported in the fire, but the damage has shocked the country. The blaze tore through the wood-panelled assembly where parliamentary debates are held and the president makes his annual state-of-the-nation address. Carelse said such was the devastation that a parliamentary session would not be held there for a long time.

Parliament spokesman Moloto Mothapo said "the entire chamber where the members sit... has burned down". The fire started in the older part of the complex - a section that once housed South Africa's first parliament. Completed in 1884, the section is where parliament keeps treasures, including around 4,000 heritage and artworks, some dating back to the 17th century. The fire then spread to the newer National Assembly and a third building housing the upper house, the National Council of Provinces.

Security question

Investigators said the fire broke out in two separate areas and the water sprinkler system did not work properly because the water was cut off. Surveillance cameras showed the suspect in the buildings at around 2:00 am. "However, security only saw him at 6:00 am, when they looked at the screens after being alerted by the smoke," Public Works Minister Patricia de Lille told AFP.

"CCTVs were working. The problem is that there was no monitoring of the CCTV cameras on that fateful night," she told a news conference on Monday.

interests, blackmail the state," he said.

Long plagued by poverty, natural disasters and gang violence, the Caribbean nation has been without a functioning parliament and with a paralyzed judiciary for two years, and Moise's assassination has only exacerbated the situation. His murder six months ago in the private presidential residence underscored the deep political, social and economic crisis the Caribbean country has been stuck in for years.

While several Haitians, two US citizens of Haitian origin and about 15 Colombian nationals have been accused of taking part in the assassination and been imprisoned in Port-au-Prince since the summer, the investigation itself has shown few further signs of progress. One of the suspects, arrested in October in Jamaica, will be returned to Colombia due to a lack of evidence, Jamaican media said on Saturday.

Daily kidnappings

The growing reach of criminal gangs across the country is undermining hopes of improving the living conditions for ordinary Haitians, who are victims of daily kidnappings by ruthless groups. Two years after the departure of the last United Nations police officers from the country, the prime minister insisted that Haitian forces will be able to restore security. "So far I have never asked for foreign troops," Henry told AFP, although he said the international community should support the country's police in training "and

agreements to limit NATO's expansion.

US officials say they are willing to discuss concerns. But few see the Biden administration as interested in grand agreements, with its objective instead changing Putin's calculus and, at best, bringing greater stability to relations. Underlying the approach is a threat to impose on Putin, in Biden's words, "sanctions like he's never seen" if he encroaches further into Ukraine, where Russia already backs an insurgency that has claimed more than 13,000 lives since 2014.

Bill Taylor, the former US ambassador to Ukraine, said the main idea was to convince Putin that the costs would be "very high" to an invasion. "The whole idea is to make it clear to Mr Putin that he



CAPE TOWN: Zandile Christmas Mafe, a suspect in connection to a fire at the South African parliament, appears in the Cape Town Magistrates Court yesterday. —AFP

"Certainly, there was a security breach," she added, saying that this was under investigation. The fire broke out just a few hundred meters from St George's Cathedral, where anti-apartheid icon Desmond Tutu's ashes were interred on Sunday while the blaze raged, a day after his funeral.

Last March another fire also broke out in the older wings of parliament, but it was quickly contained. Cape Town suffered another major fire in April, when a blaze on the famed Table Mountain, which overlooks the city, ravaged part of the University of Cape Town's library holding a unique collection of African archives. South Africa has an unusual political arrangement in that its parliament is in Cape Town while the seat of government lies in Pretoria, more than 1,300 km to the north. The country's economic and financial hub is Johannesburg. —AFP

possibly equipment". "With our men, with the police, we are going to get there, we have to get there," he said.

At least 950 kidnappings were recorded in Haiti in 2021, according to the Center for Analysis and Research in Human Rights, an organization based in Port-au-Prince. Last October, 17 North Americans linked to a Christian aid group were kidnapped after visiting an orphanage near the capital in an area controlled by the so-called "400 Mawozo", one of Haiti's most powerful gangs. The last of the hostages were released last month.

In April, 10 people, including two French clerics, were kidnapped and held for 20 days by 400 Mawozo in the same region. In August, a 7.2-magnitude earthquake killed over 2,200 people and destroyed or heavily damaged tens of thousands of homes in a nation still recovering from 2010's devastating quake. Adding to the country's misery, 75 people were killed last month in an explosion while trying to siphon gasoline from a tanker that had crashed in Haiti's second largest city of Cap-Haitien. —AFP

has a choice," said Taylor, now vice president for strategic stability and security at the US Institute of Peace. One immediate measure would likely be sanctions against Putin's inner circle and their families, depriving them of the right to travel or keep money in the West.

Germany has indicated that the cost of a Ukraine invasion could be ending Nord Stream 2 - the gas pipeline from Russia that is nearly complete despite years of criticism from the United States and Eastern European nations. One far-reaching option mullied in the West would be cutting Russia off the SWIFT network that connects the world's banks, a step earlier taken against Iran but not attempted against a major global economy. —AFP



HALIFAX, United Kingdom: Staff at Park Lane Academy process students' COVID-19 lateral flow rapid antigen tests as they undertake a program to test every pupil in school on the first day of term yesterday. —AFP

Britons warned of hospital crisis over Omicron surge

LONDON: Britain yesterday faced warnings of an impending hospital crisis due to staff shortages caused by a wave of Omicron infections, as the country returned to work after Christmas. Daily case numbers chalked up multiple records in the run-up to New Year, with Prime Minister Boris Johnson promising action to plug staffing gaps in the worst-hit areas. Hospital admissions have not hit anything like the peaks of previous waves of the pandemic and the number of people requiring ventilation has remained flat so far. But the state-run National Health Service (NHS), which is regularly under strain during the winter months from seasonal respiratory infections, is struggling with staff forced to stay at home after testing positive. Transport networks also battled absences, leaving commuters facing long waits on their return to work, while other public services such as household bin collections were hampered.

Minister for vaccines and public health Maggie Throup told Sky News it was unclear how many Britons were currently in self-isolation after the Christmas surge in the highly transmissible virus mutation. "But what is good news, it doesn't seem to be resulting in severe diseases as some of the other variants did," she told Sky News. Around 50,000 NHS staff were absent from work last week because they were ill or self-isolating. The Sunday Times has reported. At least six hospital trusts have declared critical incidents, which mean crucial services may be under threat.

'Almost impossible'

Matthew Taylor, chief executive of the NHS Confederation which represents healthcare providers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, said cases appeared to have levelled off in London. But he told Times Radio that staff shortages and rising cases across the rest of the country were a concern. "The unpredictability of staff absence means NHS leaders having to work around the clock just thinking about how they can deploy their resources best to deal with the most urgent and pressing needs," he added. "Even using all their imagination and creativity, it is becoming almost impossible, which is why we see hospitals declaring critical incidents." Anyone testing positive for the virus has to self-isolate for 10 days, or seven days if they produce a negative test. There have been calls to ease those restrictions for health staff to ease what Johnson on Monday said was "considerable pressure" on hospitals.

Taylor said reducing the self-isolation period to five days should only be done if the data indicated it was "absolutely safe". Pupils returning to school also faced the prospect of mass staff absences and merged classes. Secondary school pupils have been advised to wear face masks in class as a "temporary" measure. Britain has seen nearly 149,000 deaths since the start of the pandemic in early 2020 and Johnson has defended his decision not to increase restrictions over Christmas in England, unlike in other parts of the UK. A review of restrictions is expected this week. —AFP

Haitian PM says was targeted in assassination bid

PORT-AU-PRINCE: Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry told AFP in an interview Monday that he was targeted in an assassination attempt during weekend national day celebrations. "An attempt has been made against me personally. My life has been put in the crosshairs," said Henry, who has been de-facto running the country since the July assassination of president Jovenel Moise.

Clashes between police and armed groups erupted on Saturday during official celebrations in the city of Gonaives, some 150 km north of the capital Port-au-Prince, where Haiti's declaration of independence was signed over 200 years ago. Photos provided to AFP by Henry's office show a bullet impact mark on the windshield of his armored vehicle.

The events come weeks after groups of citizens and members of armed gangs in Gonaives had violently expressed their opposition to Henry's visiting their city. "I knew I was taking a risk," Henry told AFP in a telephone interview. "We cannot let bandits from any background, driven by the lowest financial

Biden strategy on Ukraine - talks but clear costs for Russia

WASHINGTON: From severing Russia from the world's banking system to further arming Kyiv, US President Joe Biden is hoping threats of painful consequences will deter his counterpart Vladimir Putin from invading Ukraine. With tens of thousands of Russian troops amassed on Ukraine's border, the Biden administration has accepted talks in Geneva next week with Moscow which has proposed



Ariel Henry

International

Regional rights bastion Taiwan clings to capital punishment

Activists campaigning to exonerate island's oldest death row prisoner

TAIPEI: Taiwan's claim to be a regional bastion of human rights is undermined by its retention of capital punishment, activists say as they campaign to exonerate the island's oldest death row prisoner. Wang Xin-fu is among 38 inmates in Taiwan awaiting execution, which is carried out by gunshot and without advance notice once all appeals are exhausted. At 69, Wang is Taiwan's most elderly prisoner on death row and has consistently maintained his innocence.

Rights groups led by the Taiwan Alliance to End the Death Penalty (TAEDP) have launched a campaign to exonerate Wang, arguing he was wrongfully convicted as a joint offender for the murder of a policeman in 1990. Wang had been detained in his youth and classified by Taiwan's then authoritarian government as a "thug". He was sentenced to death for supplying a gun to a "lackey" and ordering him to shoot the victim, based on testimonies from the shooter and witnesses.

But activists claim there are "obvious flaws" in the conviction, from inconsistent testimony, allegations of police torture against a witness, a lack of motive and no fingerprints. "He is a so-called 'bad guy' but bad guys also have rights. He should not be sentenced for a crime that's not his doing," said Lin Hsin-yi, executive director of TAEDP. Wang fled to mainland China after learning he was wanted and was only arrested in 2006 upon returning to Taiwan for treatment of an eye ailment. He was convicted and the supreme court upheld his death sentence in a final ruling in 2011.

Last chance

In November activists appealed to the Control Yuan, Taiwan's top government watchdog, after the

office of the top prosecutor rejected their request to file a "special appeal" for Wang - one of the only ways to challenge a final conviction. That tactic has previously worked. In 2018, the Control Yuan recommended the prosecutor-general file a special appeal for death row prisoner Hsieh Chih-hung, who had been jailed for 19 years for murder. That eventually led to his acquittal.

Now a free man, Hsieh campaigns for abolishing the death penalty, saying his and other exonerations show the capital punishment system is fallible. Campaigners point to one of Taiwan's most disput-



38 inmates awaiting execution

ed and lengthy cases, when a court in 2012 quashed the convictions of three men sentenced to death over the murder of a couple two decades ago, after they had undergone a string of trials and retrials.

Another high-profile case came the year before when a military court declared that an air force private executed 14 years previously for the rape and murder of a five-year-old girl was innocent. "The government thinks carrying out executions is the will of the people but does that really solve the problems?" Hsieh told AFP. Another death row pris-



TAIPEI: In this photo taken on Nov 12, 2021, a life-size placard of Taiwan's oldest death row inmate Wang Xin-fu is seen with activists gathered outside the building of government watchdog body Control Yuan as they campaign for his exoneration. — AFP

oner that activists campaign for is Chiou Ho-shun, who has been incarcerated for more than three decades.

Popular support

Capital punishment remains popular in Taiwan. Despite its frequent use against dissidents during decades of martial law, most polls show Taiwanese still support the death penalty even as the island has become one of the most progressive democracies in Asia. Some 35 prisoners have been put to death since 2010 when Taiwan resumed executions after a

four-year hiatus, including two since President Tsai Ing-wen took office in 2016.

Activists have criticized Tsai's government - which has embraced progressive issues such as gay marriage - for continuing with the executions. Tsai has called abolishing capital punishment "a difficult issue to deal with" due to the lack of support from the public that would require "a long process, a long time" to change. The justice ministry said it restarted a taskforce in 2017 aimed at facilitating gradual abolition and has been studying alternatives while trying to build a public consensus. — AFP

24,000 evacuated, two dead in Indonesian floods

LHOK SUKON, Indonesia: About 24,000 people have been evacuated and two children killed in floods on Indonesia's Sumatra island, officials said yesterday, with environmental campaigners blaming deforestation for worsening the disaster. Torrential rains have hammered the island for days, causing rivers to burst their banks and sending water levels surging in residential areas, the national disaster agency said.

"We experience flooding at least five to eight times a year - but (this) is one of the most severe," said Muzakkir, from Pirak Timur in hard-hit Aceh province, who like many Indonesians goes by one name. Syarifuddin, from the village of Lhok Sukon in Aceh, said the "floodwaters just kept rising - at my house, they are up to my chest".

The province is where the evacua-

tions and deaths have occurred, as well as some buildings destroyed by fast-moving floodwaters and agricultural land damaged. Jambi province on Sumatra was also hard hit, with many homes flooded. Environmental NGO Walhi said the flooding was worsened by deforestation to make way for Sumatra's expansive palm oil plantations.

