



**4** Workers must attend in person for final cancellation request



**5** Kazakhstan cuts Internet, vows 'tough' response to protests



**13** Latvia's symbolic blue cow back from the brink

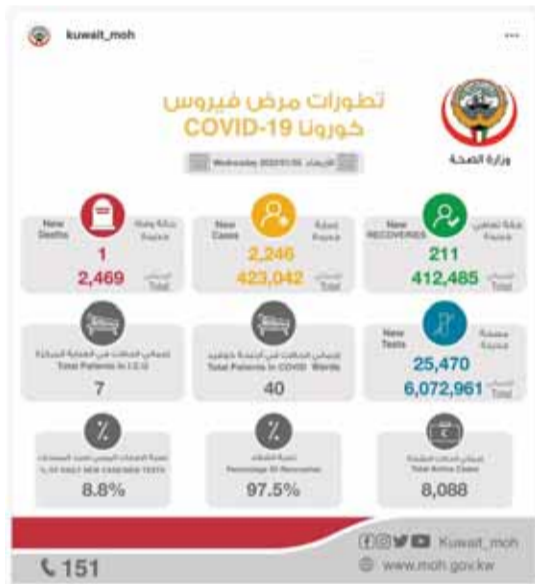


**15** Egypt will lean on Salah at African showpiece



# Kuwait records highest-ever 2,246 new coronavirus cases

## Hong Kong bans flights as Omicron surges around globe



**KUWAIT:** The health ministry yesterday said that 2,246 people tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 24 hours, taking Kuwait's total caseload to 423,042. Recoveries went up by 211 to reach 412,485. Health Ministry Spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said, noting that recoveries represent 97.5 percent of overall infections. One death from the pandemic yesterday brought the total death toll to 2,469, he told KUNA. Seven COVID cases are in ICU's and 40 patients are in hospital wards, while 8,088 others are being treated at home. As many as 25,470 swab tests were conducted, taking the total to 6,072,961 tests, Dr Sanad added.

Meanwhile, Asian financial hub Hong Kong banned flights from eight nations yesterday as part of strict new virus curbs, with Omicron outbreaks spiraling out of control from Europe to the United States. The new coronavirus variant is spreading rapidly across continents, leaving governments rushing to roll out vaccine boosters and bolster healthcare systems as infection numbers reach new highs.

Britain, the United States, France and Australia have all announced record case numbers in recent days, while China has imposed lockdowns in two cities and rolled out mass testing for millions as it doubles down on its "zero Covid" policy ahead of the Beijing Winter Olympics. Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam said the city was shuttering bars and gyms and cancelling evening restaurant dining after Omicron was detected in the international business hub.

The restrictions are the latest economic blow to a city that has kept cases low but left residents cut off from the rest of the world with tight border controls. Like mainland China, Hong Kong has maintained some of the world's harshest controls - including weeks-long quarantine periods, targeted lockdowns and mass testing. The city had recorded 114 Omicron cases as of Tuesday evening, with a small community outbreak traced to Cathay Pacific airline staff sparking the latest curbs.

Lam said health officials feared the strain was silently spreading within the community. Flights from

Australia, Canada, France, India, Pakistan, the Philippines, Britain and the United States will be banned for the next two weeks. Hong Kong also ordered a cruise ship carrying 3,700 people back to port for testing after nine passengers were found to be close contacts of Omicron patients.

To the north in the Chinese city of Zhengzhou, 13 million residents were ordered to take COVID-19 tests yesterday after just 11 Omicron cases were detected. The central city is under a partial lockdown, joining millions more in the nearby cities of Xi'an and Yuzhou also living under stay-at-home orders. But Xi'an's case numbers fell to their lowest level in weeks, with officials saying the outbreak had been "brought under control".

China has stuck to a rigid approach of stamping out COVID cases when they appear, with tight border restrictions and targeted lockdowns, since COVID-19 first emerged in the country in 2019. But with less than a month to go until the Beijing Winter  
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### News in brief

#### Coalition threatens Houthi ports

**RIYADH:** A Saudi-led military coalition threatened Tuesday to target Yemen's rebel-held ports after Houthi fighters seized a UAE-flagged ship - unless the vessel is freed. "The terrorist, Iran-backed Houthi militia must promptly release the commercial cargo ship (RWABEE) with all its humanitarian, non-combatant cargo intact," coalition spokesman Turki Al-Malki said. — AFP

#### 13 dead in Philadelphia fire

**NEW YORK:** Thirteen people died when a fire tore through public housing apartments in the eastern US city of Philadelphia yesterday, US media reported. US networks including NBC and CBS reported that the blaze in the Fairmount area of the city had killed 13 people. The Philadelphia Inquirer cited police as saying that the three-storey home had been converted into two apartments. — AFP

#### Three arrested over 'auction' app

**MUMBAI:** Three young Indians accused of setting up a fake auction app advertising the sale of prominent Muslim women have been arrested, police said yesterday. Photos of more than 100 women were featured on the "Bulli Bai" app alongside derogatory messages. — AFP (See Page 5)

#### Ethiopia detaining deportees

**NAIROBI:** Thousands of ethnic Tigrayans deported from Saudi Arabia have been detained, abused or forcibly disappeared after arriving back home in Ethiopia, Human Rights Watch said in a new report yesterday. Tigrayans repatriated from Saudi Arabia were singled out and held in Addis Ababa and elsewhere against their will upon returning, HRW said. — AFP

#### France opens terror probe

**PARIS:** French prosecutors said Tuesday they have opened a terror probe over a Dec 30 blast in Saudi Arabia targeting a car participating in the Dakar rally that badly wounded its French driver. "A preliminary investigation has been opened into multiple attempted killings in connection with a terrorist group," national anti-terror prosecutors said in a statement. — AFP

## MPs reject taxes, urge solution to population crisis

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** In a peaceful National Assembly session, MPs yesterday called on the government to resolve the housing problem, condemned failure to check corruption and warned of randomly naturalizing people. Unlike Tuesday's session which was filled with tension, during which MPs traded harsh words and insults, yesterday's session passed off without any problems.

Debating the Amiri Address, read at the opening session of the new term in October, the lawmakers reiterated full determination to prevent the imposition of taxes or raising costs of public services, and demanded a solution to the consumer debt problem.

**Continued on Page 2**



KUWAIT: MPs and ministers attend a session of the National Assembly yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## Palestinian prisoner ends hunger strike

**JERUSALEM:** A Palestinian prisoner refusing food for months over his detention ended his hunger strike late Tuesday after the Zionist entity committed to his eventual release, his lawyer told AFP. Hisham Abu Hawash, a 40-year-old member of the Islamic Jihad militant movement, began refusing food in August to protest the Zionist entity holding him without charges or trial.

The married father of five from Dura, in the south of the Zionist-occupied West Bank, is being held under administrative detention - a practice of arresting suspects for renewable six-month terms without allowing them to view the charges or evidence against them. Under an agreement proposed to Abu Hawash, his detention will not be extended beyond Feb 26 in return for his ending his fast.

His lawyer, Jawad Boulos, said Abu Hawash accepted the deal. "He agreed and ended his hunger strike just 10 minutes ago, he had some tea, and everything is okay," Boulos told AFP late Tuesday. The International Committee of the Red Cross, whose medical teams visited Abu Hawash over the weekend, said he was in "critical condition" after fasting for some 140 days, warning of "potentially irreversible health consequences and possible tragic loss of life".



Palestinian prisoner Hisham Abu Hawash is fed by his wife in hospital after ending his hunger strike late Tuesday. — AFP

The deal came after a campaign that drew support from Palestinians, ranging from Fatah that rules the West Bank, to militant factions in Gaza threatening revenge on the Zionist entity if Abu Hawash died. Palestinian prime minister Mohammad Shtayeh said the government was following the case and acting on the behalf of Abu Hawash. Hamas, the militant Islamist movement that rules the Gaza Strip, warned the issue was a "red line" for Palestinians.

Islamic Jihad, the second largest militant group in Gaza, said it held "the (Zionist) occupation fully responsible for the deteriorating health" of Abu Hawash, threatening revenge if he died. Demonstrations in his support were held in recent days in the West Bank and Gaza. — AFP

## Taleban order shops to behead mannequins

**HERAT:** The Taleban have ordered shop owners in western Afghanistan to cut the heads off mannequins, insisting figures representing the human form violate Islamic law. A video clip showing men sawing the heads off shop dummies in Herat has gone viral on social media, drawing scorn both inside and outside the country.

Since returning to power in August, the Taleban have increasingly imposed a harsh interpretation of Islamic law and severely curtailed freedoms - particularly those of women and girls. While the hardline Islamists have not issued any formal national policy on mannequins - or other creeping restrictions - various local authorities are clamping down on what they say are immoral practices.

Aziz Rahman, head of the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice in Herat, confirmed the order to AFP yesterday. Some shopkeepers had tried to get around the decapitation order by covering mannequin heads with scarves or bags, but Rahman said that did not go far enough. "If they just cover the head or hide the entire mannequin, the angel of Allah will not enter their shop or house and bless them," he said.

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## Local

# Kuwait oil price up to \$80.34 per barrel following output hike news

## Increase in line with efforts to retain market stability: Minister

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti crude oil went up Tuesday by 65 cents to \$80.34 per barrel (pb), compared with \$79.70 pb on Sunday, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. Globally, the Brent crude was up \$1.02 to \$80 pb and West Texas Intermediate also went up by 91 cents to \$76.99 pb. The increase came simultaneously with statements of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Oil Dr Mohammad Al-Fares, who unveiled Tuesday that Kuwait will increase its crude production by 27,000 barrels per day (bpd) to 2,612,000 bpd starting February 1, 2022. In the meantime, the OPEC daily basket price rose by 93 cents to \$78.93 a barrel Tuesday, compared with \$78.00 the previous Monday, said the cartel yesterday. The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) said on



**Kuwait has special role in OPEC: Ambassador**



OPEC and Non-OPEC partners, which were held via videoconference.

### Full conformity

Fares, also minister of electricity, water and renewable energy, underlined the importance of full conformity of the OPEC and Non-OPEC alliance with output levels to retain market stability and inflow of supplies. Despite growing fears about the return of lockdowns and quarantine measures particularly after the emergence of new variants, as well as the rising inflation rates, the minister suggested that there are many reasons to be optimistic about the future: mainly the continuing recovery of global economy; vaccination campaigns' expansion

and acceleration; recovery of the industrial sector; a spike in global demand for oil; and many countries' release of some of their strategic crude reserves, which helped achieve the current balance in oil markets. He noted that OPEC+ alliance will remain prudent in approach with regards to production adjustments and will review output levels on a monthly basis to ensure market stability.

Earlier, the OPEC+ decided to proceed with a production hike of 400,000 bpd, keeping their current policy of slight monthly increases in output. The decision is based on 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, said an OPEC+ statement.

Tuesday's meeting came ahead of talks slated for February 2, where existential conditions in the oil market will be reassessed, added the statement.

During their meeting on Tuesday, members of the OPEC+ alliance underlined the paramount significance of utter compliance and compensation mechanism for the alliance's member states. The OPEC+ alliance also agreed to follow up on the developments of the epidemiological situation, monitor its repercussions on the market, and make immediate adjustments if necessary. The oil-producing countries of OPEC+ are expected to continue changing the production until amending the current level of 5.8 million bpd.

### Special role

Separately, Kuwaiti Ambassador to Austria and its Permanent Representative at the UN Headquarters in Vienna Sadiq Marafi said yesterday that choosing the State of Kuwait to lead OPEC Secretariat reflected its unique role in the global oil market. In a statement to the press, he said that the appointment of the new Secretary General of OPEC, Kuwait's Haitham Al-Ghais, revealed that the status of the country and its huge role in OPEC solidify its organization's role in decreasing impact of geopolitical factors on the oil market and help stabilize the prices.

Kuwait also had mediating role in solving issues within OPEC in the past 60 years, Marafi added. Moreover, he pointed out the selection of Ghais was due his expertise within the market, noting that he was deputy managing director for International Marketing at KPC.

Ghais also chaired the Joint Technical Committee (JTC) of the Declaration of Co-operation (DoC) in 2017 and subsequently served as a member of the JTC until June 2021. Ghais has three decades experience in the oil market and he will take assume his post at OPEC in August, Marafi indicated. Ghais will succeed former OPEC Secretary General Nigeria's Mohammed Barkindo. — KUNA

its bulletin that the average annual rate of the basket last year hit \$69.89 pd.

The increase in Kuwait's oil price came simultaneously with statements of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Oil Dr Mohammad Al-Fares, who unveiled Tuesday that Kuwait will increase its crude production by 27,000 barrels per day (bpd) to 2,612,000 bpd starting February 1, 2022. This rise comes in compliance with Kuwait's new crude output quota after the OPEC and non-OPEC alliance's decision to upwardly adjust output level by 400,000 bpd as of next month, the minister said in a press statement after his participation in the 36th meeting of the joint ministerial monitoring committee and the 24th meeting of the oil ministers of the

## Weaker virus? Herd immunity? Omicron sparks cautious hopes

PARIS: With new versions forcing vaccine makers to re-test jabs, the virus that causes COVID-19 has proven highly unpredictable. But the latest variant to sweep the globe has persuaded some experts that long hoped-for collective immunity is in sight, and that the virus may be evolving into a relatively benign seasonal illness. Omicron has proven particularly contagious, infecting people thought to have immunity conferred by vaccines or a bout with the disease itself.

But while Omicron is driving a record number of cases in countries around the world, the illness is generally less severe, compared to previous variants. More people getting Omicron and recovering, combined with more vaccinations, could be the key to boosting collective defenses against almost any form of COVID, some experts have said.

Lower rates of hospitalization due to Omicron also suggests COVID-19 might evolve into a weaker form, similar to coronaviruses long circulating in the general population. "Perhaps we are witnessing the beginning of an evolution towards a more banal virus like the others we know," said Alain Fischer, who coordinates France's pandemic vaccine response.

Clinical virologist Julian Tang reacting to a UK study on Omicron's lesser severity, said he imagined one day repeat vaccination and other measures would only be necessary for the most vulnerable. "I am still hopeful that the virus will eventually become more like the other common cold coronaviruses - perhaps over the next one to two years," he said. These conjectures have been embraced by public health officials. Speaking before the legislature this week, French health minister Olivier Veran

said "maybe this will be the wave that allows us to acquire a kind of immunity".

Earlier, his Zionist counterpart, Nachman Ash, told a Zionist radio station that herd immunity was "possible". "But we don't want to reach it by means of infections," he said. "We want it to happen as a result of more people getting vaccinated." In the Zionist entity, two thirds of the population is fully vaccinated. This week the government approved a fourth jab for people over 60 and health workers in a bid to fight the virus without resorting to a lockdown.

Even if Omicron leads to fewer severe cases per million people, a larger proportion of the population infected means that hospitalizations are bound to increase overall. The World Health Organization (WHO) ahead of the holidays stressed the danger of many people getting infected with Omicron while the more severe Delta variant is still circulating. In the absence of herd immunity worldwide, Omicron is unlikely to be the last Covid variant, experts warn.

"We aren't there yet," said Fontanet. "We can expect new variants to emerge, but as our immunity strengthens over time - either through natural infection or with booster doses of the vaccine - their ability to lead to serious consequences will diminish." For epidemiologist Antoine Flahault, who heads up the Institute of Global Health in Geneva, all scenarios remain on the table. "If we want to start learning lessons from the recent past of this pandemic, let us remember that it is largely unpredictable," he said.

Meanwhile, the UK government announced changes yesterday to COVID travel rules for England, scrapping the need for visitors to have pre-departure tests and quarantine on arrival until they have tested negative. The new arrangements under which arrivals will be able to take a lateral flow in the first two days after travel rather than a more expensive PCR test come as official data showed one in 15 people in England were infected with coronavirus in the last week of 2021. — AFP

doctor working with the government on its coronavirus response, told a press conference.

In France, President Emmanuel Macron warned people not yet vaccinated that he planned to make life difficult for them by limiting access to key aspects of life. The government is seeking to push through legislation that will make vaccination compulsory for cultural activities, to use inter-city trains or visit a cafe, sparking a backlash among those opposed to further government edicts.

Vaccine policy sparked further anger in Australia, where world number one tennis player Novak Djokovic was given a medical exemption allowing him to play at this month's Australian Open. The vaccine-sceptic Serbian has repeatedly refused to confirm if he has been inoculated. Tournament chief Craig Tiley said that the defending champion had been given "no special favor".

But Stephen Parnis, a former Australian Medical Association vice-president, said it sent an "appalling message" to people trying to stop the spread of the virus. "I don't care how good a tennis player he is. If he's refusing to get vaccinated, he shouldn't be allowed in," Parnis said on Twitter. Meanwhile, Polish President Andrzej Duda tested positive for the virus and was self-isolating, his chief of staff Pawel Szrot said. "The president is fine, has no severe symptoms and is under constant medical care," Szrot said on Twitter. — AFP



HERAT: Heads of mannequins are seen at a women's clothing store yesterday. —AFP

## Taleban order shops to behead...

Continued from Page 1

Several shopkeepers in the city of around 600,000 were angered by the order. "As you can see, we have cut the heads off," Basheer Ahmed, a garment seller, told AFP, adding each dummy had cost 5,000 afghanis (around \$50). "When there is no mannequin how do you expect us to sell our products? The customer likes it when the garment is draped properly over a mannequin."

After returning to power on August 15 the Taliban promised a softer version of the harsh rule that characterized their first stint in power, from 1996 until 2001, when any artificial representation of the human form was outlawed. But restrictions have been creeping back including local reports of

orders for people to attend prayers five times a day, for men to grow beards, and for Western clothing to be discouraged.

Women, in particular, are feeling the brunt of the new orders, and are slowly being squeezed out of public life. Most secondary schools for girls are shut, women are barred from government employment apart from select specialized areas, and last week new guidelines stated they cannot undertake long journeys unless accompanied by a male relative. The Taliban have also stepped up raids on liquor sellers, rounded up drug addicts and banned music.

Their takeover has devastated aid-dependent Afghanistan's economy, with billions of dollars of assets frozen by the United States and international aid largely paused. However, the UN Security Council last week adopted a US resolution to help humanitarian aid reach desperate Afghans while keeping funds out of the hands of the Taliban government, which has yet to be recognized by any country. — AFP

## Kuwait records highest-ever...

Continued from Page 1

Olympics, a series of small outbreaks across the country has put the strategy under pressure.

The "zero COVID" approach stands in marked contrast to the strategy employed by many Western nations, which have chosen to live with the virus rather than return to severe restrictions. The more relaxed policy has seen an explosion in case numbers in the West, with the United States reporting more than a million daily cases on Monday, Britain breached 200,000 cases for the first time on Tuesday, Australia posted almost 50,000 and France registered more than 270,000, with all three countries easily topping their previous records.

India is also bracing for a new surge, with 58,000 new cases confirmed on Tuesday, more than double the number recorded three days prior. Several cities have imposed curfews and the capital New Delhi has ordered all residents outside of essential workers to stay home this weekend. "There is no room for complacency," V K Paul, a

## MPs reject taxes, urge solution to...

Continued from Page 1

MP Hassan Jowhar warned authorities to devise the necessary plans for the future growth of the Kuwaiti population, saying the 1.4 million citizens currently are expected to reach 5 million by 2050, warning that the government will face a major crisis if it does not prepare from now.

MP Abdullah Al-Turaiji praised former health minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah for his efforts in facing the coronavirus pandemic and wished the new minister similar success. The lawmaker criticized a decision by the interior ministry to revoke the driving licenses of some expats, which was later withdrawn, saying this decision showed that the ministry staff lack experience.

He also called for resolving the population imbalance which is greatly tilted in favor of expats

and warned against what he called random naturalization. Turaiji also expressed total rejection of any plan to impose taxes. MP Hisham Al-Saleh called to stop depending on oil as the only source of income, and stressed the need to diversify sources of income. He also called on the government to purchase the estimated KD 1.4 billion in consumer debts owed by 471,000 citizens. He said the best solution is to waive accumulated interest on the loans.

MP Marzouq Al-Khalifa said the Assembly will not allow the imposition of any taxes on Kuwaiti citizens, adding that taxes should be imposed on those who own chalets and plots in industrial areas. MP Bader Al-Humaidi called for "safeguarding national identity" by halting the policy of randomly granting citizenship, saying that Kuwaitis were just 62,000 in 1965, but reached over 1.3 million in 2018. He said the government should stop the policy of granting citizenship to scores of people. He also criticized the government's failure to resolve the demographic imbalance, claiming that the decision-making process is in the hands of expats in many government departments.

Local

# Zain in 2021: Empowering youth, innovation and entrepreneurship

Social programs and national efforts to empower post-COVID life



KUWAIT: Bader Al-Kharafi and Asimah Governor Sheikh Talal Al-Khalid inaugurate the Capital renovation project.



Eaman Al-Roudhan with Zain executives during Zain Great Idea 6 conclusion.



Zain was keen on advocating vaccination efforts.



Zain is a main supporter of frontliners during the pandemic.



Zain building in blue to support the UN climate change campaign.

