



**7** Afghan baby lost in US airlift chaos reunited with family



**9** Last 7 years 'warmest on record' globally



**11** 'Power of the Dog', 'West Side Story' win at Golden Globes



**14** Loeb eats into Al-Attiyah's lead as Ekstrom wins stage



# Cabinet imposes limited curbs as COVID cases soar to 3,683

Vaccines for kids soon • MoI to crack down on gatherings • Airport, schools remain open



KUWAIT: A medical worker takes a swab sample from a motorist for a PCR test. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** As the number of new coronavirus cases soared to 3,683 yesterday, a new record high, the Cabinet imposed a series of restrictions including cutting public sector employees to a maximum of 50 percent and calling on the private sector to reduce staff in offices. Government Spokesman Tareq Al-Mazrem said there are currently no plans to close the airport or impose a curfew in Kuwait, reiterating at the same time that the situation in schools remains reassuring.

Meeting online as all Cabinet ministers are under home quarantine after the health minister tested positive for COVID-19, the Cabinet said the new measures are effective from tomorrow until further notice. An official from the health ministry also announced yesterday that vaccines against COVID-19 for children aged between 5 and 11 are expected to arrive in Kuwait in the coming weeks. Undersecretary Dr Mustafa Redha said the department had made contracts with vaccination-producing companies to secure doses for this age category, which are accredited by international medical organizations.

With the new record numbers reported yesterday, authorities in Kuwait have reported more than 20,000 cases since the start of January, which is 10

times higher than all cases reported in the three months between Sept 15 and Dec 15. The number of patients in ICUs rose to 14, while patients in hospitals increased to 147. There are over 20,000 other infected people recovering at home.

Although the Cabinet has not ordered any closures, it called on all government departments to use any number of employees necessary, provided the number does not exceed half of the total employees. It also urged the private sector to "reduce the number of employees in offices to the least necessary to carry out work".

Conferences, meetings and training courses can only be held online from tomorrow, according to the Cabinet. The Cabinet also decided that passengers on public transport must not exceed 50 percent, with strict implementation of health conditions, especially wearing facemasks. Fans attending sports events must be fully vaccinated and must observe health conditions, the Cabinet said. People visiting salons, barbershops and health clubs must be fully vaccinated too.

Government departments must offer their services to the public online in person only if necessary - this must be done through securing prior appointments, the Cabinet said. The health ministry yesterday said

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## News in brief

### Gulf ministers visit China

**BEIJING:** Foreign ministers from oil-rich Gulf states arrived in Beijing yesterday for a five-day visit as turmoil in neighboring Kazakhstan raises concerns about China's energy security. The officials from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain, as well as secretary general of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Nayef bin Falah Al-Hajrah, will be in China until Friday, the foreign ministry has said. — AFP (See Page 3)

### 'Deltacron' result of lab error

**PARIS:** Experts said yesterday that an alleged hybrid coronavirus mutation dubbed "Deltacron" reportedly discovered in a Cyprus lab is most likely the result of a lab contamination, and not a new worrying variant. Cypriot media reported the discovery Saturday, describing it as having "the genetic background of the Delta variant along with some of the mutations of Omicron". — AFP

### Qatari activist resurfaces

**DOHA:** A Qatari women's activist has resurfaced on social media, four months after she disappeared from public view. Noof Al-Maadeed, who is in her early 20s, posted videos on a new Twitter account, giving assurances she was safe and well. "Noof is here. Noof is alive. Noof isn't dead," she said in one video, smiling and wearing a black hijab. — AFP

### 9 students killed in gas blast

**JALALABAD:** Nine students were killed by a blast at a mobile popcorn stall near a school in eastern Afghanistan yesterday. There were conflicting reports about the cause, with some saying the stall's gas cylinder had exploded while others suggested an old mortar bomb offered by a customer as payment had detonated. A Nangarhar province information official told AFP the popcorn seller also died. — AFP

## Djokovic wins visa battle, wants to play

**MELBOURNE:** Tennis superstar Novak Djokovic said yesterday he was hoping to still compete in the Australian Open, hours after winning a stunning victory over the Australian government in his visa battle. The ruling overturned the cancellation of Djokovic's visa on COVID-19 health grounds, and ended the unvaccinated player's detention in an immigration facility, potentially clearing the way for him to play in the tournament that starts next Monday.

His mother Dijana, speaking at a press conference in Belgrade, called it "the biggest victory in his career, bigger than all his grand slams". Djokovic

tweeted from Melbourne: "Despite all that has happened, I want to stay and try to compete @AustralianOpen. I remain focused on that."

In an emergency online court hearing, the judge ordered that the decision to cancel Djokovic's visa "be quashed". He instructed that the 34-year-old men's world number one "be released immediately and forthwith from immigration detention".

Hours later, his family said justice had been served. "Truth and justice came to the light. I would like to thank the justice system of Australia," said his brother Djordje in Belgrade, adding that Djokovic had been able to train since being released from detention. The ruling marked an extraordinary setback for Australia's conservative government, which has imposed strict border restrictions for the past two years to halt the spread of COVID.

Australian taxpayers will be asked to pay costs for Djokovic's high-powered legal team. Several hundred fans dressed in the Serbian national colors

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## Uganda ends world's longest school closure

**KAMPALA:** Uganda ended the world's longest school closure yesterday, ordering millions of students back to the classroom nearly two years after learning was suspended because of the coronavirus pandemic. Students poured through school gates

that had been shuttered in March 2020 when COVID-19 swept the globe, greeting teachers and friends after 83 weeks outside the classroom.

"I am so happy because I was missing school, my teachers, my friends and my studies," 10-year-old Nawilah Senkungu told AFP at Nakasero Primary School in Kampala, where teachers encouraged students to wear face masks and wash their hands. Education Minister John Musingo said all primary and secondary students would automatically resume classes a year above where they left off, and urged schools to follow health protocols.

"All schools have implemented guidelines and

## 9 kids among 19 killed in New York fire

**NEW YOKEK:** Nine children were among at least 19 people killed and dozens injured when a fire tore through a high-rise apartment building in New York on Sunday in one of America's worst residential fires in recent memory. At least 200 firefighters responded to the blaze, which broke out just before 11:00 am (1600

GMT) on the second and third floors of a 19-storey building in The Bronx.

Witnesses reported seeing trapped residents screaming for help from windows during the deadly inferno that the city's fire chief said had been caused by a portable electric heater, leaving victims on "every floor". "There were a lot of kids crying, 'Help! Help! Help!'" 38-year-old Dilenny Rodriguez, who escaped with her children, told AFP.

Mayor Eric Adams told reporters that 19 people had been confirmed dead and 63 had been injured, including several that were in a "critical

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MELBOURNE: This image taken from the Instagram account of Serbian tennis player Novak Djokovic shows Djokovic posing with members of his team yesterday, hours after he was released from detention. — AFP



NEW YORK: Firefighters work outside an apartment building after a fire in the Bronx on Sunday. — AFP

## Local

# Kuwait Crown Prince meets former Interior Minister

## Amir congratulates Omani Sultan on second anniversary

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem and former Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. His Highness the Crown Prince praised Sheikh Thamer's sincere and efficient performance of duties, appreciating his efforts in serving the country during his post. He wished him continued progress and success.

In other news, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable yesterday to the Sultan of Oman Haitham bin Tareq, congratulating him on the second anniversary of his throne ascension. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah also sent similar cables.

In the meantime, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of congratulation yesterday to Mohammad Al-Halbousi on his reelection as speaker of the Iraqi

Council of Representatives. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables.

Kuwait's National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem had sent a cable of congratulation to Halbousi on Sunday, in which he commended his "balanced and exemplary" performance during his past term in speakership, expressing hope for success in his new tenure. He also voiced hope for closer parliamentary cooperation with Iraq at regional and international forums in order to serve the common interests of both countries.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a condolences cable to the US President Joe Biden.

His Highness the Amir expressed sorrow over the victims of the fire, which erupted in one of New York City's buildings, and wished the injured a fast recovery. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables. — KUNA



**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets former Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. — KUNA



### Amir sends condolences to US President

## Cypriot President receives Kuwait Foreign Minister

**NICOSIA:** Cyprus' President Nicos Anastasiades received yesterday the Kuwaiti Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and his accompanying delegation on the occasion of their official visit to the Mediterranean country. During the meeting, the Kuwaiti Minister conveyed His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's warmest greetings to the Cypriot leadership. Both sides also discussed the bilateral ties between the two countries and ways of enhancing them in all fields.

Later yesterday, official negotiations were held between Kuwait and Cyprus in the capital Nicosia. The talks were held by the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister accompanied by senior officials, with the Cypriot Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikos Christodoulides. The two sides tackled bilateral relations and the historic deep-rooted ties between both countries dur-



**NICOSIA:** Cyprus' President Nicos Anastasiades meets the Kuwaiti Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah. — KUNA photos



**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah attends a joint press conference with the Cypriot Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikos Christodoulides.

ing the meeting that marked the 61st anniversary of establishing the diplomatic relations between both countries. They tackled means to boost and bolster bilateral ties at all levels, and also discussed the required joint cooperation to counter the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and its variants.

Furthermore, they discussed the latest developments on the regional and international arenas, and

main challenges facing the region. The two ministers signed two memoranda of understanding, namely, a memorandum of understanding on the establishment of a joint committee for cooperation between Kuwait and Cyprus at the level of the foreign ministers of the two countries. The second memorandum was signed by Kuwaiti Foreign Minister and Cypriot Minister of Transport, Communications and Works

regarding the prevention of theft, secret excavation, illegal import and transfer of ownership of cultural property and the promotion of its settlement, which reflects the determination of both nations to develop and consolidate bilateral relations in all fields. A joint press conference was held by the Kuwaiti and Cypriot foreign ministers after they concluded the official meeting. — KUNA

## Djokovic wins visa battle...

Continued from Page 1

gathered outside the Melbourne law offices where Djokovic had watched his successful appeal, dancing and chanting his nickname "Nole". "It's a big thing for Serbian culture and community," said Marijana Djukic, a 20-year-old university student.

Police later used pepper spray to disperse fans who mobbed a luxury car leaving the offices in which Djokovic was thought to be travelling. His lawyers and police left the scene shortly afterwards. Djokovic had arrived in Melbourne on Wednesday ahead of the Australian Open, where he hopes to win a record-breaking 21st Grand Slam title.

But the tournament may yet be out of reach. The government's lawyer told the court that Immigration Minister Alex Hawke may decide to use his "personal power of cancellation" despite the player's legal victory. Rafael Nadal, one of Djokovic's main rivals for the title, said "it is the fairest thing" for his rival to play in the Australian Open. "Regardless of whether or not I agree on some things with Djokovic, without any doubt, justice has spoken," Nadal told Spanish radio station Onda Cero.

After touching down in Australia last week, Djokovic was taken into an overnight interview with border agents, who decided the champion had failed to present a solid medical reason for not being jabbed. "I am not vaccinated," he told the official.

## Cabinet imposes limited curbs...

Continued from Page 1

the infection rate has climbed to 10.1 percent, a massive spike from the rates recorded in November and earlier of just 0.1 percent.

Authorities have urged the public to take the third booster dose to strengthen their immunity, adding that those who got the second dose six months ago and earlier must take the third dose. People who are 50 years old and above can take the dose from any vaccination center without appointment. The Cabinet had decided that those who had taken the second dose nine months and earlier are no longer consid-

ered to be immune against COVID-19. It also banned Kuwaiti citizens who have not taken the third dose from leaving the country.

Authorities have urged the public to defer travel plans unless necessary to safeguard them against the disease, which is spreading worldwide. The interior ministry meanwhile warned that it will break up all gatherings and events and will send organizers to court with the punishment expected to be up to three years in jail or a fine of KD 10,000. The Municipal Council secretariat has declared a holiday for three days starting today, adding that employees returning to work on Sunday must produce a negative PCR test taken within the past 48 hours.

Meanwhile, the National Assembly is holding a special session on Thursday to debate a number of draft laws including creating more jobs for Kuwaitis and amendments to the press and publications law. The government said it will attend the meeting.

## 9 kids among 19 killed in...

Continued from Page 1

condition". "This is going to be one of the worst fires in our history," he said. "Join me in praying for those we lost, especially the 9 innocent young lives that were cut short," he added in a later tweet.

The mainly working-class borough of The Bronx is home to a large number of immigrants and Adams said "many" of the building's residents had been Muslims who moved to New York from Gambia. Photographs and video posted on social media showed flames and thick black smoke billowing out of a third-storey window of the brick building at East 181st Street as firefighters operated on a nearby ladder.

"The fire alarm of course started and then, everywhere was smoke," said Mohamed Trawalley, 49, a resident of the building. "So it was definitely devastating. A lot of smoke. Until now, when I clear my throat, all I see is black mucus. It was so serious, I've never seen anything like it before." "It was chaos," George King, who lives directly adjacent to the building, told AFP. "I've been here 15 years and it's the first time I've seen something like this."

The injured were taken to five hospitals; many suffered from cardiac and respiratory arrest and severe smoke inhalation, officials said. Michael Joseph, 32,

who lives in the building, said it took him around 30 minutes to reach the hallway and then get down six flights of stairs because of how thick the smoke was. "Actually due to all the smoke, and just inhaling it, it's just so thick. And it's like you cannot breathe, it's like you're being suffocated."

New York City Fire Department Commissioner Daniel Nigro told reporters that the fire started in a bedroom in a portable electric heater. He said that flames quickly engulfed much of the structure and that the smoke was so dense as to be "unprecedented". Nigro added that "very heavy" fire and smoke "extended the entire height of the building". "Members found victims on every floor, in stairwells," he said.

"The last time we had a loss of life that may be this horrific was a fire which was over 30 years ago, also here in the Bronx," Nigro added. He explained that the fire originated in a duplex apartment on the second and third floors of the building. The door to the apartment had been left open, allowing the fire and smoke to spread, he said. "If you close the door the smoke and fire spread is contained within that apartment instead of spreading up the stairs," Nigro told reporters. Buildings like this one don't have fire escapes, he added.

Rodriguez, the woman who escaped the fire with her children, said the smoke was so thick when she went down that "we couldn't see". "They took my daughter away from me and I got panicked. Once I was walking the stairs, I saw a body on the floor that they tried to rescue. Also a dog, it was dead. And it was really devastating," she said. — AFP

## Uganda ends world's longest...

Continued from Page 1

AFP at a crowded bus stop in Kasubi, a suburb of Kampala. "I know I am not alone in this... it's a nightmare for us, especially the poor." Musingo said any schools demanding fees above pre-pandemic rates would be sanctioned.

The closures affected at least 10 million primary and secondary pupils and lasted 83 weeks, according to the UN's education and cultural body UNESCO. Children's rights groups had criticized the extreme length of the shutdown, warning that closures had far-reaching consequences for learning and put vulnerable students at higher risk of child marriage or forced labor.

"We can't let this happen again. We must keep schools open for every child, everywhere," the UN children's agency UNICEF said on Twitter. The charity Save the Children said students would

struggle after falling so far behind, and warned there could be high dropout rates in coming weeks unless special efforts were made to help the youngsters adapt.

Remote learning was available only for the privileged few during Uganda's school closures. Senkungu, the 10-year-old, spent the long closure helping on her grandparents' small farm, tending chickens and digging the fields. "I am very happy to see my children back to school. They have been missing their teachers plus learning," said her father, Siraj Senkungu.

Richard Aburo, deputy head at Nakasero Primary School, said schools and students had fared differently during closures, but those in rural and poorer settings had been hardest hit. "The effect of the Covid pandemic is enormous. It has affected the quality of education, so to bridge that gap will take some time," he said. "Some schools up-country did not study anything, so the effects differ," he said, adding teachers in many locations had also not been paid and abandoned the profession. The country of some 45 million people recorded 153,762 cases of COVID-19 with 3,339 deaths, according to the latest government figures issued on Jan 7. — AFP

Local

# Kuwait breaks 3,000 COVID daily infections' mark for first time

## Cabinet, CSC issue resolution to limit staff capacity

**KUWAIT:** The Kuwaiti Ministry of Health announced yesterday recording 3,683 new infection cases with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in the last 24 hours. The new figure is the highest daily record in Kuwait since the pandemic started, and the first time the country records more than 3,000 new cases in a single day. With the new contamination cases, Kuwait's caseload climbed to 437,602. Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad, the MoH spokesperson, said in a statement to the press that medical authorities recorded 544 new recovery cases, increasing the overall count of the cured to 414,241, noting that the proportion of the healed as compared to the total number of the cases reached 94.6 percent. Dr Sanad also revealed that there was a single death due to contamination with COVID-19, during the past 24 hours, thus the whole figure of the deaths settled at 2,472.