Trees act as natural defenses against floods, slowing the rate at which water runs down hills and into rivers. Logging on higher ground was having a particularly damaging impact in Aceh, said Ahmad Shalihin from Walhi. Neighboring Malaysia has also been hard hit by flooding since last month, and thousands more people have been forced to flee their homes in recent days amid new downpours.

The number of people evacuated to government shelters stood at



GAMPONG MEUNASAH, Indonesia: A family wades through floodwaters outside a residence in North Aceh yesterday. — AFP

around 13,000 on Tuesday, with the states of Johor, Malacca and Sabah the worst affected. But the numbers have fallen considerably from a peak of around 70,000 in mid-December, when Malaysia saw its worst floods

for years. About 50 people have been killed so far in the floods nationwide, according to police. Flooding and landslides are common in both Southeast Asian countries during the months-long rainy season. — AFP

Delhi imposes weekend curfew amid COVID surge

NEW DELHI: India's capital New Delhi will lock down over the weekend as authorities grapple with a fresh surge in coronavirus cases, partly fueled by the fast-spreading Omicron variant. The country was battered by a devastating COVID outbreak last year that overwhelmed hospitals and crematoriums, but daily case numbers had since then stayed reasonably low until last week.

Delhi's new restrictions came the same day the sprawling megacity's chief minister, Arvind Kejriwal, announced he had been infected and was suffering "mild symptoms". Kejriwal said he was isolating at

home and urged those in contact with him in the past few days to get tested. The capital last week closed gyms and cinemas, as well as imposing an overnight curfew in an effort to stem the spread.

All residents besides essential workers will now be asked to stay home from Friday night to Monday morning. "The government is fully prepared to fight any COVID situation," the city's deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia said in a Tuesday address. More than 200,000 people died across India last spring after a wave of Delta variant infections that brought the healthcare system to its knees.

India's 481,000 known COVID deaths is the world's third-highest toll, behind the United States and Brazil. But under-reporting is widespread and some studies have estimated its actual toll could be up to 10 times higher. India began rolling out vaccinations for teenagers on Monday and will offer booster doses for people over 60 from next week. — AFP

China locks down city of 1.2m after three virus cases

BEIJING: More than one million people in a city in central China were being confined to their homes yesterday after three asymptomatic coronavirus cases were recorded in the country's latest mass lockdown. Beijing has pursued a "zero COVID" approach with tight border restrictions and targeted lockdowns since the virus first emerged. But the strategy has come under pressure with a series of recent local outbreaks and with just a month to go until the Winter Olympics.

Yuzhou, a city with a population of around 1.17 million people in Henan province, announced that from Monday night all citizens were required to stay home to control the spread of the virus. The announcement was triggered by the discovery of three cases in the last couple of days. People in the central area "must not go out", according to a statement posted Monday, while all communities will set up "sentinels and gates to strictly implement epidemic prevention and control measures".

The city had already announced that it was halting bus and taxi services and closing shopping malls, museums and tourist attractions. China reported another 175 new COVID-19 cases yester-



NINGBO, China: A resident undergoes a nucleic acid test for the coronavirus in this city in Zhejiang province yesterday. — AFP

day, including five in Henan province and eight more in a separate cluster linked to a garment factory in the eastern city of Ningbo. Although the reported cases are low compared with elsewhere in the world, new coronavirus infections in recent weeks have reached a high not seen in the country since March 2020.

There were 95 fresh cases recorded in Xi'an yesterday - a historic city of 13 million people in neighboring Shaanxi province - which has been under lockdown for nearly two weeks. Xi'an has reported more than 1,600 cases since Dec 9, although numbers in the last few days have started to slide compared to last week's figures. — AFP



NEW DELHI: A medical worker takes a swab sample from a man for a reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) test for the coronavirus at a health center yesterday. — AFP

HK activist jailed for Tiananmen 'incitement'

HONG KONG: Jailed democracy activist Chow Hang-tung accused Hong Kong's courts yesterday of criminalizing speech and helping authorities erase the Tiananmen crackdown as she was convicted a second time for inciting people to commemorate the deadly event. Chow, a 36-year-old lawyer who has represented herself at multiple court hearings with often fiery denunciations from the dock, is a former leader of the Hong Kong Alliance.

The now-disbanded group used to organize the city's huge annual candlelight vigils to mourn those killed in Beijing on June 4, 1989 when China sent troops to crush democracy protests. Hong Kong police banned the last two vigils citing the coronavirus and security fears and the courts have already jailed multiple activists who defied that ban in 2020, including Chow.

Chow was also arrested on the morning of June 4 last year over two pieces she published calling on residents to light candles and mark the crackdown anniversary. Yesterday, a court sentenced her to 15 months in jail after ruling that her articles amounted to inciting others to defy the police ban. "The message this verdict sends is that lighting a candle is guilty, that

News in brief

14 killed in China landslide

BEIJING: A landslide at a construction site in southwest China's Guizhou province has killed at least 14 people, state media reported yesterday. Workers were reinforcing a hillside when the landslide happened on Monday evening, the official Xinhua news agency said. Rescuers have found 14 bodies, as well as three injured people, with the cause of the accident "still under investigation", Xinhua reported. Rescue work is "completed", with the three injured currently in stable condition, Xinhua added. — AFP

Philippines widens restrictions

MANILA: The Philippines will expand coronavirus restrictions in Manila from today to include more than 11 million people living near the capital as cases surge, the government said. Daily infections have spiked to a two-month high in January and the health department warned of higher caseloads in the coming days following the detection of local cases of the highly contagious Omicron variant. The provinces of Bulacan, Cavite and Rizal surrounding Manila have been placed under the third highest alert "due to a sharp increase of COVID-19 cases", presidential spokesman Karlo Nograles said. — AFP

Omicron surges in Australia

SYDNEY: Australia reported a record daily tally of nearly 50,000 COVID-19 cases yesterday as the Omicron variant raced through the population and sent people scrambling for tests. While the Omicron surge has apparently left relatively few dangerously ill, it has driven a rush on increasingly scarce self-administered rapid antigen kits and created hours-long queues at centers providing more reliable PCR tests. An earlier wave fueled by the Delta variant dashed zero-COVID ambitions in much of the country, including the major cities Sydney and Melbourne. — AFP



Chow Hang-tung

words are guilty," Chow told the court.

"The only way to defend free speech is to continue to express," she added. "The real crime is to cover for murderers with laws and to delete victims in the name of state". Hong Kong was formerly the only place in China where mass commemoration of Tiananmen was tolerated but Beijing has been remolding the city in its authoritarian image after huge and sometimes violent democracy protests in 2019.

Chow has proved an outspoken defendant throughout her prosecutions. She used her mitigation on Tuesday to read from the memoirs of families of people killed at Tiananmen. That sparked a dressing down from magistrate Amy Chan, followed by applause among some in the public gallery. Chan then ordered police to take down the identity numbers of those who had applauded. "The law never allows anyone to exercise their freedom by unlawful means," Chan ruled. "She (Chow) was determined to attract and publish attention for the purpose of calling on the public to gather," she added. During sentencing, magistrate Chan said Chow was "self-righteous", showed no remorse and used the courtroom to air her political views. — AFP

Business

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 5, 2022

OPEC, allies agree on another modest oil output hike

Group agrees to raise output by 400,000 bpd in February

LONDON: OPEC and its allies decided yesterday to maintain their policy of modestly boosting oil output next month as the rapidly spreading Omicron variant has so far not heavily hit demand.

The OPEC+ grouping, including top producers Saudi Arabia and Russia, has resisted US pressure for a wider opening of the taps in response to high energy prices fuelling a surge in inflation across the world.

The 13 members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and their 10 allies drastically slashed output in 2020 as the pandemic wreaked havoc with demand.

Last year they decided to step it up again gradually as prices recovered, while reviewing the situation every month. After a short videoconference meeting yesterday, the group said it had agreed to raise output by 400,000 barrels per day in February, the same level as in previous months.

The club's members approved a previous hike at their December meeting despite the emergence of Omicron, which had caused prices to fall as markets fretted over its potential impact on the global economy. The December decision earned the thanks of the White House, nervous of the effect of rising prices at American petrol stations, but it did not prevent crude prices from recovering considerably from their previous slump.

The price of Brent, Europe's benchmark oil contract, hit \$79.76 at 1325 GMT yesterday — 15 percent higher than before the group's December 2 meeting.

OPEC analysts told the group on Monday that

Omicron would have a moderate impact on demand and the rise in price is expected to continue in 2022.

While the new COVID variant is spreading like wildfire around the world, it appears to be far less severe than initially feared, raising hopes that the pandemic could be overcome and life return to a little more normality.

'Sense of stability'

In remarks on Monday, OPEC Secretary General Mohammed Barkindo emphasised the need to "remain highly nimble and adaptable to the constantly changing situation".

He said the group's "flexible approach has helped provide an added sense of stability, reassurance and continuity to the market and investors".

OPEC on Monday named Kuwaiti oil executive Haitham Al-Ghais to succeed Barkindo on August 1. Al-Ghais, who was Kuwait's OPEC governor from 2017 to June 2021, is a deputy managing director of the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC).

Iran exports

While OPEC+ countries have been gradually increasing output again since last year, analysts note some countries, such as Nigeria and Angola, have been struggling to lift production.

"Important here is that Russia did not lift production in December which could be a sign that they are getting closer to their capacity," SEB chief commodities analyst Bjarne Schieldrop said.

Another heavyweight, Iran, has seen its exports limited by US sanctions.



VIENNA: OPEC and its allies decided yesterday to maintain their policy of modestly boosting oil output next month.

Talks to revive a deal, which curbed Iran's nuclear activities in exchange for sanctions relief, are underway in Vienna.

They have dragged on since last year but nego-

tiators are pushing to conclude the talks to get the 2015 landmark agreement back on track. It was thrown into disarray in 2018 when the US withdrew from the accord. — AFP

Britain tightens takeover rules on security grounds

LONDON: Britain yesterday rolled out new rules to make it harder for foreign firms to buy UK assets amid national security concerns surrounding proposed takeovers by Chinese and US groups. The legislation will give ministers closer scrutiny of foreign approaches, allowing them to impose conditions on proposed deals or even block them, the government said in a statement.

Overseas investors and firms must now notify the government if they plan to buy any part of a UK business in sensitive sectors that could imperil national security—such as defence, energy and transport. The new rules, first unveiled in November, update 20-year-old legislation that was deemed no longer sufficient to tackle modern threats.

"From today, the government will be able to scrutinise and intervene in certain acquisitions made by anyone, including businesses and investors, that could harm the UK's national security, better reflecting the threats we face today," the statement said. Under the new National Security and

Investment Act, ministers will be able to also unwind takeovers if false or misleading information was given.

The rules will be enacted retroactively to any deals made since 12 November 2020. "The UK is world-renowned as an attractive place to invest but we have always been clear that we will not hesitate to step in where necessary to protect our national security," Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng said in the statement.

"The new investment screening process in place from today is simple and quick, giving investors and firms the certainty they need to do business, and giving everyone in the UK the peace of mind that their security remains our number one priority."

The legislation—which names 17 strategic areas also including artificial intelligence, nuclear power, robotics and the space industry—mirrors similar measures in key allies like Australia, Italy, France and the United States.

Chinese, US takeovers

The powers come as increasing Chinese investment has sparked calls



LONDON: Shoppers walk down the street at Brixton Market, south London. The rising cost of living will become the dominant issue facing Boris Johnson, the head of an economic think tank, The Resolution Foundation (RF), has warned. — AFP

from UK lawmakers for Prime Minister Boris Johnson to take a stronger stance on Beijing. Britain in July 2020 banned China's controversial technology giant Huawei from its 5G network because of persistent spying concerns, amid fierce political pressure from Washington.

The UK government is meanwhile reportedly nearing a deal with French energy giant EDF to force China's state-owned nuclear firm CGN to offload its stake in the Sizewell C

nuclear power project in eastern England. CGN is also working alongside EDF in the construction of a new nuclear power plant at Hinkley Point, southwest England.

Separately, the UK government last year ordered probes into three US-backed takeovers, citing national security concerns. The takeover targets comprise British-owned chip designer Arm, aerospace parts manufacturer Meggitt and defence technology firm Ultra Electronics. — AFP

German unemployment declines in December

FRANKFURT: Germany's joblessness rate fell slightly in December despite the return of health restrictions to tackle a new wave of coronavirus cases, official figures published yesterday showed. The seasonally adjusted rate dropped to 5.2 percent from 5.3 percent the previous month, the BA federal labour agency said, the equivalent of 23,000 fewer unemployed people.

"The recovery seen in recent months continued in December," agency head Detlef Scheele said in a statement. In raw figures, the number of unemployed sat just under 2,330,000, down around 378,000 since December 2020. Unemployment in Europe's top economy climbed as high as six percent in the months following the rapid spread of the coronavirus through Europe in the first half of 2020.

