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# Kuwait records new high of 2,413 coronavirus cases

## New health minister tests COVID positive, quarantines at home

By B Izzak

### New Nasser Al-Kharafi/Jassim Al-Bahar Trading Hall opens at Bursa Kuwait



KUWAIT: (From left) Bursa Kuwait CEO Mohamed Osaimi, Bursa Kuwait Board Member Talal Al-Bahar, Bursa Kuwait Chairman Hamad Al-Humaidhi, Minister of Commerce and Industry Fahad Mutlaq Al-Shuraian, Chairman of CMA Board of Commissioners and Managing Director Ahmad Al-Melhem and Bursa Kuwait Board Member Bader Al-Kharafi attend a ceremony to open its renovated trading hall. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KUWAIT: In a ceremony attended by Minister of Commerce and Industry Fahad Mutlaq Al-Shuraian, the company's board of directors, executive management and employees, as well as several distinguished personalities from the Kuwaiti financial scene, Bursa Kuwait reopened several of its renovated facilities, including its trading hall. The renovated trading hall is now equipped with the latest, state-of-the-art technologies,

as well as an opening/closing bell podium and a media center. Trading screens across the building have also been replaced with updated, more advanced ones, as well as the auditorium, training hall and many of the building's facilities, as part of the company's efforts to maintain and upgrade facilities and utilities.

Previously, the company's board of directors approved the request

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Bursa Kuwait Board Member Bader Al-Kharafi

KUWAIT: Newly-appointed Health Minister Khaled Al-Saeed yesterday tested positive for COVID-19 and was placed under home quarantine for 10 days, the health ministry announced. The minister, who was a top official on the health ministry committee fighting the pandemic before his appointment to the Cabinet last week, attended a Cabinet meeting on Monday. He also attended National Assembly meetings on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Under Kuwaiti health protocol rules, all those who contacted the minister must undergo home quarantine for at least 10 days, besides undergoing the necessary COVID-19 tests. The health ministry yesterday reported 2,413 new coronavirus cases, the largest number on a single day since the outbreak of the pandemic almost two years ago. The ministry said that the percentage of infection has soared to 8.8 percent from just under one percent two weeks ago.

The tally of new cases yesterday is more than all cases reported in the two months that preceded the new wave which began two weeks ago, according to official figures. The COVID-19 ministerial emergency committee met yesterday to discuss the new escalation in coronavirus cases and to look into measures needed to curb the surge in new cases. The health ministry also said the number of patients receiving treatment in intensive care units rose to 11, while those in hospitals increased to 53 cases, a sharp rise compared to two weeks ago.

Earlier this week, the government suspended all social events and celebrations held in enclosed areas from Jan 9 to Feb 28, adding that the decision will be



Khaled Al-Saeed

revised later in light of the pandemic situation. The government also decreed that all passengers arriving to Kuwait must produce a negative PCR test result taken within the past 72 hours. It had already decided that people arriving in Kuwait must undergo home quarantine for 10 days, but if a PCR test carried out three days after arrival is negative, the quarantine ends.

The government has sent out messages in various languages urging people to strictly observe health conditions, mainly wearing facemasks and sanitizing hands. It also urged the public to maintain social distancing. The health ministry has encouraged people to take the third booster vaccination dose to strengthen immunity against the virus. It said people aged 50 and over can take the third dose without prior appointment. The third dose should be taken after six months of the second jab. The government also decided that Kuwaiti citizens who did not take the third dose will not be allowed to travel, and that those who had taken the second dose nine months ago are no longer considered immune to the disease.

#### News in brief

##### Arrests in Egypt over suicide

CAIRO: Two youths were arrested yesterday over the suicide of a schoolgirl whom they were allegedly blackmailing with digitally altered photos of her on the Internet. Basant Khaled, 17, who lived with her family in a village of northern Egypt, died after swallowing poison on Dec 23. A source in the prosecutor general's office said she was being blackmailed after having refused to have a relationship with the youths. — AFP

##### Philippines bans child marriage

MANILA: Child marriage became illegal in the Philippines yesterday as a law banning the practice took effect in a country where one in six girls enters wedlock before the age of 18. The impoverished Southeast Asian country has the 12th-highest number of child marriages in the world, according to Britain-based rights group Plan International. But a new law lays out prison terms of up to 12 years for marrying or cohabiting with anyone under 18. — AFP

##### Swiss army knives WhatsApp

BERN: Switzerland's army has banned the use of WhatsApp whilst on duty, a spokesman confirmed yesterday, in favor of a Swiss messaging service deemed more secure in terms of data protection. The ban also applies to using other messaging apps like Signal and Telegram on soldiers' private phones during service operations. — AFP

## Biden vows to defend democracy

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden yesterday savaged Donald Trump's "lies" and attempts to overturn his 2020 election defeat, vowing on the first anniversary of the Jan 6 Capitol riot he would let no one put a "dagger at the throat of democracy". In a dark, powerful address, Biden called out Trump's effort to cheat and blasted the mob of the Republican's supporters who stormed the Capitol in an attempt to prevent certification of the election result.

"This was an armed insurrection," Biden said in his speech from Statuary Hall inside the Capitol. "For the first time in our history, a president not just lost an election. He tried to prevent the peaceful transfer of power," Biden said. "They came here in rage," Biden said, and "held a dagger at the throat of America." "I will allow no one to place a dagger at the throat of democracy."

Laying out the dangers facing a country that has long styled itself as leader of the free world, Biden asked: "Are we going to be a nation that accepts political violence as a norm?" "Are we going to be a nation where we allow partisan election officials to overturn the legally expressed will of the people?" the veteran Democrat

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WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden speaks at the US Capitol yesterday to mark the anniversary of the attack on the Capitol. — AFP

## Djokovic fights to stay after Aussie visa cancelled

MELBOURNE: Tennis world number one Novak Djokovic won a temporary reprieve in his deportation from Australia yesterday, but is set to spend the night in an immigration detention facility as he fights to remain in the country. The vaccine-sceptic Serb was detained at Melbourne's Tullamarine Airport having failed to "provide appropriate evi-

dence" of double vaccination, or a medical exemption needed to enter the country.

Djokovic had jetted into Australia on Wednesday hoping to defend his Australian Open crown and to bid for an unprecedented 21st Grand Slam title. Instead of a conquering champion's welcome, he was questioned at the airport overnight before having his visa revoked and being transferred to a Melbourne immigration detention facility pending deportation. After an emergency online court appeal, a judge ordered that the controversial star would not be removed from Australia before Monday, when a final hearing is scheduled to begin.

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Novak Djokovic

## Local

## Kuwait plays vital role in fighting corruption

## Kuwait participates an international seminar

ISLAMABAD: Kuwait participated yesterday in an international seminar on the theme of Combating Corruption organized by the government of Pakistan and the Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC) of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Islamabad. The Assistant Foreign Minister of Kuwait on Human Rights, Talal Khalid Al-Mutairi said in a statement to KUNA that Kuwait's participation in the seminar shows that we are playing a vital role along with the international community to combat corruption.

"Kuwait has always been against corruption and we think that combating corruption is necessary for sustainable development. Kuwait will keep on putting its best efforts and share its experiences with

the international community for the cause," he added. In his inaugural statement, Chairperson of the OIC-IPHRC Dr Haci Ali Acikgul said that corrupt practices are becoming a major impediment in the implementation of law and realization of human rights globally and more so in the developing countries.

"Corruption is not a localized problem specific to certain countries, regions, societies, or traditions. It plagues not only public offices but also businesses and other spheres of private domains. To mitigate the negative consequences on the lives of common people, combating corruption is placed high on the human rights and development agenda," he said.

Moreover, Foreign Minister of Pakistan Shah

Mahmood Qureshi expressed his gratitude to the OIC-IPHRC for organizing a very timely seminar on combating corruption and assessing its dire consequences on the achievement of the human rights agenda. "In line with Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan's vision, fighting corruption and ensuring protection of all human rights are the top priorities of our Government, said Qureshi.

He said that corruption is an enormous obstacle to development and the realization of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural. "It strikes at the very roots of good governance and democracy. It erodes public trust in the legitimacy of state institutions, undermines the rule of law, and violates the values of transparency,

accountability, justice and fair play," he added.

The International Seminar on the theme of "Combating Corruption - A Prerequisite for the full enjoyment of all Human Rights and Sustainable Development" focused on the multi-dimensional negative effects of corruption on sustainable development and full enjoyment of all human rights, including civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights as well as development.

More than 200 international and national stakeholders including Government officials, OIC member and Observer States, IPHRC Commissioners, and representatives of the OIC Secretariat, United Nations, practitioners, academia, and civil society participated in the Seminar. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah yesterday received a copy of the credentials of Moroccan Ambassador to Kuwait Ibn Isa. During the reception, the Foreign Minister wished the new ambassador best of luck. — KUNA

## Djokovic fights to stay after Aussie...

Continued from Page 1

With scarcely 10 days before the tournament, it remains far from clear that Djokovic will be able to play, even if he wins in court. Judge Anthony Kelly warned that justice will move at its own pace through all necessary appeals. "The tail won't be tagging the dog here," he warned the star's lawyers.

For months there had been speculation about whether Djokovic would play in the Jan 17-30 tournament, given Australia's rigid border rules. The 34-year-old has refused to reveal his vaccine status, but has previously voiced opposition to being jabbed. He has contracted COVID at least once. Then this week a jubilant Djokovic boasted on Instagram that he had scored an unexpected medical exemption to play.

That move prompted widespread outcry in Australia, where many residents have been unable to travel or welcome family from overseas for the last two years. Conservative Prime Minister Scott Morrison - under additional pressure from soaring Covid case numbers and the collapse of the once-excellent testing system - defended revoking Djokovic's visa at the last minute. "Rules are rules and there are no special cases," he said. Officials did not say exactly what evidence Djokovic failed to present, but medical exemptions must be accompanied by details of the doctor's consultation and clear reasons for not getting the vaccine.

Djokovic is now believed to be at the Park Hotel, which the Australian government terms an

"Alternative Place of Detention". As word of his arrival spread, Serbian flag-festooned supporters, anti-vaccine campaigners, refugee advocates and police descended on the already controversial facility. At least one pro-refugee protester was arrested in chaotic scenes as officers tried to clear the area.

Veronica Michich said she was there to show support for Djokovic, whom she described as a beacon of hope for post-war Serbia. "We see him as a hero. He put Serbia back on the map, because Serbia was always portrayed, we were the aggressive ones, we were the attackers." Currently around 32 refugees and asylum seekers are being held at the Park Hotel, after being brought for medical treatment from offshore detention facilities. Detainees cannot leave the hotel and nobody is allowed in or out except staff.

The facility gained notoriety last year when a fire in the building forced refugees and asylum seekers to be evacuated, and maggots were allegedly found in the food. In October, 21 men reportedly contracted COVID at the facility, which has been the site of regular protests. Detainee Mehdi Ali told AFP that Djokovic is his favorite tennis player, and that he was saddened by the prospect of the star being held there. "The media will talk about us more, the whole world probably, which is so sad, just because Djokovic would be here for a few days," he said.

Rafael Nadal - who like Djokovic and Roger Federer is stuck on a record-equaling 20 Grand Slam wins - said his rival must face the consequences of not being vaccinated. "He made his own decisions, and everybody is free to take their own decisions, but then there are some consequences," the Spaniard said. The Serb's treatment prompted fury among his fans and a fiercely worded rebuke from Serbia's president. — AFP

said January 6 had been a "dark day" but called it "stunning to see some Washington Democrats try to exploit this anniversary".

On Wednesday, the Capitol police chief, Thomas Manger, said his forces would never be caught unprepared again, as they were last year. But the political risk may be, if anything, higher than before. Writing in The New York Times, former Democratic president Jimmy Carter said Wednesday that the United States "teeters on the brink of a widening abyss."

"Without immediate action, we are at genuine risk of civil conflict and losing our precious democracy. Americans must set aside differences and work together before it is too late," Carter wrote. Democratic Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer also called for a profound look at the state of the nation. "Without addressing the root causes of the violence on January 6, the insurrection will not be an aberration - it could well become the norm," he warned.

More surprising was the voice of Karl Rove, one of the chief architects of Republican strategy over the last 30 years, who wrote in the right-leaning Wall Street Journal editorial pages that there was no forgiveness for the assault on democracy. "There can be no soft-pedaling what happened and no absolution for those who planned, encouraged and aided the attempt to overthrow our democracy. Love of country demands nothing less. That's true patriotism," he wrote.

Attorney General Merrick Garland said Wednesday that authorities have so far arrested and charged about 725 people in connection with the attack, while asking for patience in work to untangle any deeper roots of a conspiracy. — AFP

## Deputy fire chief visits factories in Subhan



KUWAIT: Deputy fire chief for prevention Maj Gen Khalid Abdullah Fahad visited several factories in Subhan. He said the visit comes on the instructions of Fire Chief Lt Gen Khalid Al-Mikrad,



in coordination with Kuwait Industries Association to fulfill the Fire Force's vision in the field of cooperation with the private sector and ensure facilities follow safety and prevention measures.

## Three people die in two road accidents

KUWAIT: Three people died in two separate road accidents on King Fahd Bin Abdulaziz Road and the Seventh Ring Road yesterday, said Kuwait Fire Force (KFF). In a press statement, the KFF's Public Relations and Media Department said that two fire-

fighting teams of Mina Abdullah and Umm Al-Hayman hurried to King Fahd Road towards Nuwaiseeb near Umm Al-Hayman area, to find a collision between a bus and a sand truck, which caused the death of two people and wounding three others. All of them are Arab residents. On the other hand, teams from Al-Isteqlal Fire Center responded to the second accident on the Seventh Ring Road in the direction of Sabhan, opposite West Abdullah Mubarak area, that caused the death of an Asian driver.

## Yemen ship seizure flashes warning for Red Sea

DUBAI: Yemeni rebels' seizure of a UAE-flagged vessel has set off alarm bells that the conflict could "wreak havoc" on oil and cargo shipping in the strategic Red Sea, analysts said. The Iran-backed Houthi rebels are more used to fighting in the dusty country's craggy mountains but on Monday took the bold move to hijack the Rwabee with its international crew.

They later showed video purportedly of military jeeps and weapons on board, while the Saudi-led coalition fighting for the internationally recognized government insisted it was carrying medical equipment. The hijacking, in the busy Red Sea that separates the Arabian Peninsula from Africa, and is connected to the Mediterranean by the Suez Canal, sent out a clear message, analysts say.

"It is hard to pinpoint the exact cause for the Houthi seizure, and the group's messaging has been a bit mixed," Peter Salisbury, a Yemen specialist at the Crisis Group non-governmental organization. "But it is hard not to read it as a not-so-gentle reminder that they could wreak havoc on Saudi and Emirati shipping in the Red Sea if they so wished."

The seven-year war, a battleground for the regional rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, has displaced millions, creating the world's worst humanitarian catastrophe, according to the United Nations. It has mainly been fought on land. The Houthis' last ship capture was in November 2019, when they seized two South Korean vessels and a Saudi-flagged tug in the Red Sea north of Hodeida.

The latest hijacking follows setbacks for the rebels with defeats in Shabwa governorate to the pro-government Giants Brigade, who are backed by the Saudis and the United Arab Emirates. It also came on

the second anniversary of the death of top Iranian General Qasem Soleimani, who was killed by a US drone strike near Baghdad airport. On the same day, two major Israeli media outlets were hacked and two armed drones targeted a compound at Baghdad airport hosting personnel from the US-led coalition fighting the Islamic State group in Iraq.

But Mohammed al-Basha, senior Arabian Peninsula analyst at Navanti Group, said the Rwabee's capture looked like an "escalation" by the rebels. "The seizure of the UAE flagged vessel signals both a political and military escalation to the Saudi-led coalition," he told AFP. "Observers and policymakers have long feared that the war in Yemen could spill over into the Red Sea and destabilize vital shipping lanes."

Conflict in the Red Sea could cause chaos. The waterway carries about 1.5 million barrels of oil per day from Kuwait, Oman and Saudi Arabia, including most of Europe's crude imports from the Middle East, according to energy analysts S&P Global Platts.

The Suez Canal accounts for about 10 percent of global maritime trade. When it was blocked by the Ever Given tanker for six days last March, maritime data company Lloyd's List said it held up \$9.6 billion worth of cargo each day. Meanwhile the coalition has threatened to target rebel-held ports in reprisal for Rwabee, an action that could carry risks for the Safer - an abandoned tanker carrying 1.1 million barrels of crude that has been lying off the Yemen coast since 2015.

Environmentalists have already warned that the Safer, which is about 22 km from where the Rwabee is being held, could break apart or explode at any moment, setting off an environmental disaster. But for Maged Al-Madhaji, director of the Sanaa Centre for Strategic Studies, the Rwabee was all show for the rebels, who are not well versed in naval warfare. The hijacking gives them "benefits of a political nature and raises their profile, rather than any real military gains", he said. "They don't have a lot of experience at sea because they're fundamentally mountain fighters," added Madhaji. — AFP

## Biden vows to defend...

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continued. "We cannot allow ourselves to be that kind of nation." Although Biden did not mention Trump's name, he made clear whom he was talking about in a blistering portrait of a man he said tried to cheat his way out of defeat in the election. "The former president of the United States of America has created and spread a web of lies about the 2020 election," Biden said. "He values power over principle."

During the assault on Congress, Trump was "sitting in the private dining room off the Oval Office in the White House, watching it all on television and doing nothing for hours," Biden said, his anger clear. "He's a defeated former president."

In a statement issued immediately after Biden's speech, Trump accused the Democrat of seeking to "further divide America". "This political theater is all just a distraction for the fact Biden has completely and totally failed," Trump said. The day's commemorative events were also to feature a speech by the speaker of the House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, and a prayer vigil on the steps of the Capitol.

However, such are the depths of division 12 months later that many senior Republicans didn't even show up. The party's top lawmaker, Senator Mitch McConnell, was leading a delegation to a funeral of a recently deceased senator some 965 km away in Atlanta, Georgia. In a statement, McConnell



MARIB, Yemen: Yemeni pro-government fighters man a position during fighting with Houthi rebels in the south of the strategic governorate of Marib on Jan 4, 2021. — AFP

Local

# Foreign residents rebuff Expat Insider report, highlight good side of Kuwait

Kuwait seen as one of the safest places in Middle East



KUWAIT: Photo shows the Green Island. Foreign residents in Kuwait have rebuffed a recent report that ranked Kuwait as the worst destination for expatriates, calling it biased. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



KUWAIT: Residents walk around their neighborhood in this file photo.



KUWAIT: Photo captured Kuwait business district in Kuwait City.



By Chidi Emmanuel

**KUWAIT:** Foreign residents in Kuwait rebuffed a recent report that ranked Kuwait as the worst destination for expatriates, calling it biased. For the seventh time in eight years, Kuwait was ranked the worst destination for expats - taking the last position in the Expat Insider survey (59th out of 59 countries).

According to Expat Insider, Kuwait ranks last in the quality-of-life index (59th), with especially poor results in the leisure options, personal happiness and travel and transportation subcategories (59th for all). Kuwait also ranked as the worst expat destination worldwide in ease of settling (59th), with 46 percent of expats not feeling at home, while 45 percent finding it difficult to settle down in the country.