As to the number of people still receiving medical treatment at intensive care units, he said that there were 14 patients in these wards as of yesterday. The whole count of the cases with confirmed infection that continue to receive treatment has

reached 20,889 and the number of people that are treated at the COVID-19 wards has stood at 147. Also in the same duration, medical staff conducted 36,318 PCR tests with the whole number of these examinations soaring to 6,235,969. Dr Sanad said,



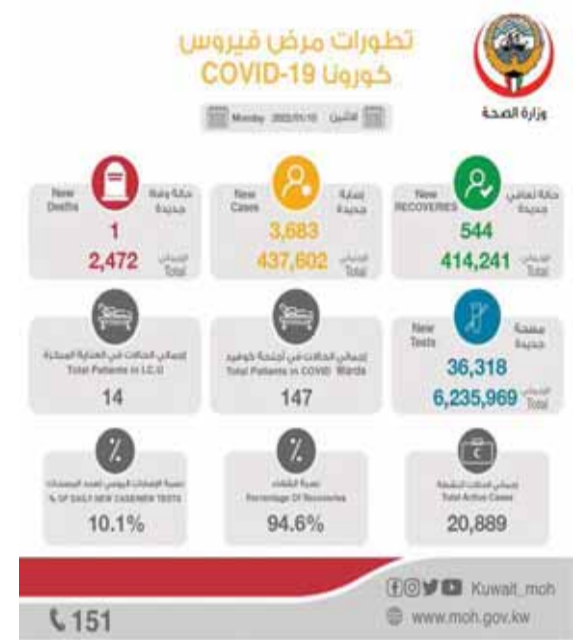
**Fourteen patients in ICUs; 147 hospitalized**

also noting that the proportion of the infection cases to the tests reached 10.1 percent.

Kuwait along, with other Gulf countries, has been battling the coronavirus and its strains with protective measures and vaccinations. In response

to the recent hike in daily infections driven by the Omicron variant, Kuwait's Cabinet yesterday ordered state departments to slash staff attendance down to 50 percent. Private employers have been told to limit their staff capacity in a manner that would still allow for a smooth workflow, the government's communication center cited spokesman Tareq Al-Mezrem as saying. In measures to halt the spread of the virus, in effect as of tomorrow, he said conferences and meetings would shift back to video link, while public transport capacity should not exceed 50 percent. Similarly, sporting venues nationwide, in addition to gyms and salons, would only allow entry to those who have been fully vaccinated, added the spokesman.

In the meantime, the Civil Service Commission (CSC) issued a resolution following the Cabinet's meeting to announce the limiting of staff capacity, as well as shifting to holding conferences and meetings virtually. In a statement, the CSC said the biometric fingerprint attendance system in all state departments will be suspended. —KUNA



## Ambassador urges Indians to strictly follow COVID regulations, get vaccinated

By Sajeev Peter

**KUWAIT:** Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Sibi George yesterday inaugurated the Indian Embassy's three BLS International outsourcing centers for consular, passport and visa services in Sharq, Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh (Abbasiya) and Fahaheel. In an online address on Sunday, the ambassador briefed members of the Indian community on the new facilities by Dr Vinod Gaikwad, First Secretary, Indian Embassy. "We are going through a very difficult time with a rapid increase in the number of COVID-19 cases. We have seen that in recent weeks, there is a spike in cases. We had a few cases in the embassy today, and as a precaution, we are closing the attestation services tomorrow," the ambassador said in his virtual address on Sunday.

"Starting January 11, we will have attestation services from the new outsourcing centers. I reiterate all to adhere to and abide by the regulations and procedures announced by the government of Kuwait to combat and limit the spread of the virus. I urge all Indians who have not taken their vaccines to immediate take vaccines and also booster shots early," the ambassador said.

"I request those who have any contact with any COVID-19 positive patient and/or showing any symptoms to immediately visit the nearest health facility for appropriate medical consultation/check-up without any hesitation or delay. The embassy is ready to provide any assistance including meeting the medical expenses for all emergency medical cases on a means-tested basis," George added.

The embassy has circulated a list of over 50 Indian doctors of the Indian Doctors Forum who have volunteered to extend free teleconsultations to those in need. "I thank IDF and our doctors for their service. Please note that our Indian Community Support Group (ICSG) and our many associations are ready to extend all support. Any issue, please bring it to our attention immediately. Together we will face this challenge," he stated.

The ambassador also urged groups and associations to



**KUWAIT:** Indian Ambassador Sibi George inaugurates the Indian Embassy's new outsourcing center BLS International at Sharq yesterday.

avoid all social gatherings. "We will shift to virtual mode and avoid physical gatherings in organizing various events such as our Republic Day celebrations on January 26 and also National Youth Day on January 12," he added.

Starting today (Jan 11, 2022) consular, passport and visa services will be rendered from the new BLS centers at: Third floor, Jawhara Tower, Ali Al-Salem Street in Sharq, Kuwait City; mezzanine floor, Olive Supermarket building, Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh; and mezzanine floor, Al-Anoud Shopping Complex, Makkah Street in Fahaheel.

The timings for the centers are: Saturday to Thursday - 8 am to 12 noon and 4 pm to 8 pm. Friday - 4 pm to 8 pm.

The old outsourcing centers run by CKGS will stop functioning with effect from Jan 10, 2022. The 24x7 WhatsApp message helpline numbers have also been updated with additional details. Information in this regard can also be obtained from these helpline numbers. In case of any further assistance/queries, please write to consl.kuwait@mea.gov.in.

## Gulf ministers visit China amid energy fears

**BEIJING:** Foreign ministers from oil-rich Gulf states arrived in Beijing yesterday for a five-day visit as turmoil in neighboring Kazakhstan raises concerns about China's energy security. The officials from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain, as well as secretary general of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Dr Nayef Al-Hajrah, will be in China until Friday, the foreign ministry has said.

Recent unrest in oil and gas-rich Kazakhstan has raised concerns in China, which has long invested heavily in its central Asian neighbor's energy industry. The visit follows a flurry of diplomatic activity by China's foreign minister Wang Yi, including a tour of Africa as well as visits to the Maldives and Sri Lanka. "Facing vast development prospects, (China) believes this visit... will further deepen China-GCC relation and promote the achievement of better results from China-GCC dialogue and cooperation in various fields," foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said at a routine briefing yesterday. "We are willing to work hard together with all

sides from the GCC, pursue common development, and advance bilateral relations to a new stage."

He did not provide further details on discussions during the Gulf ministers' visit, which is the first group trip of its kind. But they are expected to speak about strengthening energy ties with Beijing. China has sought in recent years to bolster its ties with the Gulf states, with President Xi Jinping in 2014 aiming to more than double trade with the region by 2023. State-owned newspaper Global Times said the visit may also "make breakthroughs" in talks over a China-GCC free-trade agreement. The potential agreement was first tabled in 2004, with the two sides discussing in March last year the possibility of resuming negotiations. Xi praised the Kazakhstan government's deadly crackdown on protesters as "highly responsible" in a message to leader Kassym-Jomart Tokayev last week. He added that Beijing was willing to "provide support" if needed, state media reported.

Meanwhile, Dr Hajrah affirmed the need to boost Gulf-Chinese relations on different levels. Hajrah's remarks came during his visit to China yesterday on an invitation from Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, the GCC's Secretariat General said in a statement. Hajrah hoped this visit would push the GCC-China ties forward, in the light of the framework Agreement on Economic Cooperation between the GCC States and China, signed between the two sides in June 2004 in Beijing, as well as the memorandum of understanding in 2010. —Agencies



**Indian Ambassador Sibi George tours Indian Embassy's new outsourcing center at Sharq following its inauguration yesterday.**

## KGOC signs MoU with Saudi Arabian Chevron to export excess gas

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Gulf Oil Company (KGOC) and Saudi Arabian Chevron signed yesterday a memorandum of understanding to export spare gas from joint Wafra operations. In a statement, Acting CEO Mohammad Al-Haimer said in a statement that KGOC started early yesterday to export around 12 million cubic feet of excess gas, expecting to increase exporting in the upcoming months to reach between 40-50 million cubic feet of gas. The memorandum is considered a huge achievement that will benefit both economic and environmental sectors, according to Kuwait's environmental regulations, Haimer added. He also affirmed that it also envisages developing the long and short operating plans to deliver the surplus gas from joint Wafra operations zone Kuwait Oil Company's refineries, pending treatment in line with the gas burning regulations set by the Environment Public Authority (EPA).



**KUWAIT:** Mohammad Al-Haimer, Acting CEO of KGOC (left) and Don Stilling, Senior Vice President of Chevron Saudi Arabia for Operations, shake hands after signing the agreement. —KUNA

Haimer expressed gratitude to EPA Chairman Sheikh Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Humoud Al-Sabah his supporting the KGOC. —KUNA

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## News in brief

Municipal Council closed  
due to COVID-19 outbreak

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Municipal Council yesterday suspended its work for three days after nearly 130 employees, or 95 percent of its staff, tested positive for COVID-19. The council will reopen on Sunday while employees must present a negative PCR test result taken not more than 48 hours beforehand. Earlier yesterday, the council approved a proposal to establish a new airport in the northern area of the country.

Legal action against Gulf  
artists for breaking protocol

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Ministry of Health announced yesterday taking legal action against two Gulf artists and their companions who failed to follow the proper protocol of registering in the Shlonik app and staying in quarantine after arriving in Kuwait.

Ministry restores power  
in several Hawally areas

**KUWAIT:** The Ministry of Electricity and Water announced restoring power in several areas of Hawally Governorate after technicians successfully reconnected the main transformer in South Surra, which had gone out of service yesterday morning.

Kuwait commends  
UN announcement

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait commended yesterday the UN announcement of a dialogue amongst Sudanese parties to reach an agreement paving the way for democracy, peace, and unity in Sudan. A statement for the Foreign Ministry indicated that the efforts of the UN and the international organization's mission in Sudan in this regard succeeded in bolstering dialogue and political discourse amongst all involved parties. The statement concluded with the State of Kuwait voicing continuous support of Sudan and its people on the quest to achieve security, development and stability.

OPEC basket price  
rises to \$82.14 pb

**VIENNA:** OPEC daily basket price rose by 34 cents to \$82.14 a barrel Friday compared with \$80.80 pb the previous day, the cartel said yesterday. The monthly average of the OPEC's basket price for December amounted to \$74.38 pb, while that of November settled at \$80.37 pb, the organization said in its bulletin. This signaled that the crudes' basket rate since start of the year until last week had settled at 79.99 pb. OPEC's bulletin also said the annual rate of the basket, in 2021, amounted to \$69.89 pb. The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies, known as OPEC+, decided on January 4 to proceed with a production hike of 400,000 barrels per day (bpd) in coming February. The stakeholders had also agreed to continue regular follow-up on the global epidemiological status and change the output if warranted. OPEC+ countries are expected to continue changing the production until amending the current level of 5.8 million bpd. They will re-examine market conditions and performance of the stakeholders at the 25th ministerial meeting, due to be held virtually on February 2.

Kuwait, pan-Arab cultural  
bodies eye closer cooperation

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait and a pan-Arab and Islamic cultural body are planning to bolster cooperation through joint endeavors planned for the near future, the two sides agreed after talks yesterday. The talks between Kuwait's National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) and the Arab League's Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALESCO) reviewed some of the most "monumental" events in the local cultural scene, said NCCAL spokesman and deputy chief Dr Essa Al-Ansari. Acknowledging the achievements the Kuwaiti body has made over the years, ALESCO chief Dr Salem Al-Malek said those accomplishments are a "source of pride" for all Gulf Arab citizens, citing the body's increasingly significant role towards creating a vibrant cultural scene in Kuwait. Expecting relations to remain on an upward trajectory, he said the ALESCO delegation are in Kuwait to visit landmark cultural sites that the country has to offer.

Separately, the Arab League yesterday said it would employ unconventional strategies to rid the wider region of illiteracy, on a day the Arab world has dedicated to this enormous challenge. Illiteracy has become a thorn in the side of many Arab countries, a problem that continues to scupper development plans across the region, the bloc's chief education and scientific officer Duaa Khalifa said in a speech to mark the occasion.

The unprecedented conditions in the region, namely, the COVID pandemic, has thrown the education sector into disarray, lamented Dr Ashur Amry, an education official in the Arab League, adding that the region's 21 percent illiteracy rate remains unsatisfactory. The pan-Arab bloc annually holds talks on January 10 to review efforts to fight illiteracy, seeing the problem as an impediment to regional development and prosperity. —KUNA

## Photo of the Day



**KUWAIT:** Ardeidae family birds flock at a beach in Kuwait City yesterday. —KUNA

## Zain invites Kuwait's creative minds to design monument at Capital's heart

### Project to renovate one of Capital's main entrances

**KUWAIT:** Zain invites Kuwait's architects, designers, and anyone passionate about urban design to propose their ideas for designing a monument that reflects Kuwait's rich culture, history, and identity. The company is set to cover all costs of building the monument at the heart of the nation's capital.

The invitation comes as part of Zain's partnership with Al-Asimah Governorate for the renovation project of one of the Capital's main entrances, specifically the islet between Abdullah Al-Salem and Al-Shamiya areas. Last year, Zain (the national operator) was selected to renovate and maintain this entrance, a step that reflected the role of private sector companies in achieving social sustainability projects in partnership with the public sector.



#### In partnership with Al-Asimah Governorate

As Zain strongly believes in the talents of the youth, the company has invited architects, designers, and anyone passionate about urban design to share their ideas through [zainkuwaitcity.kw.zain.com](http://zainkuwaitcity.kw.zain.com) to build a monument that reflects Kuwait's rich history, culture, and heritage. Zain will select the winning design based on a number of quality standards, and will cover the expenses of building the project.

The project is the fruitful result of a joint collaboration between the public and private sectors and will contribute to renovating the capital's entrance as a first step into beautifying all of the district's areas. Zain will explore the final design of the mon-



**KUWAIT:** A graphic released by Zain yesterday inviting people who are passionate about design to participate in the project.

ument that it will build in the location by inviting Kuwait's creative minds to join and pitch their ideas. After selecting the most unique proposal, the company is set to build the monument and renovate the entire islet.

Zain's support to this initiative comes in line with its core objectives that aim at shouldering the advancement of the community as a whole on all levels, where the company reaffirms the principal of partnership through similar efforts with the aim of contributing to the further progress of national goals and serve the country's developmental efforts.

#### Terms and Conditions:

- Submissions must be made through [zainkuwaitcity.kw.zain.com](http://zainkuwaitcity.kw.zain.com).
- The monument's design must reflect Kuwait's culture, history, and/or identity.



Scan here to visit the project's website.

- The design's size must not exceed 10x10m.
- Applicants must attach a sketch, photo, or video that clearly showcases all aspects of the design.
- Applicants may provide the design's idea only, and Zain will take care of executing the project.
- In case the winning design's owner wishes to execute the project themselves, they must complete the process within three weeks.
- Zain has the right to accept or refuse any submitted designs.
- Zain has the right to change any details within the selected design if needed.
- Zain will cover the expenses of executing the project based on the winning design, noting that there are no monetary rewards/compensation for the winning design's owner.
- Submissions are open from 10-24 January 2022.

## Eminent Kuwaiti writer digs deep into Kuwait's history in new book

**KUWAIT:** Eminent Kuwaiti writer and poet Dr Suad Mohammad Al-Sabah has published a new book entitled 'The founding of Kuwait during eras of Sabah Al-Awal (the first ruler 1718-1776) and Abdullah Al-Awal (the second ruler 1776-1814)'. Dr Suad sheds light on the period when the bases for establishing the modern State of Kuwait were laid, narrating how some of the ancestors had moved from Najd, Saudi Arabia, to Kuwait where they formed a society different from the Bedouin one in Saudi Arabia and the agricultural community in Iraq.

She tells the story how the Utub designated Sheikh Sabah Al-Awal for ruling; based on shura and consensus, noting that Kuwait had been born as an independent entity, where the rulers practiced governing without foreign influence. Sheikh Sabah Al-Awal had shrewdly adopted a balance policy for dealing with the foreign powers, ensuring non-interference in the Kuwaitis' domestic affairs.