Germany has relied heavily on subsidised short-term work schemes to help businesses and workers whether the pandemic storm, with nearly six million Germans placed on reduced hours at the peak of the crisis in April 2020. The scheme was still supporting some 710,000 people according to the latest available figures from October, the BA said.

An uptick in applications made for the short-term work scheme at the end of the year showed the "uncertainty" caused by rising numbers of coronavirus cases and the emergence of the highly transmissible Omicron variant, the BA said. Around 286,000 people were signed up to the programme in December, up from 104,000 the month before. — AFP

Elizabeth Holmes: Silicon Valley's fallen star

SAN FRANCISCO: Elizabeth Holmes's startup Theranos made her a multi-billionaire hailed as the next US tech visionary by age 30, but it all evaporated in a flash of lawsuits, ignominy and, finally, criminal charges. The rise and fall of Holmes, who on Monday was convicted of defrauding investors of her biotech startup, is a heavily-chronicled saga that prompted a hard look at her methods but also the unseemly aspects of startup life.

In many ways Holmes fit the image of a Silicon Valley entrepreneur, from her dark-colored turtleneck sweaters that evoked tech legend and Apple founder Steve Jobs to her dropping out of California's elite Stanford University.

But much like in her trial, the fundamental question has been whether she was a true visionary who simply failed, as she claimed on the stand, or a skilled self-promoter who took advantage of a credulous context to commit fraud. Her story begins in the US capital Washington, with her birth to a Congressional staffer mother and a father whose online biography says he was once an executive at Enron—an energy company that collapsed in a massive fraud scandal.

She won admission to Stanford, and there began work on cutting-edge biomedical initiatives, founding in 2003 what would become Theranos when she

was just 19. Part of Holmes's ability to convince her backers was her apparent deep personal commitment—she applied for her first patent while still in college and after dropping out, convinced her parents to let her use her tuition savings to build the company.

'Youngest woman self-made billionaire'

By the end of 2010 she had raised a whopping \$92 million in venture capital for Theranos, which she pledged was developing machines that could run a gamut of diagnostic tests on a few drops of blood. Over the next couple years she assembled what one news report called the "most illustrious board in US corporate history", including former secretaries of state Henry Kissinger and George Shultz as well as ex-Pentagon chief Jim Mattis.

"Sharp, articulate, committed. I was impressed by her. That didn't take the place of having the device prove itself," said Mattis in a surprise appearance on the stand. Theranos hype kicked up another gear in 2014 and in the span of just over a year, a turtleneck-wearing Holmes appeared on the covers of Fortune, Forbes, Inc. and T: The New York Times Style Magazine.

Forbes gave her a \$4.5 billion net worth in 2014, which was based on her half ownership of Theranos, and noted: "Youngest woman on Forbes 400: Youngest woman self-made billionaire." This glowing coverage had an impact on Theranos investors like venture capitalist Chris Lucas who told Holmes's trial the Fortune article made him "proud we were involved, very proud of Elizabeth."

But there were some things that didn't end up in those glowing reports that gushed with statements



SAN JOSE: Theranos founder and former CEO Elizabeth Holmes (2nd L) walks with her partner Billy Evans (L), her mother Noel Holmes and a lawyer as they leave the Robert F. Peckham Federal Building in San Jose, California. A jury found Elizabeth Holmes guilty on three counts of wire fraud and one count of conspiracy to defraud investors. — AFP

like "Steve Jobs had massive ambition, but Holmes's is arguably larger."

For one, she personally put the logos of pharma giants Pfizer and Schering-Plough onto Theranos reports hailing its own blood-testing technology, which were then shared with investors. That was done without the companies' permission and was a key piece of the prosecution's argument that she deliberately tried to inflate Theranos's credibility in order to win over backers. — AFP

US telecoms giants agree for delay in 5G deployment

WASHINGTON: US telecoms giants AT&T and Verizon on Monday agreed to postpone their deployment of 5G wireless service over concerns that it may interfere with flight safety equipment, AT&T and airline officials said. AT&T confirmed the deal in a statement, noting that at the request of Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, "we have voluntarily agreed to one additional two-week delay of our deployment of C-Band 5G services."

"We know aviation safety and 5G can coexist and we are confident further collaboration and technical assessment will allay any issues," the company said. The move came a day after AT&T and Verizon rebuffed a request to delay their rollout of 5G technology, scheduled for Wednesday, prompting airlines to threaten legal action.

According to representatives of the airline industry, a last-minute draft agreement was reached first with telephone operator AT&T and then with Verizon to put off the deployment of their new 5G frequency bands by fifteen days. Aviation regulators have raised concerns that the new system might interfere with the devices planes use to measure altitude and the rollout, initially scheduled for December 5, had already been postponed once. — AFP

Business

The costs of Erdogan's fight for Turkey's 'economic independence'

Erdogan trying to make Turkey attractive as a hub for cheap production

ANKARA: Turkey's consumer prices have soared by the highest rate since 2002, further undermining President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's unorthodox battle for his developing country's "economic independence". Analysts attribute the jump of the official reading to 36.1 percent last month to the surging cost of imports, which range from energy to many of the raw materials Turkey's manufacturers turn into exports.

Those costs jumped because of a historic collapse of the lira, which last year lost 44 percent of its value against the dollar. But ultimately, analysts blame both inflation and the lira crisis on Erdogan's fervent belief that high interest rates cause inflation. Conventional theory says the opposite is true because higher interest rates slow economic activity by making borrowing more expensive and providing incentives for people to keep their money in the bank. Here is a summary of Turkey's economic conundrum.

How did the problems start?

Calling high interest rates "the mother and father of all evil", Erdogan orchestrated a series of rate cuts starting in September that further undermined economists' trust in the central bank's independence. Erdogan, who has sacked three central bank governors since July 2019, has refused to accept any responsibility for the lira's collapse or subsequent jump in prices.

"I reject policies that will condemn our people to unemployment, hunger and poverty," he said last year, calling on his supporters to be patient.

The Turkish currency weakened on Monday, trading at 13.4 lira to the dollar, after the inflation data was published. It fell as low as 18.4 to the dollar at the height of the crisis last month, after starting the year around the 7.4 mark.

How bad is the crisis?

Turkey's official inflation target is five percent, but it has remained in the double digits for the past two years. The monthly inflation reading has turned into a contested political issue, with opposition leaders claiming the government is underreporting the actual price jumps, a charge it denies.

Independent economic institutes such as the Inflation Research Group (ENAG) calculated last month's annual inflation rate at 82.8 percent.

"Even in the figures they make up, domestic producer inflation is nearly 80 percent," main opposition party leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu tweeted on Monday. The opposition is demanding snap elections to address the crisis, but Erdogan insists they will go ahead as planned in June 2023.

The cost of living is expected to rise further, especially after hikes in the price of consumers' electricity and gas bills of around 50 and 25 percent respectively.

What does Erdogan expect?

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

Erdogan has previously cited Islamic rules against usury to justify not increasing rates, suggesting those who try to preserve their savings by converting them into foreign currency and gold were traitors.

Some experts believe Erdogan may be trying to make Turkey more attractive as a hub for cheap production, with local wages worth less in dollar terms. During a televised speech in Istanbul, Erdogan on Monday hailed a 32.9 percent year-on-



The lira has shed two-thirds of its value in five years.

year increase in exports to \$225.3 billion in 2021.

How has Erdogan responded?

Aware of the importance given to the lira's value against the dollar and euro by consumers and businesses, Erdogan last month unveiled a new policy to defend local currency holdings against fluctuations in the exchange rate. While the lira has since rallied, experts question whether it is sustainable and will be enough to avoid further currency weakness.

Turkey's net foreign currency reserves fell to \$8.6 billion last week - from \$21.2 billion two weeks earlier - further supporting opposition claims that the government was running out of money while indirectly trying to support the exchange rate. The government has only reported limited currency interventions. Erdogan has also raised the monthly minimum wage to 4,253.40 liras (about \$315), which is still lower in dollar terms than what the minimum wage was worth in January 2021. — AFP

Biden blames meatpacking giants for soaring meat costs

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden offered independent US farmers \$1 billion in aid Monday as part of a battle against meatpacking giants he accuses of building monopolies to squeeze out smaller competitors. "We're here to talk about strengthening competition, which will bring down costs," Biden told a virtual meeting of independent farmers and meat producers.

Calling the meat industry a "textbook example" of too much market power in the hands of a few, Biden said that "four big corporations control more than half the markets in beef, pork and poultry." "Capitalism without competition isn't capitalism. It's exploitation," he said. "That's what we're seeing in meat and poultry."

The White House unveiled an aid package including \$375 million in grants to support independent meat processing plants and \$275 million in loans at favorable rates for smaller businesses. Biden was joined by the attorney general and secretary of agriculture, who argue that multinational meatpacking companies have taken advantage of the economic slump during the Covid pandemic to gouge consumers—something the

companies and some economists dispute.

Price rises for Americans' beloved steaks and hamburgers are among the leading items driving soaring inflation, a phenomenon that has badly hurt Biden politically, clouding what has otherwise been a generally healthy recovery from the pandemic economic shutdown.

November inflation hit 6.8 percent, the highest peak since 1982, while beef prices shot up 20.9 percent that month, pork rose 16.8 percent and hamburger meat 13.9 percent. Inflation is being driven partly by enormous supply chain disruption across the world economy, as industries come back from the global slowdown at different speeds and demand outstrips supply.

Biden's critics claim that the president has fed inflation further with heavy government spending, while his Democrats say the spending programs saved the economy from even deeper damage. Meat price rises are a politically sensitive area, along with gasoline prices, which have also hit alarming new highs.

Biden has been outspoken for months against the top processors,



WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden speaks during a virtual meeting about reducing the costs of meat through increased competition in the meat processing industry in the South Court Auditorium at the Eisenhower Executive Office Building in Washington, DC. — AFP

who handle most of the meat bought from farmers. "Our overreliance on just a handful of giant processors leaves us all vulnerable, with any disruptions at these bottlenecks rippling throughout our food system," the White House said.

But Neil Bradley, a senior figure at the US Chamber of Commerce, said consolidation in the meatpacking

industry had been going on for years, without driving up prices. "The factors driving meat prices higher include increased demand, Covid-related supply chain disruptions, and increased input costs, especially higher energy and labor costs," he said. The White House policy will "likely further constrain supply and push prices even higher," he predicted. — AFP



MUMBAI: Cruise ship Cordelia Empress, where more than 2,000 people on board were prevented from disembarking in Goa after a crew member tested positive for the COVID-19 coronavirus, enters the harbour in Mumbai yesterday. — AFP

COVID-hit cruise ship halted in Indian waters

PANAJI: More than 2,000 people travelling on a cruise ship in Indian waters have been prevented from disembarking after a COVID outbreak on board, authorities said Monday. The Empress set sail from Mumbai to the former Portuguese colony of Goa but was stopped by port authorities near its destination at the city of Vasco on Sunday after the infections were detected.

At least 66 people aboard the ship have tested positive for the virus, Eugene D'Souza, a pathologist at the nearby Victor Hospital, told AFP. "It has been decided those who have tested positive will be

hospitalised or home quarantined," he added. Goa health minister Vishwajit Rane said Monday authorities were deciding whether to allow passengers to leave the ship, operated by Indian company Cordelia Cruises.

The cruise industry worldwide is struggling to get back on its feet after voyages were halted at the start of the pandemic and several vessels were hit by outbreaks. Goa's expansive beaches and lush wilderness are popular destinations for overseas and local tourists. The area has seen steadily rising COVID numbers with an influx of visitors over the festive season.

Officials elsewhere in India have fretted over the arrival of the Omicron coronavirus variant and a sudden jump in daily infections. Some of India's biggest urban centres imposed fresh movement restrictions last week, with overnight curfews in effect in the capital New Delhi and tech hub Bangalore. — AFP

Spain's jobless number posts record fall

MADRID: The number of registered jobless in Spain posted a record drop in 2021 as the relaxation of pandemic restrictions boosted its key tourism sector, official statistics showed yesterday. The number of people registered as being out of work dropped by 782,232 last year over 2020 to stand at 3.1 million at the end of December, the labour ministry said.

That is the biggest drop since the current statistical series began in 1996 and the lowest number of jobless in the month of December since 2007, it added. The number of registered jobless fell by 2.4 percent, or 76,782 people, in December from November—the 10th consecutive month of falling unemployment figures.

"The date once again reflects the progress of Spain's recovery," Socialist Prime minister Pedro Sanchez tweeted. Spain's tourism-dependent economy contracted by 10.8 percent in 2020, one of the worst results among industrialised countries.

But the eurozone's fourth-largest economy returned to growth in the second quarter of this year as global tourism picked up. Before the pandemic hit in spring 2020, Spain was the world's second-most popular tourist destination after France, and the sector accounted for around 12 percent of the economy.

Spain welcomed 28.2 million foreign tourists during the first 11 months of the year, 9.9 million more than in the previous year, national statistics institute INE said yesterday. The Spanish government had hoped to attract around 45 million tourist visits in 2021, approximately half the figure for 2019 before the pandemic hit. — AFP

NY subpoenas Trump, children in fraud probe

NEW YORK: New York's top justice official has subpoenaed ex-president Donald Trump, his son Don Jr. and daughter Ivanka in her investigation into the family's business dealings, a court filing showed Monday. State Attorney General Letitia James, a Democrat, issued the subpoenas seeking their testimony in her years-long civil probe last month, according to the document.