**KUWAIT:** The year 2021 was a turning point in the COVID-19 pandemic, as Kuwait took hopeful yet careful steps towards the gradual return to normal life after months of strict health measures, lockdowns, and enormous efforts from frontliners to curb the spread of the virus. Zain, being one of the Kuwaiti private sector's biggest players, was at the forefront of national institutions that contributed to empower this careful return by supporting many community programs, enriching innovation in entrepreneurship, and empowering the ambitions of the nation's youth for a post-COVID world.

Throughout the year, Zain has launched and supported an array of programs that centered around its comprehensive corporate sustainability and social responsibility strategy. The company's contributions covered some of the most vital sectors within the community, including health, environment, education, youth, entrepreneurship, sports, and more. In the following report, Zain showcases its most notable community projects and programs during 2021:

### Advocating environmental awareness

During 2021, Zain took part in the official inauguration of the greening and renovation project of one of the Capital's main entrances (islet between Abdullah Al-Salem and Al-Shamiya areas). The event witnessed the attendance of Al-Asimah Governor Sheikh Talal Khalid Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and Zain Vice Chairman and Group CEO Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi.

Zain, the national operator in Kuwait, was selected to renovate and maintain this main entrance to the Capital, a step that reflected the role of private sector companies in achieving social sustainability projects in partnership with the public sector.

The project was the fruitful result of a joint collaboration between the public and private sectors and will contribute to renovating the capital's entrance as a first step into beautifying all of the district's areas. Zain will build a unique monument in the location, and the company has invited Kuwait's creative youth to propose their designs and ideas. The company will select the most unique design that reflects Kuwait's rich heritage and history and cover the costs of building the monument in the location.

During October 2021, Zain Kuwait's Chief Executive Officer Eaman Al-Roudhan took part in the Global Digital Power Summit 2021, organized by Huawei on the sidelines of GITEX in Dubai. The event aimed at enabling organizations to seize the opportunities inherent in renewable energy by relying on digital technologies to achieve sustainability goals.

Zain participated in the global efforts that tackle digital energy business, as hopes are pinned on advancing the digital transformation in the energy sector to eliminate carbon emissions. The company looks forward to the success of such efforts that seek to integrate digital and electrical technologies to generate safe energy, which is accelerating greater after the pandemic. Tech sectors are currently looking to rely on safe energy, especially with the stage of economic recovery as a contribution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

In addition, Zain launched #ActivateYourRole, an online awareness campaign on its official social media platforms that aimed at raising public awareness towards climate change, sustainability, and preserving natural resources. The company used its social media platforms to spread facts that many people might not have known before, which showed the shocking impacts of climate change on our health and the environment.

The campaign came as part of Zain's corporate

## Zain's key contributions in 2021

- Zain was selected to renovate Capital main entrance, achieving sustainable development in partnership with public sector.
- Company vaccinated staff and their families, supported frontliners, and encouraged vaccine efforts.
- Environmental efforts to preserve natural resources and reduce carbon emissions.
- Zain supported Kuwaiti athletes, partnered with Kuwait Olympic Committee to develop gaming and esports ecosystem.

sustainability and social responsibility strategy towards the environment, through which the company commits to building climate change scenarios that are aligned with the Paris Agreement (2015) to reduce carbon emissions and mitigate physical and environmental risks.

Zain also supported the United Nations campaign, "Youth for Climate Action", that aimed at raising public awareness towards the environment and preserving natural resources, on the occasion of United Nations International Day, which coincides with the 24th of October of every year, as part of Zain's strategic partnership with the UN.

The company celebrated the United Nations International Day by lighting up its main headquarters building at Shuwaikh in blue along with the country's many institutions from both the public and private sectors.

### Empowering innovation and entrepreneurship

In 2021, Zain premiered the region's first Startup Innovation Digital Video Report, concluding the sixth edition of its renowned digital startups accelerator program: Zain Great Idea (ZGI) in collaboration with Brilliant Lab.

The event gathered Zain's executive management and the region's investment community along with 25 startups who made it to the final phase of Zain

Great Idea 6. The Digital Video Report was screened at VOX cinemas in the Avenues mall, and saw the finalists, who represented seven Arab countries, pitch their startups to investors and potential business partners from across MENA.

During 2021, Zain celebrated over 10 years of Zain Great Idea, which has been one of the most successful initiatives the company presented in the Kuwaiti market as part of its innovation and entrepreneurship strategy.

Throughout a decade, ZGI has empowered, trained, and invested in over 1,500 passionate Kuwaiti and Arab youth, and the program contributed to creating numerous job opportunities in the regional tech-startups arena by accelerating over 100 businesses.

Digital transformation was the prevailing success story for the vast majority of ZGI's alumni throughout the program's history. At its core, ZGI is a tech-startup accelerator program, and the huge demand for this area of entrepreneurship across Kuwait and the region only proved that Zain's vision of achieving digital leadership was on the right track.

### Supporting safe education and encouraging vaccination

Zain partnered with the National Safe Education Campaign (Safe Education) in joint col-

laboration with the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, and Ministry of Information. The campaign aimed at raising public awareness of the necessary health and traffic safety measures on the occasion of the new academic year, which started last year with physical attendance in classes.

The company was also present at Jaber Causeway Vaccination Center in collaboration with the Ministry of Health throughout a period of three days. The initiative aimed at easing the hot weather conditions on medical and administrative frontliners at the center, as well as encouraging the public to support the nation's efforts into achieving social immunity during the pandemic.

In addition, Zain organized two COVID-19 vaccination campaigns for its staff at its main headquarters in Shuwaikh in collaboration with the Ministry of Health. The company vaccinated its employees and their families with the aim of supporting the efforts exerted by the authorities in immunizing the community during the pandemic.

Zain has also launched an awareness campaign on its social media platforms through which the company encouraged the public to vaccinate and achieve the nation's goals in reaching social immunity. In addition, Zain distributed "VACCINATED" stickers at Kuwait Vaccination Center in Mishref, Jaber Causeway Vaccination Center, as well as on Snap, Instagram, and WhatsApp to promote positivity about vaccination.

### Supporting sports and powering esports

During the year 2021, Zain partnered with the Spain-based Rafa Nadal Academy at Sheikh Jaber Al Abdullah Al Jaber International Tennis Complex in collaboration with Tamdeen Sports. The academy is considered the first of its kind in the Middle East, and only the second branch of the most famous tennis center in the world: Rafa Nadal Academy - Majorca, Spain.

The company also continued to support Kuwait's National Jet Ski team for the tenth year. The team received 10 medals (8 Gold medals, 2 Silver medals) as part of their participation in the second round of the World Jet Ski Championship 2021 held in the United States. Zain welcomed the champions at Kuwait International Airport upon their triumphant return to Kuwait. Zain proudly continued to sponsor Kuwaiti champion and Jet Ski world No. 1 Yousef Al-Abdulrazzaq, who the company sponsored throughout his professional career for the past 13 years. During this time, Al-Abdulrazzaq has achieved a long list of accolades and international success, where the Kuwaiti champion faced the world's top pro racers from around the world and raised Kuwait's flag high.

The company also sponsored Street Football League (SFL), the country's biggest street football competition. SFL aims at creating a community for street football enthusiasts and encouraging them to showcase their skills and talents within a professional setting, as well as supplying talents to professional clubs, offering a pro setting for enthusiasts, as well as spreading positive values through awareness campaigns.

During 2021, Zain Esports, Zain Group's esports brand, partnered with the Kuwait Olympic Committee to manage a four-weekend esports event. The partnership and competition were the first-of-their-kind to be held in Kuwait and took place at the Olympic Committee's headquarters, with the ultimate goal of unlocking the potential of local talent and create the Kuwait esports team that will participate in future Olympic Games and other competitions across the globe.



Supporting efforts to empower careful return



Zain supported Kuwaiti athletes in regional and international arenas.



Zain's headquarters building.

# Govt ready to implement rules as Kuwait sets new record



KUWAIT: Members of the government's committee tasked with following up the implementation of COVID-related regulations meet yesterday. —KUNA

KUWAIT: As Kuwait registered a new record in daily infections yesterday, a government committee tasked with following up the implementation of regulations related to fighting the spread of COVID-19 in Kuwait met to discuss the mechanism of implementing the Cabinet's recent decision to ban indoor social gatherings starting from Sunday. Meanwhile, Kuwait Municipality launched an intensive campaign to inspect commitment to health regulations at shopping malls and markets around the country.

Kuwait reported 2,246 new COVID-19 cases yesterday; a new record in daily cases and the first time the country surpasses the 2,000 daily cases' threshold since the start of the pandemic. The previous record was 1,993 recorded on July 6, 2021. Health authorities also reported one death, seven patients in the ICU, 40 patients in hospital and 8,088 active cases in total. The percentage of daily new cases to new deaths reached 8.8 percent, while the percentage of recovery reached 97.5 percent according to the health ministry's bulletin.

Kuwait Municipality launched yesterday its campaign in various governorates to inspect the implementation of health regulation aimed at controlling the spread of the coronavirus. In the presence of Security Director in Salmiya Command, Major General Abdullah Al-Ali, health teams started their intensive tours to make sure that all shopping malls and shops were committed to health requirements,

said Head of Hawally emergency team Ibrahim Al-Sabaan in a press statement. In Kuwait City, Head of the Violations Removal Department at the Municipality's Capital branch Abdullah Jaber said that field teams in various governorates began intensive tours to ensure the adherence to health requirements to limit the spread of COVID-19. Fixed and mobile teams will be working around the clock in various malls, markets, major commercial complexes, and Souq Mubarakia, he explained.

The teams will check the compliance of the shops, complexes and parallel markets with the health requirements that were issued previous decisions. These requirements include the non-entry of unvaccinated people to major complexes, temperature measurement, wearing masks, physical distancing, and other requirements to ensure the safety of people, he noted. He said that checking the vaccination status will be through the Immune or Kuwait Mobile ID applications, to identify the status of vaccination and only allow vaccinated persons, in case of discovering the existence of non-vaccinated cases inside the complex, legal measures will be taken.

On Tuesday, administrative decision 43/2022, issued by Director-General of Kuwait Municipality Ahmed Al-Manfouhi stated that all social events in closed places would be suspended from January 9 to February 28 in implementation of the decisions of the Council of Ministers in this regard. —KUNA

## News in brief

### Crown Prince receives former justice Minister

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday former Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Nazaha (integrity) Enhancement Abdullah Al-Roumi. His Highness the Crown Prince praised the performance of the former minister and commended his efforts in carrying out his responsibilities with integrity and commitment, wishing him the best in future endeavors.

### Kuwait, France hold strategic dialogue

KUWAIT: The first round of Kuwait-France Strategic Dialogue opened in Paris on Tuesday with Deputy Foreign Minister Majdi Al-Dhafiri leading the Kuwaiti side and Minister-Delegate for Foreign Trade Franck Riester leading the French one. The meeting reviewed the multifaceted strategic relationship, the achievements of cooperation and action plans for cementing the friendly relations in the future. The Strategic Dialogue, being held on a semiannual basis in Kuwait City and Paris alternately, aims to open new horizons for cooperation in various fields given the exemplary political relationship between both countries. The Kuwaiti delegation to the meeting includes Ambassador to France Sami Al-Suleiman, and assistants to the Foreign Minister Ayham Al-Omr and Nasser Al-Hain.

## In my view

### Kuwait for all

By Nejouad Al-Yagout



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It is no secret that Kuwait is an oil welfare state. Our government takes good care of us. Even those of us who must work for a living, even those of us who do not belong to the rich in Kuwait, even those of us who financially struggle, still enjoy certain privileges. And it's not a crime to be grateful for abundance; however, when it affects people who are not Kuwaiti, it can border on injustice, as we have seen in the last several years.

Residents suffer when we flash our Kuwaiti card. In a country where nationalism is on the rise - thanks to a member of Parliament who made it trendy to mock expatriates by taxing them for the air they breathe, thanks to a proposal to charge an exorbitant amount for residents without a university degree who want to renew their residency, thanks to companies that deprive people of their severance pay, or even take advantage of residents' fear of us by not paying them for months, and thanks to the exploitation of domestic workers - it is the residents who suffer here. And when residents suffer, we suffer. Because we are one.

And it is also the stateless who suffer when we flash our Kuwaiti card. Because even while they live and blend in as Kuwaitis, they can never say they are from Kuwait. The stateless, like our forefathers, came here for a better life, a new life; and many of them are our cousins, having originated from the same tribes that migrated here alongside us. Imagine having a cousin, who shares your DNA, but cannot vote, cannot travel to some countries, and is treated with disregard or apprehension. Or imagine a stateless person, not related to you, whose family escaped traumatic circumstances, but who is ostracized because they do not have documents to prove their origins. Add to that a narrative that all stateless people have intentionally burned their documents. Or another narrative which suggests that due to security reasons, the stateless should not be given citizenship. If the case is one of security, why are the stateless employed in the military? Why are they hired to serve in the police force, to guard dignitaries? Perhaps it's time we admit these narratives are outdated. Perhaps it's time to acknowledge that this issue can be solved through compassion and integration, by reintroducing the principles of our ancestors, by allowing ourselves to welcome so-called others.

Borders are man-made. And humans can dissolve them. At least within ourselves. We can recognize that anyone who lives in our country and serves our country is one of us. We can establish humanitarian laws which consider citizenship to both the stateless and expatriates who have lived and worked here for generations. In case we need to be reminded, Kuwaitis are a melting pot. We are originally from Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, Palestine, and other countries. So, there is no template for being Kuwaiti, even though some people would beg to differ.

This current model is not working for anyone. Don't we want to be remembered for our hospitality, our generosity, the legacy left behind by the founders of Kuwait? Why are we, instead, creating resentment and divisiveness? Kuwait can be an ideal model of human beings working together to create an inclusive community, regardless of nationality or origin. Charity and humility are in our DNA. It is time to reintegrate these aspects of our tradition into our society.

We are all guilty of flashing the "I am Kuwaiti" card. It's part of our conditioning. But guess what? We can outgrow our conditioning. Some of us have. We can give up pride for humility at this very moment. After all, in Kuwait, we are a minority. If that's not a nudge to open our hearts (and minds), then what is? If that is not a prompt to be humble and grateful, then what is?

Let's start with ourselves, one by one, and remove every ounce of prejudice and sense of superiority that lurks within us. Let's bid adieu to our roles in an ego paradigm. Then, we can extend the sentiment to our community. And Kuwait can become a haven on the planet. Love is always ready. Love is always a possibility. It can transform our lives in a millisecond. All we have to do is say yes. Yes, to love.

Countries come and go. Power comes and goes. We know that from history. It's time we befriend the other, for we are the other. Residents, Stateless, Kuwaitis. We are all one. Let's imbibe this notion again and again, ad nauseam, until it registers in our hearts and we manifest it in our country. Let's imbibe this. Now.

## Worker must attend in person for final cancellation request

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) issued yesterday ministerial circular no. 1/2022 on final cancellation requests for traveling, or canceling and transferring to other sectors. "According to this circular, a final cancellation request for traveling will only be accepted if the employee attends in person at the work relations department.

The staff at this department will check whether this employee has received their full indemnities. The staff will also check whether the final cancellation for traveling or cancellation for transferring to another sector was requested by the employee," said Aseel Al-Mazyad, Director of Public Relations and Official Spokesperson of PAM.

The employee filing the request also has to sign a statement, according to procedures followed in these cases. "The work departments in charge will carefully check this statement, and any procedure in conflict with this circular will be voided," added Mazyad. Transferring to another sector means changing the visa type, for instance from article 18 (private sector) to article 20 (domestic labor), article 22 (dependent), article 17 (public sector) or other articles.



Aseel Al-Mazyad

## Motorist killed in Seventh Ring Road crash

KUWAIT: A woman died in an accident reported on Seventh Ring Road Tuesday night. Firemen and paramedics rushed to the scene in response to an emergency call reporting an accident where a vehicle crashed into a lamp post. Firemen had to use hydraulic equipment to free the body of a driver, which was then taken to the coroner. An investigation was opened to reveal the circumstances behind the accident. Kuwait Fire Force said in a statement.

Meanwhile, firemen battled a blaze reported in two warehouses containing used tires, furniture and power generators in Sabahiya yesterday. Mangaf and Fahheel fire stations' men headed to the scene in response to the emergency call reporting the fire. No injuries were reported, KFF said, adding that an investigation was opened.



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Backlash after  
Macron warns  
unvaccinated

## North Korea fires suspected ballistic missile into sea



ALMATY: This image grab shows protesters near an administrative building during a rally over a hike in energy prices yesterday. —AFP

# Kazakhstan protests spin out of control

## Mayor's office stormed • Internet cut • President vows 'tough' response

ALMATY: Kazakhstan cut Internet and mobile phone access yesterday as its president promised a tough response to what he said were "massive attacks" on security forces. Days of protests over a rise in fuel prices erupted into clashes with police and the storming of government buildings yesterday, in the biggest challenge to the Central Asian country's authoritarian government in decades.

Accusing protesters of "massive attacks on law enforcement" that left several dead and wounded, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev said he would not tolerate further lawlessness. "I am obliged to protect the safety and peace of our citizens, to worry about the integrity of Kazakhstan," he said in a televised address. "I intend to act as tough as possible," Tokayev said. "Together we will overcome this black period in the history of Kazakhstan."

Protests spread across the ex-Soviet nation of 19 million this week in outrage over a New Year increase in prices for Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG), which is widely used to fuel cars in the west of the country. Thousands took to the streets in the country's biggest city Almaty and in the western province of Mangystau, saying the price rise was unfair given oil and gas exporter Kazakhstan's vast energy reserves.

After a night of unrest that saw more than 200 peo-

ple detained, several thousand protesters stormed the headquarters of the local administration in Almaty yesterday afternoon and appeared to have seized control of the building.

### Stun grenades, tear gas

Police fired stun grenades and tear gas at the crowd, some armed with batons and shields seized from police, but were unable to prevent them from entering the building, an AFP correspondent at the scene said. Local media reported that protesters then set their sights on the presidential residence in Almaty. Both it and the mayor's office were reported to be in flames.

There were reports of other government buildings being targeted in Almaty and elsewhere, but the full picture was unclear as communications were disrupted. Journalists and witnesses inside Kazakhstan could not be reached through the internet or mobile phones. "Kazakhstan is now in the midst of a nation-scale Internet blackout after a day of mobile internet disruptions and partial restrictions," web monitoring group NetBlocks said. "The incident is likely to severely limit coverage of escalating anti-government protests."

The protests are the biggest threat so far to the regime

established by Kazakhstan's founding president Nursultan Nazarbayev, who stepped down in 2019 and ushered Tokayev into the presidency. Clashes erupted overnight in Almaty, with police firing stun grenades and tear gas into a crowd of more than 5,000 people that marched through central streets shouting anti-government slogans and sometimes attacking vehicles.

Tokayev moved quickly to try to head off the unrest, accepting the resignation of the cabinet headed by Prime Minister Askar Mamin. He also imposed states of emergency in the capital Nur-Sultan, Almaty, and Mangystau province from January 5 until Jan 19. An overnight curfew will be in place in the areas from 11:00 pm to 7:00 am, with restrictions on movement in and out.

### 'Old man out'

The protesters in Almaty yelled "old man out" - a reference to Tokayev's still-powerful predecessor Nazarbayev - and "government resign" before police moved in. Tokayev was handpicked as a successor by Nazarbayev, a close ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin. One of five ex-Soviet nations in Central Asia, Kazakhstan is of crucial importance to Russia as an economic partner and home to a large ethnic Russian population.

"We are closely following the events in the brotherly neighboring country," Russia's foreign ministry said in a statement. "We support a peaceful solution to all problems... through dialogue, not through street riots and violation of laws," it said. Kazakhstan's government tolerates little real opposition and has been accused of silencing independent voices and media. Spontaneous, unsanctioned protests are illegal despite a 2020 law that passed easing some restrictions of freedom of assembly. Smaller rallies had been staged in cities across the republic from Sunday, beginning with the town of Zhanaozen in Mangystau.

### Gas price rise outrage

The initial cause of the unrest was a spike in prices for LPG in hydrocarbon-rich Mangystau. Reports by independent media suggested that Tokayev's announcement of a new price of 50 tenge (11 US cents) per litre, down from 120 at the beginning of the year, failed to weaken the rallies in Zhanaozen and Mangystau's capital Aktau as demonstrators aired new demands. In 2011, at least 14 striking oil workers were killed in Zhanaozen as police crushed a protest over pay and working conditions, the deadliest unrest since the republic gained independence in 1991. —AFP

## Iraq's Hashed take centerstage in soft power play

BASRA: Hardened fighters of Iraq's Shiite former paramilitary Hashed al-Shaabi organization are seeking a new avenue to exert their influence - the theatre. Dubbed the "biggest theatrical production in Iraq", the pro-Iran Hashed - integrated into government forces in 2019 - has sought a captive audience in southern Iraq's impoverished, predominantly Shiite city of Basra. The events of the play stretch from the dawn of time in the Garden of Eden to more recent events - most notably Washington's killing of Iranian general Qasem Soleimani and the Hashed's own deputy leader Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis. Its Iranian director, Said Ismaili, explained that the play centers on the concept of the "just and the unjust".