Amid these negative ratings, some expatriates still see Kuwait as a place to be, irrespective of the criticisms. Expats give Kuwait some credit as they explore the good side of the country. "As long as the Kuwaiti dinar remains the strongest in the world, Kuwait will continue to attract a lot of expats. People care more about money and putting food on their table than any of those indices used in the ratings. With enough money, you can buy as many friends as you like outside Kuwait. Most people are coming here to make money and not friends," argued Daniel Kings, an African expat.

**Tax-free**

Buttressing Daniel's views, Andre explored different reasons why people travel abroad. "People travel to different places due to different reasons. Some want a place to make quick and easy money, while others want a place they can call home. Most people who come to Kuwait know what they are in for. We just need the money. If you need a second home, holiday destination and other things, you can go to Australia, Canada, US, UAE, etc. Tax-free Kuwait has the strongest currency, and this makes it an attractive hotspot," he insisted.

Kuwait is a tax haven with 0 percent VAT and 0 percent income tax. For many Westerners, this makes Kuwait an attractive place. "Unlike Western countries, Kuwait is amazingly tax-free. There is no social life here, but it is a conservative and nice place to live. Even though life is expensive here, the fact that we are not paying any kind of tax makes it easier," said Lilith Elo, a European teacher.

**Safe place in Mideast**

Undoubtedly, Kuwait can be seen as one of the safest places in the Middle East. "The crime rate is low comparing to other countries in the region. We hardly see/hear cases of armed robberies, carjackings, killings, assassinations and terror-related crimes in Kuwait. Violent crimes and racial or religious attacks against foreigners are

rare," Yuvraj Sanjay, an Indian expat, told Kuwait Times.

Emma Obod, a consultant, sees Kuwait as a family-friendly place. "Kuwait has a family-oriented atmosphere with beautiful gardens, resorts and other facilities. Although Kuwait is not as spectacular as the UAE - it is unique. I prefer Kuwait to other Gulf states," he said. Most foreigners Kuwait Times interviewed shared similar views.

**Religious freedom**

Unlike some other Islamic states, Kuwait's constitution protects freedom of belief. Although Islam is Kuwait's official religion, freedom of religion is guaranteed to a reasonable extent. Government-recognized Christian denominations include the Catholic Church, the Coptic Orthodox Church, the National Evangelical (Protestant) Church, the Armenian Orthodox Church, the Greek Orthodox Church, the Greek Catholic (Melkite) Church and the Anglican (Episcopalian) Church.

"There are many churches in Kuwait. I have been in Kuwait for over 20 years now and can practice my religion freely, irrespective of some restrictions. I have not heard of any Hindus who have been arrested for practicing their religion. In some countries, people face persecution for practicing their religion, but not in Kuwait," said Thomas Fernandes, an Indian expatriate.



KUWAIT: Foreigners pray in the Catholic Church in Kuwait City.

## Central Statistical Bureau: Annual CPI increased by 3.82%

**KUWAIT:** The annual Consumer Price Index (CPI) increased in October 2021 by 3.82 percent compared with October 2020, said the Central Statistical Bureau of Kuwait yesterday. In a press statement, obtained by KUNA, the bureau indicated the CPI increased monthly to 122.4 by 0.25 percent, as a result of high prices of major groups in the movement of the indices. On an annual level, the price movement in October 2021 went as follows with the food and Beverage group prices increased by 7.73 percent. Cigarette and tobacco group prices were stable. "The prices of clothing and footwear group prices increased by 5.37 percent."

"Housing services group increased by 0.78 percent, the Household Furniture group prices increased by 2.45 percent, Health group prices increased by 2.35 percent, the Transportation group prices increased by 4.17 percent," indicated the bureau. It pointed out that "Communication group prices increased by 4.16 percent, recreation and cultural group prices increased by 3.70 percent, the prices of the education group increased by 18.86 percent, the prices of restaurants and hotels

group increased by 1.22 percent."

**Kuwait oil price up**

In another development, the price of Kuwaiti crude oil went up by 87 cents to \$81.21 per barrel (pb), compared with \$80.34 pb on Monday, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. Globally, the Brent crude was up \$80 cents to \$80.80 pb and West Texas Intermediate also went up by 86 cents to \$77.85 pb. — KUNA



## Fire ravages building in Mahboula

**KUWAIT:** A fire was reported on the second floor of an eight-storey building in Mahboula. Mangaf and Fahaeel firemen dealt with the incident and rescued trapped persons, then evacuated the building. No injuries were reported.

**Gas explosion**

An Asian resident sustained several injuries due to a cooking gas leak and an explosion in a Fahaeel flat. Fahaeel firemen put out the fire as paramedics took the injured person to hospital.



## Local

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## COVID rocks GCC

**KUWAIT:** The Ministry of Health said yesterday that 2,413 people tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19) in the past 24 hours, taking Kuwait's caseload to 425,455. The recoveries went up by 264 to 412,749, the Ministry's Spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said, noting that the recoveries represent 97 percent of the overall infections. Zero death cases registered, keeping the total death toll at 2,469, he said. There are 11 COVID-19 cases at ICUs, 10,237 others being treated at home and 53 patients at hospital wards. As many as 27,541 swab tests have been conducted which raised the total to 6,100,502, Dr Al-Sanad added.

### Saudi, UAE cases

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia and the UAE had announced new cases yesterday, crossing the 3,000 and 2,500 cases threshold respectively. According to the Saudi Health Ministry, cases in the last 24 hours amounted to 3,168, while death increased by one. The tallies of infections and deaths hit 568,650 and 8,888 respectively. Recoveries hit 544,161 after 608 cases were reported. Also, UAE announced 2,687 cases in the last 24 hours, putting the tally at 777,584. Deaths, in the last 48 hours, stood at a tally of 2,170. Some 902 patients recovered, putting the total at 750,156.

### Iraq's Omicron case

Iraq yesterday, announced its first Omicron COVID-19 variant infections in a number of governorates of the country. Infections were recorded in Kurdistan and Baghdad with the latter location including cases amongst foreign diplomats. No Omicron cases were reported before in Iraq. The Health Ministry expressed readiness to face the new wave of the virus with hospitals throughout the country bracing for impact. — KUNA

## Photo of the Day



**KUWAIT:** Kuwaiti traders follow the movement of stock prices at the Boursa Kuwait (Kuwait's national stock exchange) yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat.

# Kuwait's waste management

## Institutions, firms spread awareness on protecting, preserving environment

By Nawara Fattahora

**KUWAIT:** Various institutions and companies are trying to spread awareness on protecting and preserving the environment through waste management. We have started seeing colorful trash bins to separate waste in some shopping malls and other places. Al Hamra tower and shopping mall in Kuwait City has placed trash bins for four types of waste - plastic, glass, paper and mixed waste. These containers are placed in the shopping mall, as well on the floors of the business tower.

Montaha Al-Jouhar, Sr Officer - House Keeping at Al Hamra Real Estate Company, said they

launched this project in 2017, and the containers were placed in 2018. "In the beginning, people were not very cooperative and didn't care much, but today, after more than three years, visitors and employees of Al-Hamra Tower are more committed to separating waste in these different bins, and we have noticed their positive response," she told Kuwait Times.

"We sent informative messages to employees to segregate their waste, so they are more responsive than the mall's visitors. Since I began working here, I have been very keen to apply waste management, and we are not done yet. We deal with different recycling companies that collect the waste from Al-Hamra free of charge. We just spend on the containers and the colorful trash bags. We aim to spread awareness on protecting the environment through recycling," added Jouhar.

Many recycling companies in Kuwait shut down during the pandemic and even before that, as waste management isn't profitable and they couldn't survive. Enviroserve Kuwait is one of the companies that works in this field, and they have containers for collecting electronics and metals at two locations: The Scientific Center and Jabriya Cooperative Society.

They also deal with companies and banks, from where they collect electronic, plastic and paper waste. "From individuals, we currently only collect electronics and metals, but will soon add paper and plastic. We collect electronic waste from individuals for a fee of KD 5. We collect waste from the Scientific Center and Jabriya Co-op once a month. Many people still don't segregate waste and throw mixed garbage in special containers, which makes it impossible to place these containers on public roads," stressed Judi, Business Development Officer at Enviroserve Kuwait.

"When we were founded in 2018 through the support of the National Fund for Small and Medium Enterprises, we were supposed to receive a plot of land, but this hasn't been realized till today. We don't have full recycling in Kuwait, but we do shred electronics, while difficult parts are sent to Dubai. To manufacture new products, we need a melting plant, which needs a bigger space and land, which is not available," she explained.

## AUB distributes blankets to laborers in various regions

**KUWAIT:** As part of its CSR and voluntary efforts, Ahli United Bank (AUB) launched a new humanitarian initiative. In this initiative the Bank distributed a number of blankets to cleaners, construction workers and elementary occupations. Through this initiative, AUB aims to provide these groups protection from severe cold weather and to make them feel warm.

Commenting on this humanitarian initiative, Faten Al-Tameemi, Head of Social Media & Corporate Social Responsibility at AUB, said in a press release: Ahli United Bank has a leading role in providing support, assistance and care to the needy groups. The Bank provides this support to the neediest directly or in partnership with various civil society institutions.

Al-Tameemi added: This initiative reflects the Bank's commitment towards the needy and low-income groups, who perform essential works in the service of society. Human and Islamic values urge us to provide them protection from the severe cold wave witnessed by the country in winter. This initiative also aims to promote the spirit of social responsibility among the Bank's



They mainly collect the waste and sort it. "We sell some materials to certain companies, which they recycle and resell. We also produce some material from the shredding process such as copper, plastic, aluminum and metal. But it's not 100 percent pure. We sell these raw materials in Kuwait. Some materials are not recycled in Kuwait such as glass, wood and others. We also deal with partners to recycle paper and cardboard, as well as plastic. We hope that people will get used to separating household waste," noted Judi.

employees. It gives them the opportunity to participate in activities directed at serving the community.

Al-Tameemi pointed out that AUB is always keen to strengthen the culture of sustainable social responsibility. This can be achieved by providing help and support to the needy people through charities working in the humanitarian field. This can also be achieved by distributing subsidies to the needy directly as was done in this initiative.

Al-Tameemi said: Kuwait is a Country of Humanity, and its people are benevolent. AUB, as one of the key players in the Kuwaiti banking sector and in line with its tireless charitable efforts, is following the same path in strengthening high principles of human solidarity and social cohesion. She emphasized that this initiative was launched based on the Bank's Senior Management recognition of the importance of meeting the actual needs of the community. It also aims to spread the spirit of solidarity, warmth and mercy among its members.

Al-Tameemi added that AUB continues to provide all forms of social and humanitarian support to the most needy to help draw a smile on their faces and bring joy and happiness to their hearts. The Bank is always keen to remain supportive in alleviating the suffering of all groups of society that need support under these circumstances witnessed by Kuwait and the whole world. She confirmed that Kuwait humanitarian support reaches out to all those in need.

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Faten Al-Tameemi



Bolsonaro starts annus horribilis with health scare

## Election rallies cancelled as India sees Omicron surge



MOSCOW: This handout image grab taken yesterday shows Russian paratroopers boarding a military cargo plane to depart to Kazakhstan as a peacekeeping force at Chkalovsky airport. —AFP

# Moscow-led troops arrive in Kazakhstan

## Dozens killed in unrest • Govt sets new fuel price limits

**ALMATY:** Bursts of gunfire echoed through the streets of Kazakhstan's largest city yesterday as Moscow-led troops arrived to help quell mass unrest that left dozens dead and hundreds detained. Fighting appeared to be continuing a day after protesters stormed several government buildings, with an AFP correspondent hearing regular eruptions of gunfire from the direction of a central square.

Burnt-out vehicles littered Almaty's streets, several government buildings were in ruins and bullet casings were strewn over the territory of the presidential residence, which was stormed and looted by protesters on Wednesday. "I didn't know our people could be so terrifying," Samal, a 29-year-old nursery-school teacher, told AFP near the residence.

Long seen as one the most stable of the ex-Soviet republics of Central Asia, energy-rich Kazakhstan is facing its biggest crisis in decades after days of protests over rising fuel prices escalated into widespread unrest. Armed protesters have fought running battles with government forces, with officials saying more than 350 security officers have been wounded and 13 killed, including two who had their heads cut off.

Under increasing pressure, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev appealed overnight to the Russia-dominated Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which includes five other ex-Soviet states, to combat what he

called "terrorist groups" that had "received extensive training abroad".

### 'Inspired from outside'

Within hours the alliance said the first troops had been sent - including Russian paratroopers and military units from the other CSTO members - in its first major joint action since its founding in 1999. "Peacekeeping forces... were sent to the Republic of Kazakhstan for a limited time to stabilize and normalize the situation," the CSTO said in a statement, without specifying the number of troops involved. The Russian foreign ministry said it saw the unrest as "an attempt inspired from outside to undermine the security and integrity" of Kazakhstan. Footage released by the Russian defense ministry showed military transport planes being loaded with troops and armored trucks before taking off from a snowy runway for Kazakhstan.

In the worst reported violence so far, police said dozens of people were killed in overnight battles with security forces at government buildings in Almaty. "Extremist forces tried to assault administrative buildings, the Almaty city police department, as well as local police commissariats. Dozens of assailants were eliminated," police spokeswoman Saltanat Azirbek said. The Almaty's mayor's office, stormed and set ablaze by protesters on Wednesday, remained partially on fire a day

later. AFP saw people milling around the square opposite the building and later heard bursts of gunfire from its direction at around 5:30 pm local time (1130 GMT) and again an hour later.

### 2,000 detained

The interior ministry said police had "moved forward to clear the streets" and detained about 2,000 people so far. Officials said more than 1,000 people had been wounded in the unrest, with nearly 400 admitted to hospital and 62 in intensive care. Protests spread across the 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 Almaty and in the western province of Mangystau, saying the price rise was unfair given oil and gas exporter Kazakhstan's vast energy reserves. The full picture of the chaos was unclear, with widespread disruptions to communications including mobile phone signals, the blocking of online messengers and hours-long internet shutdowns.

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 hand-picked Tokayev as his successor. Tokayev tried to head off further unrest by announcing the resignation of the cabinet early on Wednesday, but protests continued.

### New fuel price limits

With protests escalating, authorities declared a nationwide state of emergency until January 19, with curfews, restrictions on movements and bans on mass gatherings. The government made another concession yesterday, setting new fuel price limits for six months, saying "urgent" measures were needed "to stabilize the socio-economic situation".

Much of the anger appeared directed at Nazarbayev, who is 81 and had ruled Kazakhstan since 1989 before handing power to Tokayev. Many protesters shouted "Old Man Out!" in reference to Nazarbayev and several witnesses confirmed to AFP that a statue of the ex-leader had been torn down in the southern city of Taldykorgan.

Britain and France yesterday joined calls from the EU, UN and Washington for restraint, with French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian calling on both sides to "show moderation and open a dialogue". Kazakhstan, which tolerates little real opposition, is a key ally of Russia but has also sought good ties with the West and China. A major oil and gas exporter and one of the world's biggest producers of uranium, the country has signed lucrative deals with international energy companies. Critics say widespread corruption has meant little of that money reaching ordinary people, with average monthly salaries in the country of less than \$600. —AFP

## Tear gas fired as Sudanese rally against coup

**KHARTOUM:** Sudanese security forces fired tear gas yesterday aiming to stop thousands of protesters demanding a transition to civilian rule, the latest in weeks of unrest since a military coup. Singing, beating drums, and holding up posters of some of the dozens killed in demonstrations since the Oct 25 coup, protesters in the capital Khartoum shouted slogans against the army in defiance. "We will not stop until we get our country back," shouted one protester, 22-year-old Samar Al-Tayeb.

Other protesters set fire to tyres to create burning barricades on the streets. Crowds were marching towards the presidential palace in Khartoum when security forces fired volleys of tear gas canisters forming thick and choking clouds, witnesses said. "Our marches will continue until we restore our revolution and our civilian government, even if martyrs fall among us," said Mojataba Hussein, a 23-year-old protester.

### Deadly crackdown

When military chief General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan staged the power grab over two months ago, it dismantled a precarious power-sharing arrangement

between the military and civilians that had been established in the wake of the April 2019 ouster of longtime autocrat Omar Al-Bashir. The protests yesterday come days after prime minister Abdalla Hamdok - who had first been held under house arrest for weeks following the coup, before then being reinstated amid international pressure in a November 21 deal - resigned leaving the military fully in charge.

The protest movement had slammed the November deal as a "betrayal" for providing what they said was a cloak of legitimacy for Burhan's coup, and had kept up its rallies. When Hamdok stepped down on Sunday, he said Sudan was at a "dangerous crossroads threatening its very survival". The military takeover - one of several in Sudan's post-independence history - has seen security forces launch a bloody crackdown that has left at least 57 people dead and hundreds wounded, according to the independent Doctors' Committee.

### Protests in several cities

Demonstrations yesterday also took place in other cities, including in the eastern Red Sea city of Port Sudan, as well as in Atbara in the north and Wad Madani in the south, witnesses said. "The authority is that of the people," protesters chanted in Wad Madani, as they demanded soldiers "go back to the barracks". In Atbara, protesters called on Burhan to "hand over the country's keys and leave," witnesses said.

Crowds in the central state of North Kordofan chanted "No, no to military rule" while waving and draped in the national flag. On Tuesday, the United States,

what to say," said Purifoy. "They were somebody who was supposed to continue life and die of old age, not from stuff that could have been avoided."

Officials said eight people escaped the flames, while another two were hospitalized, one of who was a five-year-old nephew of Purifoy. "Everybody is gone except for one child," she said. "He don't know what's going on. He wants his mom, he wants his dad, he wants his sisters, he wants his cousins, he wants everybody that he had lived with for the past five years. He don't know what's going on, because he's still a child," Purifoy added.

At the Bache-Martin Elementary School, a block away from the site of the disaster, a Salvation Army truck handed out supplies to relatives. Purifoy rubbed the back of her sister Qaadira, who wept as she tried to keep out the cold with a Salvation Army blanket. Near the burnt building, a local laid a white rose on the ground under police tape.

### Investigation

"This is without a doubt one of the most tragic days in our city's history, the loss of so many people in such a tragic way," Mayor Jim Kenney told reporters earlier Wednesday. Philadelphia Fire Department deputy commissioner Craig Murphy said the fire was the worst he



KHARTOUM: Sudanese protesters rallying against the military walk past tyres set ablaze by fellow demonstrators yesterday. —AFP

European Union, Britain and Norway warned the military against naming their own successor to Hamdok, saying they would "not support a prime minister or government appointed without the involvement of a broad range of civilian stakeholders". The Western statement added that "unilateral action to appoint a new prime minister and cabinet would undermine those institutions' credibility and risks plunging the nation into conflict".

Protesters have defied a hardline response from the security forces. Burhan last month issued a decree allowing security forces to arrest individuals "over crimes related to the state of emergency", effectively banning street protests. Under the decree, security forces are allowed to enter and search "any building or individual" and impose "surveillance of any property and facility". —AFP



PHILADELPHIA: Firefighter paramedics work at the scene of a deadly fire on Wednesday in Philadelphia's popular museum district of Fairmount. —AFP

had seen in 35 years on the job. He added it was too early to say what caused the blaze, but that his department was investigating.