The filing came to light after the Washington Post reported in December that James had asked Trump to testify in person at her office on January 7. Monday's legal filing was the first time investigators have said that they also want to quiz Trump's two eldest children under oath.

Following the Post's report, Trump sued James, arguing that she was violating his constitutional rights with a politically motivated investigation. "Despite numerous attempts to delay our investigation by the Trump Organization, we are confident that our questions will be answered and the truth will be uncovered because no one is above the law," said a spokesperson for James on Monday.

The Trumps urged a court to "quash" the subpoenas, a legal filing showed. "Her (James's) actions are a threat to our democracy and I plan to hold her accountable to the fullest extent," said Trump lawyer Alina Habba.

James is probing whether the Trump Organization may have illegally reported false values on its properties, potentially to gain banking and tax advantages. She launched her investigation in March 2019 and suspects that the Trump Organization fraudulently overstated the value of certain properties when seeking bank loans, and later reported much smaller values when declaring assets so it could pay less tax.

Trump's son Eric, who is executive vice president of the Trump Organization, was interviewed by James's office on the issue in October 2020. The former president is facing pressure from several legal probes. In Washington he is trying to prevent a congressional probe into the January 6 attack by his supporters on the US Capitol from accessing White House records related to that day.

The Trump Organization is under investigation by the Manhattan district attorney for possible financial crimes and insurance fraud. In July, the Trump Organization and its long-serving finance chief, Allen Weisselberg pleaded not guilty in a New York court to 15 felony fraud and tax evasion charges.

His trial is due to begin in the middle of this year. Trump was also questioned for more than four hours in October as part of a lawsuit by a group of protestors who allege that his security guards assaulted them six years ago. He is also battling to prevent years of his tax returns from being released to prosecutors. — AFP

Business

Asian markets track Wall St surge but virus, inflation linger

Analysts warn blockbuster gains seen in recent years could be tougher to attain

HONG KONG: Asian markets rose yesterday following a strong lead from yet another record on Wall Street that was fuelled by easing concerns about Omicron and remaining optimism about the economic recovery. While the new COVID variant is spreading like wildfire around the world, it appears to be far less severe than initially feared, raising hopes that the pandemic could be overcome and life return to a little more normality.

However, inflation, supply chain snags, central bank policy tightening and geopolitical woes continue to weigh on sentiment and analysts have warned that the blockbuster gains seen in recent years could be tougher to attain.

"We expect 2022 to be far more challenging from an investment perspective," Heather Wald, of Bel Air Investment Advisors, noted. "Rarely has a market delivered three consecutive years of double-digit returns, as we have seen from 2019-2021." Still, she expected "equities to remain attractive versus other liquid asset classes".

And market strategist Louis Navellier added: "Equities are still the only game in town, with cash and bonds offering negative real returns, and equities forecasted with double-digit earnings growth and record stock buybacks anticipated." The Dow and S&P 500 started the new year in the same fashion as they spent most of 2021, by notching up new all-time highs, while the Nasdaq also rallied thanks to a surge in big-name stars including Apple, which briefly became the first firm valued at \$3 trillion, and Tesla.

Most of Asia followed suit. Sydney piled on two percent and Tokyo was up almost as much, while

Singapore and Taipei were also up more than one percent. There were also gains in Hong Kong, Mumbai, Bangkok and Jakarta, while Shanghai dipped and Seoul was flat.

London opened more than one percent higher at the start of its first day of the year, while Paris and Frankfurt also rose. Trading in Manila was cancelled when a system glitch struck less than an hour after the start. Shares in embattled Chinese property giant Evergrande rose in Hong Kong after a day-long suspension, as the company confirmed it had been ordered to demolish part of a resort in Hainan province but would work to resolve the issue.

Investors will keep a close eye on the release of minutes from the Federal Reserve's December policy meeting hoping for some insight into its plans this year in light of surging inflation, which is forcing central banks around the world to wind back their pandemic stimulus. The Fed has already started tapering its bond-buying programme and the focus is now on what it will do with interest rates, with some commentators predicting three hikes before 2023. Anticipation that rates will rise lifted the yield on the 10-year US Treasury note above 1.6 percent Monday, though analysts said that could also reflect an upbeat view on the economic outlook.

Bets on US borrowing costs rising this year and expectations Japan's central bank will stick to its ultra-low rate have pushed the dollar to levels not seen since late 2017. And strategist Navellier remained positive. "We've climbed bigger walls of worry than we face today," he said. "I am expecting a very strong January, characterised by higher trading volume as well as stunning fourth-quarter sales



NEW YORK: Traders work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) on the first day of trading in the new year in New York City. Markets were up slightly in morning trading as Omicron cases begin to subside in South Africa despite rising across America. —AFP

and earnings announcements.

"Interestingly, thanks to political gridlock, the private sector is expected to dominate GDP growth in 2022. Inflation is expected to persist, but

may moderate somewhat in the second half of 2022. "In my opinion, the Fed will remain accommodative in 2022 and the Goldilocks environment will continue." —AFP

S Lanka unveils relief package as food prices soar

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka unveiled a \$1.1 billion targeted relief package yesterday to help consumers pay soaring food costs as an economic crisis bites. The island's tourism-dependent economy was hammered by the pandemic and rampant shortages have left its people struggling to buy essential goods.

Supermarkets have been rationing milk powder, sugar, lentils and other essentials, with food prices rising by a record 22 percent last month. More than two million state employees and pensioners will be given a living allowance of 60,000 rupees (\$300) this year to deal with the rising cost of living.

Finance minister Basil Rajapaksa also announced subsidies for home gardens, with crop yields expected to fall further after a disastrous campaign to make Sri Lanka the world's first 100 percent organic farming nation. "We want to encourage a big homegrown agriculture drive this year by encouraging people to grow their own food," he said.

Rajapaksa did not say how the government would finance the package of 229 billion rupees (\$1.14 billion), which comes two months after the unveiling of a drastic austerity budget designed to rein in a runaway deficit. Last year's ban on agrochemical imports worsened food shortages by causing crop failures and prompting farmers to leave nearly a third of the island's agricultural fields dormant.

The policy was lifted after protests by farmers but its consequences have sparked discord in Sri Lanka's ruling coalition. Yesterday, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa sacked a minister who had criticised the organic farming drive and called for the removal of the agriculture minister, a close ally of the leader.

Last month a top agriculture official warned that Sri Lanka could face a famine and urged the government to implement food rationing. He was fired hours later. —AFP

KFH Auto offers fully integrated finance services

KUWAIT: KFH Executive Manager - Auto Finance and Leasing, Muaz Al-Zaabi indicated that KFH Auto showroom comprises the largest finance center at Kuwait level to finance customers' needs and requirements of cars and other products. He mentioned that the showroom offers more than 22 finance services and products.

Al-Zaabi noted that KFH Auto is the largest auto showroom in the Middle East, covering a total area of 38 thousand square meters, out of which 17 thousand square meters are allocated for exhibiting cars and other products.

He added that KFH Auto is an environment friendly facility which is compatible with sustainability requirements and comprises the following facilities:

- A/C system "Chillers" using R134A gas
- Solar energy system to benefit from the solar energy and minimize current energy usage level.
- Light and fire-resistant smart ceiling system (Parasol) which has mitigated the load on the building by 40 tons.
- LED Light's system
- Highly developed thermo-resistant glass covering an area of 2000 meters to provide natural light and minimize AC load and consumption.

HUAWEI WATCH GT 3 Moon Phase Collection II

KUWAIT: Smart watches are seen as an extension of smart phones nowadays. Smart watches let you answer calls, get important notifications, and check health data just by raising your wrist when you are busy exploring or working. The new HUAWEI WATCH GT 3 Moon Phase Collection II has a ton of intelligent life assistant features. Besides, the watch also brings the new Moon Phase Collection II, a fashionable yet classic design, up to 14 days of battery life, all-day health management, and scientific workouts. It can connect with Huawei devices as well as other Android and iOS devices.

Never miss an important call or message

When working out, you don't always have your smart phone on you. The HUAWEI WATCH GT 3 will come in handy when your phone is not with you.

The watch supports Bluetooth calls and saves you from missing important calls and messages. In addition, it can store the contact information of your family, friends, and colleagues for easy access. You can also reject calls or reply to SMS messages from the watch conveniently.

Features that make life easier

For travelers, HUAWEI WATCH GT3 has Offline Map Navigation. Features like Water Drink Reminder, Focus To-Do, and Tick Tick will remind you about things you would not want to miss. There is much you can do from the bigger smart watch display.

Young people these days have increasingly diverse lifestyles. Understandably, what they expect from a smart watch is also ballooning. Huawei knows this and has added the features

- Light Sensor and Water Sensor to minimize electricity and water consumption.
- The building height is 1.5 meters above the ground level to avoid any emergency incidents due to heavy rainfall and water drainage problems.
- Car charging systems for electrical cars
- Recycle Ceramic floors.

He added that KFH Auto accommodates more than 200 cars, 28 agencies and 44 trademarks including cars, motorbikes, jet skis, and boats. The showroom represents an integrated city comprising all that is related to the sale/purchase of new and used cars and other vehicles as well as leasing, trading, traffic, and insurance products. Also, it contains a special ladies' section.

Kfh.com/auto platform

Al-Zaabi said that KFH has launched its e-platform for auto services and offers on its website kfh.com/auto in a step which is the first of its kind in Kuwait. Customers can view the latest auto offers and take their pick. Also, customers can submit a purchase or lease request through an e-form on KFH website. The platform is considered as the first portal for all those who wish to purchase or lease cars. A specialized and highly qualified team updates information and follows up with customers right from the beginning of the service till final completion of the sale or lease transaction.

Solutions and Advantages

Al-Zaabi said that KFH services include: Sale of new cars, sale of certified used cars with agent's

maintenance, sale of motorbikes, jet skis, boats, and marine equipment, "Pay here and receive car abroad" service covering 4 countries Egypt, Jordan, USA and Turkey, retail and corporate operational and finance lease, ladies' services, new and used cars finance from commercial offices and individuals, spare parts and accessories finance service and trust (Aman) car sale service.

He added that the most distinguished finance solutions and advantages provided by KFH include agent warranty and advantages, cash or instalment sale at competitive prices, suitable payment periods, flexible settlement method (Salary deduction - bank transfer).

Al-Zaabi emphasized that KFH is the first bank to launch lease finance services in the market with advantages allowing KFH customers to own the car according to their need for a period approximating 5 years including takaful comprehensive insurance, factory warranty, substitute car in case of maintenance, repair or lease and discount advantage. The customer is given the choice either to purchase the car or return it to KFH at the end of the lease contract. KFH provides a vast variety of highly reputable trademarks approximating 80 models within its operational and lease finance programs.



Muaz Al-Zaabi

Algeria energy firm to invest \$40bn in five years: CEO

ALGIERS: Algeria's state-owned hydrocarbon firm Sonatrach will invest \$40 billion into oil exploration, production and refinement as well as gas prospecting and extraction between 2022 and 2026, CEO Toufik Hakkar said Monday.

"Our investment plan between 2022 and 2026 is approximately \$40 billion, including \$8 billion in 2022," Hakkar said on state television, noting that a third of investments will involve foreign partners. "The largest part will be dedicated to exploration and production, to maintain our production capacities, as well as refining projects to meet the national demand for fuel," he added.

The plan includes a refinery project at the largest oil field in Algeria, Hassi Messaoud, as well as an extension of the Skikda refinery in the northeast to convert certain derivatives into fuel, the CEO added. The firm also plans in January to put into service the fourth turbocharger of the Medgaz pipeline, which transports gas to Spain and Portugal, Hakkar said.

The turbocharger will allow for the provision of supplies to Spain in accordance with contractual quantities, estimated at 10.5 billion cubic metres, as well as meet any additional demand, he said. Algeria closed in November the Maghreb-Europe gas pipeline that supplies gas to Spain and Portugal, crossing through Morocco.

Sonatrach recorded a 70 percent increase in revenues in 2021 thanks to a jump in hydrocarbon exports, Hakkar said, noting that its exports amounted to \$34.5 billion compared to \$20 billion the year before. He explained that while oil is priced at an average of \$70 per barrel,

"Sonatrach's strategy is based on a price of \$50 to avoid all market fluctuations". —AFP

Algeria depends on oil exports for more than 90 percent of its foreign revenues, making it particularly vulnerable to price fluctuations. The recent recovery in crude oil prices allowed it to offset its trade deficit, which declined from \$10.5 billion at the end of September 2020 to \$1.57 billion the following year, the central bank said in late December.

Hakkar also said Sonatrach will dispatch a team to Libya by late February to look into re-establishing a presence there. The firm, which partners with Libya's National Oil Corporation, suspended the bulk of its activity in the war-torn country in 2014.