In the 18th century, her book notes, Kuwait gained prominence due to political stability and development of trade. During



this period, several tribes moved to settle in it. Trade at those times widely expanded and the Kuwaiti traders reached in their sea endeavors to the coasts of India and Africa. —KUNA



## Ministry inspectors bust shop selling counterfeit goods

**KUWAIT:** Ministry of Commerce and Industry inspectors busted a shop that sold counterfeit goods, including purses and accessories carrying labels of famous international brands. Inspectors found labels that shop workers prepared to place on items and sell them as authentic. The ministry's emergency team confiscated the goods and took legal action against the shop owner, the ministry said in a statement.



Afghan baby lost in US airlift chaos reunited with family

## Iran says Vienna talks progress thanks to 'all parties'

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BRUSSELS: NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg (R) talks during a joint press conference Ukraine Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration Olga Stefanishyna (L), after their bilateral meeting at the NATO headquarters in Brussels yesterday. —AFP

# US, Russia hold high-stakes talks on Ukraine

## Washington not taking seriously Moscow's demand of an end to NATO's eastward expansion

**GENEVA:** Top US and Russian officials held crucial talks yesterday on soaring tensions over Ukraine and security demands from Moscow, with little hope of a diplomatic breakthrough on the table. The high-stakes negotiations come with Russian troops massing on Ukraine's border and fears of an invasion, and Moscow demanding wide-ranging concessions from Washington and its NATO partners.

The talks launch a week of high-stakes diplomacy between Russia and the West, after Moscow amassed tens of thousands of troops at the Ukrainian border, drawing the United States and Europe into a Cold War-style stand-off. US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov opened their meeting at the US mission in Geneva at 8:55 am (0755 GMT), officials said. A convoy of black vehicles with Russian diplomatic plates had arrived shortly before, and was ushered through the large iron gates under a billowing US flag. The two diplomats had already met informally in the Swiss city on Sunday evening, with Ryabkov afterwards telling Russian news agencies the first meeting had been "difficult". Ryabkov was quoted by state news agency RIA Novosti yesterday as saying he feared Washington was not taking seriously Moscow's demand of an end to NATO's eastward expansion.

**'Pessimistic forecast'**  
Pointing to a 2008 promise by NATO to consider membership for Ukraine and Georgia, Ryabkov said: "Are they ready to give legal guarantees that this country, as well as other countries... will not join NATO?"

"I have a rather pessimistic forecast in this regard," Sherman in the talks on Sunday stressed "the freedom of sovereign nations to choose their own alliances," the State Department said. In the muddy trenches on the frontline in Ukraine, where Kyiv's forces have been battling pro-Russian fighters since 2014, there was little hope for diplomacy.

"I doubt that anything will change," 29-year-old soldier Mykhailo said as he walked through trenches in the town of Avdiivka, just north of the separatist stronghold city of Donetsk. "Guarantees of not joining NATO will never stop" Putin, Mykhailo said, adding: "he wants to return the Soviet Union in version 2.0."

Both sides have set firm lines, with Washington warning

that Moscow would face severe consequences from an invasion of Ukraine and Russia demanding wide-ranging new security arrangements with the West.

After yesterday's talks, a meeting of the NATO-Russia Council will take place in Brussels tomorrow, then the permanent council of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) will meet in Vienna on Thursday with Ukraine expected to dominate. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken stressed Sunday that Russia had to choose between dialogue and confrontation, warning on CNN that there would be "massive consequences for Russia if it renews its aggression on Ukraine."

"There's a path of dialogue and diplomacy to try to resolve some of these differences," he said. The United States says many of Moscow's proposals are non-starters. Blinken warned that any positive outcome from the talks would rely in part on Russia's willingness to stand down from its aggressive posture, which he likened to "an

atmosphere of escalation with a gun to Ukraine's head".

"If we're actually going to make progress, we're going to have to see de-escalation," US President Joe Biden's top diplomat said. Russia could otherwise face severe economic and financial consequences, "as well as NATO almost certainly having to reinforce its position near Russia as well as continuing to provide assistance to Ukraine", he told ABC television on Sunday.

Putin met Biden in Geneva in June and agreed on regular "stability" talks between Sherman and Ryabkov. Previous rounds were held in the Swiss city in July and September.

### US warning

In two phone calls to Putin, Biden has warned of severe consequences if Russia invades Ukraine. Measures under consideration include sanctions on Putin's inner circle, cancelling Russia's controversial Nord Stream 2 pipeline to Germany or, in the most drastic scenario, severing Russia's links to the world's banking system.

Russia insists it was deceived after the Cold War and understood that NATO would not expand eastward. Instead, the US-led alliance welcomed most of the former Warsaw Pact countries and the three Baltic nations that were under Soviet rule. —AFP

## Suu Kyi hit with new jail term, convictions

**YANGON:** A Myanmar junta court yesterday convicted Aung San Suu Kyi of three criminal charges, sentencing her to four years in prison in the latest in a slew of cases against the ousted civilian leader. The Nobel laureate has been detained since February 1 when her government was forced out in an early morning coup, ending Myanmar's short-lived experiment with democracy.

The generals' power grab triggered widespread dissent, which security forces sought to quell with mass detentions and bloody crackdowns in which more than 1,400 civilians have been killed, according to a local monitoring group.

A source with knowledge of the case told AFP the 76-year-old was found guilty of two charges related to illegally importing and owning walkie-talkies and one of breaking coronavirus rules. Junta spokesman Major General Zaw Min Tun confirmed the verdicts and sentences and told AFP Suu Kyi would remain under house arrest while other

cases against her proceed. The walkie-talkie charges stem from when soldiers raided her house on the day of the coup, allegedly discovering the contraband equipment. Yesterday's sentence adds to the penalties the court handed down in December when she was jailed for four years for incitement and breaching COVID-19 rules while campaigning. Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing cut the sentence to two years and said she could serve her term under house arrest in the capital Naypyidaw. The total six-year jail term would mean Suu Kyi would not be able to participate in fresh elections that the military authorities have pledged to hold by August 2023.

### 'Courtroom circus'

December's ruling drew international condemnation, and the Myanmar public reverted to old protesting tactics of banging pots and pans in a show of anger. Deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch Phil Robertson condemned Monday's verdicts.

"The Myanmar junta's courtroom circus of secret proceedings on bogus charges is all about steadily piling up more convictions against Aung San Suu Kyi so that she will remain in prison indefinitely," he said in a statement.

Journalists have been barred from attending hearings, and Suu Kyi's lawyers have been muzzled from speaking to the media. The verdicts come days after Cambodian strongman Hun Sen—who currently holds the chair for regional bloc ASEAN—held talks with Min Aung Hlaing in Naypyidaw. ASEAN has sought to use its influence to defuse the Myanmar crisis, but Hun Sen's visit attracted criticism from rights groups and anti-junta activists. Under a previous junta regime, Suu Kyi spent long spells under house arrest in her family mansion in Yangon, Myanmar's largest city. Today, she is confined to an undisclosed location in the capital, with her link to the outside world limited to brief pre-trial meetings with her lawyers. Besides yesterday's cases, she is also facing multiple counts of corruption—each of which is punishable by 15 years in jail—and of violating the official secrets act.

In November, she and 15 other officials, including Myanmar's president Win Myint, were also charged with alleged electoral fraud during the 2020 polls. Her National League for Democracy party had swept the elections in a landslide, trouncing a military-aligned party by a wider margin than the previous 2015 election. —AFP

## Kazak president says 'attempted coup' defeated

**ALMATY, Kazakhstan:** Kazakhstan's President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev said yesterday his country had defeated an attempted coup d'etat during historic violence last week, and insisted that Russian-led troops called in to help quell the unrest would go home "soon". During a video conference of leaders from several ex-Soviet countries in a military alliance that sent in the troops, Tokayev's Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin confirmed they would leave as soon as their mission ended. The Central Asian country is reeling in the wake of the worst violence in its recent history, but life in Kazakhstan's largest city Almaty appeared to be returning to normal yesterday, with internet coverage restored as the nation observed a day of mourning for dozens killed in the clashes. Tokayev told the video conference that "armed militants" had used the backdrop of protests to try to seize power.

"The main goal was obvious: the undermining of the constitutional order, the destruction of government institutions and the seizure of power. It was an attempted coup d'etat," Tokayev said. The Moscow-led Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) has deployed just over 2,000 troops and 250 pieces of military hardware, the Kazakh leader said, vowing that the detachment soon would leave the country.

### 'Limited time period'

Some have voiced concerns that

Moscow could leverage the mission to shore up its influence in Kazakhstan, with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken warning last week that "once Russians are in your house, it's sometimes very difficult to get them to leave".

Putin told yesterday's meeting that "a contingent of CSTO peacekeeping forces has been sent to Kazakhstan—and I want to emphasise this—for a limited time period." He said measures taken by the CSTO showed that its members would not allow "so-called colour revolutions" to break out in Russia's backyard. Large protests, Putin added, were "used by destructive forces from outside and inside the country".

Kazakhstan's authoritarian government has accused "armed bandits" and terrorists of being behind the unrest, which began with protests over a fuel price hike. The government said Monday that foreign media reports had created "the false impression that the Kazakhstan government has been targeting peaceful protesters".

Tokayev said in the meeting that his country's security personnel "have never fired and will never fire on peaceful demonstrators". He wrote on Twitter late yesterday that he had a "productive" phone conversation with European Council President Charles Michel, during which he dismissed claims force was used against unarmed protesters and said Kazakhstan will "continue to strengthen (its) partnership with (the) EU."

### Internet restored

Almaty, the country's main city and former capital, had been nearly completely offline since Wednesday. Local and foreign websites were accessible again Monday morning but connections were far from stable. AFP correspondents saw public transport operating



ALMATY, Kazakhstan: Kazakh soldiers check pedestrians in Almaty yesterday, after the violence that erupted following protests over hikes in fuel prices. —AFP

there for the first time since the violence, which left government buildings burned and gutted and many businesses looted. The internet's restoration came as Putin criticised social media's role in fomenting the unrest and called on the CSTO to work together on cybersecurity and terrorism to combat "destructive foreign interference".

Kazakh authorities have struggled to provide a clear and full picture of the unrest. On Sunday, the information ministry retracted a statement that said more than 164 people had died in the unrest, blaming the publication on a "technical mistake".

Officials previously said 26 "armed criminals" had been killed and that 16 security officers had died. In total, nearly 8,000 people have been detained for questioning, the interior ministry said yesterday. Tokayev dismissed his cabinet last week in an effort to placate the protesters and was expected

to present a new government to parliament today. On Saturday, authorities announced the arrest on treason charges of Karim Masimov, a high-profile ally of founding president Nursultan Nazarbayev who was dismissed from his post as security committee chief at the height of the unrest.

Nazarbayev, 81, who was widely regarded as holding the strings in country despite stepping down from the presidency in 2019, has not spoken in public since the crisis began. Nazarbayev's press secretary said Saturday that Nazarbayev was in "direct contact" with Tokayev and called on Kazakhs to "rally around" the president.

Nazarbayev hand-picked Tokayev as his successor when he stepped down after more than a quarter-century as head of state. Tokayev's spokesman said Sunday that the president was "taking decisions independently". —AFP

## Italy tightens restrictions on unvaccinated

**ROME:** People in Italy who are not vaccinated against COVID-19 are barred from restaurants or taking domestic flights under new rules which came into force yesterday as schools reopened nationwide. Only those who have recently recovered from a coronavirus infection are exempt from the regulations, which represent a further tightening of restrictions in the face of rising infections.

The majority of schools opened yesterday for a new term under government orders, despite calls from headteachers, the doctors' union and some mayors to delay the return to class for at least two weeks. However, over 1,000 councils across the country were keeping their schools closed, media reports said.

Top virologist Massimo Galli at the Sacco de Milan hospital said opening schools was "imprudent and unjustified", while public health expert Walter Ricciardi described the situation as "explosive". Italy was the first European country to be hit by the coronavirus in early 2020 and has one of the highest death tolls, at nearly 140,000.

It reported just over 155,000 new cases on Sunday out of a population of 60 million. Over 86 percent of over 12s have been vaccinated and jabs are available for younger children. Some 15 percent of children between five and 11 years old have had their first vaccine.

The virus is "in an exponential phase. The reopening of schools will bring additional stress, and I fear the number of infections will grow at least until the end of January," virologist Fabrizio Pregliasco said.

Trenitalia said yesterday it had cancelled 180 regional trains-affecting 550 routes—due to coronavirus infections. Regional coach companies also reported hundreds of drivers off sick with the virus. The so-called Super Green Pass showing proof of vaccination or recent recovery is required until March 31 for restaurants, hotels and gyms, and to use local or regional buses, trains, planes and ships.

FFP2 masks are now mandatory in theatres, cinemas, sports stadiums and on all public transport. Unvaccinated residents on Italy's small islands, which had warned they risked being cast into "forced exile" by the new rules, have been granted extra time.

The locals—for whom boats and planes are the only means of getting off and on the islands—will be able to continue to travel without the Super pass for health and education reasons until February 10. Prime Minister Mario Draghi was expected to address the country on the new measures later. Ricciardi, who advises Italy's health minister, told the Messaggero daily the latest restrictions "are not based on scientific evidence" and "will not stop the pandemic". —AFP

## International

# Dutch government sworn in with focus on climate change

## Earmarks 35 billion euros over the next 10 years for climate measures

**THE HAGUE:** Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte's fourth coalition government took office yesterday a record 10 months after elections, with pledges to spend big on climate change and coronavirus. The new government, formed after gruelling negotiations, has earmarked a frugality-busting 35 billion euros (\$40 billion) over the next 10 years for climate measures.

It has promised to build two new nuclear power stations and to become climate neutral by 2050, as one of the world's lowest-lying and densely-populated countries confronts rising sea levels. The government also includes the Netherlands' first ever dedicated climate and energy minister, Rob Jetten, 34, charged with curbing emissions and the country's reliance on fossil fuels, especially gas.

Bike-riding premier Rutte has said the coalition wanted to "lay the foundation for the next generation", especially on climate as around a third of the Netherlands' landmass sits below sea-level. The new coalition will meanwhile also face the immediate task of deciding whether record Omicron cases mean it should extend Europe's toughest COVID restrictions, which are due to expire on Friday.

New finance minister Sigrid Kaag was sworn in by King Willem-Alexander via video-link because she was quarantining after testing positive for coronavirus. Rutte, 54, is on course to become the

longest-serving Dutch premier later this year, and is already the EU's second longest-ensconced leader after Hungary's Viktor Orban. But the path to his fourth government since 2010 was a difficult one, taking a record 271 days of negotiations after elections on March 17.

### Climate spending

The coalition also comprises the same four parties as the last government-Rutte's centre-right VVD, Kaag's progressive D66, the centre-right CDA, and the conservative Christen Unie. The

Dutch have set another unwelcome record by being under a caretaker government for almost exactly a year, after the previous coalition resigned in January 2021 over a child benefits scandal.

But new coalition has a record number of women, with an unprecedented 14 of the 19 ministers and secretaries of state being female. Dubbed the "Teflon" prime minister for his ability to dodge scandals and stay in power, Rutte said in December he wanted his new government to "restore trust".

The spending pledges on climate and COVID will see Kaag leading the Dutch towards abandoning their traditional role as leader of the EU's austerity-obsessed "frugals". Kaag, a 60-year-old former diplomat, is also tipped to smooth ties with debt-hit southern European states that have previ-



**THE HAGUE:** King Willem-Alexander poses with Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte and his IV cabinet, following the swearing-in and inauguration ceremony of the new government, at Noordeinde Palace in The Hague, yesterday. —AFP

### It has promised to build two new nuclear power stations



ously been lectured by the Dutch to cut deficits.

The Netherlands is seen as one of the European Union's "frugal four" member states alongside Austria, Denmark and Sweden that clash with other nations over the EU's budget. Her predecessor Wopke Hoekstra of the CDA, known for his hawkish

stance on spending, moves to the foreign ministry.

Ernst Kuipers, who was responsible for moving coronavirus patients around the country, will replace Hugo de Jonge as health minister. De Jonge will take on another key pledge of the coalition: tackling a chronic housing shortage. —AFP

## Iran says Vienna talks progress thanks to 'all parties'

**TEHRAN:** Iran's foreign ministry spokesman said yesterday that efforts by "all parties" to revive the country's 2015 nuclear agreement with world powers had resulted in "good progress" during talks in Vienna. Negotiations to salvage the nuclear deal resumed in late November after they were suspended in June as Iran elected a new, ultraconservative government.