"It's not necessarily considered suspicious, but we have all hands on deck because of the magnitude of this fire," he told reporters. "We're in the process of investigating this to the highest level that we can. We're incorporating all of our resources." He said that there were four smoke detectors in the building, but none of them had been operating. —AFP

## Online sleuths track down US Capitol attackers

**WASHINGTON:** The FBI is still searching for people who stormed the US Capitol on Jan 6. So is Kay. The 34-year-old from Washington state is one of a number of online sleuths tracking down participants in the attack on Congress. "We're somewhere between journalists and law enforcement," said Kay, who declined to use her last name for security reasons. "We're dedicated to finding everyone."

More than 725 people have been arrested so far for the attack on the Capitol by supporters of Donald Trump who were seeking to block congressional certification of Joe Biden's presidential election victory. "January 6 broke my heart and I have never really gotten over it," Kay told AFP, her voice breaking with emotion. "It seemed, like, sacrilegious. To me, the Capitol is - even though I've never been there - a symbol of our democracy," she said. "And that really matters to me, that we have a healthy, thriving democracy. To see the Capitol assaulted like that, and the people inside, was terrifying, just heartbreaking."

Kay has spent months at her computer keyboard, trawling the internet in a hunt for people involved in the assault on Congress. Attorney General Merrick Garland, in a speech on Wednesday, thanked members of the public for their assistance in bringing participants to justice. "We have received over 300,000 tips from ordinary citizens, who have been our indispensable partners in this effort," Garland said.

Kay, who has a background in video production, has sifted through thousands of photographs and hundreds of hours of videos of the attack available online, much of it on social media. "I found that people were proudly posting what they had done on January 6," she said. "They were proud to be there, and it was just perfectly logical to brag about it online. So you find their social media networks, you know their username and find them across all the platforms that they're on."

Kay is one of a number of online detectives working with groups going by names such as Sedition Hunters, Capitol Hunters and Deep State Dogs. Kay mainly works with Sedition Hunters, which has a core of about 20 members and the support of hundreds of others. They use geolocation and facial recognition software such as PimEyes, and appeal for information through Twitter. —AFP

## 8 kids among 12 dead in US house fire

**PHILADELPHIA:** Jacuita Purifoy lost ten family members when a fire tore through a converted three-storey house in Philadelphia Wednesday, killing 12 people in one of the United States' deadliest residential infernos in recent years. "My sisters and my nephews and my nieces are gone. They are never coming back again," the 37-year-old told AFP outside a nearby elementary school where families of victims were consoling each other.

The Philadelphia mayor's office said that 12 people, including eight children, were killed in the blaze, revising an earlier toll of 13 victims. Purifoy lost seven younger relatives, the youngest of whom was just one year old. Three of Purifoy's sisters also died in the fire, which happened just before sunrise in public housing in the eastern US city's popular museum district of Fairmount. "I am in shock. I don't know what to do. I don't know

## International

# Health first, freedom second? How COVID is changing democracies

## Measures targeting unvaccinated could 'exacerbate existing inequalities'

PARIS: From a litany of lockdowns to mandatory mask-wearing and COVID passes to access entertainment and sporting venues, the pandemic has led to sweeping restrictions on civil liberties in some of the world's oldest democracies. Among Western countries, European nations particularly have been quick to crimp basic freedoms in the name of fighting the virus.

French President Emmanuel Macron caused a furor this week by saying he wanted to "piss off" those who refuse to get vaccinated by "limiting as much as possible their access to activities in social life". The remarks from the leader of a country that sees itself as a global beacon of liberty underscore the extent to which the pandemic has changed national priorities.

The United States has also taken aggressive steps, including closing its borders to most of the world for 20 months and making vaccinations mandatory for all federal employees and staff of big companies. The Berlin-based rights watchdog Civil Liberties Union for Europe warned in a report last year that measures targeting the unvaccinated could "exacerbate existing inequalities". "(They) may create a two-tier society where some people may enjoy an extensive set of freedoms and rights while others are excluded," the report said.



### Grievances are being exploited by all parties

notably Austria and the Netherlands, reverted to one-size-fits-all tactics and ordered people back indoors during the end-of-year celebrations.

But worldwide, many countries are now turning the screws on citizens who are refusing to be jabbed. Austria kept the unvaccinated confined to their homes last month after lifting a partial lockdown. In February, the country will be the first in Europe to make vaccines compulsory for most people. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson says his country also needs to have a "national conversation" about mandatory vaccinations, echoing similar comments from the German government.

The French government meanwhile has proposed to follow Germany's lead by barring the unvaccinated from restaurants, cinemas and leisure facilities. While public acceptance of COVID restrictions was

high at the outset of the crisis, pandemic fatigue is fueling growing resistance to new curbs. The unvaccinated complain of discrimination, with some going so far as to compare their treatment to the persecution of European Jews during World War II. And from the Netherlands to Austria, Germany, Belgium and France, thousands of people have taken to the streets - sometimes clashing with police - to protest COVID rules and health passes.

#### 'Libertarian zealots'

The grievances are being exploited by parties on the far-right, far-left and those opposed to interventionist policies. In Germany, the pro-business Free Democrats made strong gains in September's general election after campaigning against strict lockdowns. In France, which will hold presidential elections in April, far-right candidates Marine Le



BREST, France: This file photo taken on Aug 7, 2021 shows a protestor holding a QR code sign during a demonstration against the mandatory COVID-19 health pass to access most of the public space. —AFP

Pen and Eric Zemmour have come out swinging against Macron's proposed vaccine pass.

"Coronavirus restrictions are necessary; but concerns about how they are framed and imposed are not and should not be the preserve of libertarian zealots and Covid deniers," Britain's Guardian newspaper warned in March 2021. For the most part, Europe has avoided upheaval by maintaining a balance between the need to protect public health and defend civil liberties.

Raul Magni-Berton, a French political scientist who studied the COVID restrictions imposed in

around 40 European countries, cited France and eastern European countries as having the strictest curbs. His study showed that the countries with the greatest respect for individual freedoms were the oldest continuous democracies, such as Britain or Switzerland. His research also concluded that restrictions tend to be lighter in countries with coalition governments like the Netherlands or where power is shared between the central government and regions like federal Germany. "How many people are you forced to negotiate with? That's the question," Magni-Berton said. —AFP

## Isolation, innovation: Two years of the COVID-19 pandemic

PARIS: Two years ago, a previously unknown virus plunged humanity into an unprecedented global crisis that has transformed our daily lives - and significantly expanded scientific knowledge.

#### In the air

In the early months of the pandemic, the prevailing scientific advice was that frequent handwashing would help stop the spread of COVID-19. Health authorities urged people not to touch their faces with soiled hands and shared techniques on how to apply soap, while in many countries hand sanitizers became ubiquitous. But as the pandemic wore on and scientists were able to study real world examples of how the virus spread - at a choir practice, in a bus or across a restaurant - a consensus emerged that this disease was largely transmitted through the air.

The virus travels in clouds of particles that we emit when we breathe and especially when we speak, shout or sing. In a closed and poorly ventilated room, these aerosols can float and drift in the air for a long time, greatly increasing the risk of infection. But the importance of good ventilation to disperse these contaminated clouds - like clearing cigarette smoke - is not always well understood by the general public.

"There was a communication error: we scientists were not clear enough about ventilation," said Arnaud Fontanet, of France's Scientific Council, a body that guides government policy. "When scientists talk about protective measures, we have to make it clear to people that ventilation is a part of it," he told AFP.

#### Flip-flop on face coverings

As a direct result of the awareness of aerosol transmission, the discourse on masks has radically changed in two years. Initially, the World Health Organization (WHO) and many governments insisted that masks should only be used by caregivers, patients and their close relatives and not by the general public. But many supporters of generalized mask wearing saw that as a way to conserve limited supplies and prevent a shortage for caregivers.

By spring 2020, there was an abrupt policy change and the mask became an essential tool in the fight against the pandemic, becoming mandatory in some places. As more contagious variants have emerged, people have been advised to ditch their simpler fabric masks in favor of the super filtration of surgical masks. And with the surge of the extremely contagious Omicron variant, many scientists are now advising people to wear even more protective masks like the FFP2 or N95 when in crowded indoor spaces.

#### Vaccines: A game changer

The coronavirus has claimed millions of lives around the world since it first emerged two years ago, but that toll would have been far higher if it had not been for vaccines developed in record time. Against all expectations, the pandemic showed that it is possible to design new vaccines against an unprecedented disease, and then start administering them worldwide in less than a year. In the past, that process typically took 10 times longer.

Just over a year after the start of the global vaccination campaign, around half of the planet's population is fully vaccinated against COVID-19, according to the University of Oxford's website Our World in Data. However, the vaccine rollout has confirmed fears that protection against the virus would be mired in inequalities between rich and poor countries. WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus wants 70 percent of the world's population to be vaccinated by July and has called for an end to vaccine hoarding by richer nations. —AFP

## Work, school and play: How COVID reshaped our world

PARIS: The most basic everyday activities, from working to shopping and going to school, have completely transformed during the Covid-19 pandemic, and may never be the same again. As the world marks nearly two years since China announced the first death from COVID-19 - a 61-year-old man in Wuhan - on Jan 11, 2020, here's a look at how our lives have been fundamentally altered by the virus.

#### WFH

As the virus marched across the globe, governments ordered citizens to stay inside - forcing billions of people to hastily set up home offices. Remote working, working from home (WFH) all quickly became staples in our new pandemic vernacular. Even as lockdowns eased, working from home at least some of the time has remained the norm for many.

In 2021, the percentage of people working remotely hit 32 percent, up from just 17 percent in 2019, according to consulting firm Gartner. For others, the pandemic prompted a change of jobs or demands for better conditions. In the United States, tens of thousands of workers from hospitals to Hollywood walked

off the job last year in a movement dubbed "Striketober" to protest long hours and poor pay.

#### E-commerce boom

With billions bunkered down at home, businesses of all kinds had to quickly pivot, and online sales for everything from groceries to meals, clothes and furniture rapidly boomed. Online sales rose 38 percent in the first third of 2021 compared to the same period a year before, according to the Adobe Digital Economy Index. It even brought some shoppers online for the first time who aren't likely to leave soon. Gaelle Le Floch of consulting firm Kantar told AFP. "We saw new customers, more senior citizens, who became regular shoppers," she said.

#### Planes, trains and... bicycles

Between border closures and travel restrictions, the tourism sector was pummeled by the pandemic. Experts warn the air and rail industries may not return to normal before 2024. Air travel was worst affected, with worldwide traffic dropping by two-thirds in 2020. By the end of 2021, it had only reached half of 2019 levels as travel restrictions remained in place in many countries.

Even as travel picked up following initial lockdowns, chaos remains the norm in airports as passengers line up to show vaccine passes or negative COVID tests. Cities around the world also saw a drop in public transportation such as trains over fears of the virus spreading and as more people stayed home. Cycling

grew in popularity - but so did commuting by car.

#### Zoom learning

As adults stayed home to work, so too did students, with hundreds of millions of children and teens suddenly logging onto Zoom and other platforms for online classes. UNESCO, the UN's culture and education authority, has called the pandemic the worst-ever education crisis. School systems in most countries saw at least some period of complete closure. The worst impacts have been in low- and middle-income countries where 53 percent of children already suffered from a lack of access to schooling. That proportion could increase to 70 percent, according to the World Bank. In some parts of the world - including Brazil, Pakistan, India, South Africa and Mexico - a significant drop in math and reading skills has been reported.

#### Hunger and healthcare

The pandemic has led to the greatest rise in hunger worldwide in 15 years, according to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The number of people who do not have enough to eat increased 18 percent over the last year, the agency said. The problem extended beyond food access, as an additional 20 million people fell into extreme poverty in 2021, according to UN agency OCHA. The pandemic also plunged health systems into chaos and slowed progress on campaigns to eradicate other diseases ravaging the world's poorest populations, such as HIV and tuberculosis. —AFP

## France gives initial nod to vaccine pass after Macron furor

PARIS: France's lower house of parliament yesterday passed in a first reading a bill further tightening COVID measures, after three days of tense debates fueled by President Emmanuel Macron's warning that he wanted to "piss off" the unvaccinated. The bill would require a full course of vaccination against COVID-19 to enjoy basic parts of life including inter-city train travel, attending cultural events or eating out. A recent test or proof of recovery would no longer be valid.

The legislation was expected to pass relatively smoothly through parliament with support from the right-wing opposition. But it was initially blocked this week when deputies managed to defeat the govern-

ment on a procedural vote. Discussions were suspended again in the early hours of Wednesday after a furor caused by Macron's comments that he would "piss off... until the end" the unvaccinated.

The text was passed just after 5:30 am (0430 GMT) yesterday by the National Assembly at 214 votes for and 93 against, with 27 abstentions. It will now go to the Senate, the upper house dominated by the right-wing opposition that is expected to make amendments. That could put into question the government's target date of January 15 for implementing the new vaccine pass. Prime Minister Jean Castex told BFM television he "hoped very much" that the Jan 15 date could still be kept.

French media have speculated whether Macron intended to cause the controversy with coarse language, which was seized on by his rivals in the 2022 presidential election campaign. Around 53 percent of French were shocked by Macron's comments, while 47 percent were not, according to an Elabe poll published Wednesday. Castex expressed no regret over Macron's use of language. "That there

## Bolsonaro starts annus horribilis with health scare

RIO DE JANEIRO: It was already shaping up to be a tough year for Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, with his popularity at an all-time low nine months from elections, the economy in recession and COVID-19 surging. Then the far-right leader had his New Year beach vacation come crashing to an end with an emergency flight to the hospital for a partially blocked intestine. Bolsonaro, 66, was discharged Wednesday, after the blockage came free without the surgery he initially said might be needed.

But the health scare underlined the fragile state he appears to be in as he starts the final year of his

term, and the countdown to elections that polls currently place him on track to lose badly to leftist ex-president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. The coronavirus Bolsonaro dismissed as a "little flu" has claimed nearly 620,000 lives in Brazil, second only to the United States, and cases are soaring again.

The economy he vowed to revive is meanwhile in recession, weighed down by inflation that has gone from 3.75 percent when he took office on Jan 1, 2019 to a painful 10.74 percent today. Three years in, the man dubbed the "Tropical Trump" can claim few accomplishments, beyond keeping his headline base riled up with constant attacks on the "communist" left, "gender ideology," Congress and the Supreme Court, not to mention face masks, vaccines and other science-based measures against COVID-19.

"I don't know what's going to rescue Jair Bolsonaro," said Latin America expert Brian Winter, editor-in-chief of Americas Quarterly. "It's hard to imagine what could happen on the economic front that would change enough voters' minds to allow him



PARIS: Members of the public queue outside a pharmacy to receive COVID-19 antigen tests yesterday as coronavirus cases soar in Europe. —AFP

has been a storm in certain circles, I don't doubt and I see it myself. But the president can sometimes say things out loud that many, many people quietly think," he said. —AFP



SAO PAULO: Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro is seen next to a doctor during a press conference at the Vila Nova Star Hospital after he was discharged on Wednesday. —AFP

to be reelected," he told AFP. "Brazilians are just so fatigued and angry." —AFP

## International

# China official apologizes after woman miscarries outside lockdown hospital

## Hospital's general manager, 'responsible persons' at OPD suspended

BEIJING: A top health official in China's locked-down Xi'an apologized yesterday over the miscarriage of an eight-month-pregnant woman, after footage went viral of a hospital refusing her entry without a COVID test. The city of 13 million has been under strict home confinement for two weeks to stamp out an outbreak, in line with Beijing's firm "zero COVID" strategy.

The distressing incident was detailed in a social media post by the woman's niece on Jan 1, which included photos and video of the woman sitting on a plastic stool outside the hospital surrounded by a pool of blood. The post was later removed but not before it got hundreds of millions of views and sparked widespread anger online about the hardships faced by Xi'an residents.

"I deeply apologize to this patient on behalf of the city's health commission," Xi'an health commission director Liu Shunzhi told reporters, before standing and bowing to the audience. Liu said the hospital had been told to "compensate" the woman and apologized that "access to medical care was not smooth during the epidemic".

The city said in an earlier statement yesterday that the incident at Xi'an Gaoxin Hospital had aroused "wide-

spread concern and caused a bad social impact", adding that the local health bureau was investigating. The hospital's general manager has been suspended over the incident, as have "responsible persons" at the outpatient department.

The statement got more than 700 million views yesterday - illustrating the huge interest the case has generated within China. According to the Jan 1 post that went viral on the Twitter-like

“**Maybe ordinary people's lives are worthless**”

Weibo platform, staff refused to admit the heavily pregnant woman for two hours because she did not have a negative COVID test from within the previous 48 hours. Her niece wrote that her negative test result had expired just a few hours earlier. AFP could not verify the post, and calls to the hospital went unanswered.

### 'Heart attack'

The reports follow complaints from Xi'an residents over chaotic handling of the lockdown, including poor access to food and daily essentials. On Wednesday, officials told reporters that Xi'an was opening "green channels" to provide urgent medical services to certain groups - such as pregnant women and patients with critical illnesses. The pledge came as a second woman took to social media to say she had miscarried last week after being rejected by several hospitals.

The woman, who said she was in the first trimester of pregnancy, wrote that she was unable to reach anyone on the public service hotline but she thanked police for trying to help her contact hospitals. "I don't understand why couldn't I get through at the public hotline, and why I got given the runaround everywhere. Maybe ordinary people's lives are worthless," she wrote in a post from Wednesday.

Another Xi'an resident said her father died Monday after several hospitals declined to treat his ailment "due to pandemic-related rules". In a social media post from yesterday that has been viewed more than 500 million times, she recounted driving for over eight hours



XI'AN: Residents buy food and daily necessities at a temporary stall set up in a residential compound yesterday amid a COVID-19 lockdown. — AFP

searching for a hospital while her father complained of severe chest pains. After he was finally admitted, "the doctor said that the delay was too long", she wrote. It was unclear why hospitals had declined to admit the 61-year-old.

Coronavirus case numbers in China remain very low by international standards. But in recent weeks, infections

have reached a high not seen since March 2020. There were 189 cases reported yesterday, including 63 in Xi'an. Xuchang city in neighboring Henan province announced yesterday that it would test its more than 4 million residents after reporting 50 cases yesterday, while the provincial capital Zhengzhou halted dozens of coach routes. — AFP

## North Korea tests hypersonic missile

SEOUL: North Korea has successfully tested a hypersonic missile, state media reported yesterday, in the first major weapons test by the nuclear-armed nation this year. This was the second reported test of what Pyongyang claimed were hypersonic gliding missiles, as it pursues the sophisticated technology despite international sanctions and condemnation.

Hypersonic missiles move far faster and are more agile than standard ones, making them much harder for missile defense systems - on which the United States is spending billions - to intercept. The missile fired on Wednesday carried a "hypersonic gliding warhead" that "precisely hit a target 700 km away", the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported, without identifying the launcher.