Iran and its allies across the Middle East have in recent days held emotional commemorations for Soleimani and Muhandis, who were assassinated in a US drone strike in the Iraqi capital Baghdad on

January 3, 2020. Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi has vowed revenge against former US President Donald Trump unless he is tried over the killing of the revered commander. In Basra, the play was introduced as a "joint production between Iraqi and Iranian artists", featuring 140 actors, special effects, and even horses and camels.

### 'Soft war'

Formed in 2014 after a fatwa from Iraq's highest Shiite authority, Ayatollah Ali Sistani, the Hashed played a key role in the defeat of IS alongside Iraqi forces backed by the US-led coalition. In the years since Iraq announced its "victory" over the group in late 2017, the Hashed has gained considerable social and political influence, notably through its political arm, the Fatah (Conquest) Alliance. The organization has its own media outlets, film productions and even football and basketball teams.

Detractors of the Hashed accuse it of acting on Iran's behalf, and Fatah's political influence has been undermined by a relatively poor performance in October elections - with the group alleging the polls were marred by "fraud". "From the point of view of a cold war... our weapons must always be ready," the play's director said.



BASRA: Actors carry coffins draped in the flags of Iran, Iraq, and the Hashed al-Shaabi as they re-enact the 2019 funeral of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani during a play on Dec 29, 2021. —AFP

But Ismaili also referred to a "soft war", unfolding through "cultural and artistic spaces". The play helps the Hashed tell its stories to people. "There are people, our children for example, who are ignorant of certain things," spectator Ali Soueid said. "They need something like this to understand what happened in the battle... how people were killed." —AFP

## Hunger-striking Tunisia politician fighting for life

TUNIS: Tunisian former justice minister Nouredine Bhiri, who has been refusing food or medication since his arrest last week, is fighting for his life, a support group said yesterday. Bhiri, who was arrested by plainclothes officers on Friday and later accused of possible "terrorism" offences, suffers from several pre-existing health conditions. The Islamist-inspired Ennahdha party, of which he is deputy chairman, played a central role in Tunisian politics until a power grab by President Kais Saied last year.

"At the moment, medical sources say he is between life and death," Ennahdha ex-lawmaker Samir Dilou told reporters, adding that his wife and children were on standby. "Those who ordered his kidnapping must assume their responsibilities," he added, referring to Saied and his interior minister, Taoufik Charfeddine, who ordered Bhiri's arrest.

Another member of Bhiri's support committee, Abderrazek Kilani, said the former minister was suffering from kidney problems, as well as a longstanding heart condition, diabetes and hypertension, but was still refusing food or medicines. A previous alarm sounded by Ennahdha about Bhiri's health was discounted by Tunisia's independent national body for the prevention of torture (INPT) after it visited him late on Sunday.

But the INPT could not confirm the validity of the latest concerns. Three of its doctors were due to see him later Wednesday, the INPT's Lotfi Ezzedine told AFP. Saied on July 25 sacked the Ennahdha-supported government and suspended parliament, presenting himself as the ultimate interpreter of the constitution. He later took steps to rule by decree, and in early December vowed to press on with reforms to the political system.

Tunisia was the only democracy to emerge from the Arab Spring revolts of a decade ago, but civil society groups and Saied's opponents have expressed fear of a slide back to authoritarianism after the 2011 revolution that toppled longtime dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. Human Rights Watch warned late last month that Tunisian authorities were using "repressive" dictatorship-era laws to snuff out criticism of the president. —AFP

## 3 arrested over Muslim women 'auction' app

MUMBAI: Three young Indians accused of setting up a fake auction app advertising the sale of prominent Muslim women have been arrested, police said yesterday. Photos of more than 100 women - among them a number of prominent local journalists and activists known for speaking on issues affecting Indian Muslims - were featured on the "Bulli Bai" app alongside derogatory messages. Police said an 18-year-old woman and two men in their early twenties had been detained in connection with the app. "Pictures of some ladies belonging to a particular community were uploaded and... objectionable messages were also put," Hemant Nagrale, Mumbai's police commis-

sioner, told reporters. Nagrale said further details about the case would not be released by police at this stage.

Members of India's Muslim minority have spoken out in recent years about what they feel are growing attempts to target or marginalize their communities. Another fake auction platform targeting Muslim women briefly appeared six months ago, prompting a police investigation that failed to yield any suspects. Women whose images featured on the latest app have voiced their dismay on social media.

"This is how we are greeted and treated in India on the first day of the new year, while other people in my country have fun, joke and party," poet Nabiya Khan tweeted on the weekend. "Nobody deserves to be attacked, humiliated, bought and sold." GitHub, an open software development platform which had hosted the app, told local media it would assist with the police investigation. —AFP

## Trump cancels press conf, Biden to address nation

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump on Tuesday abruptly gave up his plan to steal the limelight on the anniversary of the January 6th assault against Congress, leaving President Joe Biden to address a divided nation. Trump's decision to ditch his controversial press conference in Florida means Americans will be spared a bitter split-screen moment on Thursday.

If it had gone ahead, Biden would have marked what he calls "one of the darkest days" in US history, while Trump, just a few hours later, was due to promote his lie about being cheated out of victory in the 2020 presidential election. No question, though, that Trump will be looming over Biden.

In a statement announcing the demise of his press conference, Trump yet again pushed his conspiracy theory that "fraud" accounted for his defeat to

Biden, calling it "the Crime of the Century". The statement underlined how one year after a mob of Trump supporters marched on Congress to try and prevent lawmakers from certifying Biden's victory, political wounds remain far from healed.

Today, Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris will speak from inside the Capitol's Statuary Hall, the setting during the unrest of almost unbelievable scenes as Trump supporters fought past police to invade the heart of US democracy. As a veteran politician who came out of retirement to take on what he saw as Trump's authoritarian presidency, Biden has often warned during his first year in the White House of an "existential" threat to political freedoms that until now most Americans took for granted. —AFP

## International

# After fueling Capitol riot, disinfo stalks US politics

## 'Stolen election' narrative has survived and flourished online

WASHINGTON: The storming of the US Capitol pushed social media platforms to crack down on those who peddled the "stolen election" claim that drove it, but the narrative has survived and flourished online, in right-wing media and among Republican politicians. Donald Trump's supporters acted on the baseless allegation that widespread vote-rigging robbed him of victory in the 2020 presidential election, with the January 6, 2021 violence ultimately leading Twitter and Facebook to suspend his accounts.

His claims were rejected by election officials and dozens of courts, but polling shows many Americans still believe the "big lie" that he defeated Joe Biden - a falsehood that has damaging consequences far beyond the riot. "These persistent claims pose a threat to the sanctity and trust in our democratic system writ large," said Nina Jankowicz, global fellow at the Wilson Center.

False information about elections is not new - Trump made similar claims in 2016 before he defeated Hillary Clinton - but social media, which thrives on polarization, offers a place for it to spread, and for people who believe it to organize and wreak havoc. Trump - then Twitter's most powerful user - warned his millions of followers of potential cheating before election day in 2020, told them the race was being stolen as ballots were counted, and repeated the accusa-

tion in tweets and in a speech before the tumult at the Capitol.

### From online rage to riot

"The January 6 attack was a product of social media," said Emerson Brooking, resident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab. "The 'Stop the Steal' movement captured millions of people in an alternative reality and funneled them from mass delusion to hysteria to collective violence against the US Congress." The movement, he said, "became the most important thing in the world for tens of thousands of Americans."

Social media companies have taken steps to halt the spread of false information and conspiracy theories about Biden's victory over Trump. Facebook has removed content mentioning the phrase "stop the steal," and Twitter suspended tens of thousands of accounts linked to the

QAnon conspiracy theory, adherents of which played a prominent role in the unrest one year ago.

The companies have "generally been effective in their ban on election-related falsehoods," Brooking said. But people who believe the election was stolen are still active on both websites, and "election denialism relies more heavily on coded language and closed communities." Trump still has an online presence including a mailing list that has many sub-



WASHINGTON: Workers remove snow from the East Front of the US Capitol on Tuesday, a day after a heavy snowstorm. — AFP

scribers, and has repeatedly released statements saying the election was "rigged."

Echoing Trump, more than 100 Republican lawmakers voted against certifying Biden's win, and members of the party at both the state and national level - eager for political and financial backing - continue to give credence to the former president's unfounded claims. He also has help from prominent

pundits who amplify such messages. "Trump is still generating a lot of noise, not through Twitter or Facebook anymore but through various right-wing media personalities such as Dan Bongino, Bill O'Reilly, and Candace Owens," said Yunkang Yang, a post-doctoral fellow at George Washington University's Institute for Data, Democracy & Politics. —AFP

“ January 6 attack was a product of social media ”

## Disinfo potent weapon against powerful women

PARIS: Brigitte Macron, Michelle Obama, Jacinda Ardern are among some of the world's most powerful women who have fallen victim to a growing trend: Disinformation about their sex or sexuality to mock or, worse, humiliate them. For months messages have appeared on social media claiming that Macron is a transgender woman originally named Jean-Michel. The fake news flared up in December, only a few months before presidential elections in April.

New Zealand's prime minister Ardern and former US first lady Obama were also the target of false rumours, in 2018 and 2017, that they were born as men. The rumors spread like wildfire on social media. It doesn't matter that virtually nobody believes that Macron is a transgender woman: the lies open the door to insults, scorn and even cyber harassment.

While this "gendered disinformation" is particularly visible in repeated attacks on powerful women, in also affects women in general, and sexual or gender minorities with differing levels of responsibility in public life. Disinformation targeting them is aimed squarely at sidelining women. Rumors started as disinformation have "an impact in the real world", said Marylie Breuil, a member of the feminist collective Nous Toutes (All of us Women).

### Democratic erosion

"Someone who talks openly can have their career totally trashed, including by online and often offline cyber-harassment". In Iraq, Intidhar Ahmed Jassim was forced to stand down as a candidate in parliamentary elections in early 2018 after being hounded online over claims that she had been recognized in a sex tape. In 2013, former Italian parliament speaker Laura Boldrini was bombarded with sexist insults, rape threats and pornographic montages, following a rumor that she had danced on television in her underwear.

"There is a further gender dimension there of basically silencing women and eliminating women from the political sphere," said Lucina Di Meco, a gender equality expert and co-founder of #ShePersisted, a global initiative fighting this disinformation. The United Nations has voiced alarm, condemning in April "sexist online disinformation campaigns which are increasing" and which target particularly "female journalists, female politicians, and defenders of gender equality who voice their opinion on feminist issues".

"All women and other minorities know before they speak in the media that they are potentially exposing themselves at any moment to a surprise violent reaction," said Jill-Maud Royer, joint head of the LGBTQ group of French political movement La France Insoumise. By preventing or discouraging women from participating in public life, gendered disinformation contributes to the "erosion of democratic institutions", said Di Meco, of #ShePersisted.

With Macron, trans identity is used as a "vehicle" to damage the reputation of her husband French President Emmanuel Macron, said Maud-Yeuse Thomas, an anthropologist and co-founder of the Observatoire des Transidentités (Observatory of trans identities). Fuelling rumours about someone's trans identity or supposed homosexuality increases the stigmatisation of LGBTQ people. — AFP

## Backlash after Macron warns unvaccinated

PARIS: President Emmanuel Macron yesterday faced anger from opponents and chaos in parliament after warning French people not yet vaccinated against COVID-19 that they would be squeezed out of key aspects of life. Macron, who has not yet formally declared his candidacy for re-election in April, came under fire from challengers already in the race, accusing him of overstepping the line with his remarks.

The uproar prompted a new delay to legislation aimed at tightening France's COVID rules at a time when the country is facing record daily infection rates fueled by the Omicron strain of the virus. "As for the non-vaccinated, I really want to piss them off," he told Le Parisien newspaper in an interview, using the French verb "emmerder". Derived from the word "merde" which means "sh\*t", the word is considered vulgar slang in France.

This would mean "limiting as much as possible their access to activities in social life," he added. "We have to tell (the unvaccinated)... you will no longer be able to go to the restaurant. You will no longer be able to go for a coffee, you will no longer

## Canada agrees \$31bn compensation for indigenous kids

OTTAWA: Canada announced a \$31.5 billion agreement on Tuesday to reform its discriminatory child welfare system and compensate indigenous families who suffered because of it, in what an official called the country's largest settlement. The agreements-in-principle include \$20 billion Canadian dollars (\$15.7) for First Nations children who were removed from their families and caregivers and put into state care, typically schools meant to forcibly assimilate them.

The other \$20 billion Canadian dollars will be earmarked for reforming the child and family services system over the next five years. "No compensation amount can make up for the trauma people

## Guaido digs in as 'acting president' without power

CARACAS: Opposition leader Juan Guaido officially began a new year as Venezuela's "acting president" on Tuesday after his position was renewed by a defunct parliament that continues to sit despite having no home. Guaido may retain the backing of around 60 countries but in reality, true executive and legislative power rests in the hands of his arch enemy, President Nicolas Maduro, who is supported by the nation's powerful military.

The parliament said Guaido would assume the responsibility of "defending democracy and directing the protection of state assets abroad," in a meeting that was as virtual as Guaido's power. What Guaido does have, though, thanks to backing from Washington, is control of millions of dollars worth of Venezuelan assets held outside the country, much to Maduro's chagrin.

"Today the constitution won, today Nicolas Maduro lost," said Guaido late on Monday night after the opposition-majority congress that assumed office

be able to go to the theatre. You will no longer be able to go to the cinema," the president said. "If your freedom threatens others' freedom, you become irresponsible. And irresponsible people are no longer citizens," Macron added. According to government figures, 91 percent of French over-18s are fully vaccinated.

### Pique in parliament

The rate surged over the summer after the introduction of a "health pass" which restricted many activities to those with proof of vaccination, a recent negative test or recovery from coronavirus infection. But that still leaves millions of people not covered as the Omicron wave breaks over the country. In response, Macron's government plans to make vaccination the only way to maintain access to much of public life with a so-called "vaccine pass" introduced from Jan 15.

Parliamentary debate over the tightening was already acrimonious, with the opposition forcing a delay in debate over the draft law late Monday. Macron's comments quickly derailed action in the chamber after it resumed late Tuesday, again suspending examination of the bill and jeopardizing the government's timetable for it to come into force - although ministers insist that is still their aim.

The party chief of the right-wing Republicans (LR) Christian Jacob said the group "refused to endorse a text which aims to piss off the French". The controversy has erupted amid an increasingly

have experienced," said Patty Hajdu, the Minister of Indigenous Services. "But these Agreements-in-Principle acknowledge to survivors and their families the harm and pain caused by the discrimination in funding and services."

The deal, which stemmed from lawsuits brought by First Nations families against the Canadian government, acknowledges that "discriminatory underfunding" of child and family services in indigenous communities had inflicted suffering on those involved. Despite making up less than eight percent of children under 14, indigenous children account for more than half of those in Canada's foster care, according to a 2016 census.

Over the past three decades, at least 150,000 indigenous children were ripped from their homes and placed into one of 139 residential schools. Thousands died, mostly from malnutrition, disease or neglect, in what a truth and reconciliation committee called "cultural genocide" in a 2015 report. Many others were physically or sexually abused. On the heels of the discovery of more than 1,200

from 2015 to 2021 ratified his continuation as the country's acting president. In Jan 2019, Guaido used his position as parliament speaker to proclaim himself acting president after the opposition-controlled National Assembly declared Maduro a usurper.

Like much of the international community, the assembly did not recognize Maduro's 2018 re-election in a poll widely branded fraudulent. The terms of the National Assembly members ended in January 2021 amid an opposition boycott of legislative elections, but the old legislature continues to sit. "I say it clearly, the one who has an expiry date ... is him," Guaido, 38, said last week.

Maduro, though, was buoyed by a crushing victory in mayoral and gubernatorial elections in November, as a disunited opposition broke three years of boycotts. Guaido "is lost in the solitude of his own failure ... it's a type of Frankenstein policy that has failed," said Maduro. "Imperialism (the US) thought it owned Venezuela and that they could install a president in a colonial style."

### Washington support crucial

Guaido's influence has waned since his dramatic proclamation almost three years ago, and his popularity has plummeted. While the European Union officially recognizes his interim presidency, it has nonetheless opened channels behind the scenes with



Emmanuel Macron

febrile pre-election atmosphere in France. Macron said in the interview he wants to stand for a second term in April's presidential vote but that declaring his intentions now would distract from managing the health crisis.

Macron's warning prompted backlash from all his prospective opponents in the April election which he is favourite, but far from certain, to win. "It's not up to the president of the Republic to pick out good and bad French people," Republicans candidate Valerie Pécresse, seen by many as Macron's most credible challenger, told broadcaster CNews. She called for a government "that unites people and calms things down". — AFP

unmarked graves at these schools, Canada is starting to come to terms with the nationwide trauma.

Crown-Indigenous Relations Minister Marc Miller called Tuesday's agreement "the largest settlement in Canadian history" at a videoed news conference. The amount to be paid to each individual, as well as how and when, will be determined later in consultation with experts and the country's largest indigenous organization, the Assembly of First Nations, according to lawyers representing complainants in two class action cases.

"This settlement is historic and hopefully a turning point in this country's work on reconciliation," Robert Kugler, one of the lawyers, said in a statement. The amount, he added, "underscores the severity of the harm suffered, and will provide financial support to enable victims to better their lives going forward." The Canadian government has previously fought orders to compensate Indigenous families over systems it has admitted were discriminatory, including in an appeal filed last year seeking to overturn a landmark decision awarding billions to indigenous children. — AFP



Juan Guaido

Maduro. Pragmatism is necessary, a diplomatic source said, since Guaido's claim has run out of steam. Guaido's importance, though, is almost entirely dependent on support from Washington, political scientist Pablo Quintero says.

Even with a change of administration in the White House, that has not weakened. Donald Trump ramped up pressure on the "dictator" Maduro through sanctions and while President Joe Biden has been less vocal on the matter, he has not altered Washington's position with regard to Guaido. "It is not nothing that the United States supports a government, even an imaginary one without real power," said Quintero. — AFP

## International

# North Korea fires suspected ballistic missile into sea

## Dialogue between Washington and Pyongyang remains stalled

SEOUL: North Korea fired what appeared to be a ballistic missile into the sea yesterday, South Korea and Japan said, in the first such launch by Pyongyang this year. In the decade since Kim Jong Un took power, North Korea has made rapid progress in its military technology at the cost of international sanctions. The nuclear-armed nation's first apparent weapons launch of 2022 follows a year of major arms tests despite the severe economic hardship during the coronavirus pandemic.

The South Korean military said the North fired what is "presumed to be a ballistic missile" towards the sea east of the peninsula at around 8:10 am (2310 GMT Tuesday) from Jagang province, which borders China. After an emergency meeting, South Korea's national security council "expressed concerns over the launch", according to a statement by the president's office.

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida described it as a "possible ballistic missile launch". "It is truly regrettable that North Korea has continuously launched missiles since last year," he told reporters. Kishida said the Japanese government was analyzing details, including how many missiles may have been launched. "There have been no reports of damage to Japanese aircraft and vessels so far," Japan's top government spokesman Hirokazu Matsuno told reporters.

"We are continuing analysis, but if it took a normal orbit, it is expected to have travelled about 500 kilometers and fallen outside Japan's exclusive economic zone." The launch followed a speech by Kim last week in which he said North Korea would continue to build up its military capabilities.

"I expect North Korea to continue refining its arsenal as a way to improve its strategic position at

a time of political change in the region," Jean Lee, a senior fellow at the Washington-based Woodrow Wilson International Center, told AFP. In 2021, North Korea said it successfully tested a new type of submarine-launched ballistic missile, a long-range cruise missile, a train-launched weapon, and what it described as a hypersonic warhead.

### Stalled dialogue

The dialogue between Washington and Pyongyang remains stalled, following the collapse of talks between Kim and then-president Donald



### First apparent weapons launch of 2022

Trump in 2019. Under Trump's successor Joe Biden, the United States has repeatedly declared its willingness to meet North Korean representatives, while saying it will seek denuclearization. But Pyongyang has so far dismissed the offer, accusing Washington of pursuing "hostile" policies.

At the end of a key meeting of the ruling Workers' Party last week, Kim did not mention the United States at all. Instead of the policy positions on diplomacy for which Kim's New Year statements have been closely watched in recent years, he



SEOUL: People watch a television news broadcast showing file footage of a North Korean missile test at a railway station yesterday. — AFP

focused on food security and development in an extensive speech. But he said Pyongyang would continue to boost its capabilities, keeping in mind "the military environment of the Korean peninsula" and the changing international situation.

"Pyongyang is sending the message to the US that it will not change and therefore Washington must give in," Shin Beom-chul, a researcher at the Korea Research Institute for National Strategy, told AFP. North Korea is under multiple sets of international sanctions over its nuclear and ballistic missile

programs. The impoverished nation has also been under a rigid self-imposed coronavirus blockade that has hampered its economy.