The 2015 deal-agreed by Iran, the US, China, Russia, Britain, France and Germany-offered Tehran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear programme. But then-president Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew the US in 2018 and reimposed biting sanctions, prompting Tehran to begin rolling back on its commitments.

"There has been good progress on all four issues of removing sanctions, nuclear issues, verification and obtaining guarantees" during the latest round of talks, Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh told reporters yesterday.

This progress is "the result of the efforts made by all parties to reach a stable agreement". His comments are the latest in a series of positive announcements by Iran on the talks, as the Islamic republic negotiates with the remaining parties to the deal. The US has participated only indirectly in the Vienna talks, which seek to bring Washington back inside the accord and to ensure Iran re-adheres to its own commitments.

"We are seeking a reliable and stable deal," Khatibzadeh said. "If the other party thinks an unstable and unreliable agreement is to their benefit, this is not what the Islamic Republic is after."

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said Friday that negotiations were progressing on a "rather positive path" but emphasised the urgency of bringing them to a speedy conclusion. —AFP

## UK tells developers to pay more on safety after fire tragedy

**LONDON:** The UK government has told property developers to contribute more to remove combustible cladding from residential buildings, under revised plans to be unveiled following the deadly 2017 Grenfell Tower fire. Housing Secretary Michael Gove wants the industry to stump up an estimated £4 billion (\$5.4 billion, 4.8 billion euros) to cover the expense of removing the dangerous cladding from buildings 11 to 18 metres tall with flats. It marks a U-turn on heavily criticised plans announced early last year which would have required flat owners with unsafe material on their properties to access a low-interest loan scheme to help pay the removal costs. The government would also have contributed billions.

The new proposals come after more than four years of inaction and wrangling with the property industry following the June 2017 high-rise blaze in west London that killed 72 people. An official report has blamed highly combustible cladding fixed to the 24-storey block as the "principal reason" the fire spread, while a public inquiry into the tragedy remains ongoing. Grenfell was Britain's deadliest domestic fire since World War II and has left thousands of leaseholder owners of flats in other buildings stuck in perilous situations, unable to afford the removal of the cladding. They have also faced other rising costs, from increased insurance premiums to, in some cases, having to pay for around-the-clock fire marshal patrols. Meanwhile most have been unable to sell or rent their flats because mortgage providers are unwilling to lend on the properties or because of other resulting restrictions. —AFP

## Iraq assembly holds fiery first session

**BAGHDAD:** Iraq's new parliament held a heated inaugural session Sunday, three tense months after legislative elections won by Shiite cleric Moqtada Sadr, the likely kingmaker of the next government. Sadr, 47, who once led an anti-US militia and who has a large and dedicated following, is expected to have the key say in who will serve as the next prime minister, a post now held by Mustafa al-Kadhemi.

Sunday saw the swearing in of the 329 members of the unicameral parliament and the re-election of influential Sunni MP Mohammed al-Halbussi as speaker. Shiite Hakem Zamili and Kurd Shakhwan Abdallah were elected as his deputies. But a dispute broke out between lawmakers of the Shiite Coordination Framework coalition and their Sadrist rivals, several parliamentary sources said. Iraq's post-election period has been marred by high tensions, violence and allegations of vote fraud. MP Mahmud al-Mashhadani, the oldest member of parliament who chaired Sunday's session, was "hospitalised", public television said. Official news agency INA said he was in a "stable" condition.

A parliamentary source requesting anonymity said Mashhadani "fainted". Videos filmed by MPs showed lawmakers fighting among themselves. The session was suspended for more than an hour before resuming.

## Syria's Assad regime on trial in Europe

**PARIS:** A growing number of cases are being brought in Europe, and especially Germany, against loyalists of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime on accusations of state-sponsored torture. In the latest case, a court in the German city of Koblenz is set on Thursday to rule on the case of former Syrian intelligence agent, Anwar Raslan, who is accused of crimes against humanity, for which prosecutors are demanding a life sentence.

In February 2021, the court jailed a lower-ranking former Syrian intelligence agent, Eyad al-Gharib, for being an accomplice to crimes against humanity in the world's first prosecution over the abuses.

### Here is a snapshot of the cases:

#### Germany

Germany has used the principle of universal jurisdiction, which allows a foreign country to prosecute crimes against humanity, including war crimes and genocide, regardless of where they were committed, after receiving complaints from Syrians who claim to have been tortured in regime jails.

In March 2017, seven Syrian torture survivors and a human rights group filed a criminal complaint in Germany against Syrian secret service officials. Later that year nearly 27,000 photos taken by a former Syrian military photographer known as Caesar, who documented torture and death in regime jails, were also turned over to German courts, according to German rights

### 'Consensus' government?

Sadr, who wears the black turban of a descendant of Islam's Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), emerged as the big winner of the October 10 polls, which were held several months early as a concession to a pro-democracy protest movement. His movement, which ran after he reversed an initial election boycott call, won 73 of the 329 seats.

Kurdish MP Muthana Amin said Sunday's session "began normally" but that the Coordination Framework claimed it was the largest alliance in parliament, with 88 seats. Mashhadani "asked for the information to be verified, after which he was abused," Amin told AFP, without saying whether his hospitalisation was linked to the incident. The Coordination Framework said in a statement that it did not recognise Halbussi's re-election as it took place in Mashhadani's absence. Within 30 days of its inaugural session, the parliament must elect the president of the republic.

The new president must then appoint a premier, who is chosen by the largest coalition and has 30 days to form a government. Some experts and politicians expect a new governing team in place by March for the oil-rich but war-battered country of 40 million.

Sadr has repeatedly said he wants to break with the Iraqi political tradition of a "consensus" government to instead

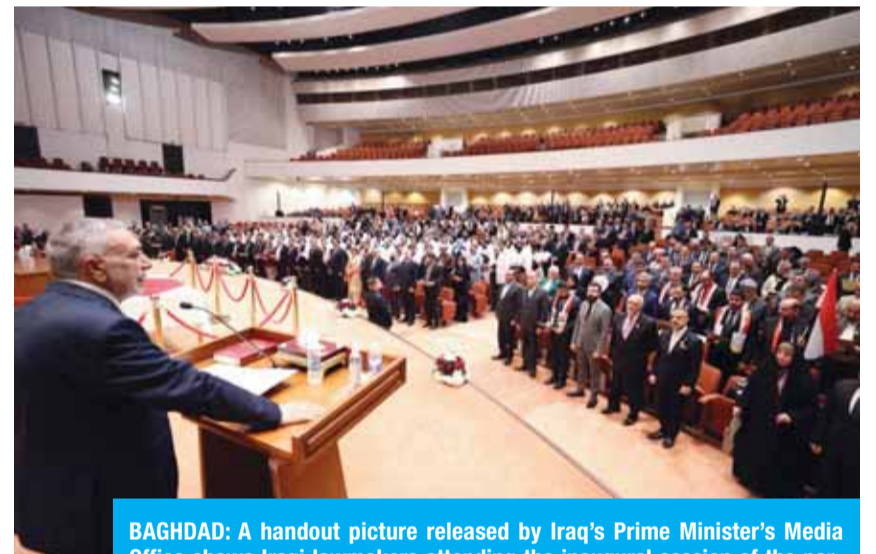
group ECCHR. In November 2017, the ECCHR announced that two new complaints for crimes against humanity and war crimes had been filed by 13 Syrians over alleged acts of torture. Seven other Syrian men and women who claimed to have suffered or witnessed rape and sexual abuse in Assad's detention centres also submitted a complaint to German prosecutors, the group revealed in June 2020.

They named nine senior government and air force intelligence officials, including top Syrian intelligence officer Jamil Hassan, already the subject of an international arrest notice. The trial of a Syrian doctor accused of torture, murder and crimes against humanity is due to start in Frankfurt on January 19.

#### France

In September 2015, a Paris prosecutor opened a preliminary inquiry against Assad's regime for crimes against humanity over allegations of abduction and torture. The following July the family of a Syrian doctor who died in a government prison lodged a complaint in Paris over his torture and murder. Another French court opened an investigation in 2016 into the disappearance of Mazen Dabbagh and his son Patrick, two French-Syrian nationals who had been arrested in Syria three years earlier. France issued its first international arrest notices for Syrian intelligence officials in 2018 for "complicity in acts of torture" related to the case as well as "complicity in crimes against humanity" and "complicity in war crimes".

The warrants were for National Security Bureau director Ali Mamluk, Air Force Intelligence chief Jamil Hassan and Abdel Salam Mahmoud, who was in charge of the Damascus branch of the Air Force Intelligence investigative branch. In April 2021, three NGOs that had lodged civil



**BAGHDAD:** A handout picture released by Iraq's Prime Minister's Media Office shows Iraqi lawmakers attending the inaugural session of the parliament in Baghdad, three months after legislative elections. —AFP

build a majority government. That would mean securing a ruling majority that would appoint a premier and cabinet from within its ranks.

### Instability and violence

Forming a majority government would be "new" for Iraq, said political scientist Ihsan al-Shammari, noting that all Shiite parties had participated in previous administrations. The post of premier historically goes to a Shiite, under Iraq's informal system of religious and ethnic quotas in place since the 2003 US-led invasion that toppled dictator Saddam Hussein.

Sadr's pro-Iranian rivals in the Conquest Alliance, the political wing of

the pro-Iran ex-paramilitary coalition Hashed al-Shaabi, won only 17 seats in the legislative polls, compared to 48 in the previous parliament. The Hashed's backers charged that the vote was marred by "fraud", but the courts rejected their appeal to have the election annulled. Hashed supporters demonstrated in anger outside Baghdad's ultra-secure Green Zone, which houses parliament, other government buildings and the US embassy. Kadhemi escaped unharmed when an unclaimed attack using armed drones targeted his residence on November 7. Sadr has hinted that he prefers an alliance with Sunni groups Azm and Taqadom, and a Kurdish party, the KDP. —AFP



**KOBLENZ,** Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany: File photo taken on June 04, 2020 Syrian campaigner Wafa Mustafa sits between pictures of victims of the Syrian regime as she holds a picture of her father, during a protest outside the trial against two Syrian alleged former intelligence officers accused for crimes against humanity. —AFP

complaints managed to get a probe opened into chemical attacks in 2013 blamed on the Syrian government. The case, already filed in Germany, was lodged on behalf of victims of the 2013 attack and a 2017 attack using sarin gas.

In December 2021, a Franco-Syrian man was jailed, suspected of providing material to the Syrian army which could be used to make chemical weapons. It is the first time that someone had been found charged in France with supporting Assad's troops, judicial officials said.

### Other countries

In July 2017, a Spanish court rejected a complaint filed by a Spanish woman of Syrian origin against nine Syrian government officials over the forced detention,

torture and alleged execution of her brother in 2013.

Legal proceedings have also been launched in Austria, Norway and Sweden which was in 2017 the first country to sentence a former soldier for war crimes. In Sweden, four NGOs lodged a complaint in April 2021 against Assad and several top officials after two chemical attacks in 2013 and 2017.

### UN mechanism

In 2016, the United Nations set up its International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism, which is preparing war crimes charges against individuals over the Syrian conflict. Since April 20 the body has been gathering evidence for use in possible future trials. —AFP

## International

Afghan baby lost in US airlift  
chaos reunited with family

Relatives of Sohail's were tracked down in Kabul with help of social media

**KABUL:** A baby lost during the chaotic evacuation of tens of thousands of Afghans at Kabul airport has been reunited with his relatives after five months, his elated grandfather has said. The boy's father handed two-month-old Sohail Ahmadi to a foreign soldier among jostling crowds desperate to flee the Taliban after the Islamists seized the capital in mid-August.

Meanwhile, Sohail's father Mirza Ali Ahmadi searched for three days at the airport for his missing son, finally choosing to board a flight to the United States with his wife and four other children. Kabul's only airport was trashed in August when tens of thousands of people scrambled to evacuate on any available flight as the United States wrapped up their withdrawal from Afghanistan after 20 years of war. Many Afghans feared a return to the Taliban's hardline rule of the 1990s or retribution for working with the US-backed government or foreign forces.

## 'Responsible like a mother'

It was only days ago that relatives of Sohail's were tracked down in Kabul with the help of social media and police, and the boy was handed to his grandfather in a heart-wrenching goodbye for the Safi couple and their three daughters. "I felt responsible for him like a mother," said Safi's wife Farimah.

"He used to wake up a lot at night... Now when I wake up he is not there and that makes me cry. 'I'm a mother. I understand he will not be with us always and he needs to be with his parents,'" she told AFP.

Her husband said handing back the baby was "very difficult" and he was sorely missed. On Sunday, Sohail's grandfather Mirza Mohammad Qasemi invited the Safi family to his home in Kabul to spend time with the boy, who was showered with affection.

"They looked after him for five months and were very attached to him," he told AFP, adding that the couple had initially been hesitant to hand him over. Qasemi, who said he too had been searching for his grandson, is excited



**KABUL:** Sohail Ahmadi (C), who was separated from his parents at the airport in the chaos of the US evacuation of Afghanistan in August 2021, plays at his grandfather's house in Kabul. — AFP

that Sohail will now be able to join his parents in the United States. "It was hard for my daughter. She was crying and not eating anything," Qasemi said, wiping his tears as he watched Sohail sleep in Farimah's lap.

Until Sohail joins his parents he will be looked after

by his aunt, Qasemi said. "We were in a bad condition these past five months ... But when we found our baby we were happy that God had given our child back to us," father Ahmadi told AFP by telephone from America. — AFP

“ I felt responsible for him like a mother ”

The pair were separated, and what happened next is unclear—but taxi driver Hamid Safi said he found the baby crying and alone on the floor of the airport the same day. "I took him to some women to breastfeed him but they would not... I kept looking for his family," said Safi, who had gone to the airport to help his brother with evacuation.

"I then called my wife and she said to bring the baby home." The couple said they kept searching for the boy's parents but on failing to find them, gave him the name Mohammad Abed and began to care for him. "If we had not found his family then we would have protected and raised him as our own child," Safi, 29, told AFP.

## UN to launch talks to resolve Sudan's political crisis

**KHARTOUM:** The United Nations' envoy to Sudan is due to launch talks yesterday aiming to resolve an escalating political crisis triggered by a military coup last year. The coup, led by army chief General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan on October 25, derailed a power-sharing transition between the military and civilians that had been painstakingly put together in the wake of longtime autocrat Omar-al-Bashir's ouster in 2019.

Citizens have repeatedly taken to the streets in the last two months or so to demand civilian rule—sometimes in their tens of thousands—and at least 63 people have been killed amid a violent crackdown, according to medics.

On Saturday, the UN announced that it would launch "intra-Sudanese talks on Democracy and Transition" and the special representative to Sudan Volker Perthes is set to hold a news conference to that end at 2:00 pm local time yesterday. But the response from key civilian factions in Sudan has been lukewarm.

"We have yet to receive any details about the UN initiative," said Jaafar Hassan, a spokesman for the mainstream faction of the Forces for Freedom and Change, the leading civilian grouping. "We are willing to take part in the talks on condition that the purpose is to resume the democratic transition and remove the coup regime, but we are against it if these talks seek to legitimise the coup regime," he told AFP yesterday.

On Sunday, the Sudanese Professionals Association, another key faction, said it completely "rejected" the UN-facilitated talks. Perthes said Saturday that the "UN-facilitated intra-Sudanese political process aims at supporting Sudanese stakeholders to agree on a way out of the current political crisis as well as a sustainable path forward towards democracy and peace."

The UN's move has been welcomed by the United States, United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Burhan has insisted that the military takeover "was not a coup" but only meant to "rectify the course of the Sudanese transition".

Authorities have repeatedly denied using live ammunition in confronting protesters and insist scores of security forces have been wounded during demonstrations that have often "deviated from peacefulness".

A November 21 deal saw Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok reinstated, after he spent weeks under house arrest in the wake of the coup. But Hamdok resigned last week, saying he had tried to prevent Sudan "from sliding toward disaster", but that the country was now at a "dangerous crossroads threatening its very survival". The UN Security Council is to meet tomorrow to discuss the situation in Sudan. — AFP

## India begins booster campaign as cases soar

**NEW DELHI:** India began a COVID-19 booster shot campaign for frontline workers and vulnerable people aged 60 and above yesterday as authorities grapple with a rapidly escalating outbreak driven by the Omicron variant. Daily case numbers are approaching the enormous figures seen last year, when thousands died each day and workers maintained round-the-clock funeral pyres for the mass cremation of virus victims.