The warhead also demonstrated a "new" capability, moving 120 km laterally after it detached from the launcher to strike the target, it added. "The successive successes in the test launches in the hypersonic missile sector have strategic significance," KCNA said. Hypersonic missiles were listed among

the "top priority" tasks for strategic weapons in North Korea's current five-year plan, and it announced its first test - of the Hwasong-8 - in September last year.

The Wednesday launch also tested the "fuel ampoule system under winter weather conditions", according to KCNA. An ampoule system involves a propellant canister attached to the missile when it is manufactured, and could eliminate the need for fueling it at the launch site. This offers an advantage over ordinary liquid-fueled missiles, which have to be loaded with propellant on-site just before launch - a time-consuming process that gives an enemy ample opportunity to locate and destroy them.

### Growing arsenal

Depending on their design, hypersonic missiles can carry conventional and nuclear warheads, and have the potential to alter the strategic balance. They are generally defined as travelling more than five times the speed of sound, or Mach 5. The KCNA report did not mention the speed at which the missile travelled on Wednesday, and assessments of its performance from other nations have yet to be released.

"It looks like the North Koreans identified hypersonic gliders as a military requirement (probably because they perceive this to be effective at dealing



This picture taken on Wednesday and released yesterday shows what North Korea says is the test-firing of a hypersonic missile. — AFP

with BMD)," tweeted Ankit Panda of the US think tank Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, referring to ballistic missile defense. "We'd need independent, detailed data to assess how effective these missiles actually are, but taking the two North Korean statements about the Hwasong-8 and this missile at face value, this test appears to have gone better" than the one in September, Panda added. — AFP

## Election rallies cancelled as India sees Omicron surge

NEW DELHI: Election rallies were cancelled in India's heartland yesterday as authorities fret over a sudden Covid surge, driven by the Omicron variant, which has seen confirmed infections nearly triple in two days. Teeming crowds have thronged campaign events for next month's poll in Uttar Pradesh - the country's most populous state with over 200 million people and a pillar of support for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has traversed key cities to cut the ribbon on infrastructure projects and partake in Hindu religious rituals to boost the state government's prospects. But with several cities imposing coronavirus curfews and health experts

warning of exponential infection growth, several parties have brought their public campaigns to a halt. "Owing to concerns over the growing number of COVID cases, all... rallies of the party have been cancelled," Ashok Singh, a spokesperson for the opposition Congress, told AFP.

Another opposition group said it had switched to virtual campaigning while the BJP cancelled a rally planned for yesterday in Noida, a satellite city of the capital New Delhi that has seen a spate of new cases. Party spokesman Manish Shukla denied the virus was the reason for calling off the Noida event - where Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, seen as a potential Modi successor, was set to appear. "It was cancelled due to some other technical reason," he told AFP, without giving further detail.

But recent electioneering has sparked concern in some quarters of the BJP. "Imposing curfew in the night and calling (hundreds of thousands) of people in rallies during the day - this is beyond the comprehension of the common man," party lawmaker Varun Gandhi tweeted last week. — AFP



ALLAHABAD: A health worker takes a swab sample from a man for coronavirus screening at a testing center yesterday. — AFP

## Japan, Australia sign defense treaty with eyes on China

TOKYO: Japan and Australia yesterday signed a "landmark" treaty to strengthen defense ties, saying the accord would contribute to regional stability, as China expands its military and economic clout. While Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison did not mention Beijing directly in a statement released ahead of the signing, the agreement is seen as another step by the regional allies to signal their concern over China's military expansion.

Ahead of Thursday's online summit with his Japanese counterpart Fumio Kishida, Morrison called the agreement "a statement of two nations' commitment to work together in meeting the shared strategic security challenges we face and to contribute to a secure and stable Indo-Pacific". "This landmark treaty will... for the first time provide a clear framework for enhanced inter-operability and cooperation between our two forces," Morrison said.

The partnership reflects "our shared values, our commitment to democracy and human rights, and our common interests in a free, open and resilient Indo-Pacific", he added. Japan and Australia, along with the United States and India, are part of the "Quad" grouping that has worked to build an alliance in the face of China's swelling presence across Asia, includ-



TOKYO: Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison hold signed documents during their video signing ceremony of the bilateral reciprocal access agreement yesterday. — AFP

ing its threats to vital international sea lanes.

Ali Wyne, senior analyst at Eurasia Group, said the treaty could enhance Tokyo and Canberra's ability to carry out joint military exercises in Japan with the United States. It "goes a considerable way towards concretizing the forms that security cooperation between Japan and Australia could take", he told AFP. "China will likely cast it as further evidence that advanced industrial democracies seek to stymie its resurgence, although Beijing's own conduct in recent years has contributed considerably to its growing diplomatic estrangement from those countries," Wyne added. — AFP

## Rare Tokyo snow blankets shrines, cancels flights

TOKYO: Snow blanketed Tokyo yesterday as hours of flurries forced the cancellation of over 100 domestic flights and the weather agency issued the city's first heavy snow warning in four years. Residents held umbrellas and pushed their bicycles as large snowflakes began to settle, with the Japan Meteorological Agency saying up to 10 cm could fall over a 12-hour period.

The JMA issued a heavy snow alert for the Tokyo area for the first time since 2018, warning of potential disruption to traffic. The snow caused the cancellation of 66 departing and 53 arriving domestic flights at the Japanese capital's main airport Haneda, an airport official told AFP, but no international flights were cancelled. Some commuter trains in Tokyo were delayed due to heavy snow, JR East railway operator said on its website.

On Twitter, the weather agency warned residents that "caution for heavy snow is warranted" in central Tokyo. "Heavy snow warnings are being issued... The affected areas might be expanded. Please check the latest weather and traffic information!" At Sensoji Temple in central Tokyo, a popular tourist destination, some visitors dressed in traditional kimono and "geta" wooden sandals with split-toe

### News in brief

#### HK minister sent to quarantine

HONG KONG: A Hong Kong cabinet minister was sent to a quarantine camp yesterday after he was deemed a close contact of a preliminary coronavirus case at a large party attended by other government officials and lawmakers. Home affairs minister Caspar Tsui was among more than 100 guests at a birthday celebration on Monday evening that was also attended by city police chief Raymond Siu and head of immigration Au Ka-wang. Police chief Siu had left beforehand and officials said they were still trying to work out when Au left. — AFP

#### Taiwan troops simulate warfare

KAOHSIUNG, Taiwan: Taiwanese troops and armored vehicles were deployed yesterday for a mock urban street battle in the latest drill preparing forces against China, which has long vowed to take the island. Soldiers from two platoons faced off in a simulated battle, firing at each other from houses and sandbag barricades as tanks rolled down a street in a mock-up town complete with signs for pharmacies and beer brands. Urban warfare has become an increasingly key training subject for the military. — AFP

#### Japan seeks curbs on US troops

TOKYO: Japan's Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi urged his US counterpart yesterday to consider restricting American troop movement in the country after a surge in COVID cases on bases and surrounding communities. The request to US Secretary of State Antony Blinken comes as virus cases surge in Okinawa, which hosts most of the US forces in Japan and is now seeing a rise in community infections. The region's governor has blamed the rise in local cases on the clusters first seen among US troops. — AFP

socks walked past the landmark's red columns and golden bells as snowflakes fell.

The scene was more prosaic for commuters stuck navigating the rare weather event in the Ginza shopping and business district. "It's kind of unusual that it snows this much in Tokyo in January," Tokyo worker Keiichi Masuda, 37, said as he hurried home. "I need to be careful not to slip as I walk."

But others in the area were taking the time to soak up the unusual snowfall, including Tokyo resident Shigeko Nagahama, 73, who was taking pictures of the iconic Kabukiza Theatre. She stood alongside others enjoying the snow settling on the traditional architecture of the building that hosts kabuki performances. "It's a beautiful sight. The snow lends a quaint aura to it, I think," she said. — AFP



TOKYO: A woman walks through Hamacho Park as it snows yesterday. — AFP

# Business

FRIDAY, JANUARY 7, 2022

## New Nasser Al-Kharafi/Jassim Al-Bahar Trading Hall opens at Boursa Kuwait

State-of-the-art technologies donated by board members Al-Kharafi and Al-Bahar



Nasser Al-Kharafi/Jassem Al-Bahar Trading Hall opens at Boursa Kuwait — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Bader Al-Kharafi speaks to Minister Fahad Al-Shuraian.



Fahad Al-Shuraian, Ahmad Al-Melhem and Bader Al-Kharafi applaud.

Continued from Page 1

submitted by board members Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi and Talal Jassim Al-Bahar to donate the building's renovation costs. The board also approved renaming the hall after the late Nasser Al-Kharafi/Jassim Al-Bahar, as two of the most prominent and distinguished economic figures, who have left a clear imprint in business, and whose financial expertise and savvy led their expansion from a local and regional levels to an international level.

Commenting during the reopening ceremony of the Nasser Al-Kharafi/Jassim Al-Bahar Trading Hall, Minister of Commerce and Industry Fahad Mutlaq Al-Shuraian said: "Today, we stand in this historic trading hall, marking yet another milestone in the journey of this stock exchange. We take pride in the decision made to name this hall after the late Nasser Al-Kharafi and Jassim Al-Bahar, two titans of the financial scene in the country whose legacy continues to live on in their sons who are both Boursa Kuwait board members. I would like to extend my deepest thanks and gratitude to Mr Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi and Mr Talal Jassim Al-Bahar for their generous donation to the trading hall and contribution to the Kuwaiti capital market." The minister added that the new trading hall, which is equipped with the latest, state-of-the-art technologies that meet international accreditations and standards, will undoubtedly reflect positively on the performance of the capital market and further attract investors to it.

Board member Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi expressed his pride on the reopening of the trading hall and its new name, saying: "Boursa Kuwait has witnessed many developments and enhancements since the start of its privatization process, becoming an outstanding example of the competence of the Kuwaiti youth and their ability to develop a strong and efficient financial market with liquidity and transparency. This has undoubtedly made the Kuwaiti capital

market an attractive destination for investors worldwide and has led to the inclusion of Kuwaiti listed companies in internationally renowned index providers."

Al-Kharafi added, "Boursa Kuwait's iconic trading hall distinguishes it from its counterparts across the region as well as worldwide. Accordingly, the board of directors has approved plans to develop the building's facilities according to internationally accredited specifications to reflect the unique identity of our stock exchange, the oldest stock exchange in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). I would like to thank the board of directors and executive management for choosing this name for the trading hall."

Board member Talal Jassim Al-Bahar expressed his excitement on the occasion and said: "I would like to extend my sincere thanks to my fellow board members for choosing to name the hall after the late Nasser Al-Kharafi and Jassim Al-Bahar. The reopening of the trading hall comes as part of Boursa Kuwait's efforts to upgrade and improve its facili-

ties, exploring innovative solutions that meet market needs and expectations, in an effort to attract investors. The company continues its successes as a booming market moving at an accelerated pace towards the sustainability of the company, the Kuwaiti capital market and the national economy. We look forward to providing a qualitative experience for all Boursa participants, as well as local and foreign companies that wish to list."

Boursa Kuwait Chairman Hamad Meshari Al-Humaidhi also expressed his thanks and appreciation to Bader Al-Kharafi and Talal Al-Bahar, saying: "We are pleased to reopen the trading hall thanks to the generous donation of my fellow board members Mr Bader Al-Kharafi and Mr Talal Al-Bahar to renovate and update the facilities. We will continue to develop the rest of the premises to contribute to the company's sustainable operations, as well as taking confident steps towards achieving the company's vision and strategic goals to develop a credible and liquid financial market in accordance with international

standards that creates opportunities for issuers and investors to create diversified opportunities."

The old trading screens and tickers have been removed from the trading floor and other locations inside the building and on its facades, replaced with new energy-efficient full color LED video walls and ticker displays with the latest technologies, providing greater possibilities for broadcasting content and reducing energy consumption by more than 50 percent. Boursa Kuwait has also begun working with a specialized organization to manage the recycling of old equipment of over one thousand devices. The project also includes an upgrade to various utilities across the premises, such as the elevators, the escalators, and the heating ventilation and air condition systems (HVAC) and air diffusers. This upgrade will reduce energy consumption by more than 20 percent, reinforcing the company's position as a socially responsible institution.

The Boursa Kuwait revamp also features a designated "Ring the Bell" plat-

form, with a mechanical brass bell that has been manufactured specifically for the exchange and engraved with patterns inspired by the Kuwaiti Sadu traditional weaving. The platform is dedicated to corporate social responsibility (CSR) events to raise awareness on environmental and social causes in addition to listing events and other corporate proceedings. Overlooking the bell-ringing platform is a fully equipped media hall to cover CSR and media related events such as press conferences and televised interviews.

The auditorium and training hall are also undergoing renovations and will be equipped with the latest audio and video technology to host myriad training seminars and financial literacy programs, in collaboration with specialized local and international companies. This is in line with Boursa Kuwait's commitment to raising financial literacy and increasing capital market awareness in Kuwait as part of the education pillar of its corporate sustainability strategy and corresponds with goal 4 of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals of achieving inclusive and quality education for all.

Boursa Kuwait's corporate sustainability strategy stipulates ensuring initiatives apply and fall in line with the company's corporate social responsibility (CSR), industry best practice standards and investor expectations, creating strong and sustainable partnerships that ultimately achieve success and allow Boursa Kuwait to leverage the capabilities and strengths of other companies or organizations that have experience in different fields, and integrating sustainability efforts with the company culture, in order to achieve longevity and an ongoing impact that is carried on and instilled in the day-to-day operations of the stock exchange. As part of the strategy, Boursa Kuwait has launched many initiatives in partnership with local and international organizations, focusing on support for nongovernmental organizations and charity programs, financial literacy and capital market awareness, the empowerment of women, as well as environmental protection.



(From left) Mohamed Osaimi, Talal Al-Bahar, Hamad Al Humaidhi, Ahmad Al-Melhem, Fahad Al-Shuraian, Bader Al-Kharafi, Bader Al-Qattan, Abdullah Al-Terkait and Talal Bader Al-Bahar and Fahad Al-Rushaid pose during the ceremony.



# France hits Google, Facebook with huge fines over 'cookies'

## Google to change its practices following the ruling

PARIS: French regulators have hit Google and Facebook with 210 million euros (\$237 million) in fines over their use of "cookies", the data used to track users online, authorities said yesterday. US tech giants, including the likes of Apple and Amazon, have come under growing pressure over their businesses practices across Europe, where they have faced massive fines and plans to impose far-reaching EU rules on how they operate.

The 150-million-euro fine imposed on Google was a record by France's National Commission for Information Technology and Freedom (CNIL), beating a previous cookie-related fine of 100 million euros against the company in December 2020.

Facebook was handed a 60-million-euro fine. "CNIL has determined that the sites facebook.com, google.fr and (Google-owned) youtube.com do not allow users to refuse the use of cookies as simply as to accept them," the regulatory body said. The two platforms have three months to adapt their practices, after which France will impose fines of 100,000 euros per day, CNIL added. Google told AFP it would change its practices following the ruling. "In accordance with the expectations of internet users... we are

committed to implementing new changes, as well as to working actively with CNIL in response to its decision," the US firm said in a statement.

Cookies are little packets of data that are set up on a user's computer when they visit a website, allowing web browsers to save information about their session. They are highly valuable for Google and Facebook as ways to personalise advertising—their primary source of revenue.

But privacy advocates have long pushed back. Since the European Union passed a 2018 law on personal data, internet companies face stricter rules that oblige them to seek the direct consent of users before installing cookies on their computers.

### 90 notices issued

CNIL argued that Google, Facebook and YouTube make it very easy to consent to cookies via a single button, whereas rejecting the request requires several clicks.

It had given internet companies until April 2021 to adapt to the tighter privacy rules, warning that they would start facing sanctions after that date. French newspaper Le Figaro was the first to be sanctioned, receiving a fine of 50,000 euros in July for allowing cookies to be



LILLE, NORF, France: File photo shows the logos of mobile apps Facebook and Google displayed on a tablet in Lille, France. French regulators have hit Google and Facebook with 210 million euros (\$237 million) in fines over their use of "cookies". —AFP

installed by advertising partners without the direct approval of users, or even after they had rejected them.

CNIL said recently that it had sent 90 formal notices to websites since April. In 2020, it inflicted fines of 100 million and 35 million euros respec-

tively on Google and Amazon for their use of cookies. The fines were based on an earlier EU law, the General Data Protection Regulation, with CNIL arguing that the companies had failed to give "sufficiently clear" information to users about cookies. —AFP

## German industrial orders bounce back in November

FRANKFURT: German industrial orders rebounded in November after a sharp drop in October, official data showed yesterday, despite persistent shortages in raw materials and components weighing on the sector. The indicator, which gives a foretaste of industrial production, climbed by 3.7 percent in November over the previous month, having fallen by 5.8 percent in October, according to revised figures from the federal statistics agency Destatis.

The figures were a "positive impulse for the economic outlook", the economy ministry said in a statement, while noting that "economic activity continues to be hampered by supply bottlenecks". The country's flagship auto industry, which was plagued by shortages of key components throughout 2021, saw orders increase by seven percent in November, having experienced a 4.7 percent fall the month before.

Whether those orders could be filled promptly will depend on whether supply chain issues subside in the new year. The lack of semiconductors, a key part for both conventional and electric vehicles, pushed car sales in Germany to their lowest level since reunification in 1990, after a sharp drop in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Producers of other transportation modes, such as planes and boats, saw incoming orders grow by 32 percent on October pushed by a raft of major orders. International demand, which suffered particularly in October, increased by eight percent over the previous month.

Order growth from inside the eurozone was particularly strong, up 13.1 percent, while those from other countries rose five percent. Domestic orders meanwhile slipped 2.5 percent on the previous month, as the government imposed new health restrictions to tackle increasing numbers of coronavirus cases. —AFP

## Taiwan sets up \$200m fund for Lithuania after China row

VILNIUS: Taiwan said Wednesday it would set up a fund with \$200 million (176 million euros) to invest in Lithuania, as businesses there complain of losses from a China-Lithuania row.

Lithuania allowed Taiwan to open a representative office in Vilnius in November under its own name—a significant diplomatic departure that set off

a bitter dispute with China. "Taiwan is setting up an investment fund with an initial funding of 200 million US dollars to invest in Lithuanian industries which are strategic for both Lithuania and Taiwan," said Eric Huang, the head of the Taiwanese representative office in Lithuania. He said the investment was part of Taiwan's plan to develop economic ties with Lithuania following pressure from China. Huang said the fund would invest in semiconductor, laser, biotechnology and similar Lithuanian industries, with the first investments expected this year.

The Baltic EU state defied pressure from Beijing and allowed Taipei to open a de facto embassy. That prompted retaliation, Lithuanian business

leaders and officials say, in the form of blocked exports from Lithuania and other economic restrictions. A Taiwanese liquor company said this week that it has snapped up more than 20,000 bottles of Lithuanian rum that were blocked from China.