The worsening economic situation during the pandemic, however, has not blunted those programs, and North Korea has continued to pursue weapons development, a UN report said in October. Concerns have grown about a full-blown food crisis in North Korea, and a United Nations human rights expert warned in October that the most vulnerable were "at risk of starvation". — AFP

## China tests 13m in Zhengzhou; Xi'an COVID outbreak eases

BEIJING: The city of Zhengzhou ordered its nearly 13 million residents to take COVID-19 tests yesterday after a handful of cases were detected, as China fights to stamp out virus clusters ahead of the Beijing Winter Olympics. Everyone in Zhengzhou, which has been placed under a partial lockdown, must be tested to "thoroughly uncover infections hidden among the public", the city's government said in a statement yesterday. The city has detected 11 cases in recent days.

The mass-testing order came as case numbers in the locked-down city of Xi'an fell to their lowest in weeks, with officials saying that outbreak had been "brought under control". Xi'an's 13 million residents have been under stay-at-home orders for the last fortnight. "Although the case number has been high for many days, the rapid rise in Covid spread at community level has been brought under control compared with the early stages of the outbreak," said Ma Guanghui, deputy director of Shaanxi province's health

commission, at a press conference. "The epidemic is showing a downward trend."

China has stuck to a rigid approach of stamping out COVID cases when they appear, with tight border restrictions and targeted lockdowns since the virus first emerged in the country in 2019. But, with less than a month to go until the Winter Olympics in the capital, a series of small outbreaks across the country has put the strategy under pressure. Although the number of reported cases in China is very low compared with other nations, infections in recent weeks have reached a high not seen in the country since March 2020.

China recorded 91 cases yesterday - including 35 in Xi'an, the city's lowest tally since mid-December. The Zhengzhou outbreak is tiny by comparison, but officials are taking no chances. State media said about 500 close contacts had been traced from the outbreak's two symptomatic cases, linked through mahjong rooms and family gatherings. Eight residential



ZHENGZHOU, China: Residents queue to receive COVID-19 tests as part of a mass testing program in this city in China's central Henan province yesterday. — AFP

communities were locked down.

On Monday, one million people in Yuzhou city - in the same province as Zhengzhou - were put under stay-at-home orders after three asymptomatic cases. Local authorities deemed to have failed in preventing virus outbreaks have been sacked or punished, including two senior Communist Party officials in Xi'an that were dismissed over their "insufficient rigour in preventing and controlling the outbreak".

Dozens of officials were punished for their handling of Xi'an's outbreak, including the official in charge of the city's health tracking system, who was suspended. Beijing will host the Winter Olympics from Feb 4, under some of the strictest rules for a mass sporting event since the pandemic started. All athletes, officials, staff and volunteers will be within a "closed loop" system that separates them from the public for the duration of the Games. — AFP

## Myanmar has 'ingredients for civil war': ASEAN

SINGAPORE: Myanmar has "all the ingredients for civil war", Cambodia, chair of Southeast Asia's regional bloc, has warned ahead of a visit by Prime Minister Hun Sen to the crisis-wracked country. Myanmar has been in chaos since a coup last year, with more than 1,400 people killed in a crackdown on dissent by security forces, according to a local monitoring group. Hun Sen, whose country this year holds the rotating chairmanship of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) bloc, will visit Myanmar on Friday and Saturday in an effort to defuse the crisis.

But Cambodian Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn warned the outlook was dire. "The political and security crisis in Myanmar is deepening, and has led to (an) economic, health and humanitarian crisis," he

said. "We feel that all the ingredients for civil war are now on the table. "There are now two governments, there are several armed forces, people are undergoing what they call the civil disobedience movement and (there is) guerrilla warfare around the country."

He was speaking at a lecture Monday organized by Singapore-based think-tank the ISEAS-Yusuf Ishak Institute. The event was held under the Chatham House Rule, which means the speaker must give permission before his comments are reported to facilitate candor. Cambodia's foreign ministry on Tuesday gave permission for AFP to report his comments.

Hun Sen, one of the world's longest-ruling strongmen, yesterday called for a ceasefire, saying "all relevant parties must stop violence". "Whether or not we reach a deal in negotiations, I ask for a ceasefire first because it has the benefits to flesh and blood - don't let people die or be injured," he said at a ceremony in Phnom Penh. In a joint statement, more than 250 anti-coup resistance groups in Myanmar condemned the visit and urged Hun Sen to cancel.

### Visit criticism

Prak Sokhonn rejected criticism that Hun Sen's visit would legitimize the junta, and said the kingdom's "immediate attention is on improving the situation in Myanmar". Efforts would remain focused on a peace roadmap and the "five-point consensus" agreed on by ASEAN leaders last year, he said. The visit aims "to pave the way for progress" by "creating a conducive environment for inclusive dialogue and political trust among all parties concerned".

Since the coup, there has been little sign of progress. A visit by an ASEAN special envoy to Myanmar has been delayed after the junta refused to allow him to meet with ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi. In response, the bloc excluded Myanmar's junta leader from a high-level October summit, a rare rebuke by a group often criticized for being toothless. Myanmar's crisis has bad implications for "regional stability... ASEAN's image, credibility, unity," Prak Sokhonn added. Nevertheless, he said Cambodia was making efforts to allow Myanmar's junta chief to resume attending meetings of the bloc again. — AFP

## Hong Kong tests 3,700 on 'nowhere cruise' ordered back to port

HONG KONG: A Hong Kong cruise ship carrying 3,700 people was ordered back to port yesterday for virus testing after nine people were found to be close contacts in an Omicron variant outbreak. Like mainland China, Hong Kong pursues a zero-Covid policy and maintains some of the world's strictest measures - including virtually closed borders, weeks-long quarantines, targeted lockdowns and mass testing.

The city has recorded 114 Omicron cases, with the vast majority identified at the airport or during the 21-day hotel quarantine that is mandatory for most arrivals. But a small community outbreak traced to Cathay Pacific airline staff has

sparked mass testing and contact tracing in recent days. Yesterday, those tracing efforts reached the "Spectrum of the Seas", one of the vessels offering cooped-up Hong Kongers a "cruise to nowhere" that sails into international waters for short trips.

Health authorities said nine people on the cruise, which left on Sunday, were classified as close contacts and ordered the ship back to port a day early. All on board - 2,500 passengers and 1,200 crew - must test negative before they can disembark. An AFP reporter outside the cruise terminal yesterday could see guests relaxing and exercising on their outdoor balconies.

"A lot of dining tables and seats in the theatre were sealed, and we have wristbands that can help track our movements on board," one passenger on board, who asked for anonymity, told AFP by phone. "When we booked the tour we knew there was a risk. It's just unlucky that it's us," she added.

Microbiologist Yuen Kwok-yung, one of Hong Kong's top COVID-19 experts, warned that an invisible infection link might have formed in the city. "The fifth wave is very likely to take place," Yuen told reporters on Tuesday. Hong Kong's strict health rules have kept the city largely free of the virus, with just over 12,000 cases and 213 deaths since the pandemic began. But it has also left a business hub that dubs itself "Asia's World City" cut off from the rest of the world, including mainland China. — AFP



HONG KONG: Cruise ship "Spectrum of the Seas" is docked at a terminal yesterday after it was ordered to return to the city. — AFP

### News in brief

#### 10 die in Zanzibar boat tragedy

DAR ES SALAAM: Ten people died when a boat ferrying people to a funeral in the Indian Ocean archipelago of Zanzibar capsized, police said yesterday. Another 15 people were rescued after the incident late Tuesday, and rescuers were still searching for others possibly missing. The accident happened after the vessel encountered a mechanical problem as it was transporting people from Chakechake on the island of Pemba to the Kisiwa Panza islet. — AFP

#### UK vows crackdown on threats

LONDON: Britain's justice secretary said yesterday he wanted to put the "fear of God" into those who threaten women and that restoring women's faith in the legal system was his "top priority" following a string of high-profile murders in London. Dominic Raab said he was "shocked and horrified" by the recent killings of several women, including one who was murdered by a serving police officer, calling the scale of violence "sickening". — AFP

#### Polish president COVID positive

WARSAW: Polish President Andrzej Duda has tested positive for COVID-19 and is self-isolating, his chief of staff Pawel Szrot said yesterday. "The president is fine, has no severe symptoms and is under constant medical care," Szrot said on Twitter. Szrot said the president had received three COVID vaccine doses in April, June and December of last year. Poland's health ministry yesterday reported a daily increase of 17,196 cases and 632 COVID-linked deaths. — AFP

#### Patients dying in Tigray

NAIROBI: Doctors in Ethiopia's war-hit Tigray region say patients are needlessly dying of treatable conditions because a de facto blockade is preventing medicines and other life-saving supplies from reaching stricken hospitals. A dire shortage of oxygen, intravenous fluids and other critical equipment had made surgery and essential procedures almost impossible over the past six months, according to doctors from Tigray's biggest hospital. — AFP

# Business

THURSDAY, JANUARY 6, 2022

## US triumphs over Canada in first dispute under new trade deal

### Conflicts soared under former president Donald Trump

WASHINGTON: The US government on Tuesday said it had won its fight with Ottawa over restrictions in the Canadian dairy market, claiming victory in the first-ever dispute under the revamped North American free trade pact. But rather than remove a point of conflict between the trading partners, the issue may exacerbate stresses, since both sides have vowed to fight to protect their own industries and workers.

US Trade Representative (USTR) Katherine Tai called the ruling under the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement a "historic win" that "will help eliminate unjustified trade restrictions." The finding, which could lead to punitive American tariffs on Canadian goods, comes amid growing trade frictions between the neighbors over issues ranging from lumber to milk, as well as newer disputes over solar panels, electric cars and taxes on tech giants.

The conflicts soared under former president Donald Trump, who forced a renegotiation of the two-decade old North American Free Trade Agreement. The end result was known in the United States by the acronym USMCA and in Canada as CUSMA, but the tensions it was meant to address have not abated under US President Joe Biden.

#### 'Trump light'

The agreement came into force in July 2020, and since then, Washington has also used the provisions to pressure Mexican auto factories to protect workers' rights to organize. Biden in November held a summit with Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Mexico's President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador to try to smooth relations. But William Reinsch, a trade policy expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said the

Biden administration's approach to trade is sometimes viewed as "Trump light."

"The rhetoric is different... it's a more rational, less impulsive policymaking process," he told AFP. But, "Their mindset is in some respects... not that different from Trump's." Leaders in both countries face a difficult political environment, given Biden's pledge to defend American workers and the relatively larger importance of the dairy market to Canada's economy, Reinsch said.

But this first dispute under USMCA could set an example on how to resolve conflicts amicably—depending on how Canada responds. In the complaint first registered in December 2020, Washington objected to Ottawa's practice of reserving a large chunk of milk imported from the United States under preferential tariffs for Canadian dairy processors. When negotiations failed to reach a settlement, Biden's trade officials escalated the dispute, calling for a panel to adjudicate it. USTR at the time said the policies "undermine the ability of American dairy exporters to sell a wide range of products to Canadian consumers."

#### Spilt milk

The dispute settlement panel issued its report December 20 and said Ottawa's practice of reserving the products "exclusively for the use of processors is inconsistent with Canada's commitment" under the treaty. Canada has until February 3 to bring its policies into compliance and if no changes are made, Washington can "impose countermeasures that are equivalent, in effect, to the offending Canadian measures... if we were to reach that point," a senior US trade official told reporters.

The Canadian government welcomed some



WASHINGTON: File photo shows US President Joe Biden shakes hands with Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau during a bilateral meeting in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington. The US government said it had won its fight with Ottawa over restrictions in the Canadian dairy market. —AFP

aspects of the panel's findings, which it said supported the supply management policies, but had "taken note" of the ruling on reserving some imports for producers. The country "takes its commitments and obligations under international agreements seriously. These include those that Canada has under CUSMA with the United States, Canada's closest trading partner," Trade Minister Mary Ng and Agriculture Minister Marie-Claude Bibeau said in a joint statement.

But they pledged "to stand up for" the dairy industry and "continue to preserve, protect and defend the supply management system." From January through October 2021, the United States exported \$478 million worth of dairy products to Canada, making the country the third-largest export destination for those goods, USTR said. There are 10,095 dairy farms in Canada, which directly support approximately 19,000 jobs, according to the Canadian government. — AFP

## Toyota overtakes GM to lead US auto sales for 2021

NEW YORK: Japanese carmaker Toyota led US automobile sales in 2021, according to figures released Tuesday, overtaking General Motors for the first time as a shortage of semiconductors roils the car industry. The shift atop the rankings came after a year in which assembly lines were plagued by scarcity of the crucial computer chips, resulting in steep fourth-quarter sales declines for both companies.

But Toyota still managed to grow annual sales in the United States by 10.4 percent to 2.3 million, while General Motors suffered a 12.9 percent drop to 2.2 million. Toyota, which has been credited with better management of the chip issue compared with some rivals, saw small annual gains for two top-selling sedans, the Camry and the Corolla, and a modest dip in sales of its Rav4 compact SUV. Its full-sized Highlander SUV scored higher sales in 2021.

GM, which relies more heavily on trucks than Toyota, saw an annual 10.8 percent drop in its Silverado pickup trucks and a 6.4 percent fall in its GMC truck line. GM has held the crown as the number-one company in US auto sales since 1931, when it sup-

planted Ford, according to trade publication Automotive News.

Charlie Chesbrough, senior economist at Cox Automotive, noted that GM's de-emphasis of sedans has cost it some market share, and characterized Toyota's ascendance as a "significant event" given GM's long-time leadership. In a market starved of inventory, Toyota also may have benefited from a smaller dealer network compared with GM, Ford and Stellantis, which owns the Chrysler brands, he said.

"The larger dealer networks of GM/Ford/Stellantis may have faced a greater challenge of keeping the right product in the right market for the right buyer," Chesbrough said in an email. "And, as a result, sales may have been trimmed because buyers couldn't find the product they wanted."

#### Semiconductor struggle

Cox has projected 2021 US sales of 14.9 million, up 2.5 percent from the 2020 level but much below the five-year average. The consultancy has pointed to strong demand but anemic inventories, saying "demand is healthy but... you can't sell what you don't have."



HOUSTON: Vehicles sit on the lot at the Joe Myers Toyota dealership in Houston, Texas. Toyota Motor Corp has been ranked the No. 1 automaker in America after surpassing General Motors in auto sales for the first time since 1931. — AFP

A shortage in semiconductors has been one of the emblematic supply chain problems of the COVID-19 pandemic. Analysts have cited outsized demand for electronics as a factor, but automakers have also seen supplies of the component affected by closures at factories in Asia due to COVID lockdowns or fires at manufacturing sites.

Among other companies reporting sales, Honda scored an 8.9 percent rise in US sales last year to 1.5 million vehicles, and Hyundai won a 19 percent increase to 738,081 autos.

While GM has acknowledged that low car inventories are a problem,

Chief Executive Mary Barra and other executives have touted strong vehicle pricing, which has enabled it to remain profitable even as sales sag.

GM's inventories recovered somewhat during the quarter, finishing December at just under 200,000. That is about 55 percent more than three months earlier, but less than half the level of a year ago.

"The key constraint for sales continues to be reduced inventory levels as a result of the semiconductor shortage. Those inventory levels are beginning to recover," said GM Chief Economist Elaine Buckberg. — AFP

## Germany paves way to clamp down on Google activities

BERLIN: Germany's antitrust regulator yesterday classified Google a company of "paramount significance across markets", a move paving the way for the authorities to clamp down on any potentially anti-competitive activities.

The decision is the first after an amendment of the German Competition Act came into force January 2021, allowing the authority to intervene earlier, particularly against huge digital companies. "This is a very important step since based on this decision the Bundeskartellamt (regulator) can now take action against specific anti-competitive practices by Google," said Andreas Mundt, president of the Federal Cartel Authority, in a statement.

Wielding the new legislation, the authority has over the last year opened probes into US tech giants such as Amazon and Facebook. In the cases surrounding Google, Mundt said his authority was looking at how the company processes personal data.

It is also examining the US group's Google News Showcase, which was launched in Germany in 2020 and allows publishers to place journalistic content more prominently online. Big tech companies have been facing increasing scrutiny around the globe over their dominant positions as well as their tax practices.

In November, Google lost an appeal at the European Union's second-highest court against a 2.4 billion euro (\$2.8 billion) fine imposed by Brussels for abusing its search engine dominance. — AFP

## US private hiring surged to 807,000 in December: ADP

WASHINGTON: Hiring surged in December, especially in the service industry, with private US firms adding 807,000 workers, payroll services firm ADP reported yesterday. It was a big upswing from the 505,000 gain in November and nearly double the increase economists had been expecting, but the hit from the fast-spreading Omicron variant may still be ahead.

The data offers a preview of the government employment report due out Friday, but ADP can be far out of line with the official figures. Economists are projecting the jobs report will show the US economy added 440,000 jobs in the final month of the year, nearly twice the disappointing November result. ADP said service firms, including restaurants and hotels that were the hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, added 669,000 workers last month, while goods-producing companies hired 138,000. "December's job market strengthened as the



MIAMI, Florida: File photo shows, a "We're Hiring" sign hangs on the wall of a Target store in Miami, Florida. Hiring surged in December, especially in the service industry, with private US firms adding 807,000 workers, payroll services firm ADP reported yesterday. — AFP

fallout from the Delta variant faded and Omicron's impact had yet to be seen," ADP chief economist Nela Richardson said.

"Job gains were broad-based, as goods producers added the strongest reading of the year," Richardson said. ADP said private hiring

in the fourth quarter averaged 625,000, topping the 514,000 average for the year. — AFP

But "while job gains eclipsed 6 million in 2021, private sector payrolls are still nearly 4 million jobs short of pre-COVID-19 levels," Richardson said. — AFP

## Leaked memo says rusty Qantas pilots making errors

MELBOURNE: Some Qantas pilots are making mistakes as they return from long breaks caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, according to an internal memo reported by Australian media yesterday. Among the errors listed in Qantas pilot reports: starting take-off with the parking brake on and misreading the altitude as airspeed, said a report by the Sydney Morning Herald and Melbourne's Age.

It also cited switches in cockpit panels being in the wrong position, and crew looking back at an event and "not realising that they were overloaded or had lost situational awareness". The memo by Qantas' fleet operations chiefs reportedly said the COVID-19 related disruption to flights meant pilots had less recent flight experience, a requirement known as "recency".

As a result, the memo is quoted as saying, expert pilots "experienced a subsequent reduction in cognitive capacity". "Airlines around the world are working through the complex process of returning to pre-COVID operations, including bringing back pilots who experienced extended periods on the ground," a Qantas spokeswoman said. Qantas recognised very early that it needed to reassess pilots' recent and current flight time requirements as well as its "refamiliarisation programs", she said. "We designed an enhanced return-to-work program fit for the unprecedented challenge facing our industry," the spokeswoman added. — AFP



Business

# European equities extend gains as Omicron fears fade

## Markets wavered in Asia after a tepid Wall Street lead

LONDON: Europe's major stock markets advanced yesterday as investors drew strength from easing Omicron virus concerns and shrugged off a mixed performance in Asia. London firmed 0.2 percent around midday, while Frankfurt jumped 0.7 percent and Paris won 0.5 percent in early afternoon euro-zone trade. Markets wavered in Asia after a tepid Wall Street lead, with inflation and expected interest rate hikes returning to the fore as Omicron fears ease. In foreign exchange, the dollar slid versus the euro before minutes from the US Federal Reserve's latest interest rate meeting.

Oil steadied after climbing Tuesday, when OPEC and its allies agreed as expected to raise output by 400,000 barrels per day in February. "Overall, risk appetite remains positive," said ThinkMarkets analyst Fawad Razaqada. "The biggest driver behind this is relief that Omicron is not as deadly as Delta, which is fuelling expectations that travel restrictions and lockdowns will be lifted soon."

### Omicron relief rally

While the new COVID variant continues to spread rapidly around the world, forcing governments to maintain containment measures, its apparently milder symptoms have also allowed traders to focus more on future economic policies and plans to rein in surging prices.

Later yesterday sees the release of minutes from

the Fed's December rate meeting, which dealers hope will provide a clearer idea about officials' policy plans. That is followed by Friday's US jobs data for last month that could play a key role in their next deliberations. With the bank due to end its vast bond-buying stimulus programme by March, commentators are debating when and how many times the Fed will hike US borrowing costs as it tries to overcome inflation running at a pace not seen in decades.

After ringing up new record highs on Monday, the S&P 500 fell on Wall Street, while the Nasdaq sank more than one percent as tech firms—which generally rely on debt and low rates to fuel growth—took a hit. However, the Dow edged upward to strike a new all-time high.

### China tech sector weighs

Chinese technology firms, which have been hit by a crackdown from China's government, were a big drag on Hong Kong as it sank more than one percent. Concerns about a new COVID outbreak in the city that has led to the reimposition of containment measures added to the glum mood.

Shanghai stocks also slid but Tokyo clung onto positive territory. In company news, China Mobile briefly soared around 10 percent on its debut in Shanghai after the telecoms giant was delisted in New York under a standoff between Beijing and



FRANKFURT, Hesse: The European Central Bank (ECB) headquarters building is pictured in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany. — AFP

Washington. It ended only slightly higher, however. The share offer is expected to raise \$8.8 billion after the company exercises an over-allotment

option, according to Bloomberg News, making it the largest on China's domestic stock markets for more than a decade. — AFP

## Theranos verdict sends a chill through startups

WASHINGTON: Fraud convictions this week for Theranos founder Elizabeth Holmes will send a chill through Silicon Valley entrepreneurs, insiders say, now they know there is the threat of jail for airy promises that come to nothing. But with billions of dollars washing around the tech industry in search of the next big thing, the fake-it-til-you-make-it ethos is here to stay.