In 2011, Sonatrach announced it was investing \$60 billion over the following five years to boost its production capacity, but had to revise its spending after global oil prices plummeted in 2014. The coronavirus pandemic also prompted the firm to reduce spending. —AFP

BB announces winner of Al-Thuraya salary account monthly draw

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank, announced yesterday Abdullah Mohammad Aleneziyas the lucky winner of the draw prize of Al-Thuraya Salary Account monthly draw. The draw rewards new and existing customers who transfer their salary to Burgan Bank by offering them a chance to win KD 10,000 every month. Each account holder has one chance to enter the draw.

The Al-Thuraya account holders have the option to hold money in Kuwaiti Dinar and other major currencies and can access account-related services such as standing orders, loans and credit cards, and benefit from the discounts and offers throughout the year.

Customers wishing to open the Al-Thuraya account can do so by simply visiting the nearest Burgan Bank branch and obtain all the necessary details, or simply call the bank's call center.



well. The TruSeen 5.0+ technology used in the watch is capable of real-time accurate monitoring of heart rate and SpO2 levels.



30-year-old Congolese chef Dieuveil Malonga (right) and Laura Timini cut fresh plants at the spices garden in Nyamata area, used as food preparation for his restaurant 'Meza Malonga' in Rwanda's capital Kigali. —AFP



Dieuveil Malonga Malonga poses as he holds some freshly cut spices from the spices garden in Nyamata area, used as food preparation for his restaurant 'Meza Malonga' in Rwanda's capital Kigali.

CONGO STAR CHEF BRINGS SECRETS OF AFRICA TO THE DINING TABLE

Congolese chef Dieuveil Malonga learned his craft in Europe's top restaurants, but says he owes his success to grandmothers across Africa, who passed on the gastronomic secrets that underpin his celebrated Afro-fusion cuisine. "I travel (to) different countries... to learn from the grandmothers. Then I get these old recipes and I bring it to my laboratory here and we try with my chefs to give it something of a modern touch," he said. The 30-year-old from Congo-Brazzaville has visited 38 of Africa's 54 countries, bringing back fermentation and other techniques, as well as ingredients that add texture and flavour to the dishes served at his restaurant in Rwanda's capital Kigali.

The treasures sourced during his trips are everywhere in Meza Malonga ("Malonga's Table" in Kiswahili). Bins holding tiny chilli peppers from the Ivory Coast, pebe nuts from Cameroon and dried mbinzo caterpillars from the Congo fill an entire wall of the establishment. Food experts have largely ignored the continent's culinary heritage, with not a single Michelin-starred restaurant to be found on the continent.

But that may soon change, thanks to the efforts of chefs like Malonga, who co-founded Chefs in Africa—a website devoted to promoting the region's rising stars. "Something... is happening in Africa, and people are getting interested in knowing more about African cuisine," he said in an interview with AFP at his restaurant, minutes before the dinner rush kicked off. He stressed the diversity of African food, citing the example of Nigeria, where one can choose



Chef Dieuveil Malonga (left) cooks with some of his workers at his restaurant 'Meza Malonga' in Rwanda's capital Kigali.

from more than 20 dishes on any given day.

'I like to eat'

Malonga was born near Brazzaville, the capital of the Republic of Congo, where, despite losing his parents at a young age, he enjoyed "a very happy childhood" within a tight-knit community, according to his website. At 13, he moved to Germany and lived with a pastor's family, later joining a renowned cooking school in Muenster.

It was a perfect fit. "I like to eat, I eat all the time," he said, bursting into laughter. "I (come) from a family that likes and celebrates food." After graduating, he trained at some of Germany's top restaurants, including the triple Michelin-starred Aqua in

Wolfsburg, before moving to France to work at the InterContinental hotel in Marseille. Despite his success, he said he could not shake off the feeling that something was "missing". So he headed back to Africa and embarked on a two-year odyssey across the continent. There he found "the key" to his new life, he said.

After falling in love with Rwanda—a fertile, hilly country with a gentle climate—he opened Meza Malonga in 2020. Here, he says he revels in foraging for ingredients and meeting the people who grow the aromatic herbs and edible flowers used in his dishes. The restaurant is not cheap—an average meal including drinks costs around \$150 (130 euros) per person—but his customers are happy to pay for an experience that marries

traditional African ingredients with modern techniques.

On the day AFP visited, the 10-course menu included sweet potato-marinated tuna, shrimp with powdered cassava and, for dessert, a coffee foam dusted with crushed peanuts. His clientele includes locals, expatriates and tourists, who line up for a meal that looks as good as it tastes—with chefs using tweezers to meticulously arrange each dish. Diner Laura Tomini said the experience made her feel like she was "in business class".

Next generation

Although Africa-born chefs like Pierre Thiam have made a splash on the global food scene, popularizing Afro-fusion in the West, Malonga

wants to raise the continent's own gastronomic profile. By 2023, he hopes to "create something big" by opening a new restaurant in the rural northern region of Musanze, at the foot of the Virunga mountain range and its famous gorillas.

He wants the second incarnation of Meza Malonga to serve as a training ground for the next generation of Africa's top chefs. In Kigali, the soft-spoken Malonga works with 10 young cooks, mainly Rwandan but also Burundian, Ugandan and Tanzanian, who praise his openness to their ideas and his willingness to let them shine. In Musanze, he says he plans to recruit and train many more chefs—with the goal of transforming the continent's gastronomic reputation. —AFP



People are seen at the entrance of the Buin Zoo.



A female lion named Massai is seen.



A Bengal tiger named Charly is seen.

CHILEAN ZOO JABS BIG CATS, ORANGUTAN AGAINST COVID



A Bornean orangutan named Sandai is seen at the Buin Zoo in Buin, Chile. —AFP photos

Bengal tiger Charly and Bornean orangutan Sandai, both members of endangered species, have received coronavirus vaccines at a Chilean zoo in a Latin American first. Charly, Sandai and eight other animals at the Buin Zoo in Santiago were chosen for the experimental vaccine campaign as they belong to species considered at high risk of contracting COVID-19. The viral disease which has killed more than 5.4 million humans so far, has also been found in zoo monkeys, apes and big cats, as well as in deer in the wild, in house pets and in minks.

Along with three lions, two other tigers and three pumas, three-year-old Charly and Sandai, 26, received their second dose Monday of an experimental vaccine developed especially for animals but not yet available for sale. They received their first shots on December 13. "The idea is to protect the

animals that are most susceptible to contracting the coronavirus while testing whether the vaccines generate immunity and, if yes, how long it lasts," said Sebastian Celis, head of the Buin Zoo's veterinary department.

Lions in Singapore, Zagreb and Washington, hippos in Belgium, Sumatran tigers in Indonesia and gorillas in Atlanta, Georgia, are among captive animals reported to have contracted the virus to date. Buin Zoo has not tested any of its animals for coronavirus as none have presented symptoms. Several US zoos have announced vaccination campaigns for their animal populations. Nearly 90 percent of Chile's human population over the age of three have been fully vaccinated to date, and 62 percent have received a booster shot. It is the only country in Latin America to have started vaccinating zoo animals. —AFP



A giraffe named Krugger is seen.



THREE MEMBERS OF BTS ARE RECOVERING FROM COVID-19

It was revealed over the Christmas period that Suga, Jin and JM had all tested positive for COVID-19 but in a new update, their management have confirmed none of them were seriously ill and they are all well on the road to full health again after ending their period of self-isolation. Big Hit Music said in a statement: "We would like to inform you that BTS member SUGA has made a full recovery from COVID-19 and his quarantine has concluded as of today at noon, January 3. "SUGA did

not exhibit any particular symptoms during his quarantine and is currently recuperating while resting at home. "We would like to thank all fans who have shown concerns for the artist's health as well as those in the medical field who are doing their best to overcome COVID-19." In a follow-up statement, the label provided an update about Jin and Rim, saying: "Neither member exhibited any particular symptoms during their quarantine.

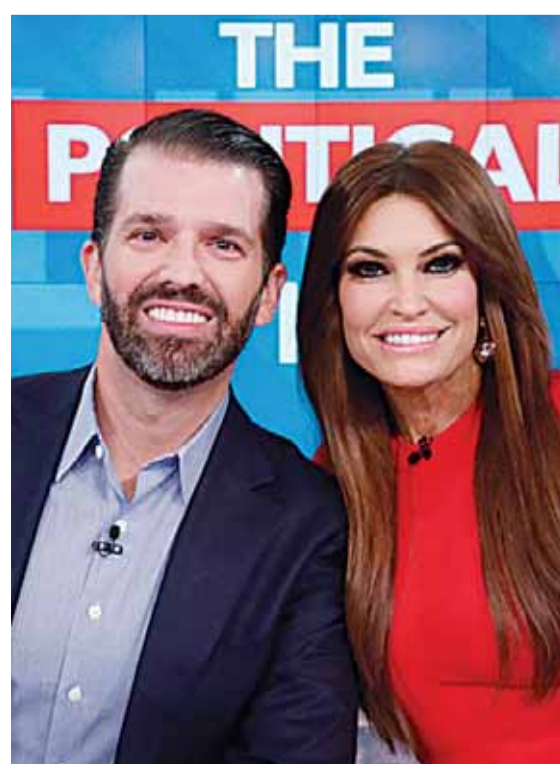
JESSIE J BELIEVES SHE CONTRACTED COVID AT LAST CONCERT IN LA

The 'Price Tag' hitmaker tested positive for coronavirus after hitting the stage on December 15 at the Hotel Cafe in the City of Angels. The 33-year-old singer - whose real name is Jessica Cornish - wrote on Instagram alongside a series of photos from the gig: "I got covid at this show BUT The audience could clap in time." The 'Bang Bang' songstress then quipped: "Balance." This comes after the 'Domino' singer shared the heartbreaking news with fans that she had suffered a miscarriage in November after opting to "have a baby on [her] own" but at her third scan was informed "there was no longer a heartbeat." The 'Voice Kids' coach wrote an emotional post on Instagram: "[broken heart emoji] Yesterday morning I was laughing with a friend saying 'seriously though how am I going to get through my gig in LA tomorrow night without telling the whole audience I am pregnant.' By yesterday afternoon I was dreading the thought of getting through the gig without breaking down..." the musician captioned a photo of her holding up a positive pregnancy test.



DONALD TRUMP JR ENGAGED TO FORMER 'FOX NEWS' PRESENTER

Former US President Donald Trump's eldest child reportedly popped the question on New Year's Eve 2020, and the couple managed to keep it a secret, until now. The 44-year-old businessman and the 52-year-old presenter - who served as an advisor to Trump during his time in office at The White House - were first reported to be an item back in 2018, after Trump Jr. divorced Vanessa Trump. An insider has claimed the pair kept their engagement "private for the past year as they settled into life in Florida after moving from New York." A source told the DailyMail.com: "They've kept it private for the past year as they settled into life in Florida after moving from New York." "It's been an open secret for the past 12 months with everyone Kim runs into admiring her almost eight-carat diamond engagement ring." Trump Jr has five children with his ex-wife Vanessa, while Kimberly has a son named Ronan Anthony with her ex-husband Eric Villency, the CEO of an interior and design firm.



LILY COLLINS MARRIES TO HER 'BEST FRIEND'

The 'Emily In Paris' actress tied the knot with Charlie McDowell, 38, last year and she loves the fact she can always say whatever is on her mind to him and he will help her to feel "better and stronger". She gushed: "Well, it's so nice to be married to your best friend. We do silly things together. We aren't afraid to speak our minds with one another, in ways that elevate and make ourselves make each other feel better and stronger and empowered. "But obviously with new experiences come new adventures and new opportunities, to find different parts of your relationships that are exciting to discover." The 32-year-old star hailed her wedding in Colorado as a "beautiful celebration" that offered a "sense of hope" amid



the coronavirus pandemic. She told the GLAMOUR UK January Digital Issue: "It was just such a beautiful celebration of getting people together after having

been apart for so long and being able to be outside and breathe, and feel a sense of calm and a sense of hope and celebration, joining together."

RYAN GOSLING LOOKING FOR CHALLENGING ROLES

The 'La La Land' star used to feel his "job was just to get work" that would cover his rent, bills and health costs but now that he has established himself as a big name in the industry, the 'Blue Valentine' actor feels he can be more selective. He told Britain's GQ magazine: "I felt my job was just to get work. I was trying to pay my rent and maybe get some health insurance," however his new goal slowly became "just to take on roles that would challenge me." The former child star - who appeared on the 90s television series 'Goosebumps' and 'the Mickey Mouse Club' - mused that after some of his 00s roles, such as 2007's 'Lars and The Real Girl' he felt he wanted to consider the wider audience, not only himself, "an audience of one". He said: "That got boring, because it was for an audience of one." The 41-year-old star has got behind the wheel in a number of movies, including 2012's 'The Place Beyond The Pines' and 2011's 'Drive' - shared why he thinks vehicles "make such great characters in films."