Huang said that 120 cargo containers that were affected had also been bought by Taiwan. The United States, which has been increasingly vocal in its concerns about Beijing, has also offered support to Lithuania. United States Trade Representative Katherine Tai, in a telephone call with Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis, promised cooperation to "address coercive diplomatic and economic behaviour," her office said. —AFP



شركة الصفاء للاستثمار  
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## KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 06 JANUARY 2022

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| No. | Ticker                    | Sector             | Price Movement & Performance |             |           |          |       |             |            |        |        |               | Valuation Multiples * |      |      |       |      |
|-----|---------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|-------------|-----------|----------|-------|-------------|------------|--------|--------|---------------|-----------------------|------|------|-------|------|
|     |                           |                    | Open Price                   | Close Price | Week High | Week Low | Range | Volume      | WTD Change | WTD %  | YTD %  | Support Level | Resistance Level      | P/E  | P/B  | Yield | Beta |
| 101 | National Bank of Kuwait   | Banking            | 999                          | 1014        | 1020      | 996      | 24    | 14,491,694  | 17         | 1.71%  | 1.71%  | 1012          | 1024                  | 21.9 | 2.12 | 1.9%  | 1.26 |
| 102 | Gulf Bank                 | Banking            | 279                          | 283         | 287       | 279      | 8     | 12,586,911  | 4          | 1.43%  | 1.43%  | 281           | 285                   | 22.7 | 1.32 | 1.7%  | 1.13 |
| 106 | Kuwait International Bank | Banking            | 219                          | 218         | 219       | 215      | 4     | 15,510,136  | 0          | 0.00%  | 0.00%  | 218           | 222                   | 76.6 | 0.95 | 0.0%  | 1.01 |
| 107 | Burgan Bank               | Banking            | 250                          | 267         | 267       | 249      | 18    | 13,567,220  | 16         | 6.37%  | 6.37%  | 256           | 274                   | 20.2 | 1.21 | 1.6%  | 1.05 |
| 108 | Kuwait Finance House      | Banking            | 832                          | 836         | 839       | 831      | 8     | 12,440,381  | 4          | 0.48%  | 0.48%  | 833           | 841                   | 32.8 | 3.66 | 1.1%  | 1.40 |
| 109 | Boubyan Bank              | Banking            | 797                          | 813         | 826       | 791      | 35    | 3,282,087   | 23         | 2.91%  | 2.91%  | 803           | 813                   | 60.0 | 4.69 | 0.0%  | 1.05 |
| 204 | National Investments      | Financial Services | 220                          | 232         | 234       | 218      | 16    | 111,347,033 | 13         | 5.94%  | 5.94%  | 227           | 237                   | 7.4  | 0.98 | 4.3%  | 1.25 |
| 205 | Kuwait Projects           | Financial Services | 143                          | 143         | 144       | 141      | 3     | 14,000,947  | 1          | 0.70%  | 0.70%  | 140           | 145                   | 32.6 | 1.77 | 2.6%  | 0.59 |
| 252 | Al Imtiaz Investment      | Financial Services | 119                          | 118         | 120       | 117      | 3     | 1,985,951   | 0          | 0.00%  | 0.00%  | 117           | 123                   | NM   | 0.72 | 0.0%  | 1.00 |
| 401 | Kuwait Real Estate        | Real Estate        | 179                          | 182         | 182       | 177      | 5     | 39,042,294  | 3          | 1.68%  | 1.68%  | 181           | 187                   | 28.1 | 1.32 | 0.0%  | 0.98 |
| 413 | Mabaneer                  | Real Estate        | 793                          | 798         | 799       | 775      | 24    | 3,699,352   | 5          | 0.63%  | 0.63%  | 798           | 814                   | 17.7 | 1.82 | 0.7%  | 1.10 |
| 501 | National Industries       | Financial Services | 284                          | 285         | 286       | 282      | 4     | 4,659,535   | 2          | 0.71%  | 0.71%  | 281           | 294                   | 5.6  | 1.03 | 0.0%  | 1.44 |
| 505 | Gulf Cable                | Industrials        | 882                          | 864         | 889       | 860      | 29    | 2,373,889   | -7         | -0.80% | -0.80% | 850           | 867                   | 30.5 | 0.88 | 5.8%  | 0.93 |
| 514 | Boubyan Petrochemical     | Basic Materials    | 858                          | 846         | 858       | 844      | 14    | 1,896,127   | -6         | -0.70% | -0.70% | 837           | 850                   | 24.0 | 1.99 | 6.3%  | 0.73 |
| 526 | Al Qurain                 | Basic Materials    | 350                          | 352         | 355       | 347      | 8     | 3,390,813   | 5          | 1.44%  | 1.44%  | 335           | 352                   | NM   | 0.96 | 4.3%  | 0.75 |
| 603 | Agility                   | Industrials        | 949                          | 950         | 959       | 942      | 17    | 5,113,684   | 5          | 0.53%  | 0.53%  | 935           | 955                   | 2.1  | 1.03 | 0.9%  | 1.48 |
| 605 | Zain                      | Telecommunications | 597                          | 597         | 601       | 596      | 5     | 9,715,022   | 2          | 0.34%  | 0.34%  | 593           | 599                   | 13.7 | 2.17 | 3.4%  | 1.34 |
| 623 | Human Soft Holding        | Industrials        | 3,224                        | 3,200       | 3,238     | 3,192    | 46    | 1,274,490   | -24        | -0.74% | -0.74% | 3200          | 3250                  | 7.0  | 3.49 | 12.4% | 0.49 |
| 642 | ALAFCO                    | Industrials        | 216                          | 214         | 218       | 213      | 5     | 3,152,988   | -4         | -1.83% | -1.83% | 212           | 222                   | NM   | 0.68 | 0.0%  | 0.88 |
| 818 | Ahli United Bank          | Banking            | 277                          | 273         | 278       | 272      | 6     | 47,791,948  | -5         | -1.80% | -1.80% | 269           | 277                   | 18.7 | 2.11 | 1.3%  | 1.15 |
| 821 | Warba Bank                | Banking            | 274                          | 271         | 274       | 267      | 7     | 8,702,831   | -3         | -1.09% | -1.09% | 268           | 275                   | 20.6 | 2.68 | 0.0%  | 1.00 |
| 823 | Mezzan Holding            | Consumer Staples   | 587                          | 585         | 588       | 584      | 4     | 638,520     | -4         | -0.68% | -0.68% | 579           | 600                   | 18.2 | 1.65 | 3.0%  | 0.43 |
| 824 | Integrated Holding        | Industrials        | 369                          | 369         | 370       | 366      | 4     | 414,063     | -1         | -0.27% | -0.27% | 368           | 371                   | NM   | 1.55 | 0.0%  | 0.48 |
| 826 | Shamal Az-Zour            | Utilities          | 228                          | 225         | 228       | 224      | 4     | 3,547,040   | -3         | -1.32% | -1.32% | 222           | 227                   | 19.1 | 3.99 | 4.0%  | 0.63 |
| 827 | Boursa Kuwait             | Financial Services | 2,020                        | 2,000       | 2,020     | 1,922    | 98    | 629,497     | -20        | -0.99% | -0.99% | 2000          | 2020                  | 25.6 | 7.11 | 2.0%  | 0.65 |

\* As of end of week closing

## Business

# 'No legal pathways': Myanmar poverty pushes thousands to Thailand

## Demand for Myanmar workers is high in Thailand

**BANGKOK:** Trekking through dense jungle and mountainous terrain at night to avoid arrest, one couple from Myanmar endured a gruelling journey to Thailand-grasping for an economic lifeline as jobs dry up in their coup-hit home. Myo Chit and his wife are among thousands of migrants who have made the crossing in recent months, spurred by the twin crises of a pandemic-hit economy and turmoil triggered by the junta's ousting of Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government.

Their two-day journey from Myanmar's coastal Tanintharyi Region took them through corn farms, rubber plantations and dense jungle before they reached the porous border, where they crossed into Thailand's Kanchanaburi province with the help of a smuggler.

There they risked arrest and immediate processing for deportation by Thai police. The couple then travelled to Samut Sakhon province near Bangkok, where Myanmar migrants have historically found work. But for undocumented migrants in Thailand, life under the radar is grim.

Many spend their nights in overcrowded housing, or in the homes of friends and relatives, and their days evading authorities. "But we could not stay (in our town)... we had to think about the future of our children," 45-year-old Myo Chit told AFP, using a pseudonym for fear of being tracked down by the Thai authorities.

He eventually secured the job he was desperate for at a clothing dye factory, earning \$10 a day. With a six-year-old child and an infant left in his in-laws' care in Myanmar, Myo Chit said leaving was difficult but had to be done. "We could not stay there because of high prices-we had to leave our village," he said. "We came here just to earn money."

### It is hard

Myanmar workers have long sought jobs in

neighbouring Thailand. Pre-pandemic, an estimated two million were living and working in the kingdom. With borders closed since March 2020, migrants have no choice but to make the journey illegally.

There is no official data on the size of the influx, but experts say one indicator is the number of migrants who have been caught by authorities. In the months after Myanmar's February 1 coup, the number of arrests tripled, according to Thai government figures.

It peaked in November with more than 6,000 migrants intercepted-more than a 10-fold increase from the 560 people arrested in January. According to Geraldine Ansart, the International Organization for Migration's Thailand mission chief, for each person arrested, "it is realistic to assume that... at least one other Myanmar national could cross the border without being apprehended".

Thai-based migrant rights activist Roisai Wongsuban said the spike in arrivals is due to Myanmar's post-coup economic crisis, which has seen inflation soar and work opportunities evaporate. With food prices doubling and fuel costs spiking as the value of the kyat, Myanmar's currency, plummeted against the US dollar, many people became destitute, she said.

"It is hard for ordinary people." Seasonal workers, who for years had travelled in and out of Thailand, were left in the lurch after COVID-spurred border closures. "The border has been closed for so long that there is no legal pathways for workers who want to come back to Thailand," Roisai added.

Thai army spokesman General Santipong Thammapiya said it was mainly Thailand's reopening to tourists in November that was drawing Myanmar workers back-many of whom staff the kingdom's vital industries, including the service and restaurant sector. "Workers... wanted to come back," he told AFP. "They also trust the Thai health-



**KANCHANABURI, Thailand:** File handout photo from the Royal Thai Army released on November 1, 2021, Myanmar migrants sit on the ground after being apprehended by Thai military personnel in Kanchanaburi province, bordering Myanmar. —AFP

care system, which can provide treatment for COVID."

### Zero tolerance

Demand for Myanmar workers is high in Thailand, where-given their status-they have no choice but to accept lower wages. According to the labour ministry, there is a shortage of up to 200,000 workers in Thailand. But according to Santipong, there is no tolerance in Bangkok for illegal migration, and those arrested making the

attempt are sent "for legal processing followed by... repatriation", he said.

Despite the obstacles, two people smugglers operating near Kanchanaburi province's Three Pagodas Pass border crossing told AFP business has been good. Prices to make the crossing range from 13,000 to 25,000 Thai baht (\$380 to \$750), and desperation drives thousands to pay. "Some are arrested, but there are even more people who are not," one smuggler told AFP on condition of anonymity. —AFP

## GM electric truck latest entrant in rich US pickup market

**NEW YORK:** General Motors launched its all-electric Chevrolet Silverado on Wednesday, formally entering a contest for the lucrative US pickup market against fellow Detroit giant Ford as well as Tesla and other electric vehicle upstarts. Mary Barra, chief executive of the Detroit automaker, unveiled the vehicle in a virtual appearance at the Consumer Electronics Show, giving a wide-ranging keynote speech that also highlighted GM's autonomous technology.

The GM announcement came a day after Ford said it would nearly double production capacity for the electric version of its top-selling F-150 pickup truck in the wake of soaring customer demand. Meanwhile, Chrysler, another iconic American auto brand and the other member of Detroit's "Big Three," said Wednesday it plans to transition to an all-electric fleet by 2028, while its sister Ram brand pursues its own EV pickup trucks.

Electric vehicles still comprise only about three percent of new vehicle sales, but more significant offerings from Detroit's Big Three are finally beginning to hit the market. "The industry has been promising an EV movement for a long time, but it finally seems like it's coming to fruition," said Jessica Caldwell, executive director of Insights at Edmunds.com.

"Automakers are no longer introducing quirky EVs with limited mass market appeal: they are rolling out thoughtfully designed vehicles with longer ranges as well as more trucks and SUVs."

### Cash cow

With lofty profit margins, pickups have been a proven cash cow for Detroit's Big Three, with enduring appeal to consumers drawn to an elevated driving platform and an image seen as rugged or independent. Pickup trucks also garner reliable demand from businesses such as construction and energy companies.

In 2021 the three top-selling cars in the United States were again pickups, with Ford's F-150 followed by the Ram Pickup and the Silverado. Startup Rivian has initiated commercial deliveries of its pickup truck. Tesla has also eyed the US pickup market, with Elon Musk unveiling a vehicle dubbed the "Cybertruck" with a space-age look.

The American EV market is still "up for grabs," Caldwell said. "In the US, we only expect market share for EVs to reach four percent in 2022, so no company is out of the running, including those who are late to the game," Caldwell said.

GM, which has announced a series of major EV investment drives over the last 18 months, began taking reservations for the 2024 Silverado at 1800 GMT. The first Silverados are expected to reach fleet customers in the spring of 2023, with vehicles for other consumers starting in the fall of that year.

That puts the Silverado on a somewhat later timeframe than Ford's F-150 Lightning, which is due to begin customer deliveries this spring. But GM's offering will come ahead of the EV pickup under Ram's target of 2024. A Ram spokesman said there are no details now on "reveal or reservation" timing. —AFP

## Omicron crashes cruise party

**LONDON:** A series of coronavirus outbreaks have cropped up on cruise ships in North and South America, Europe and Asia in recent days despite strict health measures, giving new headaches to the pandemic-hit sector.

Safety bubbles that include tests and vaccine requirements were set up to reassure travellers when cruise travel resumed last year following a long hiatus that was imposed as the world scrambled to contain the virus.

But cases have been piling up for days now in waters off Brazil, Italy, Spain, the Caribbean, the United States and India. Cruise line companies say they have taken science-based measures to protect passengers and note that the rates of infection on ships is lower than those on land-but authorities have not taken any chances.

Last week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) urged Americans to avoid cruise travel even if they are vaccinated after more than 5,000 cases were detected in US waters in the last two weeks of 2021. The United States is the sector's biggest market, accounting for nearly half of the 30.5 million passengers

worldwide before the pandemic in 2019, according to data from Roland Berger consultancy.

The Cruise Lines International Association said the CDC decision was "particularly perplexing" as the number of cases represent a "very slim minority" of the total population on board ships. "The majority of those cases are asymptomatic or mild in nature, posing little to no burden on medical resources onboard or onshore," it added.

"No setting can be immune from this virus-however, it is also the case that (the cruise industry) provides one of the highest levels of demonstrated mitigation against the virus," the association said, adding that its incidence rates are "significantly lower" than those on land. In Brazil, cruises were suspended until January 21 while the association of liners and authorities work out "differences" over health protocols following infections on ships on New Year's Eve.

Cruise trips had only resumed operating in November in Brazil. Brazilian health authorities are investigating reports of COVID protocol violations after local media reported that passengers aboard one ship broke quarantine to join a New Year's Eve party. In Europe, a cruise ship docked in the Italian port of Genoa this week to let 45 infected passengers disembark, while others who tested positive on board were isolated in cabins with balconies to be let off at later ports of call.



**Mijbil Al-Ayoub and Badrr Al-Thafeeri**

## Internal campaign held at Ooredoo Tower in association with MOH

**KUWAIT:** In continuation of its internal vaccination campaign launched in June last year 2021, Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, held a second campaign yesterday at the company's main headquarters (Ooredoo Tower) in Kuwait City for its employees to receive a COVID-19 booster shot 3 months after their second dose, and in association with the Ministry of Health (MOH).

The internal vaccination campaign was driven by Ooredoo's keenness to maintain a healthy work envi-

ronment that increases productivity and preserves public health, and ensure the safety of its employees who are the company's most valuable asset. Further, Ooredoo aims to maintain the community's welfare, through mobilizing all the needed resources and capabilities to assist the governmental bodies in the country in the battle against COVID-19.

Ooredoo was keen to organize the vaccination process for its employees from different departments within the company wishing to receive the COVID-19 vaccine booster shot, or the first vaccine shots for those who missed their appointments. Hence, the vaccination process was carried out within the highest standards of accuracy, in order to ensure the safety and comfort of all those who participated in the process, including workers in the Ministry of Health and employees.

In addition, The Ministry of Health's staff was pres-

ent to manage the COVID-19 vaccine shots in an effort to reinforce the immunity of the largest number of Ooredoo's employees. Ooredoo further expressed its appreciation and gratitude to the Ministry of Health officials, all front-line workers, and medical staff, for their quick response to Ooredoo's aspiration to hold the internal vaccination campaign, as well as their leadership in taking serious steps in saving the public's health and building a healthier and safer world.

Ooredoo Kuwait has always been a key contributor in supporting the public sector and governmental bodies in the initiatives that positively impacts the local community and enhance the nation's wellbeing.

It is worth noting that in its efforts to promote vaccination against COVID-19, Ooredoo Kuwait supported the governmental bodies in the country by providing them with the latest digital solutions and services, along with hundreds of smart devices.



**MIAMI, Florida:** Forrest Rogers, Anita Harvey and Jim Harvey (L-R) disembark from the Norwegian Pearl after it docked at Port Miami. —AFP

A trip on another ship from Spain to the Canary Islands was cut short, forcing some 3,000 passengers people to disembark in Lisbon following an outbreak. In India, more than 2,000 people travelling from Mumbai to Goa were prevented from disembarking after 66 cases were detected on board.

And in Hong Kong, Royal Caribbean's Spectrum of the Seas, a vessel carrying 3,700 people, was ordered back to port on Wednesday for testing after nine people were found to be close contacts in an Omicron variant outbreak.

### 'Severely penalised'

"There's a virus and what we have



**Ooredoo's vaccination campaign**

## Lifestyle | Features

## 'I AM NOT AN OBJECT,' SAYS FRENCH ARTIST'S BLUE WOMAN



Italy's Elena Palumbo-Mosca shows a picture in Yves Klein's book during an interview in Brussels on December 29, 2021.



Italian Elena Palumbo-Mosca poses with Yves Klein's book during an interview in Brussels. —AFP photos

For art aficionados, she's a Blue Woman featured in dozens of French artist Yves Klein's "Anthropometries"—conceptual paintings of nudes achieved by daubing models in blue paint and having them press their bodies on paper.

But Elena Palumbo-Mosca rejects being called Klein's "living paintbrush". She sees herself as an artistic "collaborator" who played a key part in the artist's famous oeuvre, which today sell for fortunes. "I am not an object, but a person who shared with Yves specific ideas and who helped him to create them out of friendship and out of curiosity," Palumbo-Mosca, who turns 87 on Friday, told AFP in her Brussels apartment.

The Italian muse did not earn money from sales of the "20 or 30" works to which she contributed. She spent three decades working as an interpreter for European Union institutions in

the Belgian capital. But her home is strewn with art. Her memories are too: a French Riviera stint as an au pair to a couple who were friends with Klein, then her youthful Paris student days she funded by working as a cabaret dancer.

**Mixed reception**

It was in February 1960 that Klein unveiled his conceptual art in his studio, using Palumbo-Mosca and other women. In March, she took part in his first public presentation, held in a Paris gallery, which critics described by using the term "living paintbrush", which she came to resent.