Nearly 180,000 new infections were recorded overnight, up nearly six times from a week earlier, with several urban centres imposing night-time curfews and restrictions on public gatherings.

"We've seen the number of cases increasing," said Sheetal Vaishnav, a doctor helping oversee yesterday's vaccinations at a clinic in the capital New Delhi.

"It's necessary that we start protecting our popula-



**BEIJING:** This picture shows the Afghanistan embassy in Beijing yesterday where Afghanistan's envoy to China announced his resignation on social media via colorful handover note, detailing how diplomats had not been paid for six months following the Taliban takeover. — AFP

## Afghan envoy to China quits after six months of no pay

**BEIJING:** Afghanistan's ambassador to China left a colourful resignation note for his post-Taliban takeover successor yesterday—revealing that staff had not been paid for months and that a lone receptionist had been left to answer phones. Javid Ahmad Qaem took to Twitter to detail how he had to scrape cash from the embassy's bank account to pay staff after the Taliban seized Afghanistan last August.

"Since we did not receive salaries from Kabul for the last six months, we assigned a committee from within the diplomats to solve the financial issues," Qaem wrote in a letter to Afghanistan's foreign ministry dated January 1 but posted to social media on Monday.

Still, he left some funds for his successor. "As of today, 1st January 2022, there is around \$100,000 left in the account." He did not say where he was going next. In a portrait of a barely functioning embassy, Qaem's letter revealed he had left the keys for the embassy's five cars in his office and that a lone local hire had been assigned to answer queries after all the other diplomats left.

Many of Afghanistan's embassies are in diplomatic limbo, run by staff still loyal to the Western-backed government toppled by the Taliban. Several Afghan diplomats have abandoned their Beijing postings since the fall of Kabul. Qaem wrote, calling his resignation "the end to an honourable responsibility" in an accompanying Tweet. "I believe when the new person assigned, Mr

tion more." People aged 60 and above with pre-existing medical conditions, health professionals, and other essential workers are all eligible for a booster nine months after their second jab. "I want to keep myself safe in this pandemic, that's why I got it," said Sunil, a municipal worker who received his latest shot yesterday.

"Nothing happened in the first one, and nothing in the second one, what can go wrong with the third one?"

## Positive signs

India appears better placed to weather the Omicron strain than it was ahead of the calamitous Delta wave it suffered last year. During that period, more than 200,000 people died within a few weeks, according to official figures. Experts believe the real number is several times higher. That outbreak saw hospitals overwhelmed, oxygen run out and patients scramble to source medicine from depleted pharmacies. In the time since, Indian health workers have injected more than 1.5 billion vaccine doses, with teens aged 15-18 eligible since last week.

As in other countries, deaths are a fraction of those during the Delta wave — with 146 fatalities recorded on Sunday, compared with more than 4,000 per day during last year's spike.—AFP



Sadaat, arrives to Beijing, there will be no other diplomat left," the letter said, adding that China had been "well-informed".

## Diplomatic limbo

It was not immediately clear of the whereabouts of his successor, or who had appointed him, and no immediate comment from Taliban officials in Kabul. The Afghan embassy in Beijing appeared open as usual yesterday afternoon, with the internationally recognised Afghan tricolour raised and two security guards outside.

Qaem, who has served as ambassador since November 2019, had expressed concerns about the Taliban in media interviews shortly after China hosted a visiting delegation in July. Weeks later, the Taliban captured Kabul and formed a new Islamist government. Since then, Afghanistan has been plunged into financial chaos, with inflation and unemployment surging.

China has provided millions to Afghanistan in aid since the takeover and the new regime sees Beijing as a crucial source of investment. The Taliban have not appointed new representatives to most missions, however, and their government is not recognised by any nation.

Beijing is not the only Afghan embassy that has seemingly fallen into chaos. Police were called to the country's embassy in Rome last week when a sacked Afghan diplomat attacked the ambassador after claiming to have been appointed to replace him, the mission said. The Taliban's foreign ministry in Kabul said the diplomat still had a valid contract and his termination was illegal.

There has also been a diplomatic standoff at the UN, with representatives of the former and current regime both claiming Afghanistan's seat. Late last year the UN Security Council indefinitely postponed making a decision on the matter. — AFP

## News in brief

## Spain bouncy castle tragedy

**MADRID:** A four-year-old girl has died following a bouncy castle accident last week in eastern Spain, the second child to die after a gust of wind blew away the structure, local officials said yesterday. Another seven children were hurt after they fell from the inflatable bouncy castle on January 4 in Mislata on the outskirts of Valencia. An eight-year-old girl died from her injuries the day after the fairground accident. "We regret the death of the second girl who was in hospital in serious condition following the accident," Mislata city hall said in a statement. The city declared three days of official mourning and cancelled all official events until noon tomorrow in the wake of the girl's death. "What great sadness! Despite the extraordinary efforts made by health-care workers, the second girl injured at the fair has died," Mislata mayor Carlos Bielsa tweeted. — AFP

## Pope calls for 'reality therapy'

**VATICAN CITY:** Pope Francis yesterday urged the international community to step up COVID vaccination and said "reality therapy" was needed to battle "baseless information" putting people off getting jabbed. The Argentine pontiff, who has previously described getting vaccinated as "an act of love", urged governments to ensure everyone around the world had access to vaccines. "Frequently people let themselves be influenced by the ideology of the moment, often bolstered by baseless information or poorly documented facts," he told members of the Vatican's diplomatic corps. "The pandemic, on the other hand, urges us to adopt a sort of 'reality therapy' that makes us confront the problem head on and adopt suitable remedies to resolve it," the 85-year old said. — AFP

## Villager killed in tiger attack

**KUALA LUMPUR:** An indigenous Malaysian villager has been killed in a tiger attack, with government rangers shooting dead the critically endangered creature after it also charged them, authorities said. The 59-year-old victim, Anek Along, was attacked Friday near the town of Gua Musang in the northern Malaysian state of Kelantan. The 120-kilogram (264-pound) creature then rushed other villagers who threw spears to fend the creature off, wounding its face, according to wildlife officials. Rangers arrived a few hours later and shot dead the tiger after it charged them. Kelantan wildlife department director Mohamad Hafid Rohani told AFP authorities were "sad" they were forced to kill the creature "as tigers (in Malaysia) are dying out". — AFP



**BANGALORE, India:** A health worker inoculates a college student with a dose of Covaxin vaccine against the COVID-19 during a vaccination drive for youths in the 15-18 age group at a junior college in Bangalore yesterday. — AFP

# Business

TUESDAY, JANUARY 11, 2021

## Kazakhs count cost of living as largest city reels from violence

### People live in poverty in mineral-rich Kazakhstan

**ALMATY:** Before clashes between security forces and government opponents left dozens dead and rendered parts of Kazakhstan's largest city almost unrecognizable, citizens in the west of the oil-rich country were staging their own protest against a sudden New Year fuel hike.

By the time the government rolled back prices for liquefied petroleum gas—a relatively cheap petrol alternative widely used by residents of the former Soviet republic's hydrocarbon heartland—solidarity demonstrations had popped up all over the vast republic. In Kazakhstan, a long summer drought and complications in the landlocked country's trade with China made 2021 an especially expensive year, with strong inflation forecast to continue this year too.

The concession from beleaguered President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev to reduce LPG prices by more than half on Tuesday arrived too late to save a reputation for stability carefully cultivated by the republic's image-conscious authoritarian leadership. That night and on Wednesday the southern city of Almaty witnessed protests of unprecedented size and ferocity that saw government buildings seized and set alight before the army and a Russia-led peacekeeping mission restored an uneasy calm.

As residents surveyed the devastation, many blamed the sheer gulf between a ruling elite constantly finding ways to enrich itself and ordinary people getting steadily poorer. "Everything has become so awfully expensive," complained Galiya, a 42-year-old protester who gave only her first name and said she planned to go abroad in search of work if there were no major changes to the government.

#### 'We live in poverty'

"We have all the minerals in the periodic table here but we live in poverty. The government raised the minimum wage from 42,500 tenge (roughly \$100) to 60,000 tenge at the start of the year. How would you begin to live here on that?"

The last quarter of 2021 bequeathed Kazakhstan its worst food inflation since 2016, a year that brought unprecedented nationwide protests as citizens opposed proposals for land code amendments that extended land leases for foreign investors.

The demonstrators made frequent reference to next-door China, whose economic interests in the country have sparked anxiety in the past. But local analysts argued that the protest mood was payback for the government's overnight move to strip away supports for the tenge currency the year before—a de facto 50 percent devaluation that collapsed local purchasing power and intensified resentment of top-level officials and their offshore lifestyles. This time round a long summer drought causing price spikes for vegetables, meat and animal feed has compounded household woes in an economy still struggling to bounce back from the global energy price crash in 2014.

Frequent rule changes, subsidy cuts and "speculation" on Beijing's side of the border in the second half of 2021 meanwhile caused long waits and a surge in costs for containers carrying imported goods, according to Oksana Sorokina, director of the Almaty-based SevenR Logistics company.

"As a result we met the end of the year with a shortage of goods with wild prices that of course were passed on to end-consumers," Sorokina said.

#### Country of contrasts

Like many emerging economies dependent on energy exports, Kazakhstan is a country of stark contrasts. Nur-Sultan, the city that replaced Almaty as capital in 1997, glitters with cosmic architecture designed by the likes of Britain's Norman Foster. The government has continued to pour money into the city, while many provincial centers have struggled to shed their Soviet-era skin.

In Almaty, mountain suburbs are studded with colorful mansions, some boasting spires. But the bowels of the city are an indifferent grey and suffer



ALMATY, Kazakhstan: Pedestrians carry food in Almaty on Sunday after violence that erupted following protests over hikes in fuel prices.—AFP

some of the world's worst air during the coal-powered heating season. Citizens appeared dazed as they returned to everyday errands in the financial hub and came to terms with damage inflicted by rampaging mobs.

A 34-year-old psychologist called Natalya said she accepted the government explanation that the events that rocked her city were part of a "planned act of terror" while acknowledging that price rises had contributed to deep dissatisfaction.

"The problem is that salaries have stayed the

same. (Cost of living) became a useful trigger, and death and horror were consequences," Natalya said. "Now I think the government will take the people into account a little more often." Tatiana Boldyreva, a private tutor who was buying fresh milk served in plastic bags, agreed. "Prices are out of control," said Boldyreva, as a street butcher hacked hunks of meat for hungry customers, most of whom had not filled their fridges since before New Year. "But that's no reason to start a war." —AFP

## IMF warns developing countries of 'economic turbulence'

**WASHINGTON:** Emerging economies should gird for possible rough times as the US Federal Reserve prepares to raise interest rates and world economic growth slows because of the Omicron variant of COVID-19, the IMF warned yesterday. The International Monetary Fund, which is scheduled to release updated economic forecasts on January 25, said that for now global economic recovery from the ravages of the pandemic should continue this year and next.

But "risks to growth remain elevated by the stubbornly resurgent pandemic," IMF economists Stephan Danninger, Kenneth Kang and Helene Poirson wrote in a blog post. The highly contagious Omicron strain has spread like wildfire around the world since mid-December, causing record numbers of new COVID cases in the latest wave of the global health crisis.

Omicron, which seems to cause less severe disease than previous strains of the coronavirus, is causing countries to reinstate health measures that hamper economic growth. "Given the risk that this could coincide with faster Fed tightening, emerging economies should prepare for potential bouts of economic turbulence," the economists said, as these countries are also confronting elevated inflation and substantially higher public debt.

The Fed has signaled that it will raise key interest rates sooner and more aggressively than it had planned, in order to counter rampant inflation in the US that is hitting US households and consumption—the engine of economic growth in America. Higher interest rates mean financing costs for some emerging economies with dollar-denominated debt will rise.

These countries are already lagging behind in the global economic recovery and thus less able to absorb added expenditure. "While dollar borrowing costs remain low for many, concerns about domestic inflation and stable foreign funding led several emerging markets last year, including Brazil, Russia, and South Africa, to start raising interest rates," the IMF said. —AFP

## Sri Lanka seeks Chinese debt reschedule

**COLOMBO:** Cash-strapped Sri Lanka sought to reschedule its huge Chinese debt burden in Sunday talks with visiting foreign minister Wang Yi, the president's office said. The island's tourism-dependent econ-

## UK manufacturers optimistic despite Brexit risks: Poll

**LONDON:** British manufacturers are optimistic over the 2022 outlook but fear fresh Brexit fallout one year after the nation's departure from the European Union, a survey showed yesterday.

Industry body Make UK, representing 20,000 manufacturing companies across Britain, revealed the findings of its survey of 228 firms conducted with consultancy PwC. The survey concluded that manufacturers "are more positive about the growth outlook as they enter 2022, with greater confidence in the prospects for their own companies than either the global or UK economies".

Almost three quarters of respondents "expect conditions in manufacturing to improve" this year despite the Omicron variant affecting some output. Two thirds insisted Britain remained a "competitive location" for manufacturing, but the same proportion also stated leaving the EU had hurt their business.

And 56 percent of firms believed

more Brexit woes will materialize this year. Britain formally left the EU single market and customs union at the start of 2021. "One year on from leaving the EU, two thirds of companies said that leaving had moderately or significantly hampered their business, with over a half of companies fearing a further impact this year from customs delays due to import checks and changes in product labeling," Make UK said.

The manufacturing sector has also been hit by the ongoing global supply crunch—and soaring inflation caused largely by spiking energy costs. "It's testament to the strength of manufacturers that they have emerged from the turbulence of the last couple of years in such a relatively strong position," added Make UK Chief Executive Stephen Phipson. "While clouds remain on the horizon in the form of rapidly escalating costs and access to key skills, the outlook is more positive for those that remain adaptable,



LONDON: British manufacturers are optimistic over the 2022 outlook but fear fresh Brexit fallout one year after the nation's departure from the European Union, a survey showed yesterday.

agile and innovative."

Trade was also affected by new Covid-19 border restrictions as Britain races to curb the rampant Omicron variant—but Make UK downplayed the impact on manufacturing. "The majority

of manufacturers have weathered the storm of the last couple of years," it added. "To date, the sector appears to have seen little or no disruption from the latest Omicron variant to alter this confidence." —AFP

## Air France-KLM adds biofuel surcharge to plane tickets

**PARIS:** Air France-KLM said yesterday it would add a surcharge of up to 12 euros (\$13.50) on its tickets to try to offset the cost of using more expensive sustainable aviation fuel. Air France said that the fuel levy would be added to tickets from January 10.

Travellers in economy class will pay between one and four euros more while those in business class will pay between 1.5 euros and 12 euros, depending on the distance to their destination, it said in a message to its clients.

Air France's Dutch partner KLM and low-cost subsidiary Transavia will also implement the surcharge on flights departing from France and the Netherlands, the company announced, adding that it replaces between 0.5 percent and one percent of the kerosene it uses with the sustainable alternative.

Sustainable aviation fuel or SAF is chiefly made from used cooking oil or from forestry or agricultural waste. It allows airlines to reduce carbon emissions by 75 percent compared with kerosene over the lifecycle of the fuel.

Jet fuel currently accounts for between 20 and 30 percent of airlines' costs. Take-up of SAF, which is between four and eight times more expensive, has been slow. Current production levels fall far below what would be required to power the world's aircraft fleet.

In 2019, sustainable fuel represented less than 0.1 percent of the 360 billion liters of fuel used by the aviation industry. Air France said it was confident that the cost of SAF would fall as more European countries begin mass producing them. On Thursday, the airline will start offering passengers who are anxious to reduce the carbon footprint of their flight the chance to make a donation towards the purchase of extra sustainable fuel.

Air France vowed that every euro donated would be invested in SAF. Air traffic accounts for between 2.5 and three percent of global carbon emissions. The industry aims to become carbon neutral by 2050, both by investing in jets that guzzle less kerosene and by using cleaner fuel.



TREMBLAY-EN-FRANCE, France: This file photo shows an Air France Airbus A 318 is pictured at the Roissy airport.—AFP

Under a new law that took effect in France on January 1, airlines refueling in the country are required to use at least one percent of sustainable fuel in their fuel mix — a proportion set to increase to two percent in 2025 and five percent in 2030. —AFP

omy has been hammered by the pandemic and its depleted foreign exchange reserves have led to food rationing at supermarkets and shortages of essential goods.