KATIE PRICE VOWS TO MAKE 2022 A YEAR OF 'NO DRAMA'

The 43-year-old star - who has Harvey, 19, Junior, 16, Princess, 14, Jett, eight, and seven-year-old Bunny from previous relationships - is looking forward to the coming months with her fiancé Carl Woods and has promised to lead a quiet life following a turbulent 2021 which saw her go back to rehab after being arrested for drink driving

while already banned from being behind the wheel. She said: "2022 is my year, 22 is my lucky number. My birthday. The main box on Deal or No Deal. This has to be my year of no dramas. "Babies, marriage, this year I want it all. I've definitely found the one in Carl and we will get married. "It will be in England, because of the family, my mum is terminally ill and can't travel. So I'd never get married unless my mum was there." Last month, the former glamour model was banned from driving for another two years and given a 16-week suspended jail sentence for crashing her car into a hedge while disqualified and she admitted she's still "ashamed" of her actions, but has pledged to see a therapist "forever" in order to deal with her issues.



PRINCE CHARLES 'PROUD' OF SONS

The 73-year-old royal has been an outspoken environmental campaigner for decades and he is delighted both Princes William and Harry have launched their own initiatives to help save the planet. In an essay for America's Newsweek magazine, he wrote: "As a father, I am proud that my sons have recognized this threat [of climate change]. Most recently, my elder son, William, launched the prestigious Earthshot Prize to incentivize change and help repair our planet over the next 10 years by identifying and investing in the technologies that can make a difference. "And my younger son, Harry, has passionately highlighted the impact of climate change, especially in relation to Africa, and committed his charity to being net zero." Charles also reflected on his late father, Prince Philip's, efforts to help the planet through the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). He wrote: "Sixty years ago, my late father identified the damage humankind was inflicting on the planet and helped to found the World Wildlife Fund. A decade later, when I first spoke publicly about the environment, many wondered if my sense of urgency was misplaced.



ANDY COHEN 'REGRETS' CRITICIZING SEACREST'S NEW YEAR'S EVE SHOW

The 53-year-old star caused a stir with his drunken comments while co-hosting CNN's 'New Year's Eve Live' special on Friday with his friend Anderson Cooper and although it was his rant against New York City's outgoing mayor, Bill de Blasio, that attracted the most attention, the 'Watch What Happens Live' star admitted the only thing he wishes he hadn't done was launch a barrage of negative remarks about ABC's rival program 'Dick Clark's New Year's Rockin' Eve' and its host. He said on his SiriusXM show 'Andy Cohen Live': "The only thing that I regret saying, the only thing is that I slammed the ABC broadcast and I really like Ryan Seacrest and he's a great

guy. And I really regret saying that, and I was just stupid and drunk and feeling it." During the broadcast, Andy criticized the "group of losers" performing on ABC's show, including Journey, Ashanti and Ja Rule. He said:

"There's lots of smoke coming from Ryan Seacrest's group of losers that are performing behind us. I mean, with all due [respect] if you've been watching ABC tonight, you've seen nothing. I'm sorry. It's true.



Lifestyle | Feature

NIBBLING CATS, COVID MASKS: FIRST LOOK AT CES TECH SHOW



An attendee places a finger inside the mouth of Yukai Engineering Inc Amagami Ham Ham play-biting cat robot, during CES Unveiled ahead of the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas, Nevada. —AFP photos



An attendee demonstrates the Shiftall Haritora X full-body tracking system and mutalk microphone for metaverse experiences while wearing an Oculus headset during CES Unveiled ahead of the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas.



The Shiftall Megane X virtual reality headphones for metaverse experiences are displayed during CES Unveiled ahead of the Consumer Electronics Show (CES).



An attendee demonstrates the Shiftall Megane X virtual reality headphones and mutalk microphone for metaverse experiences during CES Unveiled ahead of the Consumer Electronics Show (CES).

A finger-nibbling plush cat and a cooling fan for the ever-present anti-COVID mask: the CES tech show in Las Vegas on Monday offered a glimpse of the offerings at this year's meet-up. CES, one of the world's largest trade fairs, is pushing ahead with an in-person edition after being online-only last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Here are timely - and quirky - products that will be pitched at the Wednesday to Friday convention:

Cooling masks

Entrepreneur Eric Fouchard got tired of feeling hot and stuffy under his anti-COVID mask, so he came up with a tiny ventilation system that can be mounted under a face covering. The fan is held in place with a magnet assembly and is powered by a small rechargeable battery held in a strap that passes over the back of a user's neck. "The first way to use it is when you are on a plane or a train," he told AFP. "The second one is when you are working and you need to remove the mist on your glasses." "The filtration of the mask stays the same," Fouchard, a Frenchman, said of his Aeronest system.

'Sweet biting'

The Japanese phrase "amagami" translates roughly to "sweet biting" in English. "We find it very comfortable and we want to bring it to the world," Japanese entrepreneur Shunsuke Aoki said. He transformed that impulse into a small, battery-powered plush creature that nibbles gently on your finger. Aoki said young dogs or cats will harmlessly do the same thing, which is a source of comfort for people - noting that he likes to let the device nibble his finger while driving. "In a COVID situation, with people staying home every day, it gives you very good comfort," he added.

Who's driving?

Who will be behind the wheel of the race cars scheduled to hit the track at CES? No one. "It's completely self-driven. There's software that tells the car what to do," said Paul Mitchell, president and CEO of Energy Systems Network, the organizers of the Indy Autonomous Challenge racing competition.

"It takes the information from the sensors and it tells the car whether to turn, whether to brake, accelerate or overtake another vehicle," he added.

Autonomous cars will race on Friday on the Las Vegas Motor Speedway at speeds of up to 160 miles (nearly 260 kilometers) per hour. The exercise is not just for fun: Mitchell said the competition tests autonomous tech at high speeds so that, one day, cars can operate themselves on highways. "Race cars and racing in general is a great platform to push the technology to the absolute edge," he added.

Mask for more than COVID

The white plastic shell of these masks covers the nose and mouth - and looks like something out of Star Wars. But their inventors say they can stop pollution, bacteria and even COVID. Connected to a belt-worn device, it contains an "active" filter capable of destroying fine particles and pathogens or pollutants. "It's a fantastic tool to fight the COVID crisis," said Franck Glaizal, co-founder of Airxom. "Traditional masks are not 100 percent airtight, air passes through the sides. Our mask is completely airtight," said Trong Dai Nguyen, an engineer with the company. The current model is due to be released in a few months, for about \$340. "If you change (surgical) masks every four hours, after three years it is more expensive than our mask," he added.—AFP



Nicolas Duperret poses on a MoonBikes Motors snowbike, the world's first electric snowbike, during a press event for CES 2022 at the Mandalay Bay Convention Center.



Joji Yamaguchi of Languless Co holds a toy dog wearing an Inu-Pathy collar during a press event for CES 2022 at the Mandalay Bay Convention Center.

Bowie estate sells songwriting rights to Warner

David Bowie's estate has sold the publishing rights to his "entire body of work" to Warner Chappell Music, the company said Monday, the latest massive deal in a roaring song rights purchasing boom. Warner Chappell did not reveal financial terms of the agreement, but according to trade publications the price tag is estimated at upwards of \$250 million.

Recent years have seen a series of blockbuster music rights acquisitions by corporations—including from superstars Bruce Springsteen, Bob Dylan and Tina Turner—a trend driven by the anticipated stability of streaming growth combined with low interest rates and dependable earning projections for time-tested hits. The Bowie deal includes hundreds of songs spanning the glam rock pioneer's six-decade career, including "Space Oddity," "Changes," "Life on Mars?" and "Heroes."

"All of us at Warner Chappell are immensely proud that the David Bowie estate has chosen us to be the caretakers of one of the most groundbreaking, influential, and enduring catalogs in music history," said Guy Moot, head of WCM, in a statement. "These are not only extraordinary songs, but milestones that have changed the course of modern music forever." Warner now houses Bowie's work as a songwriter as well as a recording artist.

The owners of a song's publishing rights receive a cut in a number of scenarios, including radio play and streaming, album sales, and use in advertising and movies. Recording rights govern reproduction and distribution. Warner Music Group has handled much of Bowie's recorded catalog since 2013, last year adding his recordings from 2000 to 2016 to the fold. The announcement comes days before Bowie's birthday on January 8, when he would have turned 75, and the sixth anniversary of his death on January 10.

Lucrative asset class

Music catalogs have always changed hands but the current publishing sales frenzy has escalated rapidly, with financial markets increasingly drawn to lucrative music portfolios as an asset class. Bruce Springsteen's publishing and recorded music rights recently went to Sony for a staggering \$500 million, with Bob Dylan also selling his full publishing catalog to Universal for hundreds of millions of dollars.

The past year has seen other major acquisitions including from Stevie Nicks, Paul Simon, Motley Crue, The Red Hot Chili Peppers and Shakira. The flurry of sales comes amid a wider conversation over artists' ownership of the work, amplified in large part by Taylor Swift, who has found resounding success as she makes good on her vow to re-record her first six albums so she can control their master recording rights.

"If I'm a successful artist right now, I'm looking to own everything I could possibly own so I could sell everything off at some later date," music analyst Alan Cross told AFP, while also defending older artists' rights to cash in on their own work. Such sales are useful for estate planning and perhaps more lucrative in the long-term, Cross said: in the United States, making a lump-sum sale also means artists are taxed at the capital gains rate, which is much lower than the income tax they or their estates would pay on regular royalty checks.

'Memories and feelings'

Jeff Jampol, whose company manages legacy artists and their estates including the Doors and Janis Joplin, said the right moment to cash in is of course a gamble, as most catalogs "gain value over time." "It is cyclical—but if you're in your 70s, or you're making succession plans, do you want to wait for the next cycle?" he told AFP. But could such sales alter how fans engage with the music of these artists?

Maybe temporarily, Jampol said, but "long term" I don't think so. "Music encompasses and encapsulates memories and feelings," he said. "And those things don't change." The company that's publicized a large share of the recent explosion in sales is Hipgnosis Songs Fund, a British investment and management company. In its interim report released in September 2021, Hipgnosis said its rights vault has grown to 146 catalogues and 65,413 songs—a value the company places at \$2.55 billion.

For Jampol, the concern that looms largest over the recent flurry of transactions is that hedge funds, pension funds, and private equity firms now own seminal art. "What do they know about soul and poetry and art and what are they going to commit to from an artistic point of view?" he said. "It's not just numbers on pages," Jampol continued. "It's music that created very special feelings & emotions—and those shouldn't always be for rent to the highest bidder." —AFP

Eccentric French TV twins die of COVID

Two unvaccinated French TV star twin brothers, who made their name on a science program in the 1980s before becoming famous for their cosmetic surgery, have died within a week of each other from COVID-19, friends and family confirmed. The death of Igor Bogdanoff, 72, was confirmed on Monday evening by his lawyer Edouard de Lamaze, as well as his agent.

He died just six days after his brother Grichka Bogdanoff passed away in a Parisian hospital, also of COVID, the lawyer confirmed. Instantly recognizable in France and

a favorite in the country's glossy celebrity magazines, they also claimed to have taken part in the creation of Bitcoin.

"We were implicated, very early, in the birth of the cryptocurrency," Grichka told French TV show Non-Stop People in June, with their claim largely based on their proximity and friendship with Japanese mathematicians behind Bitcoin. Igor announced that they would soon launch their own currency, "Exocoin". Neither of the brothers had been vaccinated against COVID-19, their friend, Luc Ferry,

a former education minister, said last week.

Ferry told Le Parisien newspaper that he had urged both of them to get vaccinated "countless times" but they refused on the basis that they were "very sporty, without a gram of fat". "Grichka, like Igor, wasn't an anti-vaxxer. He was anti-vax for himself," Ferry said, confirming that both of them had contracted COVID. The Russian-origin twins shot to fame as the presenters of the hit 1980s science show "Temps X" on the country's TF1 channel and carved out careers as amateur and

often controversial science writers afterwards.

In their later years, their looks, socialite lifestyle and legal problems stemming from their attempt to relaunch "Temps X" kept them in the public eye. They denied having plastic surgery to explain their transformed looks, but admitted to having undergone "experimentations" which gave them their extreme high cheek bones, as well as large lips and pronounced chins. "We are proud of having faces like extra-terrestrials," they said in 2010. Igor was a father of six from several marriages. —AFP

Sports

Azarenka turns back time in dominant win over Badosa

Two-time Australian Open champion sends out 'a message'

ADELAIDE: Two-time Australian Open champion Victoria Azarenka sent out a message ahead of the opening Grand Slam of the year with a dominant win over Spain's Paula Badosa in the Adelaide International yesterday. The 32-year-old was in ruthless form as she blasted the world number eight off the court 6-3, 6-2 in just 77 minutes. Badosa had a breakthrough year in 2021, culminating in winning the BNP Paribas Open at Indian Wells, where she beat Azarenka in an epic three-set final.

But the 24-year-old was never in the hunt against the Belarusian yesterday, with Azarenka superior in every department. Azarenka won the Australian Open in 2012 and 2013, and she showed against Badosa that she could again threaten this year. "I wasn't expecting to play the way I did today," Azarenka said. "I felt really focused, I was really prepared and I'm glad the way I started the year. For me to come out and produce this type of tennis really makes me proud."