The invited audience, she said, was electrified by the performance during which Klein—dressed in a black dinner jacket, with a white bow tie and white gloves—directed his paint-slicked models. "Some tore out their hair. Others applauded," she recalled.

"It was clear that we were doing something that nobody had ever done," she said—not that she was able to linger long with the well-dressed crowd. "As soon as we'd finished our work, we went to wash ourselves off off-stage—the paint, after all, was toxic."

**Patented paint**

Klein had patented the ultramarine hue of the special thick paint he developed for his paintings, calling the mix of synthetic resin, matte and pigment "International Klein Blue" or IKB. The task of applying the paint was very physical, but Palumbo-Mosca was well prepared, having spent a childhood skiing and ice-skating, and having been a champion artistic diver as a teenager.

She also helped Klein as he embarked on his "Fire Painting" series, in which he used an industrial blowtorch to sear compositions onto com-

bustion-resistant cardboard at a testing centre owned by Gaz de France. Those works, Palumbo-Mosca said, were "a culmination of his thought—the divine expressed through water and fire corresponding to Japanese cosmogony", conceptions concerned with the origin of the universe.

Klein died in 1962 of a heart attack, just 34 years old. Today, his works—particularly his "Anthropometries"—can sell at auction for tens of millions of dollars. Sotheby's has described his oeuvre, "using the human body as an anthropomorphic brush", as having opened "a new frontier of painting". Klein broke apart the very definition of painting, radicalised the enduring art historical motif of the nude, and laid conceptual foundations that have continued to inform performance art to the present day," it said in notes accompanying an auction two years ago. —AFP



In this file photo taken on March 04, 2018 actress Rita Moreno arrives for the 90th Annual Academy Awards in Hollywood, California.



In this file photo taken on December 07, 2021 actress Rita Moreno arrives for the premiere of Steven Spielberg's "West Side Story" at the El Capitan Theatre in Los Angeles. —AFP photos

## 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 typecasting.

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 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 be 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. —AFP

## CHINESE SPY SPOOF DRAWS RARE RESPONSE FROM MI6 CHIEF

Britain's spy chief yesterday thanked China's state news agency for "free publicity" after it posted a spoof of James Bond that mocked the Western intelligence community's growing focus on threats posed by Beijing.

The rare response by MI6 head Richard Moore comes as China and Britain clash over Beijing's treatment of its Uyghur minority and creeping authoritarianism in the former British colony of Hong Kong. Moore—codenamed "C" within the agency—previously said adapting to China's rise was the spy service's "single greatest priority" and warned of Chinese "debt traps, data exposure and vulnerability to political coercion".

Debt traps refer to China extracting concessions such as the use of ports from countries that sign up to its soft-power infrastructure initiative when they default on loan repayments.

In a tongue-in-cheek Twitter post on Tuesday, state news agency Xinhua said it had uncovered "leaked video" of a "secret meeting" between British and American spies after Moore bumped Beijing higher on MI6's agenda.

The attached clip—titled "No Time to Die Laughing"—featured a pair of Chinese actors playing fictional British spies called "James Pond" and "Black Window".

In his Thursday response, Moore tweeted: "Thank you for your interest (and the unexpected free publicity!)" He posted a link to a speech he gave in November in which he said China sought to "exploit the open nature" of British society and "distort public discourse and political decision making across the globe".

In four and a half minutes of what Xinhua called "rib-tickling moments" filled with canned laughter, the elegantly dressed duo enter a castle and start discussing a dossier on Chinese espionage tactics, only to realise the papers actually refer to the United States.

Pond—codenamed "Agent 0.07"—then blasts the "fictional Chinese debt trap and data trap" as a "pathetic" excuse to get more funding for British intelligence.

In a call with an apparent CIA operative, Pond learns the US has tapped his mobile phone. He is warned not to buy a model made by sanctioned Chinese company Huawei due to a supposed "back-door", before being gifted a new phone by the CIA.

"To be America's enemy is dangerous," says the champagne-swilling Pond. "But to be America's friend is fatal."

Britain caused outrage in China last year after blocking the involvement of telecoms giant Huawei from involvement in its 5G broadband roll-out, after the US raised spying concerns. —AFP

## GRAMMYS POSTPONED, SUNDANCE GOES VIRTUAL OVER COVID

The organization behind the Grammys on Wednesday postponed the music awards gala scheduled for January 31 due to "uncertainty surrounding the Omicron variant" of COVID-19 that has ripped through the United States in recent weeks. Minutes later, the prestigious Sundance film festival—which was set to begin January 20 in Park City, Utah—announced it was shifting all of its premieres and events online, a move it deemed necessary "despite the most ambitious protocols."

In a statement, the Recording Academy said that "holding the show on January 31 simply contains too many risks," and it would announce a rescheduled date "soon." The heavily mutated Omicron variant, the most transmissible to date, accounted for around 95 percent of US cases in the week ending January 1.

The wave that began in December has cases running at nearly 500,000 a day in the United States, according to the latest CDC figures, with new hospitalizations also rising—though numbers of new deaths have remained largely flat, likely due in part to vaccine availability. The Omicron variant is also milder than previous variants, raising hopes the virus could be evolving into a relatively benign seasonal illness.

Still, the World Health Organization in Europe has sounded an ominous note of caution on Tuesday, warning the soaring infection rates could have the opposite effect. "The health and safety of those in our music community, the live audience, and the hundreds of people who work tirelessly to produce our show remains our top priority," the Recording Academy said in



File photo shows Winner of Best Rap Song and Best Rap Album Ludacris' trophy is seen in front of the Grammy logo at the 49th Grammy Awards in Los Angeles. —AFP

explaining its decision to postpone.

Sundance organizers echoed that sentiment: "While it is a deep loss to not have the in-person experience in Utah, we do not believe it is safe nor feasible to gather thousands of artists, audiences, employees, volunteers, and partners from around the world, for an eleven-day festival while overwhelmed communities are already struggling to provide essential services."

**Subdued spring season?**

Among the selected films at Sundance—the Robert Redford-founded indie festival—this year will be "jeenyuhus: A Kanye Trilogy," a documentary assembled from more than two decades of footage shot by West's long-time friend Clarence "Coodie" Simmons. And the 64th annual Grammys features a class of pop stalwarts and newcomers including Justin Bieber, Billie Eilish and Olivia Rodrigo leading the nominees, as Jon Batiste, the jazz and R&B artist and bandleader, garnered the most nominations with 11. Last spring's show was the first Grammys of the pandemic era, and saw organizers craft a more television-friendly, socially distanced cabaret-style show that was heavy on performances. Those awards were postponed to March 14 after the original date was dropped during last winter's deadly surge in coronavirus cases.

The 2022 edition was expected to see a return to the usual arena-style celebration at Los Angeles' Staples Center. But it appears the spring entertainment season might be muted over pandemic concerns yet again. The Golden Globes, set for January 9, had already planned a stripped-down affair with no audience or media. Organizers had cited health concerns regarding the decision to scrap the audience, but the move also came in the wake of an industry boycott over internal ethical collapses. The Oscars currently are still on for March 27. And after two years sans Coachella, the premiere California desert music event that kicks off the festival circuit is currently slated to begin April 15 with proof of vaccination or a negative test. —AFP

## BODY-MONITORING TECH TREND COMES WITH CONCERNS

A ring shimmers on display at the Consumer Electronics Show, but this is no mere piece of jewelry—it's packed with sensors capable of detecting body temperature, respiration and much more. Startups at the annual gadget extravaganza in Las Vegas touted technology-enhanced accessories designed to look fetching on the outside while scrutinizing what is happening on the inside of wearers.

"We want to democratize personal health," said Amaury Kosman, founder of the French startup that created the Circular Ring. While that goal was shared by an array of exhibitors, some experts worried a trend of ceaselessly tracking steps, time sitting, heart rate and more could bring risks of stress and addiction.

Circular Ring provides a wearer with a daily "energy score" based on the intensity of their activity, factoring in heart rate, body temperature, blood oxygen levels and other data, according to Kosman. "At night it continues, we track the phases of sleep, how long it takes you to fall asleep, if you are aligned with your circadian rhythm, etc.," he said of the ring, which will cost less than 300 euros (\$340) when it hits the market later this year.

"And in the morning it vibrates to wake you up at the right time." A mobile application synced to the ring is designed to make personalized lifestyle recommendations for improving health based on data gathered, according to the founder.

### High demand for wearables

Demand for body-tracking "wearables" is strong: CES organizers forecast that more than \$14 billion will be spent this year in a category that includes sports tech, health-monitoring devices, fitness activity trackers, connected exercise equipment and smartwatches.

That figure is more than double what was spent in the category in 2018. Growth has been driven by smart watches such as those made by powerhouses Apple and Samsung, as well as internet-linked sports gear—which boomed during the pandemic—and personal tracking devices.

Companies are also moving to fill a need for instruments that provide data that can be relied on as part of a pandemic-driven trend of remote health care. Swiss Biospectral taps into smartphone cameras to measure blood pressure when a finger is placed over a lens.

French Quantiq is developing algorithms that calculate heart rate, respiratory rate and blood pressure from "selfies." Meanwhile, Japanese startup Quantum Operation has designed a prototype bracelet that continuously measures the level of glucose in the blood. Diabetic patients would be spared needle jabs for frequent blood sugar tests.

Body-minding wearables can provide valuable health data, but some fear a "quantified self" trend is blurring the line between well-being and stressful obsession.

### Growing dependent?

South Korean firm Olive Healthcare displayed a "Bello" infrared scanner that analyzes stomach fat and suggests how to lose it, along with a "Fitto" device that assesses muscle mass and ways to increase it. Society needs to determine whether these kinds of tools solve problems or "give rise to new dependencies," contended German political scientist Nils-Eyk Zimmermann.

A danger is that the "digital self" generated by such technology does not match reality, reasoned Zimmermann, who blogs on the topic. He also saw danger in "game" features, such as rewards and peer competition that put pressure on users that may not be healthy.

Withings's US sales director Paul Buckley was confident people can handle health data made available from devices such as the Body Scan smart scale unveiled at CES by the French company.

"I don't think it's too much," Buckley said as he showed off the scale capable of performing electrocardiograms and analyzing body composition. "You're able to be more informed about what is going on in your body." —AFP



Jungwoo Shin poses in the Hutech Industries Co. KAI GTS9 Massage Chair featuring real 3D art motion and four-channel sonic vibration massage at CES 2022 at The Venetian Las Vegas.



The Y-Brush, an electric toothbrush to clean teeth in only 10 seconds, is displayed during ShowStoppers on the sidelines of the Consumer Electronics Show (CES).

# ROBOT TRACTORS MAY BE HEADING TO A FARM NEAR YOU

Driverless plows and autonomous tools to weed vegetable plots are the latest innovations ready to help farmers juggling labor shortages, climate change and environmental protection, while trying to feed a growing world population.

Venerable American farm equipment manufacturer John Deere and French agricultural robot start-up Naio debuted their latest innovations at the Consumer Electronics Show, which began Wednesday in Las Vegas.

Touted as a means to feed the world, John Deere combined its popular 8R tractor, a plow, GPS and 360-degree cameras to create a machine a farmer can control from a smartphone. Once the tractor is driven into the field, the farmer can simply swipe right to send it on its way, with no need to be in the cab.

Equipped with six pairs of cameras and artificial intelligence capabilities, the equipment constantly checks its position to the inch, and stops automatically as soon as it perceives an obstacle and sends a warning signal. The autonomous plow will be available in North America this year, John Deere Chief Technology Officer Jahmy Hindman told AFP.

Other versions to seed or fertilize fields will come later, but combines to harvest crops are more complicated. The company has not yet specified the price for the equipment. Technology is not new to the agriculture industry.

For nearly 20 years, farmers have used GPS to aid steering, allowing them to plow straighter than a human.

"The customers are probably more ready for autonomy in agriculture than just about anywhere else because they've been exposed to really sophisticated and high levels of automation for a very long time," Hindman said.

Other major farm equipment manufacturers are working on similar tractors. American company New Holland presented a concept machine in 2016, while Japan's Kubota in 2020 unveiled a prototype that even eliminates the cab.

### Repetitive tasks

Machines to automate farm tasks, including mechanical milking machines for dairy farms, generally improve productivity while freeing farmers from repetitive and physically demanding tasks. Gaetan Severac and Aymeric Barthes launched Naio in 2011 after discussing the problems farms faced finding workers.

And they realized that robots, guided by centimeter-accurate GPS, could limit the use of chemicals. At the Las Vegas tech show, they introduced the American market to Ted, a robot that can step over vines to weed around plants, and turn around on its own at the end of a row.

They also have a little "farm assistant" called Oz that can hoe, weed, or furrow, as well as a dedicated row crop weeding robot, Dino. All are

equipped with sensors, lasers, cameras or probes, allowing the robot to understand its environment, as well as collect data useful to the operator. Farmers "no longer consider us as a gadget for the future," Severac told AFP. He said it's likely the use of autonomous machines will first gain ground in specialized crops, with very high added value and requiring the most work, such as vegetables or vines, before moving to large cereal crops.

Artificial intelligence, machine learning, drones and even satellites all contribute to the move towards automating farm work, and the agricultural sector accounts for a quarter of the revenues of satellite imagery company Planet Labs.

"You can see the chlorophyll content in the sensors that we use that take pictures," company co-founder Robbie Schingler told AFP. That allows a farmer to determine the health of a crop and possibly to add water or fertilizers. Barrett Hill, 36, a poultry farmer in Illinois, is not surprised by the array of new technologies.

"Adding computers and stuff like that make the whole operation more efficient," he said, pointing to centralized management of ventilation in his henhouses or a system that avoids planting twice in the same place. However, he is not sure driverless tractors are right for his family farm. "I'm sure that's really expensive. And I kind of want to be out there doing it," he said. —AFP



The Serenio by Shycocan COVID-19 virus neutralizer is displayed during ShowStoppers on the sidelines of the Consumer Electronics Show (CES).



An attendee demonstrates the Owo vest, which allows users to feel physical sensations during metaverse experiences such as virtual reality games, including wind, gunfire or punching, at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES).

## CREEPY MEETS COOL IN HUMANOID ROBOTS AT CES TECH SHOW

A lifelike, child-size doll writhed and cried before slightly shocked onlookers snapping smartphone pictures Wednesday at the CES tech show — where the line between cool and slightly disturbing robots can be thin.

"Oh! The eyes are very scary," said Marcelo Humerez, an exhibitor from Peru who happened upon the Pedia-Roid, which is designed for medical training, as its eyes went white. But just a few stands away, a humanoid named Ameca got a decidedly different reception, as it chatted with a curious crowd that marveled at its ability to make a range of stunningly person-like gestures.

"Whoa, robot! I didn't expect that when I turned the corner," said Ricky Rivera, an exhibitor with Canada-based tech company Geotab. "But it looks amazing and it tracked me right away." Both reactions were, in some ways, exactly what the makers had been aiming for.

Morgan Roe from Britain-based Engineered Arts said the firm created software and technology to make Ameca person-like — though there are limits to how realistic it can be. "We've designed Ameca to be as human-like as possible in movement," he told AFP while standing next to the robot, whose gray face moved and blinked as he spoke.

"Humans are so complex, so making a robot exactly like a human is almost impossible," he added. "But if we did that, then you wouldn't be scared of it because you would

just assume it was a human."

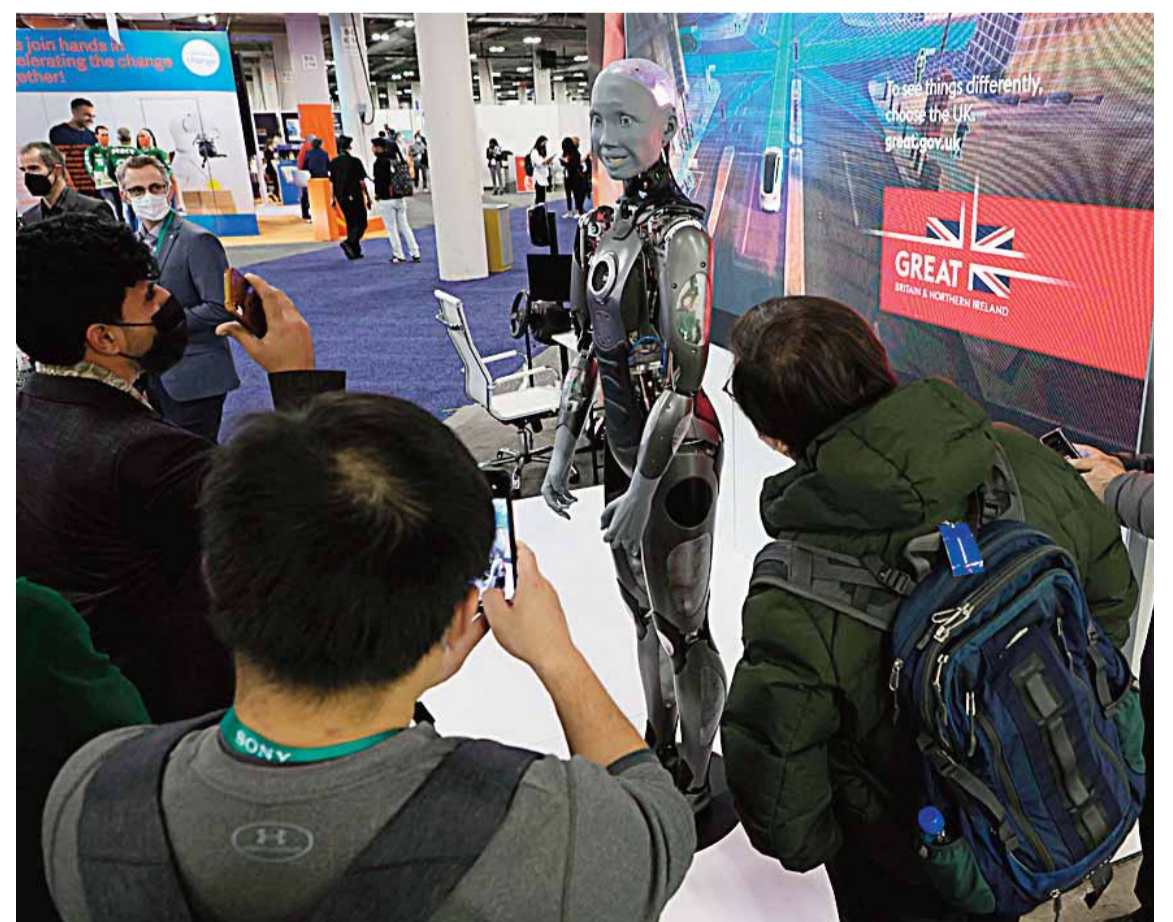
### 'A little bit creepy'

Just before perfection, though, is a creation that is off in ways that reveal it isn't a living being — it's a concept called "the uncanny valley." "It doesn't quite move like a human, it doesn't quite express itself or emote or talk like a human. That's the uncanny valley, that's the scary bit," said Roe.

Yet the slightly frightening aspect of the Pedia-Roid robot was done on purpose, said Yusuke Ishii from Japanese firm tmsuk, which was displaying the doll. "We want to create a realistic scenario, so that's the reason we added some of the scary noises, so it will behave like a child," he said through a translator.