"Any startup founder who believed that their technology wasn't there yet, but had faith that it ultimately would be should be very nervous," said Aron Solomon, chief legal analyst at Esquire Digital, a marketing firm for attorneys.

"I'll bet you there are a lot of founders ... right now who watched the trial and thought they have probably done some of the same things Elizabeth Holmes did," he said. The 37-year-old was found guilty of four counts of fraud for lying to investors over a blood testing device she claimed would disrupt the medical testing industry—and make them fabu-

lously rich in the process.

She claimed to have a machine that would analyze just a few drops of blood for a gamut of diseases, allowing doctors to pounce early enough to save their patients from cancer or HIV. Her tests were supposed to be fast and cheap, replacing the expensive, slow lab tests offered by established names.

Hundreds of millions of dollars poured into what blue chip names were convinced could be the next Apple or Google. Except that it wasn't. Holmes's months-long trial shone a spotlight on the blurred line between chutzpah and cheating that some say marks modern-day Silicon Valley.

Startup founders have to sell visions of wild success to get backing, said Solomon. They often speak in the present tense about things that are really in a hoped-for future—if only they have enough time and money. "You are always faking it; you are just trying to get your product better and better by constantly iter-



SAN JOSE: Elizabeth Holmes (2L) walks with her partner Billy Evans (L) and her parents Christian (R) and Noel (2R) Holmes, outside of federal court after she was found guilty on 4 of 11 accounts faced in her fraud trial. — AFP

ating," he said.

Holmes testified at her trial that a new generation of her blood testing machine on the verge of completion would have performed as promised. The problem with the model, says analyst Patrick Moorhead, is when-as in Holmes's case—the promised success is a chimera. "There is a difference between setting a bold vision and lying to investors," he said. "That

is what I think we see here."

Silicon Valley has a long history of creating billionaires out of college dropouts in possession of a good idea. Modern-day titans of capitalism, from Microsoft's Bill Gates, to Amazon's Jeff Bezos to Google's Larry Page and, perhaps most famously of all, Apple's Steve Jobs, have all turned a brainwave into untold riches. — AFP

## AUB re-launches Al Hassad Islamic account with additional features

KUWAIT: Following the huge success of Al-Hassad Islamic Account, Ahli United Bank (AUB) announced the re-launching of the account after adding a suite of additional unique features that are more apt for customer aspirations. These new features come in line with the Bank's commitment to constantly developing its services, and its keenness to maintain customer satisfaction. The Bank also aims to meet customer different banking needs, and develop its existing saving schemes and create new products and services tailored to these needs.

In its new design, Al-Hassad Islamic Saving Account presents a broader variety of rewards. Customers can now participate in the draw to win monthly KD 100,000 prize, in addition to 4 quar-

terly mega prizes of KD 250,000 that will help the lucky winners realize their life dreams. There are also 10 weekly prizes of KD 1,000 each. In addition to this attractive package, there will be the annual expected profits on the basis a Wakala contract that increases the attractiveness of the Al-Hassad Islamic Saving Account to customers.

To be eligible to participate in the draw, the customer should have a minimum balance of KD 100, whereby the customer has two chances to participate, with up to 30,000 chances per draw, in addition to rewarding annual profits. Every KD 50 invested entitles the customer to one chance in the draws, provided that to maintain his balance for at least fifteen days before the draw date. The longer the customer keeps his balance the bigger the chances of participation in the draw with every KD 50 in the account. Draws are held every Wednesday based on the draw scheme. On religious and national holidays, the draw is postponed to the next business day.

On this occasion, Mrs Hanadi Khazal, Head of Retail Distribution at AUB said that as part of AUB's commitment to provide the best banking experience to its customers, we continue to

enhance our products and services to meet their expectations. We review and boost our offers on a continuous basis. We strive to make Al-Hassad program the simplest and easiest savings account. Moreover, Al-Hassad Account provides a unique account opening feature online with all ease with instant deposit option. These advances are in line with AUB's leading role in presenting the latest technologies and services to present its customers a convenient banking experience.

Mrs Khazal said that Al-Hassad Islamic Saving Account had achieved a huge success over the past several years and brought a life-changing shift in the lives of an increasing number of AUB customers who became able to realize their dreams thanks to the mega prizes provided by Al-Hassad.

Mrs Khazal reiterated that Ahli United Bank is proud to re-launch Al-Hassad Islamic Saving Account in a new, more sophisticated version designed to reward our present customers for the trust they have placed in the Bank, with a view to attracting new customers and promote commitment to the culture of saving within all segments of society, thereby encouraging all members of society to become part of Al-Hassad Islamic Saving Account.

## 'Far from paradise': Albanian youth find hardship abroad

TIRANA: Alma had hoped her teenage son would find a better life after he left his native Albania for Germany, but he disappeared days after leaving. "The worry is stabbing my soul. I'm the guilty one. I'm the one who encouraged him to leave. Where is he? What is he doing?" cried the 38-year-old widow, whose last name has been withheld to protect her identity.

The 16-year-old left by car heading for Germany with three others in early December, but hasn't been heard from since. Alma poured her life savings from her work as a cleaner to pay for the trip, hoping he would find a better future.

"He has talent, he sings very well, he could study and have the life I never had," she said as tears streamed down her face. Faced with persistent unemployment and deepening poverty at home, an untold number of parents across Albania begrudgingly send their children abroad, including through illicit means, hoping for a better future in Europe.

Some rely on forged documents to travel, while

others are accompanied by relatives or an adult who drops them off before returning to Albania.

There are no official estimates on the number of unaccompanied children who attempt to migrate to Europe in a year, but officials stopped hundreds at the border in 2020 alone. Once in Europe, life is usually far from ideal. Unable to speak the local language, the children grapple with isolation while many are forced to live in group homes.

### 'Massive delusion'

Following four decades of iron-fisted rule that ended in the 1990s, Albanians flocked abroad en masse, desperate to escape hardship and isolation after weathering brutal oppression at the hands of the country's communist dictatorship.

Over the past 30 years, approximately 1.7 million people—or 37 percent of the population—have left Albania, where the average salary is 420 euros (\$475) a month and one in three young people are unemployed, according to official statistics.

"For many Albanians, the West is still a paradise that will solve all their family's economic and social problems," Drita Teta, a sociologist in Tirana, told AFP. "This is a massive delusion".

To combat the scourge, Albanian police have cracked down, tightening controls at departure points hoping to stop young people who do not have the necessary documents. Between January



TIRANA, Qarku i Tiranës: Photo shows Manjola (L), mother of Florim and his father (R), posing in their own home in Tirana. Faced with persistent unemployment and deepening poverty at home, an untold number of parents across Albania begrudgingly send their children abroad, including through illicit means, hoping a life in Europe will provide a better future. — AFP

and November last year, 309 minors were prevented from leaving Albania, compared to the 239 who were stopped during the same period in 2020.

Experts noted that the coronavirus pandemic also appears to have slowed the movement of Albanian children to Europe significantly as borders closed. — AFP

### News in brief

#### Rolls-Royce completes sale

LONDON: British aircraft engine maker Rolls-Royce has completed the sale of Norwegian unit Bergen Engines to UK industrial group Langley Holdings for 91 million euros (\$103 million), it said Tuesday. The company said in a brief statement that it would use the proceeds, together with 16 million euros held by Bergen and retained by Rolls-Royce, to "help rebuild" its balance sheet. Rolls-Royce scrapped its original plan last year to sell Bergen to Russia's privately-owned TMH after Norway threatened to veto the deal on national security grounds. The British group had announced the Langley deal in August 2021 after halting its planned sale to TMH in March. Bergen has been part of Rolls-Royce since 1999, servicing engines for Norwegian Navy vessels — and for top-secret intelligence gathering ship Marjata according to local media reports. — AFP

#### Huarong plunges 50% as trading resumes

BEIJING: Shares in China's state-owned debt collector Huarong Asset Management plummeted 50 percent yesterday as trading resumed in Hong Kong after a \$6.6 billion state-orchestrated bailout of the embattled company. The company's Hong Kong-traded shares were suspended in April last year after it delayed its annual report, spooking Asian markets. When Huarong published its results in August, it revealed a record \$15.9 billion loss for 2020 and outlined a rescue plan. Yesterday, its share price slid from HK\$1.02 (\$0.13) to HK\$0.51 by day-end, closing 50 percent down. The plunge follows a filing late Tuesday in which Huarong said it would return to its core business, adjust its structure, cut capital consumption and boost returns. — AFP

#### Sony to explore making electric cars

LAS VEGAS: Electronics giant Sony unveiled Tuesday a new prototype of its Vision-S electric vehicle and announced the founding of a company to explore jumping into the rapidly growing market. The Japanese firm, better known for its TVs and video game consoles, will create the Sony Mobility subsidiary in spring 2022 as it weighs entering the field. Sony chief executive officer Kenichiro Yoshida unveiled at the CES tech show in Las Vegas the Vision-S 02, a new version of the firm's first prototype that has begun road testing. Through this new branch, the electronics giant "intends to explore entry into the EV market," it said in a statement. The Vision-S is packed with internal and external sensors and is used by Sony to test its autonomous driving technologies. — AFP

#### Swedish banker to face trial

STOCKHOLM: The former chief executive of Swedish bank Swedbank, Birgitte Bonnesen, will face trial on fraud and market manipulation charges, law enforcement officials said Tuesday. Bonnesen was sacked in 2019 following allegations that the bank engaged in money-laundering in the Baltic state of Estonia. Authorities believe Bonnesen attempted to cover up money-laundering by the bank in Sweden by diffusing "intentionally or by aggravated negligence ... false information about the bank's measures to prevent, detect, block and signal suspicions about money-laundering in (its) operations," the prosecutor in charge of the investigation, Thomas Langrot, said in a statement. In 2019, a documentary made by an investigative news programme for Swedish broadcaster SVT. — AFP

## Business

# Al-Omar: 100% Kuwaitization ratio in 2021 recruitment process at KFH

## KFH is the largest private sector institution concerning number of Kuwaiti employees

KUWAIT: KFH Group Chief Human Resources Officer, Zeyad Al-Omar said that HR Department has successfully achieved the bank's strategic goals through its pre-set plans. The year end results were comprehensive, well balanced, supportive of other bank sectors and departments, compatible with KFH strategy, driven general performance and enhanced sustainable growth at all levels.

Al-Omar indicated that KFH has enhanced training and development policies and the digitalization strategy. KFH continued to recruit national talents and skills. He added that HR has contributed significantly to the achievement of KFH vision and establishing the foundations of a fully integrated system for the management to achieve security, stability and alleviate performance and productivity ratios.

Al-Omar said that we have focused on transformation to a smart environment, applied digitalization to most of HR functions and automated KFH operations. In addition, we have enhanced and developed a special system for HR, through which employees services are automated without the need for manual paperwork. Also, certain services are provided to employees through special systems outside duty hours and off work site to facilitate procedures and cope with the digitalization aspect at KFH level.

### Recruitment Automation

Al-Omar said that KFH has succeeded, by utilizing digital platforms and highly developed technological tools, in conducting personal interviews, evaluation, employment and training functions which have proven effective during the pandemic. KFH has adopted a highly developed system (Psychometric Profiling & Skill Based Assessment) to determine the candidate level of educational qualifications, skills and character and prepare analysis and reports to better measure the candidate's efficiency and determine his strengths, weaknesses, and development opportunities.

He indicated that the recruitment and assumption of duty procedures are usually performed automatically. Most of the recent recruitments were completed remotely through the digital technology due to the pandemic conditions. He reiterated that KFH is committed to provide the support required for employees to transfer to the new work model which represents the new caliber of business future. The increase in professional speaking robots in call centers, the XTM machines and the self-service centers shall determine the type of employees recruited in the future.

### Training Programs

Al-Omar emphasized that KFH lays great emphasis on investing in human resources, unleashing youth powers and enabling them to cope with the global trends in banking industry, expertise and skills in order to achieve occupational success and function development. He added that KFH is keen on enhancing investment in training and designing training programs on professional digital platforms which are specialized in training and development of skills. KFH believes in the significance of human resources as one of the basic assets

and a real power for the success of the organization. Also, it believes in alleviating performance indicators and improvement of efficiency.

On the other hand, Al-Omar said that KFH has succeeded in designing and organizing training programs through professional digital platforms for training and development of skills. He added that investment in training and development of digital systems for e-training and learning shall continue and the new recruits shall be provided with the required training programs through specialized digital platforms.

### Internships and Diplomas

Al-Omar said that KFH is continuing the internship programs which it launched in 2013 and emphasized that the program has comprised several Kuwaiti employees and proved its effectiveness in alleviating the educational and practical efficiency of employees.

KFH considers that the employees gathering between efficiency in the line of specialization and the development of educational qualifications is one of the basic elements of success as education provides the employee with knowledge and updates on the latest theories and applications in various business fields.

Al-Omar revealed that the total number of training hours during 2021 reached 74500 hours, apart from the scholarships which KFH provides to its employees every year. The number of occupational certificates received by KFH employees reached 113 certificates in 2021.

### International Universities

KFH has provided a series of condensed virtual courses in collaboration with Harvard, INSEAD and IMD to build the abilities of its employees and prepare them as the future leaders of KFH. The development plan is being completed with the addition of IE University in Madrid.

Al-Omar indicated that the relations and collaboration with these entities aim to train and qualify employees in a professional manner that depends on the concept of technical efficiencies and international professions. The bank provides a special job-related training to the employee based on international specifications and enables employees to obtain accredited efficiency certificates and join the most reputable organizations.

### Forsa Program

As part of its continued endeavor to train and develop the abilities of its employees, KFH was keen on attracting and qualifying young national talents. Al-Omar said that KFH had launched 7th & 8th editions of Forsa Program which includes comprehensive training programs and workshops aiming to enhance the skills of employees in various work fields at the bank based on KFH strategy to train and qualify national manpower.

He added that the Forsa Programs launched regularly by KFH comprise advanced training courses based on variable learning methods. Also, they include internships to Silicon Valley – USA and field visits to the most reputable global technological organizations e.g., Microsoft,



Zeyad Al-Omar

Google, Apple, Ripple, and other technology giants. Visits are also made to the laboratories of the highly advanced American universities and to the innovation center at Silicon Valley and to several reputable FinTech companies. Field visits are made to Kuwait – Turk to be acquainted with Kuwait – Turk research center services within a team comprising hundreds of engineers.

KFH had concluded a partnership with LinkedIn to launch a learning platform LinkedIn Learning for KFH Group employees. The platform enables users to have unlimited access to the contents of the platform and select the training programs and videos.

### Job Fairs

KFH participated last year in 5 virtual job fairs in cooperation with several local universities due to the pandemic conditions. KFH continues its pioneering role in qualifying, recruiting and developing distinct human talents of Kuwaiti graduates by granting them jobs at KFH or supporting their abilities to cope with the needs and requirements of the labor market in the private sector.

KFH presented, in these fairs, a general definition of banking business and Islamic banking. This process aimed to open the door for fresh graduates and select some of the candidates to work at KFH and give them the appropriate jobs.

On the other hand, Al-Omar highlighted KFH role in enhancing strategic partnerships with the concerned official authorities and government and private universities to give the Kuwaiti youth the opportunities to train and work. KFH also, endeavors to enhance Kuwaiti youth efficiency and increase the nationalization efforts in which KFH achieved remarkable results.

### Social Participations

Al-Omar mentioned KFH participation in training a group of students and other society categories to prepare prospected employees to bear responsibility in the future. The latest training program covered a group of persons with special needs in cooperation with the Kuwait Society for the Welfare of Handicapped.

### Largest Nationalization Entity

Regarding nationalization, Al-Omar emphasized that KFH has a long record of national talents employment and developments. He indicated that the successful execution of recruitment and development of national talents has resulted in KFH having the highest number of Kuwaiti employees at the Kuwaiti banks and private sector institutions level. The Kuwaiti recruits ratio

during the recent years ranged between 98% - 100% and the nationalization ratio reached 76% in 2021.

He added that KFH is keen on ensuring that Kuwaiti employees occupy all posts in the middle management and executive management by continuously focusing on the promotion process through (HiPos and Successors) programs. He indicated that the Kuwaitis ratio in the leading positions in 2021 approximated 77% while the Number of Kuwaitis in the leadership development programs reached 75%.

### COVID-19 Committee

Al-Omar said that since the beginning of the corona pandemic, KFH has established a special committee to encounter the pandemic and its impacts. The committee comprised employees from various departments. The committee is still playing a vital role in dealing with the pandemic and avoiding any negative impacts on the business e.g., dealing with infected cases, protecting employees and customers, following up government instructions, communicating with official authorities and reporting the latest development on the pandemic inside KFH e.g. infected cases, closing of certain branches, reopening branches, examining suspected cases and other activities.

Al-Omar mentioned that the committee had organized 3 vaccination campaigns, one in collaboration with the banking union and two in collaboration with the Ministry of Health. He said that the campaigns have achieved the targeted goals.

He indicated that the committee is continuing to ensure business continuity, provide high quality services, combat spread of the plague, enhance awareness programs and ensure employees participation in combating the pandemic by applying all precautionary arrangements and procedures.

### Woman's Role

Al-Omar emphasized that KFH has recruited national talents from both genders while ensuring to enhance woman's participation in the work force in all KFH departments. KFH has granted women the opportunity to occupy various posts, thus increasing women's representation in KFH team as per KFH strategy in this field.

He indicated that the ladies branches in KFH is an advantage that puts KFH in the lead and provides the market with banking and finance expertise of highly professional ladies. This advantage would achieve an added value for the national economy and the Kuwaiti society. KFH is always keen on developing this aspect.

### Advantages and Sponsorship

Al-Omar said that KFH is continuing its strategic initiatives to foster employees and provide them with the best advantages. He added that the bank has designed (Wellness Program) to achieve health goals for employees in collaboration with Hinsta for the third year respectively. The program includes Better Life application which comprises interactive functions and online learning materials with the facility to contact a personal coach for guidance and enhancement. This would have a positive impact on the gen-

eral work environment.

He added that HR is leading the efforts that would ensure the safety of work environment during the pandemic by presenting fully integrated protocols which are designed to enhance a safe and healthy environment for employees and special healthcare programs.

KFH organizes annually a questionnaire to the group employees on the best means to improve performance. The questionnaire gives employees the opportunity to express their opinions and evaluate certain issues related to work and management. The questionnaire has recorded tremendous participation by KFH group in general, bearing in mind that this questionnaire is taken into consideration when plans, strategies and goals are set for KFH and its departments.

KFH provides a distinguished discounts program comprising significant discounts on the prices of several commodities in addition to several advantages on purchases from the most reputable shops and markets including various commodities and products that interest KFH employees.

### Vaccination Campaigns

Al-Omar said that KFH has launched during the year an enhancement campaign to encourage employees to take Covid19 vaccination titled We want you vaccinated which included prizes, gifts, and various offers.

He added that the campaign aimed to encourage employees to take the vaccination to ensure the safety and health of the employees and their families as part of KFH social responsibility.

Al-Omar emphasized that KFH is keen on spreading and applying work protocols among employees and provide highly advanced digital platforms for internal communication as well as HR Information System through which employees can view all matters of interest to them including the submission of Covid-19 disclosure on regular basis.

### Graduates Qualification

National Cadets Recruitment System at KFH is considered as the best in the market based on the recognition and testimony of various Kuwaiti employees and graduates training entities. The system classifies and determines the capabilities of applicants and determines work fields where the employee can fit best. The employees receive a condensed training program, theoretical and practical, with periodical evaluation of the employee's comprehension of the training. The employee is put on the right path and field which he selects personally and which suits his abilities, skills and practical interests.

### Figures and Accomplishments in 2021

- ┆ Total No. of training hours: 74500
- ┆ No. of occupational certificates received by KFH employees: 113
- ┆ The ratio of Kuwaiti employees in the leadership development programs: 75%
- ┆ The ratio of Kuwaitis in the new recruitment process: approximately 100%
- ┆ The ratio of Kuwaitis in the leadership posts: 77%
- ┆ National labor ratio: 76%

## Here's why we think HUAWEI WATCH GT Runner is the best sports watch this year

By Taleb Kanjo

KUWAIT: When it comes to improving your running performance, knowledge is power. Elite athletes have teams of coaches and performance experts logging and analysing their every move; for the rest of us, a running sports watch is the next best thing.

Huawei recently announced the HUAWEI WATCH GT Runner, its first professional running watch built for sports and it is not only the wearer's smart assistant, but also your personal training coach. Through recording environmental and health data, Huawei's newest sports watch can formulate scientific and effective training plan to provide you with comprehensive and professional fitness experience. The HUAWEI WATCH GT Runner is a sports watch that comes loaded with real-time heart rate monitoring, accurate track positioning, scientific running program and an AI Running Coach feature. In addition to its lightweight and comfortable design, it also boasts an astonishing 2-week battery life, all-day health management, convenient life assistant features, and broad compatibility with accessories and third-party apps.