Key ally China is Sri Lanka's biggest bilateral lender and Wang's visit comes after a warning from international ratings agencies that President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's government could be on the brink of default. "The President pointed out that it would be a great relief if debt payments could be rescheduled in view of the economic crisis following the pandemic," Rajapaksa's office said in a statement.

There was no immediate comment from the Chinese embassy in Colombo. Sri Lanka's foreign reserves had dropped to just \$1.5 billion at the end of November — enough to pay for only about a month's worth of imports. The island's main energy utility began rationing electricity on Friday after running out of foreign currency to import oil for its thermal generators.

China accounted for about 10 percent of Sri Lanka's \$35 billion foreign debt to April 2021, government data shows. Officials said China's total lending could be much higher when taking into account loans to state-owned enterprises and the central bank.

Sri Lanka has borrowed heavily from China for infrastructure, some of which ended up as white elephants. Unable to repay a \$1.4 billion loan for a port construction in southern Sri Lanka, Colombo was forced to lease out the facility to a Chinese company for 99 years in 2017.

The United States and India warned that the Hambantota port, located along vital east-west international shipping routes, could give China a military foothold in the Indian Ocean. Both Colombo and Beijing have denied that Sri Lankan ports will be used for any military purposes. —AFP



## Business

# Too much meat? Spain factory farming debate creates beef

## Divide deepens between Socialists and left-wing coalition

MADRID: Debate over the environmental impact of Spain's huge factory farming sector is heating up in the country, Europe's biggest meat consumer, and splitting its ruling coalition.

In an interview published in British daily The Guardian, Consumer Affairs Minister Alberto Garzon lashed out against Spain's "so-called mega-farms", calling them unsustainable.

"They find a village in a depopulated bit of Spain and put in 4,000, or 5,000, or 10,000 head of cattle," he said. "They pollute the soil, they pollute the water and then they export this poor quality meat from these ill-treated animals."

Garzon is the coordinator of the tiny United Left party, a junior member of the minority coalition

government led by Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, and his comments angered farmers. "There are no mistreated animals in Spain, minister," the UPA union, which represents small producers, said in a statement.

It said Garzon's statements were "based on falsehoods, clumsy, nearsighted and could have harmful effects on Spanish meat exports". Pablo Casado, the leader of the conservative main opposition Popular Party (PP) which is strong in some rural areas, also weighed in, calling Garzon's words "an attack against ranchers and farmers and the image of our country".

Government spokeswoman Isabel Rodriguez said Garzon was speaking in a personal capacity.

She added that the government "supports the

livestock sector, which contributes decisively to our exports". The debate risks deepening the divide between the Socialists and left-wing coalition partner Podemos ahead of an election in the Castile and Leon region north of Madrid as the PP rides high in the polls.

### 'Bigger and bigger'

Garzon had already come under fire in July for urging Spaniards to reduce their meat consumption, prompting Sanchez to say that for him "there's nothing that beats a well done steak". For Salvador Calvet, a University of Valencia professor who studies the sector, the outcry over Garzon's comments is due to the cultural and economic weight of livestock farming, which provides a living for "many families".

It is responsible for some 2.5 million jobs in the country and accounts for nine billion euros (\$10 billion) in annual exports, according to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

And it is booming. Meat production has increased ten-fold in Spain over the past 60 years, a larger increase than in most other European nations, according to a University of Oxford database.

Although there are fewer farms, their size is getting "bigger and bigger", said Calvet. The growth of the sector is fuelled by external demand, especially from China, as well as within Spain, where ham, chorizo sausages and other animal products are a key part of many people's diet. Each Spaniard eats an average of 98.8 kilograms (218 pounds) of meat per year, compared to the worldwide average of 42 kilograms, according to FAO figures. That makes Spain Europe's biggest meat consumer, ahead of Portugal at 98.7 kilograms and Poland at 88.5 kilograms.

### 'Legitimate debate'

This level of consumption amounts to more than 270 grams per day, "when international scientific recommendations recommend 300 grams of consumption per week", environmental group Greenpeace said in a statement. It warned that the consequences of this overconsumption are "devastating". Greenpeace was one of several environmental groups which backed Garzon, who has also come under fire for banning adverts for sugary foods aimed at children and a crackdown on the betting industry.

"There is a legitimate debate" over the environmental impact of livestock breeding but the reality is "complex and nuanced", said Calvet. Breeders have "improved" their practices in recent years but they could still do more, he added. — AFP



MAZARICOS, Spain: In this file photo, cows wait to be milked at the Grille Sociedade Cooperativa Galega farm near the village of Mazaricos, northwestern Spain. — AFP

## Huwaida Abdullah wins KD 4,000 in Burgan Bank's draw

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank yesterday announced Huwaida Refaat Abdullah as the winner of the Value Account KD 4,000 draw. The winner expressed her excitement of winning the cash prize of KD 4,000.

Dedicated to offer the best-in-class services, Burgan Bank's Value Account presents customers with exceptional features which were specifically designed to suit the needs of expatriates living in Kuwait. Account holders will be able to enjoy matchless benefits that include receiving a free credit card for one year, application for a loan, in addition to a chance to enter the quarterly draw to win KD 4,000 as well as other discounts from selected merchant stores.

Burgan Bank will continue presenting exclusive services and draws with an aim of exceeding customers' expectations while offering them chances to win valuable cash prizes all year round.

## KFH continues 'With Your Card, the Journey Begins' campaign

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) continues its campaign "With Your Card the Journey Begins", which is developed exclusively for the KFH Mastercard cardholders, in cooperation with Mastercard, Kuwait Airways- Oasis club and Ali Al-Ghanem & Sons Co.

The prizes of the campaign comprise of Oasis club travel miles and luxurious Land Rover cars -Defender. The campaign gives 204 winners the opportunity to win by using KFH Mastercard credit and prepaid cards. The transactions that qualify the customer to enter the draw will include all purchase transactions using KFH Mastercard credit and prepaid cards locally and globally where every KD 1 local purchase transaction shall give the customer one chance to enter the draw while every KD 1/- global purchase transaction shall give the customer 10 chances to enter the draw.

The campaign shall continue till 10th February 2022 and the campaign prizes shall be distributed as follows:

- Draws for Kuwait Airways Oasis club Miles, 200 winners of travel miles (50 winners each month). Each winner shall get 50K miles from the Oasis club.
- Draws for Land Rover (Defender) cars - 4 winners (one winner each month)

It is worth noting that KFH executes, through the campaign "With Your Card the Journey Begins", a fully integrated program comprising of various events and activities for both customers and society. The program includes various competitions, prizes, and innovative events. Establishing a link between the prizes and the card usage inside and outside Kuwait shall enhance the usage of the cards in the local market, activate merchants' sales and achieve the mutual interest of KFH and its partners: Mastercard, Kuwait Airways Oasis club and Ali Al-Ghanem & Sons Co and shall create an added value to the customers experience in shopping and banking services as targeted by KFH.

KFH is always keen on enhancing cooperation with its partners to plan and execute several campaigns as this would reflect positively on the customer's satisfaction, usage volume, expand KFH market share and enhance KFH pioneering position in the banking cards market.

## New Huawei Watch GT Runner: Your personal assistant on how to train like an Olympic champion

KUWAIT: Huawei Consumer Business Group (BG) yesterday announced its first sports watch, the Huawei Watch GT Runner. The latest smartwatch is not only the wearer's smart assistant, but also their personal training coach. Through recording environmental and health data, the Huawei Watch GT Runner can formulate scientific and effective training plan, providing users with comprehensive and professional fitness experience boosted by the opening of the new 4680m2 Huawei Health lab facility in Songshan Lake, Dongguan, China. The new Huawei Health Lab represents a breakthrough in R&D project that will support more than 80 types of testing requests for R&D personnel in fields such as

ing running, such as heart rate, pace, calorie consumption, etc., are like consumers' personal check-ups, but for most people, it is difficult to interpret the data and provide training guidance based on the results. Huawei Health Lab has an extensive professional team, ranging from sports science researchers to medical experts, and from data acquisition engineers to algorithm engineers. These experts cover biology, sports training, medicine, software engineering, algorithm engineering, test engineering, biological engineering, applied sensor technology research, and more.

Huawei's latest Huawei Watch GT Runner intelligently defines the user's physical ability level according to

measured by Huawei TruSport to advise runners on the degree of recovery and recovery time for a single training session. In this way, runners can plan a more reasonable amount of training.

### Huawei Health Lab

Furthermore, Huawei TruSport can determine the degree of recovery and monitor short-term fatigue while also provides training index for users to understand their training status. The Huawei GT Runner is a professional runner watch that was built for sports. It features the new Huawei TruSeen 5.0+ heart rate monitoring technology1, bringing a newly upgraded heart rate module, 8 PDS in a circular arrangement, enhanced dynamic heart rate monitoring, more signal input, and an overall improved heart rate monitoring accuracy.

### Up to 2-weeks long battery life

Huawei Watch GT Runner inherits the powerful battery life of Huawei's wearable family, delivering 14-day4 battery life in smart mode under typical usage scenarios and offers 8-day of long battery life in heavy usage scenario.

### All-day health management

The Huawei Watch GT Runner provides continuous, real-time, and precise SpO2 (Blood Oxygen Saturation), sleep and stress monitoring features for a comprehensive health management.

The Huawei Watch GT Runner sports the Huawei TruSleep 2.0 sleep monitoring technology which can perform sleep stage monitoring, real-time heart rate monitoring, sleep breathing monitoring, and provide you with assessment of sleep quality without disturbing your sleep. The Huawei Watch GT Runner is also a stress management assistant. This sports watch monitors your stress 24/7 and it will even notify you if your stress levels are high and even help you out with breathing guidance to help relieve some of the stress off you. The new Healthy Living Shamrock has added many small features to better-fit users' daily health needs. Through personalized settings, users can receive regular reminders like Health challenges, daily water intake, daily mindfulness, early sleep reminder, exercise volume, and stay positive are all small things related to your health.

### Convenient life assistant features

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



professional research, ecosystem co-development, and health and fitness scenario incubation.

Country Manager for Huawei Consumer Business Group UAE, Keith Li, said, "Since 2015, the concept of health management has become increasingly popular. As people pay more and more attention to their health, the demand for health monitoring of smart devices is becoming stronger. We put forward the concept of active health management in 2018, using our leading technology capabilities to provide users with top notch active health detection management services. This is also in line with Huawei's vision committed to bringing the digital world to everyone, every family, and every organization, and build a smart world with all things connected."

### Huawei Watch GT Runner

As one of the important means of daily health management for people, running training also has a lower entry requirement and can be benefit to most users. Therefore, Huawei focused on investing in running projects. Huawei's strategy for health and fitness does not stop here. In fact, what Huawei wants to do is a whole new set of health systems based on smart wearable devices that connect users' body data and life scenarios, and Huawei TruSport is just a component of this strategy. In addition, the large amount of data generated dur-

ing running, such as heart rate, pace, calorie consumption, etc., are like consumers' personal check-ups, but for most people, it is difficult to interpret the data and provide training guidance based on the results. Huawei Health Lab has an extensive professional team, ranging from sports science researchers to medical experts, and from data acquisition engineers to algorithm engineers. These experts cover biology, sports training, medicine, software engineering, algorithm engineering, test engineering, biological engineering, applied sensor technology research, and more.

### Built for sports

After nearly 6 years of development, Huawei finally developed a set of scientific fitness system and named it Huawei TruSport. With the algorithms, it can accurately collect various physical indicators generated by the human body during running, scientifically analyze the collected data, and present the most reasonable training tips. Based on Huawei TruSport, Huawei developed the Running Ability Index (RAI). To measure the running performance, which is hard to measure before, Huawei developed the RAI, using Huawei TruSport algorithm to calculate the relationship between heart rate and pace to get a personal score.

Huawei TruSport provides training load, which can scientifically evaluate training volume. It can help runners to scientifically quantify their training and Huawei proposes to use training load instead of running volume to measure training volume. Training load can also be

## Gulf Bank announces 10 winners of Al-Danah draw for December

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank held its monthly Al-Danah draw on Sunday, to announce the winners for December. The 10 lucky winners received cash prizes of KD 1,000 each. The winners are:

- Abdulaziz Fahad Ibrahim Al-Yagoot
- Lavina Nancy Santhumayor

- Sarra Abdullmajeed Dashty
- Saminah Akil Bhajat
- Musaad Salem Abdulla Al-Adwany
- Hani Akram Mohammed Al-Hawari
- Mohammed Shahzad Mohammed Younis
- Waleed Mosaad Saed Farhan
- Hyam Desoqi Hussain Aliwah
- Hani Mashed Jaber Aaber Alenzi

The Al-Danah account is one of the most rewarding savings accounts in Kuwait with its periodic draws that award valuable prizes and multiple benefits for account holders. Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account offers monthly opportunities to win KD 1,000 to ten lucky winners, in addition to two quarterly draws with KD 100,000 prizes each, a semi-annual draw prize of KD 1,000,000 and a grand draw prize of KD 1,500,000.

## CBK bonds and related Tawarruq

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the most recent issues of CBK bonds and related Tawarruq at a total value of KD 240 million for three months with a rate of return at 1.125 percent.

## Business

# Last seven years 'warmest on record' globally, says EU

## Alarm over sharp increases in record concentrations of methane in atmosphere

PARIS: The last seven years have been the hottest on record globally "by a clear margin", the European Union's climate monitoring service reported yesterday, as it raised the alarm over sharp increases in record concentrations of methane in the atmosphere.

Countries around the world have been blasted by a relentless assault of weather disasters linked to global warming in recent years, including record-shattering wildfires across Australia and Siberia, a once-in-1000-years heatwave in North America and extreme rainfall that caused massive flooding in Asia, Africa, the US and Europe. In its latest annual assessment, the Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) confirmed that 2021 had joined the unbroken warm streak since 2015.

It found that last year was the fifth warmest on record globally, marginally warmer than 2015 and 2018. Accurate measurements go back to the mid-19th century.

The annual average temperature was 1.1 to 1.2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, measured between 1850 and 1900, C3S said. That was despite the cooling effect of the natural La Nina weather phenomenon.

Overall, the monitoring service found the last seven years "have been the warmest years on record by a clear margin". "2021 was yet another year of

extreme temperatures with the hottest summer in Europe, heatwaves in the Mediterranean, not to mention the unprecedented high temperatures in North America," said C3S Director Carlo Buontempo.

"These events are a stark reminder of the need to change our ways, take decisive and effective steps toward a sustainable society and work towards reducing net carbon emissions."

### Methane surge

The C3S also monitored atmospheric concentrations of the planet-warming gases carbon dioxide and methane, finding that both had increased with no sign of a slowdown. Methane particularly has gone up "very substantially", to an annual record of about 1,876 parts per billion (ppb).

Growth rates for 2020 and 2021 were 14.6 ppb per year and 16.3 ppb per year, respectively. That is more than double the average annual growth rate seen over the previous 17 years. But an array of human-caused and natural sources made it hard to pinpoint why there had been such a strong increase in recent years, C3S said.

Methane (CH4) is the gas most responsible for global warming after CO2. While more short-lived in the atmosphere, it is many times more potent than CO2. Natural sources include wetlands, while

human-induced sources are leaks from natural gas and oil production, coal mining and landfills, as well as rice paddies, livestock and manure handling.

Vincent-Henri Peuch, Director of the Copernicus Atmosphere Monitoring Service, which tracks greenhouse gas increases, said observational evidence was crucial in the effort to avoid "climate catastrophe". Reducing the amount of methane seeping into the air would quickly translate into a slowdown of rising temperatures, and help close the so-called emissions gap between the Paris Agreement target of a 1.5C cap on warming and the 2.7C we are heading for even if all nations honor their carbon-cutting promises.

That has spurred interest from policymakers keen to find the quickest ways to wrestle down emissions. At the COP26 climate summit last year, around a hundred nations joined an initiative to cut methane emissions by at least 30 percent this decade. Noticeably absent was China.

The oil and gas industry has the biggest potential for rapid reductions, especially through the detection and repair of gas leaks during production and transport. While global warming may seem gradual, its impact on extreme events is "dramatic", said Rowan Sutton, of Britain's National Centre for Atmospheric Science at Reading University. "We should see the record breaking 2021 events, such as the heatwave in



LES BRENETS, Switzerland: This file photo shows the cracked soil of the dried bed of the Brenet Lake, part of the Doubs river, a natural border between eastern France and western Switzerland. —AFP

Canada and floods in Germany, as a punch in the face to make politicians and public alike wake up to the urgency of the climate emergency," he told the Science Media Centre.