The firm's brochure notes the robot can "realistically simulate the jittery movements of a child who is reluctant to receive treatment." At times, the roughly 43-inch (110-centimeter) tall robot moaned and talked, and its legs jerked — though it can also simulate convulsions or the vomiting reflex.

Ana Kloar, an exhibitor from Slovenia, watched the Pedia-Roid for a bit and found it pretty cool. "A lot of children are afraid of dentists or doctors in general, and in this way you can practice how to treat them, how to comfort them," she said. And what about those eyes — rolling back into the doll's head or turning white? "They are a little bit creepy, but the doll, it's quite cool," she said. —AFP



Attendees look at an Ameca model humanoid robot by British company Engineered Arts at CES 2022 at The Venetian Las Vegas. Ameca was designed as a research platform for human-robot interaction. —AFP photos

Lifestyle | Features

## Cheryl does her own cleaning

The 'Fight For This Love' singer - who has four-year-old son Bear with former partner Liam Payne - admitted she doesn't exercise regularly anymore because it's hard to find the time between caring for her son, working, and tackling her chores in the house. She told Women's Health UK magazine: "Exercise isn't top of my priority list at the moment - I haven't done anything regularly for over a year - but I recently bought a Peloton spin bike. I've used it a few times and I enjoy it, especially with the music. But when you're a mum, the day floats away, so I don't get to use it that often. "After dropping Bear off at nursery, I do my work calls and housework, and then it's time to pick him up!" The 38-year-old star admitted her approach to life changed completely when she had her son because she no longer worries about "silly stuff". She said: "My approach to life and the world changed when I became a mother to Bear. I have a completely different perspective now that I'm responsible for another human. I care less about silly stuff and more about the important things in life, like Bear's health and happiness." As well as Bear, meditation has also changed Cheryl's life for the better.



## Oliver Hudson admitted Kurt Russell 'was not a happy dad'

The 'Cleaning Lady' star reminisced about the time he dealt with law enforcement after "doing dumb things" with paintball guns when he was just 16 years old and told how he had to work hard to persuade police that the 'Escape From L.A.' actor - who has been in a relationship with Oliver's mother Goldie Hawn for 38 years - really was his next of kin. Speaking on 'Live With Kelly and Ryan', he said: "I did get arrested when I was 16 years old. It was a crazy story 'cause they had to call the parents, and they said, 'What's your dad's name?' and I said, 'Oh my God, Kurt Russell.' "They're like, 'No, kid, what's your dad's name?' And I said, 'It's Kurt Russell.' "They started fighting over who was gonna make the phone call. It was crazy." Host Kelly Ripa then quizzed her guest as to how the 70-year-old star had reacted. She asked: "When Kurt gets that phone call, is he upset or is he understanding? Is he the Kurt I fantasize that he is?"



## Michelle Heaton's husband feared she'd end up dead

The 42-year-old singer sought help for alcoholism in April 2021 when her health hit rock bottom and Hugh Hanley admitted that, although standing by her was difficult, he feared the worst if he walked away with their two children, Faith, nine, and seven-year-old AJ. He said: "At the start of last year, I didn't know if Michelle could survive. Her body was shutting down and she was drinking more than ever. "We were heading to a final outcome because everyone was at breaking point. "She was choosing darkness and I was trying to deal with the chaos of her spiralling and worrying about where it was going to end for her, me and the kids... "There was a desire to make sure the kids didn't grow up without a mum. "I knew if I left, Michelle wouldn't have made it much longer. I was very aware that I was there to help keep her alive." Michelle was hos-

pitalised and put on a drip one day in December 2020 but even stark warnings from her doctor and a pancreas and liver specialist couldn't stop the Liberty X star from drinking, much to her husband's frustration. Hugh told The Sun newspaper: "Hearing two senior doctors say your wife is going to die and then watching her go home and continue to drink, just felt like I was banging my head against a brick wall. "I'd ask, 'What is it going to take for you to realise how bad this is?' But she wasn't taking it on board." Michelle - who was drinking two bottles of wine and a bottle of vodka a day at her lowest point - added: "I did try to stop. I really did. I'd have a couple of good days and when I say good days, I don't mean sober days. "But I just couldn't stop. Now I understand addiction, I know this is a disease and it can happen to anyone."



## Mike Tindall feels 'mentally better' when he exercises

The 43-year-old former rugby star - who has children Mia, seven, Lena, three, and Lucas, nine months, with wife Zara - admitted he doesn't find as much time to work out as he used to because of his hectic family life, but he's looking forward to getting back in training for the Doddie Aid Motor Neuron Disease fundraising initiative this month, as well as some charity bike rides to raise money for research into Parkinson's disease. Asked his goals for 2022 on his 'The Good, The Bad, and The Rugby' podcast, he said: "Obviously Doddie Aid is starting in January so that's get on your bikes, get on your walkers, horses, whatever, get some exercise done. Might use that to drop as I scaled in at just over 108 kilos. "There's a plan for a few Parkinson's rides later on this year so I need to get into a little bit of bike shape but since the young man's come along, time disappears, which I'm noticing a lot more when you've got three children so..." Co-host Alex Payne asked: "Upping the exercise?" Mike replied: "Yeah because it makes me mentally feel better too." Mike has been patron of Cure Parkinson's since 2018 and has taken part in a number of cycling and running challenges for the charity. His father Philip was diagnosed with the degenerative condition in 2003 and the sportsman reflected last year on how his dad now "struggles" with everyday tasks.



## Kate Moss thinks that being in love makes her 'feel beautiful'

The 47-year-old supermodel - who has been in a relationship with photographer Nikolai von Bismarck, 35, since 2015 and has daughter Lila, 19, from a previous relationship with Jefferson Hack - spoke out about how the prospect of "being in love" and spending time with family leaves her feeling at her most beautiful. She said: "Being in love makes me feel beautiful. My daughter Lila inspires me to be the best person I can be and my favourite moments are, when all the family are sitting down together having lunch on a sunny Sunday afternoon in the country." Kate's sentiments come as she has collaborated with acclaimed make-up artist and long-time friend Charlotte Tilbury to launch the Charlotte Tilbury Beautiful Skin Foundation, and has been trying the products "in secret" in the run up to release day (06.01.2022). The star was quick to praise the foundation - which aims to remove blemishes yet create "real looking" skin with ingredients such as rose complex and hyaluronic acid to bixa orellana seeds - as a confidence boost. She told Vogue: "It's so easy to use yourself, it makes me feel my most beautiful, confident self, every day." In a statement Charlotte said: "I've known Kate since the very beginning of my career - we met for the first time both aged 19, on a Dazed shoot in the '90s, and have been friends ever since. Kate supported me from the start of my journey from make-up artist to beauty entrepreneur and is always one of the first to try my products before they launch. Kate has been trialling my Beautiful Skin Foundation in secret for a long time now and loves it, so it was the perfect opportunity for us to work together."



## Chloe x Halle comfortable in their own bodies

The R&B duo - which consists of sisters Chloe Bailey, 23, and Halle Bailey, 21 - admitted that although



they like to "take risks" with their outfit choices, they also like to "always be comfortable." Chloe said: "I think we're learning that we should always be comfortable no matter what we wear. But sometimes, even I forget that and will be like, 'I'll just wear it for a few minutes if it's cute. It's also about taking risks and making mistakes, or even great decisions, sometimes." Her thoughts were echoed by Halle, who believes that the pair of them are just trying to "embrace their skin from the inside out." Speaking to Harper's Bazaar, she explained: "We're just trying to embrace our skin from the inside out. As I get older, I'm becoming more comfortable in my body and learning to embrace it." The hitmakers - who were propelled to fame after superstar Beyonce spotted them on YouTube and signed them to her label - were speaking out while promoting their latest project, which sees them collaborate with lingerie company Victoria's Secret to design their own line. The 'Grown-ish' stars have designed pieces of a "cosy" and "comfortable" nature, which aim to reflect their busy lifestyles. Halle went on to gush about how it feels to work with a brand she feels is "empowering." She said: "To be associated with [a brand] that just really empowers you as a woman and makes you feel good about yourself is something that we really appreciate," Halle says about the partnership. "It really aligns with our values-collectively trying to make women feel good."



## Jennifer Lawrence is obsessed with TikTok

The 'Don't Look Up' star - who is expecting her first child with husband Cooke Maroney - hates the fact she is hooked on the video-sharing social media platform but ruled out making her own dance trends on the app, or even participating in them. In a questionnaire segment on 'The Late Show with Stephen Colbert' filmed in December but broadcast this week, the 31-year-old actress was asked what is the "most used app on your phone?" and sheepishly replied: "Oh god, I hate the answer, but Tik Tok." Stephen then asked: "Do you do the Tik Tok?" She answered: "No, I don't make Tik Toks," to which Stephen said: "Why not?" and wondered why when the Academy Award winner gave a definite "No." He told her: "People would watch," to which Jennifer acknowledged, saying "I know". The 'American Hustle' star also revealed she couldn't pick a favourite between cats and dogs as she "couldn't choose between God's babies" and that if she could only listen to one song for the real of her life, it would be 'Holding on to You' by country singer Miranda Lambert. The 'X-Men: First Class' actress was less decisive about what animal she was most afraid of. This came after Stephen asked the 'Silver Linings Playbook' star: "What's the scariest animal?" She instantly fired out: "Mongoose," to which Stephen probed her for more reasoning, asking her what she found so frightening about the tiny little critter. Jennifer gave it another go, offering up "honey badger," which the host conceded are "tough" before then suggesting a shark. She said: "I think a shark is the scariest." Stephen told her she "was all over the place" with her answers. The 'Red Sparrow' star went on to give further reasoning for answer, saying she had previous experience with the sea mammal. Jennifer said: "I went diving in a shark cage one time and then I tried to to duck jump out of the shark cage because there was jellyfish in the shark cage." —Bang Showbiz

## Sports

# Melbourne 'maggot-fame hotel' at the centre of Djokovic vaccine saga

## Nine-time Australian Open champion stripped of entry visa

**MELBOURNE:** He is the tennis world number one with more than \$150 million in prize money to his name - but this year Melbourne is reportedly putting Novak Djokovic up in a hotel best known for immigrant detentions and maggot-ridden food. The nine-time Australian Open champion has been stripped of his entry visa by border control agents for failing to give enough evidence that he is fully vaccinated against COVID-19 or has a valid medical exemption.

While he launches a legal battle to overturn the visa decision and defend his title in a tournament barely 10 days away, the 34-year-old Serbian is widely reported to be lodged in the city's Park Hotel. The dark-brown brick and concrete building is a far cry from the residence Djokovic enjoyed last year, when tough COVID-19 restrictions forced players to exercise in their hotel rooms and balconies while in quarantine.

Then, Djokovic reportedly sent a letter to Tennis Australia complaining about the luxury hotel's conditions and demanding players stay in private homes with tennis courts and better food. This year, he is believed to be in an establishment housing around 32 detainees who cannot leave the hotel and nobody is allowed in or out except staff. Migrants say the rooms are relatively small.

Australia's border control authorities have refused to confirm where the player is staying. The Park Hotel gained notoriety last December when a fire in the building forced refugees and asylum seekers to be evacuated. One person was hospitalized for smoke inhalation. There were no fatalities. A week later, asylum seekers posted images to social media showing

food they had been served allegedly filled with maggots alongside mouldy pieces of bread. Earlier, in October, 21 men reportedly contracted COVID in the facility, which has been the site of regular protests.

### 'So sad'

Detainee Mehdi Ali told AFP, that although Djokovic is his favorite tennis player, he was saddened by the prospect of the star being detained there. "The media will talk about us more, the whole world probably, which is so sad, just because Djokovic would be here for a few days." Nearly 180 people have been released from detention in the Park Hotel in the past year.

Most of those remaining are said to have been brought into Australia for medical attention from their offshore detention in the tiny Pacific island of Nauru and in Papua New Guinea's Manus Island. In a prior life, it was known as the Rydges hotel and served in 2020 as a COVID-19 quarantine hotel. It was blamed for being the source of a wave of infections in the city.

As Djokovic waited in his temporary new home for news of his legal battle, a crowd of a few dozen fans gathered in a nearby park playing music and protesting his detention. "Do you know how I'm feeling? I'm feeling sad," said Gordana, a female Djokovic supporter. "And feeling that I lost part of my heart because of Djokovic. Djokovic is (like my) son." Outside the building, a score of activists protested against Australia's strict immigration policies introduced to stop people from gaining entry by boat. Police stood nearby.

A banner hanging from the building's awning



**MELBOURNE:** Members of the local Serbian community gather for a vigil outside a hotel where Serbia's tennis champion Novak Djokovic is reported to be staying in Melbourne, after Australia said it had cancelled Djokovic's entry visa after having failed to 'provide appropriate evidence' of double vaccination or a medical exemption. —AFP

read: "Abolish detention centers." Others gathered to protest the restrictions they have endured to constrain COVID-19, as well as seeking other freedoms. "I'm here on behalf of all the people that are fighting for freedom whether it's for refugees,

whether it's Novak whether it's the people in general, the public, well over these mandates who are sick and tired of being restricted," said Ryan Guszich. "And freedom in general. And, you know, it's our body our choice." — AFP

## Five Djokovic's controversies

**MELBOURNE:** Hailed as one of the greatest tennis players of all time, Novak Djokovic is at the centre of a new storm after gaining a controversial exemption from having a COVID-19 vaccine in order to take part in the Australian Open. On arriving in Melbourne on Wednesday, the 34-year-old was unable to immediately enter the country after a dispute arose over his paperwork. AFP Sport looks at incidents that have dogged the career of the world number one and 20-time Grand Slam title winner:

### US Open default

Djokovic saw his 2020 US Open title hopes dashed when he was sensationally disqualified from his last-16 match against Pablo Carreno Busta after accidentally hitting a female line judge in the throat with a ball. The Serb had lashed out in frustration after dropping serve in a match played on an empty Arthur Ashe Court where fans were banned due to the pandemic. "This whole situation has left me really sad and empty," Djokovic said in a statement. "I checked on the linesperson and the tournament told me that thank God she is feeling OK. I'm extremely sorry to have caused her such stress. So unintended. So wrong."

### COVID tour

In the midst of the pandemic in 2020, and with professional tennis shut down, Djokovic organized the Adria Tour, a series of exhibition events in the Balkans. However, the tournament was abandoned in Zadar in Croatia after Bulgarian player Grigor Dimitrov tested positive for coronavirus. Djokovic and his wife Jelena as well as fellow players Viktor Troicki and Borna Coric also went on to reveal positive tests. The players were also heavily criticized for dancing and embracing at a nightclub.

### Tone deaf?

When Djokovic arrived in Melbourne for the 2021 Australian Open, he whipped up another storm for issuing a list of requests that reportedly included players being given private homes with tennis courts. "Djokovic is a tool," firebrand Aussie player Nick Kyrgios tweeted in response.

### Pain barriers

Djokovic has long faced accusations that he exaggerates injuries in matches. At the 2008 US Open, he took two medical timeouts in a gruelling five-set win over Tommy Robredo. Quarter-final opponent Andy Roddick then mockingly listed Djokovic's injuries to include "two hurt ankles, bird flu and SARS!" Djokovic defeated the American and hit back in his post-match, on-court interview. "Well, obviously Andy was saying I had 16 injuries last match... and obviously I don't," he said.

At the 2020 French Open, vanquished quarter-final rival Carreno Busta was dismayed to see the trainer called to tend to the Serb. "Every time a match gets complicated he asks for medical assistance," said the Spaniard. At the 2021 Australian Open, American player Taylor Fritz was equally scathing after Djokovic needed five sets to win their third-round clash. Djokovic said he was suffering an abdominal strain. "If he was really, really injured, he wouldn't have kept playing," said Fritz. Djokovic went on to claim a ninth Australian Open title.

### Water way to go

Djokovic came under fire when he claimed it was possible to alter the composition of water and food through positive thinking. In an online exchange with 'wellness guru' Chervin Jafarieh, the world number one said: "I've seen people and I know some people that through energetical transformation, through the power of prayer, through the power of gratitude, they manage to turn the most toxic food or the most polluted water, into the most healing water." — AFP



**KUWAIT:** The first round of the URC Futsal league semifinals will start on Sunday and will be the best of three matches. There will be two matches between Kuwait and Salwa Al-Sabah clubs and the second will be between Arabi and Fatat.



**MELBOURNE:** Naomi Osaka of Japan shakes hands with Marnya Zanevska (left) of Belgium after beating her in their singles match at the Melbourne Summer Set tennis tournament yesterday. — AFP

## Osaka in cruise control to reach Melbourne quarters

**MELBOURNE:** Japanese tennis star Naomi Osaka cruised into the quarter-finals of the Melbourne Summer Set tournament with a 58-minute demolition of Belgium's Marnya Zanevska yesterday. Top-seeded Osaka broke her Belgian opponent twice in the first set and three times in the second as she overpowered Zanevska 6-1, 6-1 on Rod Laver Arena to continue her Australian Open preparations, where she will be the defending champion. Osaka, playing her first tournament since the US Open in September, was strong in every department as she booked a quarter-final clash with German veteran Andrea Petkovic.

The four-time Grand Slam champion pulled out of all tennis after losing in the third round of the US Open. She had earlier withdrawn from both the

French Open and Wimbledon, citing mental health issues. Osaka did play in the Tokyo Olympics in front of her home crowd but suffered a shock third-round defeat to Czech Marketa Vondrousova. After defeating Frenchwoman Alize Cornet in three sets in the first round at Melbourne, Osaka said she aimed to enjoy herself on her return to the court.

She appeared to be in high spirits against the 82nd ranked Belgian, who has spent most of her career playing on the secondary ITF tour. "I did get a lot of nerves out in the first match (against Cornet), but I was nervous again today, but just because I've never played her before, so it was a bit unfamiliar," Osaka said. "I thought that I learned a lot from my match on Tuesday, so I'm really glad that I was able to apply it, and I think my biggest thing was my first serve percentage. "I'm really happy with how that went today."

Osaka raced through the first set in only 28 minutes and took just five minutes longer to win the second against her outclassed opponent. Second seed Simona Halep was also untroubled in her second-round match, beating fellow Romanian Elena-Gabriela Ruse 6-2-6-1. Halep, like Osaka a former



**MELBOURNE:** Naomi Osaka of Japan shakes hands with Marnya Zanevska (left) of Belgium after beating her in their singles match at the Melbourne Summer Set tennis tournament yesterday. — AFP

world number one, took just 61 minutes to see off Ruse and book a quarter-final against Viktorija Golubic. The sixth-seeded Swiss player was impressive in her 6-3, 6-0 win over Dutchwoman Lesley Pattinama Kerkhove. — AFP

## Dakar Rally blast driver Boutron out of coma

**PARIS:** French driver Philippe Boutron, seriously injured in a blast being investigated as a suspected terror attack on December 30 in Saudi Arabia days before the start of the Dakar Rally, has emerged from a coma, his son said yesterday. Benoit Boutron said his father still has a long way to go as he has serious leg injuries even after undergoing surgery in Saudi Arabia prior to being repatriated.