Earlier, former French Open champion Iga Swiatek launched her season and defense of her title with a straight-sets win over qualifier Daria Saville. The Pole took an hour and 20 minutes to see off the Australian 6-3, 6-3 and book a second-round clash against US Open finalist Leylah Fernandez. The 20-year-old Swiatek burst onto the world stage when she won the French Open in

2020, then claimed titles in Adelaide and Rome in 2021 to move into the world top 10. Against Saville, who missed most of 2020 and 2021 with injury, Swiatek came away with a comfortable win.

"I stayed focused pretty well," said Swiatek, who will chase a second Grand Slam crown at the Australian Open later this month. "Even though at the beginning I wasn't completely sure what my tactics should be because it was our first match, I stayed consistent, which was great. "I had some ups and downs, for sure, because it was my first match (of the season) but I feel pretty good." The 17-year-old American prodigy Coco Gauff brushed aside Norwegian qualifier Ulrikke Eikeri 6-2, 6-1 to book a tasty second-round clash with top seed Ashleigh Barty.

Also through is the 2020 Australian Open champion Sofia Kenin. The sixth-seeded American was pushed hard by Italian qualifier Lucia Bronzetti before winning 7-5, 7-5. Kenin will now take on Australia's Ajla Tomljanovic. There was an upset in the first match on centre court when 22-year-old Russian Anastasia Gasanova came from a set down to beat eighth seed Elina Svitolina 5-7, 6-4, 6-3. Svitolina looked lethargic after the first set and Gasanova took full advantage, outlasting the Ukrainian in a match a shade over two-and-a-half hours long. — AFP



ADELAIDE: Victoria Azarenka from Belarus hits a return against Spain's Paula Badosa at the Adelaide International 2022 WTA women's singles tennis match in Adelaide yesterday. — AFP



KUWAIT: Public Authority for Sports Deputy Director General for Competitive Sports Dr Saqer Al-Mulla received Rider Ali Makhseed from Kuwait Motor Sports Club after winning third place in the UAE draft race championship which was held in Abu Dhabi earlier. Dr Al-Mulla thanked Makhseed for his efforts.

Beijing seals off its Olympic 'bubble'

BEIJING: Beijing sealed up its Winter Olympic "bubble" yesterday, preparing the Games venues, transport and staff for the world's strictest mass sporting event since the global pandemic. China, where the virus emerged toward the end of 2019, has pursued a zero-tolerance strategy on COVID-19 and is taking the same approach to limit the pandemic's potential impact on the February 4-20 Winter Olympics and subsequent Paralympics.

From yesterday, thousands of Games-related staff, volunteers, cleaners, cooks and coach drivers will be cocooned for weeks in the so-called "closed loop" with no direct physical access to the outside world. That contrasts with the COVID-delayed Tokyo Summer Olympics, which allowed some movement in and out for volunteers and other personnel. The global media and roughly 3,000 athletes are expected to start arriving in the Chinese capital in the weeks ahead and will remain in the bubble from the moment they land until they leave the country.

Anyone entering the bubble must be fully vaccinated or face a 21-day quarantine when they touch down, and everyone inside will be tested daily and must wear face masks at all times. In an interview with AFP last Friday, Zhao Weidong, head of the Olympic organizing committee's media department, said Beijing was "fully prepared". "Hotels, transportation, accommodation, as well as our science and technology-led Winter Olympics projects are all ready," Zhao said. Beijing's international airport activated its closed-loop system after the clock struck midnight yesterday, state-run CCTV news reported.

Two Japanese participants were among the first to go through the system, which was staffed by officials

in full protective equipment and keeps all Games arrivals separate until they reach the Olympic village. Passengers are subjected to temperature checks and coronavirus tests on arrival but can proceed to the village without waiting for test results. "Suppose these people are carrying large luggage, such as bobsleighs, sleds or other sports equipment, they can hand over them to our logistics team here, who will deliver the equipment directly to venues or waxing rooms," Wang Yanling, operation manager at Capital Airport, told CCTV.

City lockdowns

Fans will not be part of the closed loop, and organizers will have to ensure that they do not mingle with athletes and others inside the bubble. People who live in China must also quarantine upon leaving the bubble to return home. The system includes dedicated transport between venues, with even closed-loop high-speed rail systems operating in parallel to those open to the public. It is set to be operating well into late March and possibly early April. AFP reporters outside venues in Beijing saw workers erecting wire fences and security guards standing by in the winter chill.

Most major venues are outside of the capital. Foreign diplomats in China have told AFP that the measures look to be so impregnable that they worry they will not be able to offer proper help to their nationals inside the bubble. China's "zero-COVID" strategy has been successful in keeping cases low but the system has come under pressure with a series of recent outbreaks in recent weeks. Xi'an, a historic city of 13 million, has been under lockdown for nearly two weeks after a spate of cases was detected. Yuzhou, a city with a population of around 1.17 million people in Henan province, also began a lockdown on Monday night after three asymptomatic cases were discovered. — AFP



BEIJING: Workers use zip ties to lock up a fence to help create a 'bubble' surrounding the Beijing Olympic Park yesterday in Beijing. — AFP

Djokovic heading to Australian Open with COVID-19 exemption

MELBOURNE: World number one Novak Djokovic said yesterday that he was heading to the Australian Open to defend his title after being granted a COVID-19 medical exemption to play. All participants at the opening Grand Slam of the year, which starts on January 17, need to be vaccinated against COVID-19 or have the exemption, which is assessed by an independent panel of experts. The Serb has repeatedly refused to confirm if he has been inoculated, with his participation at Melbourne Park the subject of intense speculation after he pulled out of the ongoing ATP Cup in Sydney.

"I've spent fantastic quality time with my loved ones over the break and today I'm heading Down Under with an exemption permission. Let's go 2022!" the nine-time Australian Open winner, who beat Daniil Medvedev in last year's final, said on Instagram. His post was accompanied by a picture of the 34-year-old at an airport, looking relaxed, with his bags on a trolley.

"Djokovic applied for a medical exemption which was granted following a rigorous review process involving two separate independent panels of medical experts," Tennis Australia said in a statement.

'Genuine reason'

Tournament director Craig Tiley last week confirmed a number of players had been granted exemptions, without naming Djokovic, while explaining the process involved. "There are two medical panels that assess any application, and they assess it in a blind way. They don't know who the applicant is," he told reporters. "Against the ATAGI [Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation] guidelines, an exemption gets granted or not. The reason for granting that exemption remains private, between the panel and the applicant."

He said yesterday there had to have been a "genuine reason" to grant an exemption. "Central to this process was that the decisions were made by independent medical experts and that every applicant was given due consideration," he said. Djokovic expressed his opposition to the COVID-19 vaccine in April 2020 when it was suggested they might be



Serbia's Novak Djokovic

obligatory so tournament play could resume. "Personally I am not pro-vaccines," said Djokovic. "I would not like it for someone to compel me to be vaccinated so I can travel. "But if it becomes compulsory, what will happen? I will have to make a decision."

It is not the first time Djokovic has opposed the perceived medical route having been against surgery when he had an elbow problem in 2017 - this decision led to his split with then coach Andre Agassi. However, when his alternative remedy did not work he opted for surgery in 2018 although he regretted doing so on a personal note.

"Every time I thought about what I did, I felt like I had failed myself," Djokovic told the Daily Telegraph. Djokovic has received support from his family too over his Australian conundrum. His father Srdjan said in late November that his son would probably not play in Melbourne, accusing the organizers of "blackmail". Government officials in Victoria state, which hosts the Australian Open, had been adamant for months that only vaccinated players would be able to play the tournament.

"They're the rules. Medical exemptions are just that - it's not a loophole for privileged tennis players," the state's Deputy Premier James Merlino said recently. Confirmation that the Serbian superstar is en route sets the scene for a showdown with arch-rival Rafael Nadal, with both gunning for a record 21st Grand Slam title. The Spanish superstar is already in Melbourne preparing after recovering from the coronavirus. Fellow 20-time Grand Slam winner Roger Federer is sidelined by injury and not travelling to Australia. — AFP

Bigger squads

Despite record numbers of coronavirus cases as Britain battles the Omicron variant, Premier League clubs have so far been allowed to maintain full crowds. That has avoided a repeat of the economic losses from matchday revenue of the past two seasons and the English top-flight's record breaking \$2.7 billion US television rights with NBC to kick in next season will only increase its financial advantage over other major leagues.

However, there is not expected to be much transfer activity among those towards the top of the table with Manchester City already taking control of the title race thanks to a 10-point lead over Chelsea. City have even offloaded Ferran Torres to Barcelona for a reported 55 million euros (\$62 million). But manager Pep Guardiola confirmed the Spanish international's departure will not mean City will be addressing their lack of a natural striker. Chelsea have been rumored with a move for Everton's Lucas Digne to cover for left-back Ben Chilwell, who has been ruled out for the rest of the season with a knee injury.

Liverpool look set to rely on what they have in reserve to cope without Mohamed Salah and Sadio Mane while they are at the Africa Cup of Nations. The prospect of Champions League riches next season could lure Arsenal, Tottenham or West Ham into strengthening as they battle for a top-four finish. Manchester United trail all three sides but there are more likely to be departures than arrivals at Old Trafford with interim boss Ralf Rangnick admitting his squad is "too big". French international Anthony Martial is reportedly close to a loan move to Sevilla after expressing his desire to leave, while Dean Henderson, Jesse Lingard, Juan Mata and Donny van de Beek could also move on in search of more first-team action. — AFP

All eyes on Newcastle for Premier League's January arms race

MANCHESTER: Three months on since a controversial takeover by the Saudi sovereign wealth fund was given the green light by the Premier League, Newcastle have the chance to splash their newfound wealth in the January transfer window. The Magpies are badly in need of reinforcements just to remain in the English top-flight after winning just one of their 19 games this season.

Newcastle's last two matches have even been postponed because they were unable to field a team with enough senior players due to coronavirus infections and a growing injury list that could dictate who arrives at St. James' Park in the next 27 days. Defenders are expected to be top of the shopping list after Newcastle shipped a Premier League record 80 goals in 2021, 42 of which have come this season.

England international right-back Kieran Trippier is reportedly close to a £25 million (\$34 million) move from Atletico Madrid with Lille centre-back Sven Botman also a target. "Trippier is an extraordinary footballer who has given us a lot and we will try to keep him," said Atletico manager Diego Simeone after Sunday's 2-0 win over Rayo Vallecano. "But nowadays, when a player wants to leave, you can't force them to stay." Injuries to Newcastle's two most potent attacking weapons Callum Wilson and Allan Saint-Maximin have also seen some star strikers linked with a move to Tyneside, including Arsenal's out of favor Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang.

Sports

Wolverhampton end Rangnick's honeymoon at Manchester Utd

Shaw questions Manchester United's commitment

MANCHESTER: Wolves ended Ralf Rangnick's unbeaten start as Manchester United interim manager on Monday as Joao Moutinho's strike earned a deserved 1-0 win at Old Trafford. A first home defeat to Wolves in 42 years leaves United still seventh in the Premier League table, four points adrift of the top four. But it was another lacklustre performance that was just as concerning as the result for Rangnick as the Red Devils were thoroughly outplayed.

"We didn't play well at all, neither individually or collectively," said Rangnick, who had taken 10 points from his first four games in charge. "We didn't press at all. We tried but after 10 or 15 minutes we were not able to get into those pressing situations." "The games show we still have a lot of work to do. Especially against the ball, but also in the first half when we had the ball, we had too many unforced giveaways."

An injury crisis at centre-back with captain Harry Maguire, Victor Lindelof and Eric Bailly all missing, forced Rangnick to hand Phil Jones his first Premier League appearance in two years. But the former England international was one of few United players to emerge with any credit from a ragged display that raises questions over their chances of qualifying for next season's Champions League. Cristiano Ronaldo was named United captain for just the second time in the absence of Maguire.

In his new year message on social media, Ronaldo said he was "not happy" with the state of affairs at United and that "we have to work harder, play better and deliver way more than we are delivering right now." However, there was no sign of improvement as Ronaldo was kept quiet up against a number of his Portuguese international teammates. David De Gea was the difference between the sides when United won 1-0 at Molineux in August and the Spaniard was again his side's saviour with a finger tip save to turn Ruben Neves' volley over early on.



MANCHESTER: Manchester United German Interim head coach Ralf Rangnick gestures on the touchline during the English Premier League football match on December 30, 2021. — AFP photos

Wolves managed more shots in the first half than they had in their previous three matches combined. But Bruno Lage's men have scored just 14 goals in 19 league games and again failed to make their control of the game show in the scoreline. "It is one more victory," said Lage. "Lovely stadium, a place with a lot of history, but the most important thing is how we played." "We played in our way, we controlled the first half and missed a lot of chances. We win three points but again we have more chances than goals."

Rangnick left Bruno Fernandes on the bench after the Portugal midfielder missed Thursday's 3-1 win over Burnley due to suspension. However, it was not until his introduction on the hour mark that the home side even began to threaten a breakthrough. Fernandes should have opened the scoring when he rattled the crossbar with the best chance of the match from Nemanja Matic's cross 23 minutes from time.