Moreover, the HUAWEI WATCH GT Runner is compatible with Huawei devices as well as other Android and iOS devices, and that is definitely a bonus if you are using devices from other brands.

### Built for Sports

The HUAWEI WATCH GT Runner features the whole new HUAWEI TruSeen™ 5.0+ heart rate monitoring technology, which adopts eight photodiodes in a circular layout, two sets of light sources 8-in-1 LED lens light-emitting chip, multi-channel for receiving light sig-



nal and curved design to realise better light penetration, lower power consumption and more comfortable wearing experience. The Dual-Band Five-System GNSS positioning also provides users with more accurate geographic location positioning. The signals of L1 and L5 carriers are received at the same time, and the difference in ionospheric delay between the two frequencies can be used to eliminate the influence of the ionosphere on the electromagnetic wave delay.

It is the first sports watch with a suspended antenna design, which can greatly reduce interference factors such as metal and make the antenna signal more accurate and reliable.

Additionally, made with sports-friendly material the HUAWEI WATCH GT Runner sits tightly and comfortably on your wrist. The sports watch adopts a lightweight and high-strength composite fibre watchcase, which enhances durability. Together with a ceramic ultra-light bezel and aerospace-grade titanium-alloy metal watch crown, the weight of the entire watch body is as light as 38.5g, providing a comfortable wearing experience to runners. The HUAWEI WATCH GT Runner also adopts an antibacterial silicone watch strap, so you don't need to worry about sweat and dirt con-



tacting the strap during training which can affect health, as well as comfort. Moreover, the Running Ability Index and AI Running Coach allows you to accurately evaluate your performance and improve it through personalised training programmes, achieving your goal efficiently and effectively.

### Ultra-long battery life

The HUAWEI WATCH GT Runner supports up to 14-day battery life in smart mode under typical usage scenario and offers 7-day of long battery life in heavy usage scenario. The longer battery life ensures you can wear it all day and use it continuously, even during sleep. Whether you are wearing it for workouts, meetings, or sleeping, you can always stay connected and keep track of your health and fitness.

### All-day Health Management

As you would expect from Huawei smartwatches, the HUAWEI WATCH GT Runner provides continuous, real-time, and accurate SpO2 (Blood Oxygen Saturation), sleep and stress monitoring features for a comprehensive health management.

The HUAWEI WATCH GT Runner sports the

HUAWEI TruSleep 2.0 sleep monitoring technology, which can perform sleep stage monitoring, real-time heart rate monitoring, sleep breathing monitoring, and provide you with assessment of sleep quality without disturbing your sleep. The HUAWEI WATCH GT Runner is also a stress management assistant. It also monitors your stress 24/7 and it will even notify you if your stress levels are high and even help you out with breathing guidance to help relieve some of the stress off you.

The new Healthy Living Shamrock has added many small features to better-fit users' daily health needs. Through personalized settings, users can receive regular reminders like Health challenges, daily water intake, daily mindfulness, early sleep reminder, exercise volume, and stay positive are all small things related to your health.

### Smart life starts from your wrist

As a smart wearable device, the HUAWEI WATCH GT Runner breaks the boundaries of the smartwatch and extends it with third-party apps, covering daily life, travel, gaming, entertainment, work, fitness, and health, covering all aspects of young people's use scenarios.

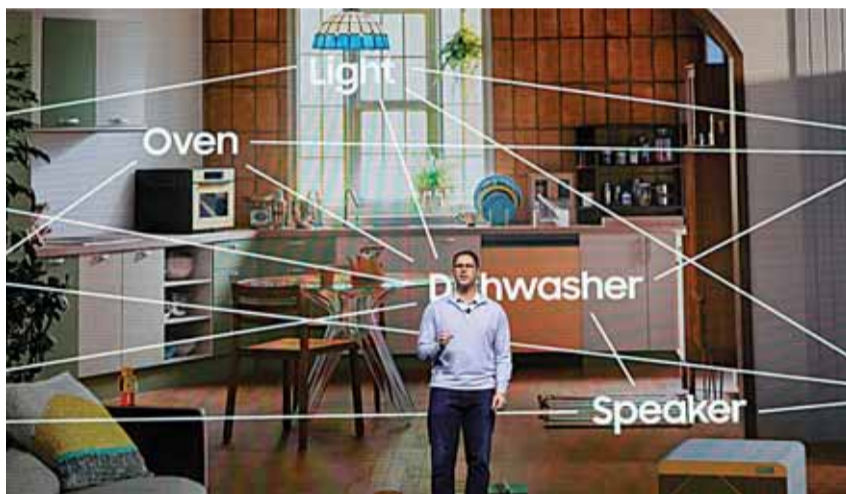
The HUAWEI WATCH GT Runner supports Bluetooth calls, allowing you to make and receive calls via Bluetooth connection right from your wrist. Some of us like to listen to music when running, to help pump and get us into the rhythmic vibe, the HUAWEI WATCH GT Runner comes with a large storage space which can store up to 500 songs, so that more of your favourite songs can be saved and listened to during workouts. In addition, you can receive, read and reply to SMS messages right from your wrist thanks to the convenient message notifications aboard the HUAWEI WATCH GT Runner.

The HUAWEI WATCH GT Runner is every runner's dream in many ways! If you want a sports watch that can help you track your sports activities, steps, routine, heart rate, and fitness level then you would absolutely fall in love with this professional sports watch. The all-new HUAWEI WATCH GT Runner will be up for grabs in Kuwait on the 19th January 2022 starting at a price of KD 99.900.

# CES TECH FAIR OPENS UNDER PANDEMIC SHADOW



A vehicle with Luminar LiDAR based Proactive Safety pre-collision braking crash avoidance technology stops to avoid a child-sized test dummy as it is demonstrated on a test track at the Las Vegas Convention Center ahead of the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas, Nevada. —AFP photos



The Consumer Electronics Show (CES) throws open its doors to thousands yesterday in Las Vegas despite surging COVID-19 cases in the United States, as one of the world's largest trade fairs tries to get back to business. After a series of high-profile companies like Amazon and Google cancelled over climbing virus risk, the return of the in-person convention was cast in doubt.

But organizers cited their vaccine and mask requirements while insisting the show - with its mix of journalists, entrepreneurs and tech lovers from around the world - had to go on. "Despite a few well-publicized cancellations amongst our exhibitors, we have over 2,200 exhibitors here at CES 2022 in Las Vegas, and all of them are counting on us to move forward," Steve Koenig, a vice president from the group that runs the convention. "Why? Well, because these businesses are looking for investors, they're looking for partners, they're looking to conduct business," he added.

Some health experts have voiced caution that people may not universally respect the mask mandate, and noted that daily testing would be a useful tool to keep the spread in check. The event has been cut back by a day to end Friday, and the scale of the show will be sharply reduced with fewer than half the roughly 4,500 exhibitors that turned up for the last in-person edition in 2020 - just before pandemic lock-



SmartThings Head of Products & Engineering Mark Benson speaks during the Samsung keynote address at CES 2022 at The Venetian Las Vegas.

downs hit the United States. Badge-wearing attendees pulling suitcases have begun trickling in, some with a bit of trepidation.

**'We are concerned'**

"We are concerned and worried given the situation and the spike in the cases," said exhibitor Bhavya Gohil, who added he was vaccinated and that the organizers' precautions were reassuring. "But definitely yes, we are still

worried of what could be the outcome," he noted. The show is held in a hybrid format, in person but also online, using software developed by Web Summit, a European technology conference.

"There's no walking, there's no noise, there's no distractions," Paddy Cosgrave, Web Summit founder, said of the upsides of joining online. "But I don't personally believe that you can mimic online the quality of an actual in-

person, humans-to-human interaction," he added. Despite a thinner crowd, the show floor will still hold firms hawking everything from quirky gadgets to technology aimed at humanity's deepest concerns. One of the top items on the menu for the 2022 edition is transportation, increasingly electric and autonomous.

Space-related technologies are making a strong entrance, after a year that saw peaking interest in space tourism and the development of satellite internet. And of course, the metaverse is on everyone's mind, although its definition remains fluid at this stage. The concept refers to the emergence of a world where digital and real worlds are combined, which humans will access via augmented and virtual reality equipment. Born out of science fiction, it has become one of tech's hottest topics since Facebook announced colossal investments in this field and renamed itself Meta.

But for now, the industry is focused on more immediate challenges, such as global chip shortages and supply delays, which are delaying new product launches. Deals and business are, not surprisingly, top of mind for those who have decided they had to attend CES in person. "I do think that people are still going to want to do business and this is a show where a lot of business gets done," said exhibitor Vanessa Camones. "A lot of people don't want to lose that opportunity." —AFP

## Space business: Final (profitable) frontier

The snub-nosed craft resembles a shuttle-airplane mashup, and is the latest entrant in a profit-seeking push with staggering potential - and risks - for humans to visit, work or even live in space. The display of technology like the life-size model "Dream Chaser" ship at the CES tech show in Las Vegas is a sharp signal that the commercial space era is upon us.

Experts see a path for companies to power an unprecedented era of rapid advances, but with the near certain peril that space disasters will occur and lives will be lost. Sierra Space, a subsidiary of private aerospace contractor Sierra Nevada Corp., plans to have the 30-foot (nine-meter) "Dream Chaser" flying missions this year, making the reusable spacecraft key to its off-Earth ambitions.

"Before governments were the only ones that could do it. Now, it's getting down to regular human beings who can get a ride to space," Neeraj Gupta, the company's general manager of space destinations, told AFP.

The craft is meant to carry people and equipment to and from commercial space installations the company envisions building in the next decade, including a system of inflatable structures to house humans in orbit.

Sierra has a deal with NASA for unmanned flights to the International Space Station that are to start this year, and is working with Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin to develop a commercial outpost off-Earth. "We really see a market opening to take more and more people to space," Gupta added. Commercial space efforts have been growing rapidly and captured lots of attention, especially launches of Elon Musk's SpaceX rockets that have been carrying astronauts for NASA. Bezos's own spaceflight last year alternately fascinated fans and outraged critics of the so-called "billionaire space race".

**Space risks**

Yet companies like Sierra are proposing something in addition to tourism - a com-



A full sized crew model of the Sierra Space Dream Chaser space plane is displayed ahead of the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas, Nevada. —AFP

mercial hub in space that could be used to make products, and a ship that can provide transportation. A video of their "space plane" shows the unmanned version of the craft cruising back to Earth and landing on a runway like any other commercial aircraft. Companies have proposed a series of ideas which until recently sounded like long shots, such as asteroid mining - but they have also suggested less far-fetched biomedical applications or production of some types of technology.

Mason Peck, an astronautics professor at Cornell University, said that until the last five years making things in space and bringing them back to Earth just didn't make sense. "Now there are companies... who are actually focused on this question: How can I make a buck in space?" he told AFP. "This has never been the way that people articulate the benefits of space. It's always been something a little bit broader, like the benefit to mankind or humanity or the sake of science," he added.

But the power of profit has the potential to vastly accelerate efficiency, technological advances and capacity in ways that is not in the slow and purposely deliberate approach of NASA or the European Space Agency. "It's pumping more money into the space industry. Technology improves, cost goes down so everybody benefits," said Mike Gruntman, a professor of astronautics at the University of Southern California. This would come as NASA has agreements that are part of the agency's efforts to enable an American-led commercial economy in low-Earth orbit.

Yet the prospect of increasing activity in space which could be done by profit-seeking companies carries very real risks. "There is certainly going to come a time when there will be tragedy and death and destruction as a result of this as there is with everything. There's car crashes, bridges fail, trains derail," Peck added. "The next William Shatner we send to space might not make it back... and that will be terrible. But these are not reasons not to do it," he said referring to the Star Trek star's trip on a Blue Origin launch. —AFP

## RIO DE JANEIRO CANCELS CARNIVAL STREET PARADE OVER OMICRON



In these file photos, performers take part in a street party during the annual 'Ceu Na Terra bloco', in the run up to Rio's carnival, in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil). —AFP photos

Authorities in Rio de Janeiro announced on Tuesday the cancellation of next month's carnival street celebrations due to an increase in COVID-19 cases brought on by the rapidly spreading Omicron variant. It is the second year running that the coronavirus has forced the Rio street parade, which was due to take place from February 25 to March 1, to be called off. "The street carnival in the form that took place in 2020, which did not happen in 2021, will not take place in 2022," Mayor Eduardo Paes said in a live broadcast on social media platforms.

The street parade by musical bands called "blocos" is different to the better known procession by samba schools that takes place in Rio's Sambadrome. The Sambadrome can hold 70,000

people in a stadium that allows authorities to control those that enter. Amongst the options available to them are proof of vaccination, a negative COVID test and the wearing of masks for those in attendance. "The street carnival, given its nature and its democratic aspect, makes any type of control impossible," said Paes.

In 2020, there were an estimated seven million revelers for the days-long street parades, according to the Riotour travel agency. Although previous meetings between Rio authorities and the blocos failed to reach a compromise, new talks are planned for Friday where the musical groups association president Rita Fernandes told AFP they will make "a more decentralized proposal." The arrival of the

highly contagious Omicron variant, coupled with an increase in social gatherings over Christmas and the New Year, has seen COVID cases soar in Rio.

New COVID cases jumped from 21 on December 14 to 458 just two weeks later. So far, though, the rise in cases has not led to a significant increase in hospital admissions or deaths. Four fifths of Rio's population have had at least two vaccine doses while almost a quarter have also been given a booster shot. Some 67 percent of the South American country's 213 million population are vaccinated with two doses, while 12 percent have had the third. Almost 620,000 people in Brazil have died of coronavirus, second only in the world to the United States. —AFP

## Lifestyle | Features

**Ecuador, Colombia slam use of wild animal species after MasterChef episode**

Ecuador on Tuesday warned would-be wild animal eaters of possible prison time and Colombia launched an investigation after a competitive cooking TV show featured shark, alligator and capybara as ingredients. In the offending episode, contestants of MasterChef Ecuador cooked up tolo, a small shark, as well as a type of wild deer and a capybara, a large rodent that can weigh up to 80 kilograms (175 lbs). The National Animal Movement of Ecuador warned that the use of such ingredients on TV would "normalize the consumption of protected animals, whose ownership contributes to the trafficking of wild animals and the destruction of ecosystems."

Neither the channel nor the producers of the program responded to the charges leveled against them, though the show's chef and judge, Carolina Sanchez, claimed the meat was "from a farm." In response to the program, which was filmed in Colombia, Ecuador's environment ministry said it "rejects the promotion and dissemination of graphic or audiovisual content that encourages the purchase and consumption of wild species or their constituent elements."

It also warned that crimes against wild flora and fauna can be punished with prison sentences of up to three years. In Colombia, Environment Minister Carlos Eduardo Correa announced an investigation. He said authorities "are verifying information circulating on social networks about the use of wildlife by-products in television programs." "Trafficking and marketing of wildlife is a crime in Colombia," he wrote on Twitter. MasterChef Ecuador, which is in its third season, is recorded in Colombia and broadcast on the privately owned national channel Telemazonas. —AFP



In this file photo taken, the stage is set for the nominations announcement for the 79th Golden Globe Awards, at the Beverly Hilton Hotel in Beverly Hills, California. A stripped-down Golden Globes will go ahead with no audience or media on January 9, 2022, as the event traditionally known as Hollywood's biggest party reels from an industry boycott over ethical lapses by its organizers. —AFP photos



Helen Hoehne, president of the Hollywood Foreign Press Association (HFPA), attends the nominations announcement for the 79th Golden Globe Awards, at the Beverly Hilton Hotel in Beverly Hills, California.

**GOLDEN GLOBES TO GO AHEAD WITHOUT AUDIENCE OR TV**

A stripped-down Golden Globes will go ahead with no audience or media on Sunday, as the event traditionally known as Hollywood's biggest party reels from an industry boycott over ethical lapses by its organizers. The Hollywood Foreign Press Association - which votes on the Globes - has been accused of racism, sexism, bullying and corruption, with television rights-holder NBC last year pulling the plug on its annual awards broadcast.

Nonetheless, honors in film and television will be announced Sunday from the Globes' usual Beverly Hills hotel venue, in a program the organization said was set to highlight "the long-established philanthropy work of the HFPA." "Over the past 25 years, the HFPA has donated \$50 million to

more than 70 entertainment-related charities, film restoration, scholarship programs and humanitarian efforts," the group said in a statement.

No audience will be present for the 79th Golden Globe Awards, the group said, citing health concerns due to the coronavirus pandemic and the rapidly spreading Omicron variant. The Golden Globes have traditionally been second in importance only to the Oscars in Hollywood's film awards season, but their credibility has been thrown into question - and their future plunged into doubt.

Many Tinseltown publicists and studios refused to participate in this year's edition, and A-listers publicly distanced themselves from the embattled group, at least until reforms are made. The HFPA

announced its annual nominations last month, with Kenneth Branagh's childhood-inspired "Belfast" and Jane Campion's dark Western "The Power of the Dog" topping the selections with seven nods apiece.

But ads and billboards boasting of Golden Globe nomination tallies have been notably absent in Los Angeles this winter. The organization - consisting of just over 100 entertainment writers connected to foreign publications - has rushed through reforms, including admitting its biggest ever annual intake of new members last year. The HFPA diversity row was triggered by a Los Angeles Times investigation last year showing that the organization at the time did not have a single Black member. —AFP

**JAPAN TUNA GOES FOR \$145,000: PANDEMIC DAMPENS AUCTION**

Chef Akifumi Sakagami (center) holds a part of a tuna which was bought jointly by Michelin-starred sushi restaurant operator Onodera Group and wholesaler Yamayuki for 16.9 million yen (145,290 USD) at the Toyosu fish market's New Year auction, at a restaurant yesterday. —AFP photos



Journalists and bystanders look at a tuna which was bought jointly by Michelin-starred sushi restaurant operator Onodera Group and wholesaler Yamayuki for 16.9 million yen (145,290 USD) at the Toyosu fish market's New Year auction.

The buyer of a \$145,000 tuna at Tokyo's traditional New Year auction said yesterday he hoped the purchase would "brighten" a COVID-hit 2022. The top price paid for a tuna at the first auction of the year at Tokyo's Toyosu fish market fell for the third year running, with demand hit by the pandemic. The 16.88 million yen shelled out jointly by a restaurant operator and a wholesaler for the huge bluefin tuna yesterday was far below the 2019 record of 333.6 million yen. The first tuna auction of the year at Toyosu market is a closely watched tradition that draws a horde of fish wholesalers every year.

Bidders sometimes shell out an enormous amount to win the top-priced tuna, which is seen as bringing good luck, as well as plenty of publicity for the buyer. Yesterday's top-priced 211-

kilogram (465-pound) fish was caught off the northern Aomori region of Japan, famous for its quality tuna, and went to Michelin-starred sushi restaurant operator Onodera Group and Japanese wholesaler Yamayuki. Hours after the early-morning auction, the prize fish was delivered to a restaurant operated by Onodera in Tokyo's upscale Omotesando neighborhood to be publicly sliced and filleted.

"I participated in the auction hoping to get the top-priced tuna, which is considered auspicious, and serve it to our customers to brighten their year ahead a little, even as our world remains marred by the pandemic," head chef Akifumi Sakagami told AFP. The tuna will be offered to customers both in Japan and at the firm's restaurants abroad, including in Hawaii, New York and

Los Angeles, he added. Sushi enthusiasts gathered outside the upscale Tokyo restaurant to await the tuna, eager for a morsel.

Junko Kawabata, 78, said she had jumped on the expressway from her home in eastern Tokyo for the chance to taste the top-priced catch. "I just love tuna," she said, proudly displaying a numbered ticket indicating she would be the first customer to be served. "I can't wait to eat a piece of it." Another sushi lover, 59-year-old company employee Mitsuaki Tsubota, also arrived early to get a ticket. Tsubota, whose workplace is across the street from the Onodera restaurant, said he would pop out of the office during his lunch break to enjoy the tuna. "That would be a very luxurious lunch," he said with a grin. —AFP

**FUROR OVER KFC KENYA FRIES FIASCO**

US fast-food chain KFC has triggered an online furor in Kenya after it ran out of fries, with local Twitter users threatening a boycott because it does not use locally-sourced potatoes. "You love our chips a little too much, and we've run out. Sorry!" KFC admitted on Twitter this week, offering its customers various alternatives.