"Moreover, the continued increases in greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere screams out that the underlying causes have yet to be addressed." —AFP

## KIB holds symposium at KU on investment, real estate appraisal

KUWAIT: Kuwait International Bank (KIB), represented by its Real Estate Department, recently conducted a symposium at Kuwait University (KU), responding to an invitation from the Faculty of Administrative Sciences to discuss the principles of investment and real estate appraisal. Held at the new university campus in Shidadiyah, with the attendance of a number of faculty members and college students, the symposium was presented by Fahed Al-Saleh, Manager of the Real Estate Advisory Division at the Bank's Real Estate Department, and Eng. Hossam Al-Kolak, Team Leader, Real Estate Appraisal Engineers at the Real Estate Department. Both KIB representatives were able to share the Bank's 40-years' experience and technical know-how in the real estate field, aiming to inspire future generations of business and real estate financing leaders in the country.

Following an introduction that included a brief overview of the Bank's history in the real estate sector, Al-Saleh elaborated on the meaning of real estate investment, describing some of its most prominent characteristics. He also presented a set of examples to the students on how to invest in the real estate market locally and globally, explaining its value as one of the best tangible assets, and how its market remains stable and sustainable compared to others, despite the various changes and circumstances. Al-Saleh also discussed the differences between the types of real estate, such as private and commercial housing, commercial buildings and complexes, and several others.

Referring during his lecture to the various administrative and financial services, including Islamic financing, that can be utilized in developing the real estate sector in Kuwait, Al-Saleh highlighted one of the most prominent of these services, which is real estate appraisal. He listed some of its services, which include real estate inspection for clients, preparing feasibility studies for projects, determining rents for different units of real estate, estimating the cost of construction, providing consultations and technical reports for various real estate projects, in addition to following up on the implementation of projects and their completion stages. Al-Saleh also noted how the field of real estate appraisal can be one of the most advanced and specialized areas within the field, as it requires engineering expertise, eye for detail, and scientific applications to reach a fair value for the property to be appraised.

On his part, Eng. Hossam Al-Kolak touched on some of the factors that can directly or indirectly affect the value of real estate, explaining that there are natural and organizational factors, as well as social, economic, and political factors. Al-Kolak also introduced some examples applied in the Kuwaiti market of the methods used to reach a fair value for real estate in light of these variables, most important of which are the cost method, the income capitalization method, and the method of comparing real estate market sales.

Dr. Saud Al-Thaqeb, Faculty Member in the Department of Finance and Financial Institutions at Kuwait University, on the other hand, mentioned that the main objective of organizing this symposium is to educate students in Administrative Sciences on the concepts of real estate management, and the foundations of real estate appraisal. He also reaffirmed Kuwait University's distinguished role in expanding the knowledge of young nationals in this field particularly as part of their studies. Upon concluding the symposium, the KU team thanked Al-Saleh and KIB for presenting this knowledge-rich lecture. On the other hand, the KIB team thanked Kuwait University for its invitation and the opportunity it provided for the Bank to share its extensive and comprehensive experiences in the field of investment and real estate financing.

It is worth noting that the real estate appraisal department at KIB is considered a highly credible reference for some of the most important government agencies, banking institutions, as well as investment and real estate companies, who turn to KIB on an ongoing basis for its integrated real estate management services. This can be attributed to the Bank's long and comprehensive experience in this industry since its inception in 1973 as "Kuwait Real Estate Bank".



Fahed Al-Saleh

## KGOC implements Oracle Cloud Applications

KUWAIT: Oracle yesterday announced that Kuwait Gulf Oil Company (KGOC) is the first Oil Company in Kuwait to implement Oracle Fusion Cloud Applications Suite to fully automate core business processes across financial services (FS), human resources (HR) and Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) to help achieve its mission of becoming one of the most technologically advanced oil and gas companies in the Middle East region and globally.

Kuwait Gulf Oil Company KSCC (KGOC) was established on 10th February 2002, as a wholly owned subsidiary of the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation for upstream oil and gas operations. KGOC represents the interest of the State of Kuwait in the Partitioned Zone (PZ). The PZ lies alongside the border between the State of Kuwait and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The natural resources in the PZ are shared equally by the State of Kuwait and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

"At KGOC, cloud led digital transformation is playing a vital role towards enhancing business efficiencies for sustained growth and building the workforce of future that is free from working on mundane tasks and instead focuses on delivering high value projects", said Ahmad A. Safar, Team Leader Information Technology at Kuwait Gulf Oil Company. "With the implementation of Oracle Fusion Cloud Applications, we have automated sixty four

business processes across finance, HR and supply chain. This operational agility allowed us to swiftly transition to remote working during the pandemic, without compromising on any business process or commitment to our customers, partners suppliers and employees", added Latifa E Alnasrallah Project Manager, Kuwait Gulf Oil Company.

Under this digital initiative, KGOC has implemented Oracle Fusion Cloud Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), Oracle Fusion Cloud Human Capital Management (HCM) and Oracle Fusion Cloud Self-Service. The implementation is helping KGOC streamline key finance process to ensure better budgetary control, sharpen forecasts and automate routine tasks including contract management, renewals and supplier invoicing to avoid overspending.

KGOC has automated the core HR function that now enables employees to complete everyday tasks including leave requests, pay slips, goal setting etc. through self-service applications. This automation now allows the HR teams to focus on creating better employee productivity and welfare programs. The fusion cloud application implementation is now also providing KGOC teams a consistent experience across all devices in addition to mobility services, enabling a centralized data source for FS and HR data to improve decision-making.

Oracle Fusion Cloud Applications implementation in KGOC has also ensured business continuity for FS and HR activities and avoided business interruptions during COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown.

KGOC's management can now also access a customized dashboard from any location to get a real time view of their business unit's spend, contract status,



renewals and other financial details. Furthermore, KGOC has also automated its payroll module for swift monthly payroll reconciliation besides also introducing a supplier portal, which gives KGOC suppliers the ability to directly access information and view their invoices.

"With Oracle Fusion Cloud Applications, KGOC is now able to quickly adapt business models and processes, reduce costs, innovate more and drive further growth. Besides the modern user experience that is helping enhance productivity, the embedded AI capability of our fusion cloud applications is also helping KGOC further innovation, improve scalability and enhance speed to market", said Leopoldo Boado, Senior Vice President - Business Applications, ECEMEA, Oracle.

The implementation of this digital project has been completed by Oracle Consulting Services, Kuwait Gulf Oil Company has received the 'Best Product Execution' award in the Middle East from Oracle Consulting Services.

## NBK wins Visa Global Service Quality award

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) was awarded a 2020 Visa Global Service Quality Awards (GSQA) for Pursuit of Excellence - Card not Present Adoption, Issuer, which recognizes issuers among those with the greatest growth in card not present transactions.

A delegation from Visa visited NBK's headquarters to deliver the award. Salah Al-Fulaj, CEO of NBK received the award from Dr Saeeda Jaffar, Visa's Group Country Manager for the GCC region, in the presence of Mohammed Al-Othman, General Manager of Consumer Banking Group, and a number of senior executives from NBK and Visa.

"We are reaping the fruits of the enormous efforts in creating our successful strategy over the past few years. We developed our digital transformation roadmap and planned ahead for a better future, demonstrating our insightful and proactive vision to optimize our offerings. That entailed taking all necessary steps that included making huge investments in the most advanced payment solutions and services," Al-Fulaj said.

"Today, NBK enjoys a dominant market position and has a wide customer base in Kuwait. We also provide the largest Point of Sale (POS) network with NFC-enabled technology, allowing us to continue providing the best customer experience," he added.

Al-Fulaj highlighted that NBK's strategic direction revolves around being the digital leader and trendsetter in Kuwait and in the region as well as building next generation digital banking experience that ensure its continued success and increase its market share, especially among its youth customers.

## Al-Tijari announces winner of Al-Najma weekly draw

KUWAIT: Commercial Bank of Kuwait conducted the weekly draw on Al-Najma Account on January 9, 2022. The draws were conducted in the presence of Ministry of Commerce and Industry representative Ahmed Al-Basman.



"This award demonstrates our strong partnership with Visa, through which we are always keen to provide exclusive value-added products and unique offers to our customers," Al-Fulaj commented.

Meanwhile, Dr Saeeda Jaffar, Visa's Group Country Manager for GCC region, said: "We are pleased to present this award to National Bank of Kuwait, a pioneer in adopting the latest and most advanced payment solutions in the region and a leader in providing the best services to its customers." She added that this award recognizes issuers based on a predefined set of criteria, including the growth in card-not-present (CNP) transactions in 2020. Additionally, NBK has always been a leader in maintain top-notch banking services, and constantly strive to provide the most innovative payment solutions to their cus-

### The result of the draw was as follows:

1) Al-Najma weekly account - the prize of KD 5,000 went to the winner Naser Saleh Haji Kamal

The bank stated that Al-Najma Account prizes are distinguished by the highest cash prize and diversity of prizes throughout the year clarifying that the account offers weekly prize of KD 5,000, monthly prize of KD 20,000 and a semi-annual prize of KD 500,000 in addition to the largest prize - linked bank account payout of KD 1,500,000.

Al-Najma Account can be opened by depositing KD 500, and customer should maintain a

tomers. Dr Jaffar reiterated Visa's commitment to Kuwait, saying, "We look forward to reinforcing our position as the partner of choice in providing growth opportunities for our financial institution partners in Kuwait and the region." The Visa Global Service Quality Awards (GSQA) program was established in 1992 for clients in the US and was further expanded to include international regions to incorporate Visa's partners around the world as part of its efforts to achieve the highest level of customer satisfaction.

NBK continues to enhance its leading position in the banking sector through the largest domestic banking network in Kuwait, with 68 branches all over the Country, as well as a large POS network exceeding 15,000 terminals, all NFC-enabled. In addition, NBK has the largest owned ATM network all over Kuwait.

minimum amount of KD 500 to be eligible to enter all draws on Al-Najma Account prizes. As for the chances of winning, the more balance a customer maintains in Al-Najma Account, the more chances the account holder will get to win, the account also offers additional benefits like the ATM card, a credit card against customer's account and all CBK banking services that customer can enjoy.

The bank revealed that Al-Najma account is available to everyone, and anyone can open Al-Najma account through CBK mobile application in simple steps from anywhere and at any time.

## Lifestyle | Features



This handout image released by the Hollywood Foreign Press Association (HFPA) shows HFPA Grantee and A Place Called Home Chief Development Officer Katie Alheim presenting the Best Animated Motion Picture Award onstage during the 79th Annual Golden Globe Awards at The Beverly Hilton. — AFP photos



HFPA Grantee and Founder and Executive Director of Kids in the Spotlight Tige Charity presents the Best Performance by a Supporting Actor in a Series, Limited Series, or Television Movie Award onstage during the 79th Annual Golden Globe Awards at The Beverly Hilton.

## 'Power of the Dog,' 'West Side Story' win at untelevised Golden Globes

"The Power of the Dog" and "West Side Story" on Sunday won the top film prizes at an untelevised Golden Globes that was largely ignored by Hollywood, with awards unveiled via a live blog without any of the usual A-list glamour. Jane Campion's dark Western "The Power of the Dog" became only the second film directed by a woman to win the best drama prize. The film also won for best

hopes that a Globes win can provide, were hugely overshadowed by a long-brewing row over ethical lapses by the organizers.

The Hollywood Foreign Press Association, a group of 100-odd entertainment writers with links to foreign publications, has been accused of a litany of failings from corruption to racism. The Globes are traditionally billed as Tinseltown's biggest party - in past years,

strange," she wrote. DeBose thanked the HFPA while cautioning that further reform is needed. "There is still work to be done, but when you've worked so hard on a project - infused with blood, sweat, tears and love - having the work seen and acknowledged is always going to be special," she tweeted.

A Los Angeles Times expose last year found the HFPA had no Black members, opening the floodgates for criticism from across Hollywood including from A-list stars such as Tom Cruise. Since the scandal broke, the HFPA has rushed through reforms, admitting its biggest ever annual intake, including several Black and other minority members. It has banned members from accepting lavish gifts and hotel stays from studios courting their votes, and highlighted its philanthropic work.

During the behind-closed-doors ceremony on Sunday, the HFPA tweeted pre-recorded videos from Arnold Schwarzenegger and Jamie Lee Curtis praising the group's community work. "I'm proud to be associated with them in this venture," said Curtis, referring to funding by the HFPA for community programs. But celebrities were otherwise conspicuously absent from the proceedings, leaving the Golden Globes website's live blog to inform readers: "No other awards community shows as much love and generosity to others quite like the HFPA!"

### Oscar hopefuls

Despite the subdued atmosphere surrounding the Globes, three wins apiece for "The Power of the Dog" and "West Side Story" confirm their credentials as contenders for an award season that culminates in March with the Oscars. Campion's "Power of the Dog," starring Benedict Cumberbatch, which tackles toxic masculinity in 1920s Montana and was released by Netflix with a limited theatrical run, has received rave reviews. Spielberg's "West Side Story" remake



HFPA Grantee and Hola Mexico Film Festival Director Diana Luna presents the Best Actress in a TV Drama Series Award onstage during the 79th Annual Golden Globe Awards at The Beverly Hilton on January 9, 2022.

flopped at the box office but was also adored by critics.

Kenneth Branagh, whose black-and-white account of the outbreak of sectarian violence during the late 1960s in "Belfast" is considered a strong award season contender and had jointly topped the nominations, won only for best screenplay. Andrew Garfield won best actor in a comedy of musical for "tick, tick ... Boom!", which is based on the semi-autobiographical musical of the same name written by "Rent" composer Jonathan Larson. "Succession," HBO's tale of about a media tycoon's warring family, topped the television side with three prizes including best drama. — AFP



This illustration photo shows a person checking the Golden Globe Awards online via the Golden Globes Twitter account, in Los Angeles.

director and best supporting actor for Kodi Smit-McPhee. Steven Spielberg's "West Side Story" remake claimed top honors for best comedy or musical, as well as lead and supporting actress prizes for stars Rachel Zegler and Ariana DeBose.

Will Smith and Nicole Kidman won the prizes for best actor and actress in film dramas for their turns in "King Richard" and "Being the Ricardos." But none of the stars were present as usual at the Beverly Hilton, with the ceremony held behind closed doors. The awards, which are usually closely followed for the immediate boost to box office tallies and Oscar

the event was watched by TV audiences of millions, and spawned frenzied debate and memes on social media. This year, NBC scrapped its broadcast, the HFPA did not offer a livestream, and the event failed to take off on Twitter, where pop culture fans were more preoccupied with the death of US comedian Bob Saget.

### 'Work to be done'

The young stars of "West Side Story" took to Twitter to mark their wins, with Zegler noting that she had been awarded her Globe exactly three years after being cast as an unknown by Spielberg from among 30,000 hopefuls. "Life is very

## US comedian and 'Full House' star Bob Saget found dead aged 65

Bob Saget, the US comedian who delighted millions as the star of television's "Full House" in the 1980s and 1990s, has died, his family said Sunday. He was 65. "We are devastated to confirm that our beloved Bob passed away today," Saget's family said in a statement published by People magazine. "He was everything to us and we want you to know how much he loved his fans, performing live and bringing people from all walks of life together with laughter." Saget, often heralded as "America's dad" and one of the most ubiquitous faces on US television in the 1990s, was found dead in a Florida hotel room on Sunday, the Orange County Sheriff's office said.



US actor Bob Saget

It was unclear how he died. Detectives saw no sign of foul play or drugs when they were called to the Ritz-Carlton Orlando, Grande Lakes, where Saget had been found "unresponsive," according to police. He had been touring the country and had done a show in Jacksonville the night before his body was found. He tweeted after the performance that he had "loved" it, telling fans to check his website for 2022 tour dates.

Tributes poured in, including from his Full House co-stars. Saget starred in the show as Danny Tanner, the widowed father of three girls, and his efforts to raise them - assisted by his brother-in-law Jesse and friend Joey - formed the heart of the popular sitcom. "I am broken. I am gutted. I am in complete and utter shock. I will never ever have another friend like him. I love you so much Bobby," tweeted actor John Stamos,

who played Jesse. Candace Cameron Bure, who played Saget's eldest daughter on the show, tweeted: "I have no words. Bob was one of the best human beings I've ever known in my life. I loved him so much." Fellow co-stars the Olsen twins also expressed their condolences. "We are deeply saddened that he is no longer with us but know that he will continue to be by our side to guide us as gracefully as he always has," Mary-Kate and Ashley said in a statement carried by US media.