MANCHESTER: Wolverhampton Wanderers' Mexican striker Raul Jimenez (right) shoots past Manchester United's English defender Phil Jones but over the crossbar during the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and Wolverhampton Wanderers on January 3, 2022.

Moments later his free-kick was headed home by Ronaldo, but clearly from an offside position. United's attacking flurry quickly fizzled out and Romain Saiss hit the bar from a free-kick as Wolves continued to pose a threat. The visitors finally got their reward eight minutes from time when Jones'

header fell kindly for Moutinho at the edge of the box and he drilled low into the bottom corner. Jose Sa was still needed to make a vital save from another fierce Fernandes free-kick with virtually the last kick of the game. Victory lifts Wolves up to eighth, just three points behind United. — AFP

Mbappe's hat-trick fires PSG into French Cup last 16

VANNES: Kylian Mbappe scored a hat-trick as Paris Saint-Germain overcame their COVID crisis and a drone-related interruption to ease into the French Cup last 16 on Monday with a 4-0 win over fourth-division Vannes. Despite the absence of five PSG players including superstar Lionel Messi and Danilo after positive tests for COVID-19, Mauricio Pochettino's side were never worried by the Brittany minnows.

Defender Presnel Kimpembe, wearing the captain's armband, headed in after 28 minutes just after the match had been interrupted for a minute after a drone flew over the Rabine Stadium in western France. Kimpembe then set up Mbappe for the second just before the hour mark with the French forward completing a hat-trick in an 18-minute spell.

Mbappe added a second after 71 minutes after good work from Marco Verratti and Xavi Simons adding a third six minutes later for his 150th goal in a PSG jersey. "I'm happy to get started again," said World Cup winner Mbappe. "It was not an easy match for us to play, but we were there." Pochettino added: "We can be happy with our team performance, very solid. His (Mbappe) goals were the icing on the cake. He is a top player in the world."



VANNES: Paris Saint-Germain's French forward Kylian Mbappe (up) tries to control the ball during the French Cup round of 32 football match between Vannes OC and Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) at La Rabine Stadium on January 3, 2022. — AFP

"We made a few adjustments at half-time, including the positioning of the midfielders. It allowed us to be more fluid in the flow of the ball, and to find depth." Vannes' Cup dream was over with the Brittany side also missing out on their hoped for bonanza after the French government's crowd restrictions with 5,000 spectators only permitted at outdoor events. Vannes had been hoping for a 9,600 sell-out and according to their

president Maxime Ray are set to miss out on revenue of 250,000 euros (\$282,000).

"We are missing out on what is a fortune to us," he said. COVID could also overshadow Tuesday's Lens versus Lille Cup clash with seven players from the visiting team confirmed positive. "We had four COVID cases which has now become seven," said Lille coach Jocelyn Gourvennec, without naming the players. — AFP

Ocampos strike sees Sevilla sink Cadiz 1-0

MADRID: A second half goal from Lucas Ocampos was enough for Sevilla to claim a 1-0 win at Cadiz on Monday and move five points behind La Liga leaders Real Madrid. Oihan Sancet bagged a hat-trick in Athletic Bilbao's 3-1 win over Osasuna while Villarreal hammered bottom side Levante 5-0. Sevilla struggled to break down a Cadiz side that is second from bottom and facing a difficult battle against relegation.

The breakthrough came in the 58th minute with Ivan Rakitic providing the assist and the Argentinian Ocampos supplying the finish. Sevilla remain second, five points behind Real Madrid but with a game in hand. Villarreal leapfrogged Valencia into eighth with a five-goal thrashing of Levante. Boulaye Dia opened the scoring after just three minutes and further goals from Pau Torres and Gerard Moreno saw them leading 3-0 at the break.

Manuel Trigueros added a fourth in the 74th minute before Moreno rounded off the rout five minutes later with his second of the night. Levante have now mustered just eight points from 19 matches and are eight points away from safety. Bilbao also moved up a place to tenth after Sancet's hat-trick saw them past Osasuna. Kike put the home side ahead after 10 minutes but 21-year-old Sancet stepped up to steal the show, scoring twice in the first half and completing his hat-trick in the 68th minute. — AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000	Khaldiya	24848075
Amiri Hospital	22450005	Kaifan	24849807
Maternity Hospital	24843100	Shamiya	24848913
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700	Shuwaikh	24814507
Chest Hospital	24849400	Abdullah Salem	22549134
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010	Nuzha	22526804
Adan Hospital	23940620	Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300	Qadsiya	22515088
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000	Dasmah	22532265
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9	Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
		Shaab	22518752
		Qibla	22459381
		Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
		Mirqab	22456536
		Sharq	22465401
		Salmiya	25746401

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144

CHANGE OF NAME

My old name is **Nuruddin** change to new name as **Nuruddin Alimohammed bawaji**. Old place of birth Banswara Rajasthan change to new place of birth Partapur Banswara Rajasthan and I am divorced. (C 0999) 5-1-2022

Job Opportunities

**CRANE OPERATOR
HEAVY TRAILER DRIVER**
General Requirements
• Must have transferable 18 no. visa
• Can Join Immediately
• Crane Operator - 400 KD
• HT Driver - 225 KD
Contact
Tel.: 67010017

EMERGENCY 112

Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is 1889988

For labor-related inquiries and complaints:
Call MSALHOTLINE 128

REQUIRED Female Business Development Executive

Responsibilities:

- Depth knowledge in U.S. DOD & Affiliates Contracts in Kuwait
- Analyzes Contract requirements (special provision, etc.)
- Negotiation skills on contracts terms and conditions to mitigate business risk and maximize financial objectives.
- Identifying new avenues for business growth and generate business leads
- Identifying decision makers and making customer profiles
- understanding the potential customer's points
- Maintaining successful relationship with existing customers
- Regularly communicating with contracting officers for existing and upcoming requirements
- Reporting both client's success and failures to the team
- Updating all efforts and lead information in the CRM (or equivalent tool) every day
- Constantly learning and acquiring in-depth knowledge of relevant technology, products and competition
- Carrying out any other tasks as assigned by the team managers

Requirements:

- Required experience in dealing with Military bases and U.S. DOD & Affiliates contracts.
- A degree from recognized university and excellent MS office skills.
- Preferred U.S. national, but preference also given to other nationals.
- Transferable Residency (Visa 18)
- Valid Kuwait Driving license.
- Required Female candidate.

Send us your updated CV to majid.arif@gscsgulf.com

'Big Ben' leads Steelers past Browns

Roethlisberger bids farewell to Heinz Field



PITTSBURGH: Najee Harris #22 of the Pittsburgh Steelers rushes with the ball in the fourth quarter against the Cleveland Browns at Heinz Field on January 03, 2022 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: Ben Roethlisberger bid farewell to Heinz Field with a 26-14 win over the Cleveland Browns in what is likely to be the quarterback's final home for the Pittsburgh Steelers on Monday night. With the clock ticking on the two-time Super Bowl champion's time in Pittsburgh, Roethlisberger passed for 123 yards and a touchdown as the Steelers kept their NFL playoff hopes alive. If this is to be the final lap of Big Ben's 18-year NFL career, Monday's performance turned back the clock. "I am at a loss for words," the 39-year-old Roethlisberger said.

"I am so thankful for this place and these fans. There is no place like it. "I have called this place home for almost half my life." His family came onto the field to join him as many of the fans remained in the stadium well after the final horn sounded. The future Hall of Famer took his time leaving the field, walking the perimeter of the stadium shaking hands of people who pressed up against the railings and soaking in the cheers from the adoring Steeler faithful who chanted "Thank you Ben" during the game.

"I wish I could bottle this and have it forever," Roethlisberger said. "I was born in Ohio but I live here. This place Heinz Field is so special to me and means so much to my family." The Steelers remain in the playoff hunt after the win over the Browns, who have been eliminated from the AFC postseason. The Steelers (8-7-1) must now win their final game in Baltimore next week and receive some help to wrap up one of the

conference's seven playoff spots.

They are a half-game behind the Indianapolis Colts, Las Vegas Raiders and Los Angeles Chargers entering the final week of the regular season. The Raiders and Chargers face each other next weekend. Roethlisberger had plenty of help on Monday. Rookie Najee Harris ran for a career-best 188 yards and a touchdown while Chris Boswell kicked four field goals. The same could not be said for embattled Browns quarterback Baker Mayfield, who was sacked nine times, including four times by T.J. Watt.

"This is the story of my career. It is not always pretty but we found a way to win," said Roethlisberger. Heading into the game, Roethlisberger ranked fifth in NFL history with 63,721 passing yards and eighth with 416 passing touchdowns. This season, he has passed 21 touchdowns and nine interceptions. Harris had 28 carries and also broke the franchise's single-season rookie rushing record with 1,172 yards. He surpassed Hall of Famer Franco Harris, who had 1,055 yards in 1972.

Mayfield completed 16 of 38 passes for 185 yards, two touchdowns and two interceptions for the Browns, who dropped to 7-9 on the season. David Njoku and Harrison Bryant caught touchdown passes. Mayfield told reporters after the game that he was dealing with some injuries and wasn't sure if he would be able to play next week. "Now it's time for me to start looking at what's best for me and my health," he said. "I'm pretty damn beat up right now." — AFP



PITTSBURGH: Ben Roethlisberger #7 of the Pittsburgh Steelers runs on the field during player introductions prior to a game against the Cleveland Browns at Heinz Field on January 03, 2022. — AFP

Trail Blazers outgun Hawks as Joel Embiid records triple double

LOS ANGELES: Anfernee Simons scored a career-best 43 points as the Portland Trail Blazers snapped a four-game losing streak with a 136-131 win over the Atlanta Hawks on Monday. Simons shot 13 of 21 from the floor, drained nine of 16 from the three-point line and sank all eight of his free throws in front of a crowd of 15,100 at the Moda Center arena. Trae Young led the Hawks by scoring an NBA season-high 56 points. "I don't care about nothing besides the fact we lost, so it sucks I had this type of night on a loss because at the end of the day that's all that matters to me," said Young. "I just wish we would have won."

Young shot 17 for 26 from the field and added 14 assists in the loss. Young's 56-points surpassed Kevin Durant's 51-point performance for the Nets at Detroit on December 12. Golden State's Stephen Curry and Boston's Jaylen Brown have also had 50-point games this season. Young also became the first player with 50-plus points and 14-plus assists in an NBA game since James Harden did it with the Houston Rockets in 2016.

The game marked Young's second 50-point performance of his career, as he previously scored 50 against Miami on February 20, 2020. Portland played without Damian Lillard, CJ McCollum and Cody Zeller. Trail Blazers coach Chauncey Billups was back

on the bench after missing three games due to COVID-19 measures. Norman Powell scored 26 points and Nassir Little added 22 in the win for Portland.

Elsewhere, Joel Embiid posted his third career triple double with 31 points, 15 rebounds and 10 assists to power the Philadelphia 76ers past the struggling Houston Rockets 133-113. "We can beat anybody on any given night," Embiid said. Furkan Korkmaz added 24 points and a career-high 11 rebounds, Isaiah Joe scored 18 points, Seth Curry contributed 15 and Tobias Harris had 14 as the Sixers won their fourth-straight game.

Garrison Mathews scored a team-high 23 points, while Eric Gordon and Jae'Sean Tate each scored 14 and Josh Christopher had 13 for the Rockets, who have lost eight straight. Jalen Green and David Nwaba chipped in with 12 apiece and Kenyon Martin Jr had 11 points. Philadelphia played without Tyrese Maxey, Matisse Thybulle and head coach Doc Rivers as they were sidelined because of COVID-19 measures. Assistant coach Dan Burke served as the acting head coach for the second consecutive game.

"He was not going to let us lose that game," Burke said of Embiid. Philadelphia needed a 41-29 third quarter to put some distance between themselves and the Rockets, the worst team in the Western Conference. "Whether it's me pushing the ball, attacking or finding guys, I thought it's been great," Embiid said. In Washington, Bradley Beal and Kyle Kuzma led a late rally and combined for 71 points as the Washington Wizards beat the Charlotte Hornets 124-121.

Curry goes cold

Kuzma had 36 points and 14 rebounds and Beal



PHILADELPHIA: Joel Embiid #21 of the Philadelphia 76ers shoots the ball against the Houston Rockets on January 3, 2022 at Wells Fargo Center in Philadelphia. — AFP

posted 35 points, while Daniel Gafford finished with 15 points and 11 rebounds for the Wizards, who were coming off a one-point loss to the Chicago Bulls on Saturday night. Davis Bertans and Corey Kispert added 14 and 12 points in the win. Washington came back from a double-digit deficit in the second half, by scoring nine consecutive points to grab a seven-

point lead in the final minute. In the late game in San Francisco, Jordan Poole and Gary Payton combined for 46 points as the Golden State Warriors overcame a subpar performance from Stephen Curry to outlast the visiting Miami Heat 115-108. Curry shot just one for 10 on three-pointers and three for 17 overall to finish with just nine points. — AFP