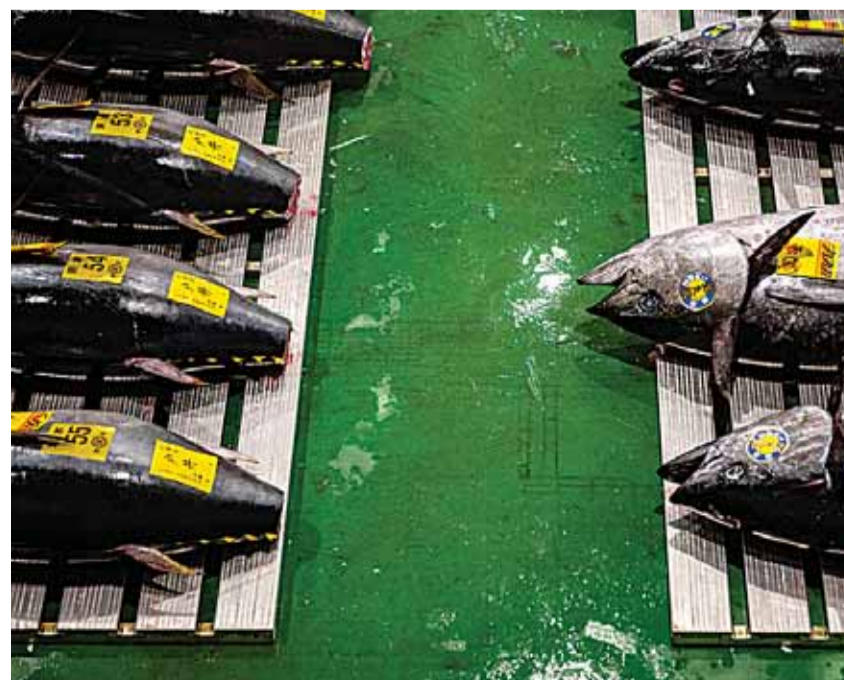
The franchise's regional boss Jacques Theunissen said it had become the latest casualty of global shipping disruptions caused by the coronavirus pandemic. "It has to do with delays in shipping lines due to the COVID situation," he told local news outlet Business Daily. He said KFC was hoping to resolve the shortage with the expected arrival of a container-load of potatoes this week. But it was his admission that the company does not source potatoes from local farmers that ignited a Twitter storm among Kenyans.

"All suppliers need to go through the global quality assurance approval process and we cannot bypass that even if we run out to ensure that our food is safe for consumption by our customers," Theunissen said. With the news coming during Kenya's potato harvesting season, many took to social media to call for people to snub the fast-food giant and #BoycottKFC was trending on Twitter. "If you are a true Kenyan, you should not eat chips prepared by KFC! Eat chips elsewhere," one user tweeted.

The fried chicken franchise entered the Kenyan market in 2011 and has 35 outlets across the East African region. Kenya grows more than 60 different varieties of potatoes, with farmers currently struggling with a glut. In an apparent U-turn, KFC said Tuesday it had initiated plans to source potatoes from Kenyan farmers, adding it was already doing so for other goods such as poultry, vegetables, flour and ice cream. KFC's competitors were quick to take advantage of the gaffe to promote their own chips, with Burger King tweeting: "We have enough fries for everyone." —AFP



Wholesaler Yukitaka Yamaguchi cuts a tuna which at the Toyosu fish market's New Year auction, at a restaurant in Tokyo yesterday.



Bluefin tuna lined up in rows are seen as wholesalers participate in the New Year's tuna auction at Toyosu fish market in Tokyo, Japan yesterday.

## Lifestyle | Features

HERD THE MOOS? LATVIA'S SYMBOLIC  
BLUE COW BACK FROM THE BRINK

Latvian blue cows graze on a pasture at Riga Zoo's affiliate Ciruli in Kalvene, Latvia. —AFP photos



A Latvian blue cow (left) rests next to Highland cows at a pasture of Riga Zoo's affiliate Ciruli in Kalvene, Latvia.

Once a rarity, cows with light blue or dark ultramarine hides may again be glimpsed grazing on the Latvian countryside among the regular brown, black or white spotted cattle. The unique and hardy breed, driven to near extinction during the Soviet era, has made a comeback over the last few decades as an unlikely symbol of Latvian national identity.

"Their worst days are over," said Arnis Bergmanis, head of the Ciruli animal park in the village of Kalvene, which serves as a breeding facility for the cattle. "Blue cows are unique and wonderful. I'm glad we can help them thrive," he told AFP while examining a baby calf. In 2000 there were only 18 blue cows in Latvia, but today they number around 1,500 — thoroughbreds as well as hybrids.

Originally found only on the Baltic coast in the Kurzeme region, they are increasingly popular in central areas too. "We are happy to help every



Latvian blue cows feed on hay at Riga Zoo's affiliate Ciruli in Kalvene, Latvia.

new farmer or guesthouse owner get their own special blue cow," Bergmanis said. Rural innkeepers acquire the cattle as a tourist attraction, while farmers include a token blue cow in their herd for its strong maternal instinct. "If a calf of any color loses its mother or gets separated, the blue cow will take the calf and raise it as its own," Bergmanis said.

**Cultural symbol**

Blue cows evolved on the coast, where they led a spartan lifestyle, able to subsist on bush branches and dune grass — fodder considered inedible by other cattle. Legend has it that they get their color from the sea, though in fact they are born almost beige. Their coat soon turns blue however and gets darker with the years.

The pigment also influences the muscular tissue, producing beef that is exceptionally dark, though their numbers have always been too low for meat sales on a mass scale. When the communists came to power under the Soviet occupation, they put an emphasis on mass production of beef and dairy. They favored more generic cattle, causing the blue cow to almost go extinct.

But theatre, of all things, saved the day. Following the highly popular 1970s play "The Blue One" by Latvian playwright Gunars Priede, the special cattle returned to public consciousness, becoming a symbol of vanishing national identity. In 2006, farmers, scientists and enthusiasts founded the Blue Cow Association to safeguard the breed. The government meanwhile offers special subsidies for owners of blue cows.

**'Strong, independent'**

Blue cows provide less milk than your average cattle — around 5,000 liters (1,300 gallons) per

cow per year compared to 8,000 for the Holstein breed — but the milk is healthier and more nutritious. They also stand out for their ability to thrive in harsh conditions, according to Daiga Simkevica, head of the Blue Cow Association. "The strong, independent and robust blue cow can live all year round outdoors, even during the winter frosts, which many other cattle breeds can't endure," she told AFP.

The Blue Cow Association organizes seminars for farmers, keeps meticulous records to avoid inbreeding, works to keep the population growing and also does research on the cattle. "In the future we hope to carry out full DNA analysis to identify those genes that are unique to the blue cow," Simkevica said. "We've never had a blue cow catch the bovine leukosis virus, therefore we hope to identify genes that might benefit all other cows too." —AFP



A breeding bull of the Latvian blue breed is pictured at Riga Zoo's affiliate Ciruli in Kalvene, Latvia.

Dutch cow farmers  
face tough  
climate choices

In the flat expanse of the Dutch countryside, Corne de Rooij nostalgically strokes the muzzles of his calves, wondering how long he will be able to keep them. Livestock farming is one of the main emitters of greenhouse gases in the Netherlands, where climate change threatens to swallow up the low-lying fields.

"It's my passion and my life," the reserved 53-year-old says in a small voice in his stable in the southern Netherlands, where he raises calves and chickens. "If we have to stop raising them, it will hurt." Dutch farmers have found themselves pushed to the wall by the government, which is offering them a final choice to make their farms more climate-friendly, or change jobs. The new coalition government wants to release 25 billion euros (\$28 billion) by 2035 to help reduce herd sizes and reduce emissions of nitrogen, a greenhouse gas emitted particularly by fertilizers and manure.

The small, densely populated country of 17.5 million people is also densely populated with animals: nearly four million cattle, 12 million pigs and 100 million chickens. The Netherlands is the world's second biggest agricultural exporter after the United States, but agriculture is responsible for 16 percent of the Netherlands' greenhouse gas emissions. Cows are also major emitters of methane, a potent greenhouse gas, from their digestive systems.

**'Uncertainty is huge'**

The government aims to help farmers diversify their business, to retrain, to innovate or even to relocate if their farm is near a protected natural area. But if they fail to comply, the government has warned it could even take the very sensitive step of expropriating land from recalcitrant farmers. The government insists it has no choice. Huge construction projects aimed at tackling a housing shortage have already been suspended by the supreme court in a case brought by environmental groups over greenhouse gas emissions.

By pushing the agricultural sector to accelerate the climate transition, the government hopes to be able to resume some of these building projects, while reducing nitrogen emissions by 50 percent by 2030. Overall, the Dutch have realised that their country is too small to do everything at once: farming, a huge flower producing industry, one of Europe's biggest airports at Schiphol in Amsterdam, a dense road network, housing for everyone plus, in the middle of it all, nature zones.

Prime Minister Mark Rutte's new coalition — his fourth — does not specifically mention reducing herd sizes, but it is a measure that has long been under consideration and has sparked the anger of the farming sector. Farmers, who have often been in the business for generations, have for years felt left out and lost, says de Rooij, who is based in the village of Riel, in the southern province of Brabant, near the Belgian border.

"The uncertainty is huge" for him and his colleagues, who he says are constantly confronted with new rules which require more investment. The latest edict will cost him nearly a million euros to make his barns climate neutral. De Rooij says farming has become an "easy victim" that the Dutch government always points the finger at first, even if he says he is "obviously concerned" by climate change. "But give us time and money" and "clear objectives", he says.

**'Starting blocks'**

The main Dutch farming union, LTO, says the government is right to release billions of euros to make the sector more sustainable. But it criticizes the fact that more money has been earmarked to compensate farmers who stop, than to encourage those who want to stay on. "Farmers can see the change in the climate, they can see what they have to do, and they want to do it — but there is a cost," LTO president Sjaak van der Tak told AFP. "We are in the starting blocks, but society and politics has to make this transition possible." Until then, Corne de Rooij is learning to live with uncertainty. "I know quite a few colleagues who think they would be better off quitting, because in the Netherlands, you don't know which foot to dance on," he said. "The politicians have to get their feet back on the ground." —AFP

## Having pets not kids robs us of 'humanity': Pontiff

Pope Francis risked the ire of the world's childless dog and cat owners yesterday, suggesting people who substitute pets for kids exhibit "a certain selfishness". Speaking on parenthood during a general audience at the Vatican, Francis lamented that pets "sometimes take the place of children" in society. "Today... we see a form of selfishness," said the pope. "We see that some people do not want to have a child.

"Sometimes they have one, and that's it, but they have dogs and cats that take the place of children. This may make people laugh but it is a reality." The practice, said the head of the world's 1.3 billion Catholics, "is a denial of fatherhood and motherhood and diminishes us, takes away our humanity". Thus, "civilization grows old without humanity because we lose the richness of fatherhood and motherhood, and it is the country that suffers", the pontiff said at the Paul VI Hall.

Francis has been photographed petting dogs, allowed a baby lamb to be draped over his shoul-



Pope Francis arrives to hold a general audience at the Paul VI Hall at the Vatican yesterday. —AFP

ders during Epiphany in 2014 and even petted a tiger and a baby panther. But while his predecessor, Benedict XVI, was a cat lover, Francis is not known to have a pet at his Vatican residence. In 2014, Francis told Il Messaggero daily that having pets instead of children was "another phenomenon of cultural degradation", and that emotional relationships with pets was "easier" than the "complex" relationship between parents and children.

Yesterday, while inviting couples who are unable to have children for biological reasons to consider adoption, he urged potential parents "not to be afraid" in embarking on parenthood. "Having a child is always a risk, but there is more risk in not having a child, in denying paternity," he said. The Argentine pontiff has in the past denounced the "demographic winter", or falling birth rates in the developed world. Earlier this year, he criticized modern society, in which career and money-making trumps building a family for many, calling such mentality "gangrene for society". —AFP

## 'WHAT A LIFE!': MORENO REFLECTS AS NEW OSCARS BID LOOMS

It took Rita Moreno a year to agree to a documentary about her career. When she finally watched it for the first time, she exclaimed to her daughter: "What a life I've had!" The Puerto Rican superstar's seven decades in show business have earned her Emmys, a Grammy, a Tony and an Oscar — the rare "EGOT" feat, achieved by only 16 artists ever. Moreno is the only Latina among them, having overcome racism and sexual abuse in Hollywood long before #MeToo, as well as a tumultuous romance with Marlon Brando.

Now a happy mother and grandmother, she is the subject of "Rita Moreno: Just a Girl Who Decided to Go for It" on Netflix, which traces the ups and downs of a life often seen to embody the "American Dream." And at 90 she is back on the big screen thanks to "West Side Story," Steven Spielberg's remake of the film that won her an Oscar in 1962 — which could now earn her another.

Having won best supporting actress all those decades ago as the feisty Anita, Moreno steps into a new role as Valentina, while her former character is played by young Broadway star Ariana DeBose. "That was very difficult for me,"

Moreno told AFP, describing a scene where Valentina rescues Anita from sexual assault. "I've gotta tell you it was surreal, very strange. Difficult. Exciting. "My brain was telling me 'no, no, no, that's not Anita. You're Anita! I had to tell my brain, 'No, I'm not Anita any more.'"

**'No role models'**

Moreno was born in Puerto Rico in 1931. She emigrated with her mother to New York when she was five, where her dancing opened doors to the entertainment industry. "At the time there were no role models for girls like me," so she chose Elizabeth Taylor, Moreno recalled. She made her Broadway debut at 13, and soon after found herself in the movies.

On the big screen she received endless "ethnic" roles. Not even her Oscar for "West Side Story," in which her skin was painted darker, would end the type-casting. But she continued to expand her career in theater and on television, becoming a role model for today's Latino stars like Lin-Manuel Miranda, Gloria Estefan and Eva Longoria. They and others speak of Moreno's inspiring work in the new documentary, which elicits laughter and admiration as well as



In this file photo, actress Rita Moreno presents the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film during the 90th Annual Academy Awards show in Hollywood, California. —AFP

tears. "I promised myself that I was going to be as honest as I could be," said Moreno.

Despite decades on the screen, she admitted it was difficult to open up about behind-the-scenes strife in her marriage to US cardiologist Leonard Gordon, who died in 2010. "It was the first and only time on set that I had to ask them to cut

because I was going to cry." Moreno is more visceral when discussing Brando, with whom she had a passionate eight-year relationship. "Have you ever been so obsessed by somebody that you feel as if you can't breathe without them? That's how Marlon felt about himself," she quips. "He was the daddy I couldn't please," adds Moreno.

**'Nervous'**

These days, Moreno lives in California, enjoys cooking and makes a gazpacho "to die for." But the next few months are unlikely to be quiet, as anticipation mounts that Moreno could be in line for a second Oscar for the new "West Side Story." That could potentially pit her against her young co-star DeBose. "Ariana will be nervous that I got nominated, that's what I think, because she thinks 'Oh wow, it's Rita Moreno,'" she told AFP, flitting between Spanish and English. "And I'm thinking 'no, no, no, you played Anita, not me, and you deserve it'... She was fabulous, she was divine."

The pair both earned supporting actress nods from the Critics Choice Awards and Golden Globes, with the Oscars still to come. "I called Steven Spielberg and said 'What should I do? Should I show up to these things?'" Moreno recalled, worrying that her presence could make DeBose "nervous." "He said: 'Absolutely, you must show up just to show that everybody is friendly with everybody in the cast... you were chosen, you need to be there.'" —AFP

## Sports

# Spain and Poland power into ATP Cup semi-finals

## Schwartzman overwhelmed by World No 9 Hurkacz

**SYDNEY:** Roberto Bautista Agut swept past Serbia's Dusan Lajovic to steer Spain into the ATP Cup semi-finals yesterday, where they will meet Poland after world number nine Hubert Hurkacz overwhelmed Argentina's in-form Diego Schwartzman. The winner between Daniil Medvedev's defending champions Russia or the Matteo Berrettini-led Italy, last year's finalists, will also book a last-four berth when they meet in Sydney today.

The outcome of Group C is more complicated with all four teams - Britain, Canada, Germany and the United States - still in contention. They also play today. After Chile beat Norway earlier in the day, Spain only needed one win in their final Group A tie against 2020 champions Serbia to progress, and that came from the consistent Pablo Carreno Busta. The world number 20 topped Filip Krajinovic 6-3, 6-4 for his third consecutive win of the season before Bautista Agut, ranked one place above his teammate, rubbed salt in Serbia's wounds by cruising past Lajovic 6-1, 6-4.

"I'm very happy to have won the match in two sets, the humidity was tough, but we need these matches coming from Europe and the winter," said Bautista Agut, who played consistently from the baseline. "I haven't played three matches in a row for three or four months and it's really good to start the season with rhythm, with minutes on the court

and I couldn't be more pleased."

Despite missing Rafael Nadal, who is playing an ATP tournament in Melbourne, Spain have dropped just one set at the 16-team event as Carreno Busta and Bautista Agut warm up for the Australian Open which starts on January 17. Hurkacz has also been in fine touch, battling past 13th-ranked Schwartzman 6-1, 6-4 in 81 minutes. Both Poland and Argentina went into the tie unbeaten in Group D, winning previous clashes with Greece and Georgia, to make their showdown a winner-takes-all battle.

### 'Super proud'

Poland's world number 117 Kamil Majchrzak set up his team for victory with a gutsy 6-3, 7-6 (7/3) win against Federico Delbonis, who is ranked 73 places higher, leaving 2021 Miami Open champion Hurkacz to seal the tie. "So happy for Team Poland, we are in the semis and super proud of that achievement," said Hurkacz, who sent down 12 aces and won 85 per cent of his first-serve points. "We are a great team, have great team spirit and support each other and I think the atmosphere that we bring helps us play better."

It was another solid win for Hurkacz after a career-best 2021 garnered three ATP Tour titles. Schwartzman was coming off an upset win over world number four Stefanos Tsitsipas on Monday.

### Chile beat Norway



Roberto Bautista Agut of Spain

Majchrzak has been a more-than-competent second singles player for Poland, enjoying one of the best weeks of his career with three wins in a row. "My ranking maybe is out of the top 100, but I feel like I belong in the top 100 and more, so I'm going for it now," he said.

Greece's Tsitsipas revealed he was still in pain after November elbow surgery when he was beat-

en by Schwartzman, casting doubt over whether he would play his singles rubber. But he took to the court against Georgia's Nikoloz Basilashvili, only for his opponent to retire while losing 4-1 in the opening set, complaining of breathing difficulties. Greece and Georgia both lost their opening two ATP Cup ties and had no chance of making the semi-finals. — AFP

### News in brief

#### Ranji Trophy postponed

**NEW DELHI:** India's domestic Ranji Trophy has been postponed after a nationwide surge in coronavirus cases, the country's cricket board said in a statement. The first-class competition - named for Maharaja Ranjitsinhji, an Indian prince who played for England in the 1890s - was scheduled to start this month. But the long-format tournament and February's Twenty20 women's league were both called off until further notice on Tuesday, the Board of Control for Cricket in India said. "BCCI does not want to compromise the safety of the players, support staff, match officials and other participants involved," its statement read. Indian media reported that six Bengal players had tested positive for the virus ahead of the Ranji opener on January 13. The tournament was scheduled to be held in six cities - Mumbai, Bangalore, Chennai, Kolkata, Ahmedabad and Thiruvananthapuram. — AFP

#### French Cup: Lens host Monaco

**PARIS:** Lens will face Monaco in the last 16 of the French Cup after Lille's Renato Sanches missed the crucial penalty when their game ended 1-1 after 90 minutes. Cup holders Paris Saint-Germain will host Nice in the next round, scheduled for the end of this month, while record 10-time winners Saint-Etienne will head to fourth-tier Bergerac, after the draw was made earlier on Tuesday. Lens captain Seko Fofana scored twice after his outfit trailed 2-0 in the first half and converted the winning penalty. "We're very happy, there's a lot of pride tonight," he told Eurosport. "At the start we found it hard to find each other on the field. We made some small errors. A game lasts 90 minutes, we put a big effort in and we were rewarded for that," he added. In front of just 5,000 fans at the 38,000-capacity Stade Bollaert-Delelis due to coronavirus restrictions, the visiting Ligue 1 champions Lille dominated the first half of the northern derby against Lens. — AFP

#### Kane 'involved' in Spurs project

**LONDON:** Tottenham boss Antonio Conte says Harry Kane is "totally involved in this project" at the club after the England captain attempted to engineer a move to Manchester City during the summer transfer window. Chairman Daniel Levy stood firm and the 28-year-old forward, who is under contract until 2024, was forced to stay at Spurs. Kane had a slow start to the season but has recovered his scoring touch under Conte, who replaced Nuno Espirito Santo as manager in early November. Conte, whose side visited his former club Chelsea in the first leg of their League Cup semi-final, said Kane was a key part of his plans. "I knew the situation in the summer and, when Harry decided to stay in Tottenham, I found a player totally involved in this project now," he said. "I am happy to have him in my team because for sure we are talking about the top player, a top striker in the world, and if we want to win or if we want to think to build something to win, Harry must be a point of start." — AFP

## Pakistan to host West Asia boxing tournament

**KUWAIT:** Pakistan's Ambassador to Kuwait Sayyed Sajjad Haidar welcomed his country's organization of the first edition of West Asia professional boxing tournament to be held in Islamabad January 22nd under the WBC rules - with boxers from 16 countries participating. The Ambassador spoke during his reception of WBC representative in Kuwait Mishal Al-Fajji.

The meeting was attended by Pakistan's labor attache Farakh Amir Seyal, Deputy Chairman of Pakistan Boxing Association in Kuwait Hafez

Shubair and Kuwait's representative in the international tournament Boxer Abdelrahman Al-Sanad. Ambassador Haidar said, organizing such tournaments will strengthen friendship between people of the region and strengthen calls for peace. He said the tournament will see the best boxers in their countries participating which promises to be highly competitive.