## How Djokovic absence could impact the Australian Open

**MELBOURNE:** Novak Djokovic's hopes of winning a 10th Australian Open were in tatters Thursday after he had his visa cancelled upon arrival in Melbourne. AFP Sport examines the implications for the tournament if Djokovic is unable to take part when the first Grand Slam of the year begins on January 17.

French prosecutors opened a terror probe over the incident on Tuesday with 61-year-old Boutron the sole member of the five occupants injured. "He is seriously injured, he has though emerged from his coma," Benoit Boutron told French channel RMC. "The positive thing is that along with other members of the family we can visit him on a daily basis."

"Both his legs are badly injured and we will know more in the coming days. "We were able to see him, we can talk to him, for the moment though it is limited. "He needs time to recover but things are progressing little by little." Dakar organizers had said that the incident was not related to racing while Saudi authorities had indicated there was no criminal suspicion over the explosion. But France's foreign ministry then

### No 10th title

World number one Djokovic would have been chasing a 10th title at Melbourne Park and a record 21st Grand Slam crown. The 34-year-old Serb was Australian Open champion in 2008, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2019, 2020 and 2021. His hopes of another title in 2022 were derailed on a night of drama at Melbourne airport when he was barred from entering Australia and his visa was cancelled. The Serb landed Wednesday night after celebrating on social media that he had a medical exemption to play in the tournament without proof he was fully vaccinated against COVID-19. The vaccine exemption, which can only be granted after clearance by two medical panels, sparked fury among Australians

who have endured COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions for two years.

### Opportunity knocks for Nadal?

With no Djokovic, the romantics of the sport will dream of Rafael Nadal instead winning a 21st Slam and adding to his sole victory in Australia in 2009. The 35-year-old Spaniard is level on 20 Grand Slam titles with Djokovic and Roger Federer. Nadal arrives in Australia having been laid low by COVID-19 at the back end of last year and having sat out Wimbledon and the US Open in 2021 because of a foot injury. Six-time Australian Open winner Federer is missing as the 40-year-old battles to recover from a knee injury. — AFP

Sports

# Chelsea take control; Spurs splutter in League Cup semi

## Liverpool's semi-final first leg deferred over COVID

LONDON: Thomas Tuchel warned Chelsea their League Cup semi-final against Tottenham is not over yet after they took control of the tie with a 2-0 first leg win on Wednesday. Tuchel's side are within touching distance of a first League Cup final appearance since 2019 after brushing aside Tottenham at Stamford Bridge.

Kai Havertz put Chelsea ahead with a deflected strike before Ben Davies's farcical own goal increased their lead before half-time. Although Chelsea were unable to completely kill off their London rivals, they head to Tottenham for the second leg on January 12 as firm favorites to reach the final against Liverpool or Arsenal. Liverpool's semi-final first leg, scheduled for yesterday, has been postponed until next week after a significant coronavirus outbreak among Jurgen Klopp's squad.

Chelsea's victory was their first in three games, building on their spirited fightback from two goals down to draw 2-2 against Liverpool on Sunday. "It seems like a deserved win, an excellent result because it reflects the game. We could have scored more but it is hard to score against Tottenham," Tuchel said. "We did create a lot, some huge chances. The up-side is everybody knows it is going to be a tough match in the second leg. It's not decided yet."

With Romelu Lukaku back in the fold, albeit once again looking far from his best, Tuchel will hope he has navigated a storm that threatened to derail Chelsea's season. Lukaku, Chelsea's club record £97.5 million (\$132 million) signing from Inter Milan last year, was dropped for the Liverpool game after he gave an interview that featured criticism of the way he was being used by Tuchel.

But Tuchel said he held "calm" talks with the Belgian striker on Monday and restored him to the

team to face Tottenham after he issued an apology. "I was pretty sure he was not affected. Even the last days he seemed relaxed, fine with the situation and mentally moved on," Tuchel said. "Romelu can handle pressure and adversity, it was a good performance, he contributed a lot to our defensive set up and had chances."

### 'It was a difficult game'

Ironically, Lukaku's return came against Tottenham boss Antonio Conte, who got the best out of him during their Serie A-winning spell together at Inter. Conte was back at Chelsea for the first time since being sacked in 2018 despite winning the Premier League and FA Cup in his two-year reign.

The Italian claimed earlier this season that Chelsea had yet to work out how to get the best out of Lukaku, but he has plenty of work to do with his own team on the evidence of Tottenham's spluttering display. "It was a difficult game. Chelsea were much better than us. If you compare the teams there is not a comparison," Conte said. "Today we have seen the difference between the teams. If we think we are close (to Chelsea), I think we are not in the right way."

Lukaku was greeted with surprisingly little venom from the Chelsea fans, a reception perhaps helped by their side making the perfect start in the fifth minute. Japhet Tanganga played Emerson Royal into trouble deep inside the Tottenham half and Marcos Alonso pounced to steal possession. Alonso slipped his pass behind the out of position Tanganga to Havertz, whose close-range shot deflected in off Davinson Sanchez for his first goal since November 6.

Although Chelsea were without Thiago Silva



LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur's English striker Harry Kane (right) reacts after being elbowed by Chelsea's French defender Malang Sarr during the English League Cup semi final football match between Chelsea and Tottenham Hotspur on January 05, 2022. — AFP

and N'Golo Kante after they tested positive for the coronavirus, the European champions dominated from start to finish. Lukaku had a role in Chelsea's second goal in the 34th minute as his persistence drew a foul from Sanchez. Hakim

Ziyech's free-kick should have been easily dealt with by Tanganga, but the hapless centre-back headed it straight at Davies, who had no chance of getting out of the way as it rebounded off his shoulder into the net. — AFP

## Africa Cup of Nations poses massive challenges for host

YAOUNDE: The Africa Cup of Nations, kicking off Sunday in Cameroon after a delay over COVID concerns, is also posing major security, political and organizational challenges for the host nation. Some were fearing yet another postponement, with African football chief Patrice Motsepe saying late last month that the rapid spread of the Omicron variant in a country with a low vaccination rate is "an enormous challenge".

The African Football Confederation (known by its French acronym CAF) has set down draconian rules that may bar fans from entering stadiums en masse. Spectators must be fully vaccinated and show a negative PCR test less than 72 hours before a match. Stadium capacity is set at 60 percent though it will be increased to 80 percent when Cameroon's own "Indomitable Lions" play—notably, in the opening match against Burkina Faso on Sunday.

Motsepe, a South Africa mining tycoon, has already acknowledged the risks presented by a proliferation of false tests. COVID is already having an impact with Senegal delaying its departure for the tournament, after three players tested positive and tiny Gambia saying it is facing a "catastrophe" because it is not allowed to replace players hit by COVID.

Cameroon, a poor central African country of 27 million people, has officially recorded 1,840 COVID deaths from 110,000 infections, though experts warn of under-reporting. Few people wear masks and only 2.4 percent of the population has been vaccinated in the country led for nearly four decades by strongman Paul Biya. The authorities are also 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.



YAOUNDE: A vendor selling Cameroon football attire poses for a portrait in Yaounde. — AFP

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 telephone.

Cameroon was chosen in 2014 to stage the African football showcase in 2019 but fell behind with preparations. Egypt stepped in at the last minute to host the event in Cameroon's place. The 2021 tournament was postponed twice, first because of fears that torrential seasonal rains could affect the tight schedule, and then because of the COVID pandemic. But major infrastructure projects were also at issue, with the flagship Olembe complex in the capital Yaounde still not fully completed. Cameroon's hardline President Biya, 88, has looked to the hosting of the African football fiesta as a way to burnish his international image following his latest disputed election victory in 2018, handing him a seventh term. Late last month, dozens of activists from the main opposition party were given prison terms of up to seven years for taking part in peaceful protests against his rule. — AFP

## Bissouma returns as Mali eye strong showing

JOHANNESBURG: Brighton midfielder Yves Bissouma has made peace with Mali coach Mohamed Magassouba and is set to be a driving force behind the bid to go far at the Africa Cup of Nations in Cameroon from Sunday. He fell out of favor in 2018 and a shoulder injury prevented him being considered for the 2019 Cup of Nations in Egypt, where Mali made a disappointing last-16 exit.

While it would be stretching optimism to believe Mali can go all the way, they seem certain to secure a top-two finish in a section including one-time champions Tunisia, minnows Mauritania and debutants the Gambia. Here, AFP Sport puts the spotlight on the four Group F contenders. The group winners and runners-up are assured of last-16 places while the best four third-placed teams from the six sections also qualify.

### Mali

Mali have regularly punched above their weight, finishing second, third twice and fourth three times in 11 appearances at the African football showcase. While not among the favorites in Cameroon, a squad including Bissouma and Southampton forward Moussa Djenebo from the Premier League are certainly capable of reaching the quarter-finals. In most of the six groups finishing first carries a huge advantage as the table toppers then face a third-placed team in the round of 16. Group F is different. The winners will likely face title-holders Algeria or the Ivory Coast while the runners-up would have a theoretically easier task against the Group B runners-up, possibly Guinea.

### Tunisia

The Carthage Eagles hope a frustrating start to preparations is not a sign of things to come as the



Yves Bissouma

floodlights went out just minutes into a training session near Tunis and did not come back on. Tunisia are an incredibly consistent team as they have now qualified for an unrivalled 15 consecutive Cup of Nations tournaments from 1994. During that time the north Africans have been champions once, runners-up once, semi-finalists twice and quarter-finalists six times. Having reached the semi-finals in Egypt three years ago, the expectations of supporters will be that a team captained by Saint-Etienne forward Wahbi Khazri will go at least as far in Cameroon.

### Mauritania

After reaching the Cup of Nations finals for the first time in 2019 and then qualifying for back-to-back appearances, the fortunes of Mauritania nosedived. Expected to be competitive recently in a World Cup group including Tunisia, Equatorial Guinea and Zambia, they fared woefully, collecting just two points from a possible 18 and finishing last. French coach Corentin Martins, who had been in charge since 2014, was fired and compatriot Gerard Buscher, elevated from his technical director role, did not last long after a poor Arab Cup showing. Another Frenchman, Didier Gomes Da Rosa, has taken over and will do well to plot a victory over the Gambia and secure possible qualification as one of the best four third-placed finishers. — 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 |
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## Nets thump Pacers 129-121

Mavericks' stun Warriors; Irving makes NBA season debut



INDIANAPOLIS: Kyrie Irving #11 of the Brooklyn Nets drives to the basket during the game against the Indiana Pacers on January 5, 2022. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: Star Brooklyn guard Kyrie Irving scored 22 points in an NBA season debut delayed by his unvaccinated status, helping the Nets rally for a 129-121 victory over the Pacers in Indiana on Wednesday. Irving's first appearance was just one highlight on a night that featured the Dallas Mavericks' 99-82 triumph over the league-leading Golden State Warriors. The victory in Dallas set the scene perfectly for a post-game ceremony to retire the jersey No 41 of Mavericks franchise icon Dirk Nowitzki.

In Indianapolis, all eyes were on Irving, who missed the first 35 games of the season. He played just under 32 minutes, scoring 10 of his 22 points in the fourth quarter to help Brooklyn erase a 19-point third-quarter deficit. "Oh man, it was amazing," Irving said in an on-court interview. Irving remains ineligible to play home games in Brooklyn because of New York vaccine mandates. He is also barred from games at Madison Square Garden and in Toronto, and it wasn't until this month that the Nets decided it would be

worth having him on court part-time.

"We were going around signing a bunch of 10-day (contract players) when we have a guy who can play for us, so what's the difference between a 10-day and a guy - those are part-time players, too," Nets coach Steve Nash said, calling it an opportunity to "use a resource that we have and that we weren't using." Irving's return came at an opportune time for the Nets, who had lost their last three games to slip behind the Chicago Bulls for the Eastern Conference lead.

Irving was in the starting lineup but got off to a slow start as Pacers guard Lance Stephenson - playing on a 10-day contract - scored 20 points in the first quarter as the hosts took a 37-22 lead. But Irving warmed up, and capped an 8-0 run with a jump shot at the third-quarter buzzer that pulled Brooklyn within five points heading into the final frame. "We just wanted to come out with a resilient attitude and do the right things on both ends of the floor," Irving said, calling the first half "horrible." "We came out the second

half with a resolved attitude," he said.

Kevin Durant led the Nets with 39 points, eight rebounds and seven assists. James Harden added 18 points, six assists and five rebounds. The first look this season at Brooklyn's "Big Three" of Irving, Durant and Harden may have been encouraging, but Irving won't be available for their next two games - when they host the Milwaukee Bucks today and San Antonio Spurs on Sunday. "It's not ideal this situation we're in," Irving said. "But we're going to battle through it and we're going to do everything we can to stay together."

### Mavs honor Nowitzki

The Mavericks' win over the Warriors was the start of an emotional night in Dallas, where Germany's Nowitzki, who led the team to the NBA title in 2011, became the fourth player to have his jersey retired by the club. Nowitzki played all 21 of his NBA seasons in Dallas, winning a season Most Valuable Player award as well as a Finals MVP.

He's sixth on the NBA's all-time scoring list with 31,560 career points and paved the way for European players such as two-time NBA Most Valuable Player Giannis Antetokoumpo and Dallas' Slovenian star Luka Doncic. Doncic scored 26 points, and the Mavs won their fourth straight as Stephen Curry and the Golden State Warriors were unable to get their potent offense going.

Curry connected on just five of 19 shots from the field - including one of nine from three-point range - as the shooting woes that have seen him limited to 37.9% over his past 15 games continued. "Everyone is throwing everything at him," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said. "I think tonight he pressed a little bit." Despite their struggles, the Warriors managed to erase a 14-point deficit and take a seven-point lead in the third quarter, but they couldn't sustain the charge and finished with a season-low in points. "I thought we kind of ran out of gas in the fourth quarter," Kerr said. — AFP

## Iraqi women boxers aim sucker punch at gender taboos

NAJAF: Iraqi boxer Bushra Al-Hajjar jumps into the ring, gloves raised to eye level, and strikes out at her sparring partner. Her bigger struggle, though, is to deliver a blow against social taboos. In Iraq's Shiite Muslim holy city of Najaf, the sight of a women's boxing hall is unusual but, like others here, the 35-year-old boxing instructor is fighting deeply-ingrained taboos.

"At home, I have a full training room, with mats and a punching bag," said the mother of two, who also practices karate. Hajjar won gold in the 70 kilogram-class at a boxing tournament in the capital Baghdad in December. "My family and friends are very supportive, they're very happy with the level I've reached," she said, a blue headscarf pulled tightly over her hair.

Twice a week, she trains at a private university in Najaf, 100 kilometers south of Baghdad, where she also teaches sports. In overwhelmingly conservative Iraq, and particularly in Najaf, Hajjar acknowledges her adventure has raised eyebrows. "We've come across many difficulties," she said. "We're a conservative society that has difficulty accepting these kinds of things." She recalls the protests when training facilities first opened for women, but said "today, there are many halls".

### 'Macho society'

Boxing student Ola Mustafa, 16, taking a break from her punching bag, said: "We live in a macho society that opposes success for



NAJAF: Bushra Al-Hajjar, a 35-year-old Iraqi boxing instructor, is pictured during a training session in Najaf. — AFP

women." However, she said she has the support not only of her trainer but also of her parents and brother, signaling that social change is afoot. "People are gradually beginning to accept it," she said. "If more girls try it out, society will automatically come to accept it."

Iraqi boxing federation president Ali Taklif acknowledges that Iraqi women engaging in the sport is a "recent phenomenon", but says it is gaining ground. "There is a lot of demand from females wanting to join," he said, adding that Iraq now has some 20 women's boxing clubs. More than 100 women boxers have competed in a December tournament, in all categories, he added. But "like other sports (in Iraq), the discipline suffers from a lack of infrastructure, training facilities and equipment".

In the past, Iraq had a proud tradition of women in sports, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. Whether in basketball, volleyball or cycling, women's teams regularly took part in regional tournaments. But sanctions, decades of conflict and a hardening of conservative

social values brought this era to a close, with only the autonomous Kurdistan region in northern Iraq largely spared.

There has been a timid reversal in recent years, with women taking up a range of sports, also including kickboxing. For Hajer Ghazi, who at age 13 won a silver medal in December, boxing runs in the family. Her father, a veteran professional boxer, encouraged his children to follow in his footsteps. Both her sisters and older brother Ali are also boxers.

"Our father supports us more than the state does," said Ali in their hometown of Amara in southwestern Iraq. The father, Hassanein Ghazi, a 55-year-old truck driver who won several medals in his heyday, insists: "Women have the right to play sports, it's only normal." He recognizes certain "sensitivities" remain, linked to traditional tribal values. As an example, he pointed out that "when their coach wants them to run, he takes them to the outskirts of town", away from too many onlookers. — AFP

## Medvedev topples Berrettini to steer Russia into semis

SYDNEY: World number two Daniil Medvedev battled past seventh-ranked Matteo Berrettini and returned to court to win the deciding doubles to keep defending champions Russia on track for another ATP Cup title as they swept into the semi-finals yesterday. Medvedev, who is set to be the top seed at this month's Australian Open with Novak Djokovic facing deportation over a visa issue, was dominant in the first set.

But the gritty big-serving Italian battled back to win a second set tie-break before the Russian got a crucial break in game three of the third set to carve out a 6-2, 6-7 (5-7), 6-4 win. Russian number two Roman Safiullin earlier lost 7-6 (8/6), 6-3 to world number 10 Jannik Sinner with the tie forced into a doubles shoot-out.

Medvedev played just five doubles matches in 2021, but has fronted up for three so far in Sydney and partnered with Safiullin again to keep their unbeaten record intact, digging deep to beat Berrettini and Sinner 5-7, 6-4, 10-5. "What we did amazing today was we were in a tough position at one point, and every change, every shot we had to make we tried to discuss it, and it worked," said Medvedev of the doubles. "Roman stated playing unbelievable and we had some crazy rallies, it was amazing."

Medvedev and Berrettini met in singles for the first time since the 2021 ATP Cup final, when the Russian ran out a 6-4, 6-2 winner to seal the trophy for his team, and he again had

the edge. Known on tour as "Deep Court Daniil", he took up his customary position near the back wall to return serve, breaking twice in the first set. The match turned in the third set when Medvedev's service return earned him three break points to establish a 2-1 lead. He held serve for 3-1 and there was no way back for the Italian.

"I made some bad decisions in the second set so I tried to learn from that in the third. I served well throughout the match and that helped me," added Medvedev, who led the ATP Tour with 63 match wins last year. The Roberto Bautista Agut-led Spain and Hubert Hurkacz's Poland have already made the last four and play each other Friday. The fate of the final group rests on what happens in the evening. If Alexander Zverev's Germany beat Canada then Britain will become the last semi-finalist. But if Canada win they will go through at Britain's expense.

Britain keep their hopes alive by topping the United States 2-1. In-form Dan Evans silenced big-serving American John Isner 6-4, 7-6 (7/3) to put his country in the driving seat, handing teammate Cameron Norrie an opportunity to close out the tie against Taylor Fritz. But the world number 12 failed to do so, crashing 7-6 (7/4), 3-6, 6-1. Fritz returned to partner with Isner for the decisive doubles, but they couldn't conquer Evans and Jamie Murray who came through 6-7 (3/7), 7-5, 10-8. — AFP