On his part Al-Fajji lauded the support of the Pakistan Ambassador and his keenness on ensuring the tournament success adding that "we



worked hard for months to prepare for the first tournament and make sure for it to be successful. Kuwait's

boxer Abdelrahman Al-Sanad said he was ready and look forward to compete in the 70 kg category. — AFP

## KIB's team prepares for KBC tournament

**KUWAIT:** In line with its commitment to strengthen relations within the banking sector through sports, social and other community activities, Kuwait International Bank (KIB) announced that its football team is set to take part in the Kuwait Banks Club (KBC) League for this year, which kicks off later this month. The KIB team continued its training and preparations to compete in this annual tournament, with the team featuring a group of the Bank's employees who are passionate football enthusiasts with the necessary skills and abilities to qualify them to compete in the league's matches and vie for the championship cup.

On this occasion, Manager of External Communication at the KIB's Corporate Communication Unit (CCU), Fahad Al-Sarhan said: "As a 'Bank for Life', for both our customers and our employees, we strive to provide a creative and harmonious work environment for our employees by adopting internal activities and initiatives that allow them to express their themselves as individuals as well as a cohesive group- whilst also enabling to



actively pursue their hobbies.

This effectively contributes to boosting the physical and emotional health and well-being of our employees by promoting a balanced lifestyle and greater work-life balance. It also helps to enhance their sense of belonging to their workplace and motivates them to perform at an even higher level." Al-Sarhan also noted that KIB is keen on embracing the sports talents of its employees and encouraging them to continue developing their abilities and skills through training and participation in tournaments, such as the KBC League.

## Djokovic COVID-jab exemption sparks backlash in Australia

**MELBOURNE:** Australians reacted with fury yesterday after world number one Novak Djokovic received a medical exemption from having a COVID vaccine in order to play at this month's Australian Open. Tournament chief Craig Tiley said that the defending champion had been given "no special favor" but urged the Serb to reveal why he got the exemption to soothe public anger.

All participants at the first Grand Slam of 2022, which starts on January 17, must be vaccinated against COVID-19 or have a medical exemption, which is granted only after assessment by two panels of independent experts. The nine-time Australian Open champion announced late Tuesday he was en route to Melbourne with "an exemption permission", ending the drawn-out saga over whether he would defend his title.

But Stephen Parnis, a former Australian Medical Association vice-president, said it sent an "appalling message" to people trying to stop the spread of COVID-19. "I don't care how good a tennis player he is. If he's refusing to get vaccinated, he shouldn't be allowed in," Parnis said on Twitter. Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said that if the reasons for Djokovic's exemption were "insufficient" then the

Serb would be "on the next plane home".

"We await his presentation and what evidence he provides us to support (his exemption)," Morrison told a press conference. "If that evidence is insufficient, then he won't be treated any different to anyone else and will be on the next plane home. There should be no special rules for Novak Djokovic at all. None whatsoever." Former Australian ATP Tour player Sam Groth, now a television commentator, said it was "a decision that spits in the face of every Victorian and Australian" in a column in Melbourne's Herald Sun newspaper.

There was also outrage on the streets of Melbourne. "I think it's disgusting. I think he should have made his mind up before now and it shouldn't be a last-minute decision to get him in," resident Ron Wilson told AFP. Other residents of the Victoria state city were more sympathetic, with Morteza Yari saying: "I think as long as the exemption is valid and they have valid reasons I don't see a problem with that." Among the conditions allowing entry without a vaccine is if a person has had COVID-19 in the past six months. It has not been revealed if that was the case with Djokovic.

### 'Sick hypocrisy'

Tiley said the two panels assessed each exemption without knowing the identity of the applicant and he did not know under what grounds Djokovic got the green light, which is confidential. "It will certainly be helpful if Novak was to explain the conditions in which he sought and was granted an exemption," Tiley told reporters, acknowledging the back-



Serbia's Novak Djokovic

lash. "I would encourage him to talk to the community about it... we have been through a very tough period over the last two years and would appreciate some answers to that."

Groth agreed that Djokovic should reveal why he has been allowed in. "You're willing to say you have an exemption but not willing to say why? It's sick hypocrisy. I don't like it at all," Groth wrote. However, Tiley defended the integrity of the exemption application process, which is overseen by national and Victorian state governments. He revealed that only 26 of the approximately 3,000 players and support staff travelling to Australia for the tournament had applied for a vaccine exemption. Only a few of those had been successful. — AFP

Sports

# Security fears loom over Africa's football fiesta

## Africa Cup of Nations faces its next big worry

**YAOUNDE:** After overcoming fears of postponement because of the COVID pandemic, the Africa Cup of Nations now faces its next big worry: security. Host nation Cameroon will ceremonially launch the month-long tournament on Sunday when they face Burkina Faso. But the authorities are struggling with separatist gunmen in the west and jihadist raiders in the north - and some fear militants will seize the country's turn in the sporting spotlight to launch attacks. Security forces in the west are on high alert after armed groups sent threatening messages to teams in Group F, gathering Tunisia, Mali, Mauritania and Gambia.

The four teams are scheduled to play in the coastal town of Limbe, and their training site is Buea, a hotspot of separatist unrest. "The threats are very serious," Blaise Chamango, head of an NGO in Buea called Human Is Right, told AFP by phone. "Yesterday, there was an explosion in a takeaway outlet in Limbe. That sent a very powerful message." He added: "The government has stationed heavily armed soldiers at nearly all the crossroads in Buea and Limbe. Security and defense forces are arresting and searching everyone they see in some districts."

### Separatist campaign

Buea is the capital of the Southwest Region, which with the neighboring Northwest Region is in the grip of violence sparked by a bid by Cameroon's anglophone minority to secede from the French-majority country. After years of frustration at perceived discrimination, separatists declared a "Federal Republic of Ambazonia" in October 2017. The entity, which has no international recognition, is based on the former British Southern Cameroons, which joined Cameroon after the French colony gained independence in 1960.

More than 3,500 people have died and more than 700,000 have fled their homes. Rights moni-

tors say atrocities and abuses have been committed by both sides.

In his New Year's message, Cameroon's veteran hardline president, 88-year-old Paul Biya, warned that while some independence fighters had handed themselves in, the militants "continue to engage in criminal activity, increasing their use of improvised explosives and killing unarmed civilians". The government's mantra is that "safety will be guaranteed" for AFCON, although neither the authorities nor the Confederation of African Football (CAF) responded to AFP requests for information on security measures.



### Cameroon battles separatist gunmen

### Jihadist fears

On Monday, the atmosphere in the capital, Yaounde, was more relaxed than in the troubled English-speaking regions some 250 kilometers to the west. A handful of security agents kept half an eye on final preparations at the brand-new Paul Biya Stadium in the district of Olembe, built specially for the CAN and home to the Cameroonian national squad.

"Security is only really a concern in the Northwest and Southwest regions and I think our defence forces have enough experience to respond adequately," said James Mouangue, head of the



**YAOUNDE:** A general view of the Olembe stadium in Yaounde, Cameroon. The African Cup of Nations (CAN) will open in Cameroon on January 9, 2022 in a tense security context, with threats from armed Anglophone separatists on one side and the risk of attacks from Boko Haram and the Islamic State group on the other. —AFP

national human rights commission and a professor of public law. "The security measures put in place are exceptional, given the level of risk, and there were no problems when we hosted the African Nations Championship in January 2021," he noted.

Separatist militants are not the only spectre haunting Cameroon. The country's Far North region, the tongue of land that touches on the troubled Lake Chad region, has in the past suffered cross-border raids by jihadists from neighboring Nigeria. Attacks have fallen back since militants from Boko Haram and the West African branch of the so-called Islamic State group (ISWAP) began a bloody

internecine war. But some fear the groups could seek to grab attention by striking in Yaounde, the economic hub Douala or the north itself.

Others, though, say such plans may be too much of a stretch. "I don't think the jihadists can disrupt the Cup unless they carry out a really large attack, even though that remains a possibility," said Guibai Gatama, editor of northern Cameroon's leading twice-weekly publication, L'Oeil du Sahel (The Eye of the Sahel). "The stadium in the North where Group D (comprising Egypt, Nigeria, Sudan and Guinea Bissau) will play is located in Garoua, which is very far from their sphere of operation." — AFP

## Egypt will lean on Salah at African showpiece

**JOHANNESBURG:** Mohamed Salah, in prolific form for Liverpool this season, will lead Egypt against bogey team Nigeria in a blockbuster Group D opener at the Africa Cup of Nations in Cameroon. Salah leads all scorers in the Premier League this season with 16 goals, including one in the 2-2 draw with Chelsea on Sunday, his last match before leaving for west Africa. Although Egypt have won a record seven Cup of Nations titles, they have triumphed only twice in seven clashes with three-time champions Nigeria in the competition ahead of the January 11 showdown. Here, AFP Sport puts the spotlight on the four Group D contenders. The group winners and runners-up are assured of last-16 places while the best four third-placed teams from the six groups also qualify.

### Egypt

The Pharaohs' Portuguese coach Carlos Queiroz has backed Aston Villa forward Mahmoud "Trezeguet" Hassan to shine at the Cup of Nations although he has not played a full senior match since mid-April due to injury. The 27-year-old was an unused substitute in three Premier League matches during December before coming off the bench for a cameo appearance against Brentford. "Trezeguet is an experienced and good player," former Real Madrid manager and twice Manchester United assistant manager Queiroz said. "I am sure he will be



Egyptian midfielder Mohamed Salah

a key figure for us." Unlike most Cameroon-bound teams, Egypt will rely heavily on home-based stars, choosing 19 and only six based abroad, including Salah and Arsenal midfielder Mohamed Elneny.

### Nigeria

A chaotic build-up for Nigeria has included a change of coaches, the loss of a star forward because they requested his release too late, and the withdrawal of several key players due to COVID and injuries. German Gernot Rohr was sacked after the Super Eagles scraped into the final round of 2022 World Cup qualifying and Augustine Eguavoen, who played for Nigeria at the 1994 World Cup, has been placed in temporary charge. He will have to do without inform Emmanuel Dennis because Premier League club Watford say Nigeria did not alert them in time that they were selecting him, and coronavirus has ruled out another regular scorer, Victor Osimhen of Italian club

Napoli. But Nigeria are never more dangerous than when all seems lost. They possess a squad capable of winning the Cup of Nations, or making a humiliating last-16 exit.

### Guinea-Bissau

The Djurtus (wild dogs), for decades an African football lightweight, have reached the finals a third consecutive time under coach Baciro Cande. Gritty fighters in qualifiers, the west Africans have struggled at the higher level of the finals, securing just one point from each previous appearance. But a team skippered by goalkeeper Jonas Mendes will be hopeful of a first win when they start against Sudan, a nation they hammered 4-2 in a World Cup qualifier in Omdurman last September. Mendes and forwards Piqueti and Frederic Mendy were part of the 2017 and 2019 campaigns and Porto full-back Nanu and midfielder Moreto Cassama, from French Ligue 1 club Reims, are potential stars.

### Sudan

One-time champions Sudan are back after a 10-year absence having used aerial power to upset South Africa in a key qualifier. The Jediane Falcons reached the 2012 quarter-finals, but it is difficult to imagine them repeating that feat under new coach Burhan Tia. He succeeded Frenchman Hubert Velud, who paid the price for winless World Cup and Arab Cup group campaigns. Salah-less Egypt hammered Sudan 5-0 in the Arab Cup while the chances of repeating a 4-0 whipping of Nigeria in 1963 are wafer thin. That leaves Guinea-Bissau as the only realistic hope of a victory. AFP predicts: 1. Egypt, 2. Nigeria, 3. Guinea-Bissau, 4. Sudan. — AFP

## Serie A restarts under COVID cloud; Juventus face key month

**MILAN:** Juventus begin a crucial month for the season with the visit of old rivals Napoli as Serie A returns to action today, with a COVID-19 resurgence looming large over fixtures. Dozens of players among the top division's 20 clubs are out of action with the virus, with Juve captain Giorgio Chiellini one of those sidelined after testing positive and 15 new cases among Verona and Udinese's squads announced on Tuesday. And the rapid spread of the virus has led to stadium capacities being cut back to 50 percent as the Italian government tries to keep the lid on another wave of the pandemic.

Napoli coming to town marks the start of a run of tricky fixtures for Massimiliano Allegri's side, who are fifth, a full 12 points behind league leaders and reigning champions Inter Milan. They also have to take on Roma, AC Milan and Atalanta - who are four points ahead of Juve in the final Champions League spot - all before mid-February. Chiellini's absence and injury to his club and Italy defensive partner Leonardo Bonucci leaves Juve shorn of two of their most influential players, while in attack Paulo Dybala and Federico Chiesa will be on the bench after recovering from injury.

Napoli will arrive in Turin with a long absentee list, largely thanks to

players at the Africa Cup of Nations and COVID cases, with coach Luciano Spalletti set to stay at home with COVID after testing positive on Tuesday. Star striker Victor Osimhen, who has already missed a chunk of fixtures with facial fractures, is also positive alongside Hirving Lozano, Eljif Elmas, Kevin Malcuit and Mario Rui, who is however suspended for today's match.

Spalletti's side have a seven-point gap to make up on Inter after a disastrous December in which they ceded top spot and dropped down to third following three straight home defeats, and are also without defensive lynchpin Kalidou Koulibaly and Andre-Frank Zambo Anguissa, both at the Cup of Nations. Ready to pounce are AC Milan and Roma, who face off at the San Siro hoping to gain ground in their respective title and Champions League races. Second-placed Milan can extend the three-point gap between them and Napoli while Jose Mourinho's Roma are two behind Juve in sixth.

Worst hit by the virus are Salernitana, who with nine players positive have asked for their match with Venezia - their first since their place in Serie A was saved - to be postponed after health authorities again blocked their players from playing. — 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

### Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144

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# Lakers overpower Sacramento Kings

## James lifts Lakers; Morant catches fire against Cavaliers



LOS ANGELES: Talen Horton-Tucker #5 of the Los Angeles Lakers scores as he is fouled by Damian Jones #30 of the Sacramento Kings during a 122-114 Los Angeles Lakers win at Staples Center on January 04, 2022. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: LeBron James made several clutch baskets in the waning minutes of the fourth quarter as the Los Angeles Lakers rallied from a late seven-point deficit to beat the Sacramento Kings 122-114 on Tuesday. James scored 14 of his team-high 31 points in the final quarter as the Lakers won for the fourth time in the last five games. Los Angeles' Malik Monk also had a strong final quarter, scoring 11 of his 24 points in the last seven minutes of the contest in front of a crowd of 17,900 in Los Angeles.

Monk drained six three-pointers in the game and James and Russell Westbrook put the finishing touches with layups in the final moments. Westbrook finished with 19 points. Reserve Talen Horton-Tucker also scored 19 points for the Lakers, who beat a Pacific Division team at home for the first time this season. De'Aaron Fox scored 30 points and Buddy Hield added 26 with seven three-

pointers for the Kings.

In Cleveland, Ja Morant scored the go-ahead basket with 22 seconds left in the fourth quarter to lift the Memphis Grizzlies to a 110-106 win over the Cleveland Cavaliers. Morant scored six of his 26 points in the final minute as the Grizzlies won their sixth straight game. "I don't fear nobody," said Morant. "If you are 7-foot-7 I don't care, I am coming straight at you." Morant hit a short jump shot to give the Grizzlies a 106-104 lead, then stole the ball from Cavs Brandon Goodwin for another score with 22 seconds remaining.

Morant then sealed the win by hitting a pair of free throws as the Grizzlies won for the 10th time in the last 11 games on the road. The Grizzlies were coming off a 118-104 win over the Brooklyn Nets on Monday. "We came in knowing we had back-to-back games. We just had to lock in defensively and find a way. We came up with some key stops at the

end of the game to get the win," Morant added. Morant also added six assists but his franchise-record run of 30-point games was halted at five.

### VanVleet in hot form

Elsewhere, Devin Booker scored 33 points and Chris Paul finished with 11 points and 15 assists as the undermanned Phoenix Suns beat the New Orleans Pelicans 123-110. Mikal Bridges scored 23, Cameron Johnson added 18, Bismack Biyombo had 16 and Jalen Smith had 12 in the win. The Suns were without head coach Monty Williams. They were also missing starters Deandre Ayton and Jae Crowder, and reserve players JaVale McGee and Abdel Nader, all because of Covid-19 measures.

Devonte' Graham scored 28, Jonas Valanciunas had 25 points and 16 rebounds, Brandon Ingram scored 16 and Josh Hart had 15 points and 11 rebounds for the Pelicans. In Toronto, Fred VanVleet

scored 24 of his 33 points in the first half as the Toronto Raptors won their third straight game with a dominating 129-104 victory over the San Antonio Spurs. VanVleet also had seven assists and was seven of 14 in three-point attempts at Scotiabank Arena. VanVleet has scored at least 30 points in the past three games as the Raptors improved to 17-17 to reach .500 on the season.

He's the first Toronto player to score 30 or more in three straight since Kawhi Leonard did it in four straight in 2019. "You recognize when you're in rhythm and you just try to hold on as long as possible because it's not always like that," VanVleet said. "I try to keep my floor a little higher but when you're hot, you've just got to be aggressive and ride it out as long as you can." Pascal Siakam added 18 points, 12 rebounds and five assists, Gary Trent tallied 21 points, OG Anunoby and Justin Champagnie each scored 14 points in the win. — AFP

## Beijing's smog woes cast pall over 'green' Winter Olympics

BEIJING: Beijing's air pollution is far below acceptable World Health Organization levels with the Chinese capital a month away from hosting the Winter Olympics - but environmental data shows its skies have improved dramatically in recent years. The city declared a "war on pollution" after winning the Olympics bid in 2015, shutting down dozens of coal plants and relocating heavy industries in order to shed its status as one of the world's most polluted cities.

China also hopes to use the Games to showcase its green credentials and has built dozens of wind and solar farms to power the sporting spectacle. Beijing's environment bureau said on Tuesday that the concentration of ultrafine PM2.5 particles - blamed for a rise in lung cancer, heart attacks and premature babies - dropped to 33 micrograms per cubic meter in 2021, down a third from levels in 2013 when the city was had some of the world's worst air quality.

But levels are still six times higher than the 5 micrograms per cubic metre mark recommended by the WHO. "Beijing's average PM2.5 reading was down 63.1 percent from 2013 when records began, decreasing at a pace that far exceeded the rates seen in developed countries over the same period," the city government said. The clean-air campaign - which



BEIJING: A worker sleeps near the Shougang Big Air venue, which will host the big air freestyle skiing and snowboarding competitions at the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics, at Shougang Park in Beijing yesterday. — AFP

has greatly reduced the number of days where the city is hit by thick smog - also pushed millions of households and businesses to switch from coal to natural gas for winter heating.

Despite the improved air quality, smog risks remain "severe", China's environment ministry warned last week. The ministry added that Olympic host cities Beijing and Zhangjiakou have contingency plans in place should smog envelope venues and affect visibility. But the air pollution figures showed major strides in the average reading of Ozone - an atmospheric gas responsible for tens of thousands of deaths in China each year - which stood at

149 micrograms per cubic meter last year, well above WHO standards.

"The 2021 air quality data for the city of Beijing is encouraging," Li Shuo, a campaigner for Greenpeace China said. "Air pollution is also a nation-wide challenge. While citizens in Beijing breathe with ease, many other provinces need to see much faster progress." China was home to 42 of the world's 100 most polluted cities last year, according to air quality tracker IQAir. According to the WHO, as of 2019 there was some 99 percent of the world's population living in places that do not meet air quality guidelines. — AFP

## Liverpool's COVID crisis deepens: Assistant boss Lijnders tests positive

LONDON: Liverpool assistant manager Pep Lijnders has become the latest member of the club staff to test positive for coronavirus, throwing today's League Cup semi-final at Arsenal into further doubt. With manager Jurgen Klopp and three players - Alisson Becker, Joel Matip and Roberto Firmino - already isolating, Lijnders, who took charge of the team for Sunday's 2-2 draw at Chelsea, recorded a positive test late on Tuesday.

That was after Liverpool had made a submission to the English Football League to postpone the first-leg clash at the Emirates following further positive cases among the squad and other player availability issues linked to illness and injury. The club have cancelled yesterday's pre-match press conference, at which Lijnders was due to speak.

Liverpool are also missing Thiago Alcantara, Takumi Minamoto, Nat Phillips and Harvey Elliott through injury, while Mohamed Salah, Sadio Mane and Naby Keita are now on Africa Cup of Nations duty.

A Liverpool statement on Wednesday said: "Lijnders' test result comes in addition to a number of suspected positive cases among players and football staff recorded earlier on Tuesday, which forced the cancellation of the day's scheduled training session. "As a result of the outbreak and the suspension of preparations, as well as other illnesses and injuries recorded within the squad, the club submitted an application to the EFL for the postponement of today's tie with Arsenal, with the news of Lijnders' positive result coming after the request was lodged. "The outcome of this application is still pending." — AFP