"Full House" ran for eight seasons, from 1987 to 1995, on ABC, which said it was "deeply saddened" by Saget's passing. "Whether playing a loving father on 'Full House' or hosting the early years of 'America's Funniest Home Videos' with his signature wit and charm, Bob always knew how to connect with families through heart and humor," the network said in a statement. "Our thoughts are with his family as we mourn the passing of such an incredibly gifted comedian and talent."

### 'Gone too soon'

Though his television persona was "America's dad," his stand-up comedy was known for being far more raunchy. Saget was also a host of "America's Funniest Home Videos," wildly popular in the pre-YouTube era, and had been the voice of the narrator on the CBS hit show "How I Met Your Mother." From 2005 to 2010 he had a recurring role on the HBO hit "Entourage," playing a parody of himself.

Star Trek actor George Takei said Saget was "a regular presence in our living rooms, bringing to us the funniest videos and countless belly laughs." "Gone too soon, like so many of the brightest souls," he wrote. "Still in shock. I just spoke with Bob a few days ago. We stayed on the phone as usual making each other laugh," comic Gilbert Gottfried wrote on Twitter. Actor and director BJ Novak tweeted: "I have always and will always love Bob Saget." — AFP



In this file photo, guests attend the 50th anniversary celebration of Woodstock at Bethel Woods Center for the Arts in Bethel, New York. Michael Lang, a concert promoter who co-created the generation-defining Woodstock music festival, died on January 8, 2022 aged 77. — AFP

## Michael Lang, a Woodstock festival organizer, dies at 77

Michael Lang, a concert promoter who co-created the generation-defining Woodstock music festival, died Saturday aged 77, a family friend confirmed. Lang died of a "rare form of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma" at Memorial Sloan Kettering Hospital Cancer Center in New York, according to a statement from the family released by music executive Michael Pagnotta.

"We are very sad to hear that legendary Woodstock icon and long time family friend Michael Lang has passed at 77 after a brief illness," Pagnotta said on Twitter, adding, "Rest In Peace." Lang was only 24 when he helped organize the Woodstock festival in August 1969 in the Catskill Mountains of New York state. The

three-day affair brought together an unparalleled group of hugely popular rock and folk stars, including Joan Baez, Janis Joplin, The Who, Joe Cocker, Santana and Jimi Hendrix.

It drew more than 400,000 young people for an exuberant celebration of the 1960s' counterculture built around music, drugs and free love. The festival-with sporadic rain transforming the rolling hills of Max Yasgur's dairy farm into a sea of mud-covered hippies-became a pivotal moment in rock history, immortalized in an eponymous Oscar-winning documentary (Lang makes repeated appearances) and in a song performed by Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young.

Lang also produced two follow-up Woodstock festivals in 1994 and 1999 - though they were less popular than the original. The 1999 version ended with a restless crowd looting, setting fires and vandalizing structures. In 2019, Lang attempted to organize a 50th anniversary Woodstock sequel, but amid financial and logistical setbacks it was ultimately canceled. — AFP

## Puddings and pageantry for Queen's Platinum Jubilee

Pomp, pageantry and puddings will form the centrepiece of celebrations to mark Queen Elizabeth II's 70 years on the throne, Buckingham Palace announced yesterday. The 95-year-old monarch's Platinum Jubilee begins on February 6 - the date in 1952 when she became queen after the death of her father, King George VI. Britain's longest-serving monarch will be the only queen or king in the country's long history to have ruled for 70 years. Buckingham Palace officials unveiled a series of events to mark the occasion and reflect the Queen's call for the celebrations to promote a mood of national unity.

Topping festivities that reflect national passions is a competition to create a new Jubilee pudding, with the winner chosen by judges including the palace head chef. The head of state will also be presented with a digital map showing every tree planted as part of the Queen's Green Canopy initiative. The Queen and her eldest son and heir, Prince Charles, planted their own tree on the royal estate in Balmoral, northeast Scotland, last October. The main celebrations will be held over a four-day long weekend, kicking off with public holidays on Thursday June 2 and Friday June 3.

On the Thursday, the Queen's Birthday Parade will see more than 1,000 soldiers, horses and army musicians perform a Trooping of the Color ceremony in central London. The annual event in central London marks the Queen's official birthday but has been cancelled for the last two years because of the coronavirus pandemic. Continuing a tradition dating back hundreds of years, people will light beacons in over 1,500 towns, cities and villages across the country that evening.

On the Friday, there will be a service of thanksgiving at St Paul's Cathedral in London, followed up on the Saturday with a live concert featuring big-name stars. More than 200,000 neighborhood parties are expected to be held on Sunday June 5, as well as a street pageant in London featuring performers from across the Commonwealth. The dress and robes worn by the Queen at her coronation in 1953 will be on display at her Windsor Castle home west of London after the main events.

### Positive headlines?

Royal officials will be hoping the events can generate more positive headlines after a slew of negative publicity in recent months. The Queen's second son, Prince Andrew, is facing a US civil claim for sexual assault and questions about his links to convicted sex offenders Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell. The monarch's grandson, Prince Harry, is set to release his memoirs this year, with the family braced for fresh revelations after his criticisms last year.

The program of mass Jubilee events makes no mention of COVID restrictions, which have curtailed royal engagements and other public duties since early 2020. Queen Elizabeth II is only the second British monarch to celebrate silver, golden and diamond jubilees to mark 25, 50 and 60 years on the throne. In 1977, her Silver Jubilee saw nationwide street parties and a procession - as well as the release of the Sex Pistols' punk anthem "God Save The Queen".

A highlight of the Golden Jubilee in 2002 was guitarist Brian May - from the rock band Queen - playing the national anthem on the roof of Buckingham Palace. In 2012, a flotilla of 1,000 boats sailed down the River Thames to mark the 60th anniversary of her reign, helping to boost interest and support for the monarchy. Soon afterwards, the Queen and her beloved corgis starred in a cameo alongside James Bond actor Daniel Craig at the opening ceremony of the London Olympics. — AFP

# Bulgarian Pomaks keep traditional wedding rite alive



Bulgarian Muslim women look at the dowry during a wedding ceremony in the village of Ribnovo. Barbie blonde Nefie Eminkova, 21, and her fiancée Schaban Kiselov, 24, are tying the knot in a flurry of bright colors, flowers, dancing and blessings. — AFP photos

The marriage of Nefie Eminkova, 21, and her fiancée Schaban Kiselov, 24, is an extravaganza of bright colors, flowers, feasting and dancing. But the bride, who comes from Bulgaria's Pomak minority, can see none of it. Her eyes must remain tightly closed until a Muslim priest blesses the couple.



Bulgarian Pomak (Bulgarian speaking Muslims) bride Nefie Eminkova, 21, is decorated with 'gelina' or face painting ahead of her wedding ceremony in the village of Ribnovo.

The pair are following an age-old traditional winter wedding rite that their tiny community nestled in the southern Rhodope mountains was forced to abandon during communism but has revived since the fall of the regime in 1989. The ritual spans two whole days, starting with a lavish display of the bride's dowry. It comprises "everything you can think of" that a new family might need, Nefie explains. Handmade socks, crocheted baby blankets and bedding are hung out on wooden

scaffolding in the street, next to a fully-made marriage bed and a television set.

#### Silk flower garlands

The culmination of the wedding comes at the end of the second day with the "gelina" - the painting of the bride's face. In private and away from prying male eyes, two older women relatives cover Nefie's face with a thick layer of white face paint and then decorate it with multicolored sequins. They cover her hair with a red headscarf and frame her painted doll-like face with silk flower garlands and streaks of shiny tinsel, making her unrecognizable.

She is then presented to her husband-to-be clad in traditional attire of dark crimson baggy pants, multicoloured apron and bodice and henna-painted fingertips contrasting with his simple blue jeans and black blazer. Nefie holds up a hand mirror and secretly takes a peek at her face. She will be allowed to open her eyes wide only after the imam blesses the new couple and her husband washes her face with milk in their new home. Plenty of food and dancing to music from zurnas and drums ensures the success of the marriage festivities but there is no alcohol.

#### Revival of banned tradition

"That's the way people here get married and we also like to have it this way," Nefie tells AFP before the "gelina" face painting. Nefie and Schaban will leave Ribnovo, a mountainous village of around 3,000 inhabitants, in the spring for Germany, where the young man has a small flooring business. Like many other Bulgarians, he

was forced abroad in search of work and a better income and has only returned briefly for the wedding.

"My parents did not have a chance to

wedding and circumcision rites during the 1970s.

There are around 200,000 Pomaks living in Bulgaria today but only Ribnovo and



have such a wedding and I decided to do it the old way in order to make them happy, they look even happier than we are," Schaban says. Bulgaria's communist regime from after World War II until 1989 was especially hostile to the country's sizeable Muslim minority. The Pomaks - Slavs converted to Islam during Ottoman rule - were particularly oppressed and forced to abandon their colorful attire as well as their

one other southern village maintain the old wedding rites. This is thanks to Ribnovo's geographical isolation and the "capsulation" of its community, Ethnology Professor Evgenia Ivanova explains. And while only a handful of weddings are held every winter in Ribnovo, the same Muslim ritual is also observed in Bulgaria's southeastern neighbor Turkey. — AFP

Bulgarian Muslim woman looks at the dowry during a wedding ceremony in the village of Ribnovo.



Bulgarian Pomak (Bulgarian speaking Muslims) bride Nefie Eminkova, 21 and her fiancée Schaban Kiselov, 24, dance during their wedding ceremony in the village of Ribnovo.

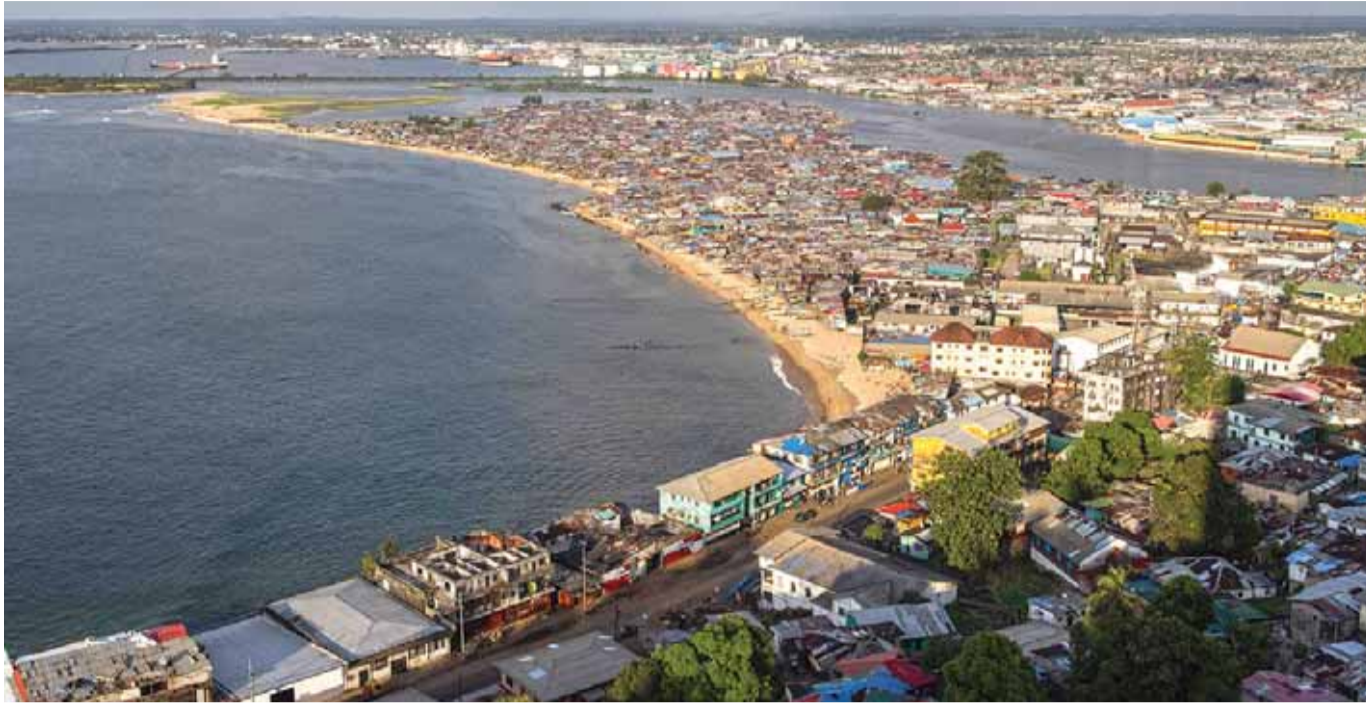


Bulgarian Muslim woman carries her baby as other people dance and play music during a wedding ceremony in the village of Ribnovo.



Bulgarian Pomak (Bulgarian speaking Muslims) bride Nefie Eminkova, 21 receives greetings and money from relatives during her wedding ceremony in the village of Ribnovo.

Lifestyle | Features



The famous West Point slum is pictured from the dilapidated Ducor hotel in Monrovia. The Ducor Hotel, when it opened its doors in 1960, was the first five-star hotel in Africa. At its height, it hosted illustrious guests such as the former Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie.



The old pool is pictured of the dilapidated Ducor hotel which overlooks Monrovia. — AFP photos

# IN LIBERIA, ABANDONED HOTEL STANDS AS SYMBOL OF HAUNTED PAST

**T**owering above Liberia's ramshackle capital Monrovia stands a hotel that once symbolized an African dream yet today lies in ruins, a legacy of brutal conflict. When it opened its doors in 1960, the Ducor was one of the only five-star hotels in Africa, boasting a night club and air-conditioned rooms, according to travel guides. At its height, it hosted VIPs such as former Ethiopian emperor Haile

and even who owns it seems unclear. The ruin, atop one of the city's highest hills, looms over Monrovia's downtown and the densely populated West Point slum.

The former hotel's rooms have been stripped bare, mildewy walls are pockmarked with bullet and shell holes, and the grounds have become a haunt for drug users. "It makes everybody sad," said Ambrose Yebea, a retired tourism

ministry official who previously offered tours of the hotel. Liberia's government once planned to restore the hotel to its former glory with the help of former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. But there has been no progress since his downfall in 2011, and time continues to chip away at the Ducor.

the 1950s, according to Yebea, prompting the construction of the Ducor in 1960 to cater to travelling executives and government officials. Designed by Zionist entity architect Moshe Mayer, in modernist style, it became one of Africa's most luxurious hotels. Then Zionist entity-foreign minister Golda Meir, who later became prime minister, attended its opening ceremony. As did Guinea's independence leader Sekou

Moshe Mayer to build a similar luxury establishment in Abidjan, which is still in operation. Many of Africa's leaders stayed at the Ducor during the 1960s and 70s, including Selassie, Yebea said, with several booking rooms during the 1979 conference of the Organization of African Unity in Monrovia. But by that point, the hotel was likely already in decline. A 1975

launched renovation plans. In 2011, her government handed the Ducor to the Libyan African Investment Company (LAICO), a subsidiary of Libya's sovereign wealth fund.

### Libyan scheme

According to a 2011 government statement, the renovated hotel was due to have 151 rooms, restaurants, a shopping centre, a tennis court and a casino - as well as provide jobs in the impoverished country. However, the project - which with another scheme to develop a rubber-processing plant was priced at \$65 million - then fell foul of another war.

Liberia cut ties with Gaddafi's Libya in 2011 as the country descended into civil war. Renovation works stopped. "It came to us as a big shock," said Frank Williams, a laborer who said he'd been one of 150 people employed by LAICO. "Today we are jobless". The project has been at a standstill since, and its future is unclear. Neither Liberia's presidency nor its tourism ministry, nor LAICO, responded to several requests for information.

The Libyan entity is under European Union sanctions over its alleged close links to the former Kadhafi regime. In 2020, the UN Security Council also said that LAICO is struggling financially, incurring debts for the hotels under its management. Some still hope to see the Ducor reborn. Ambrose Yebea, the retired tourism official, said it could lure tourists and generate jobs. "Every Liberian sees it the same way," he said. "They want it to be refurbished". — AFP



An old lounge area is pictured in the dilapidated Ducor hotel in Monrovia.



An old stairway is pictured in the dilapidated Ducor hotel in Monrovia.

Selassie. Guests would lounge by the swimming pool, sipping cocktails and watching the sun set over the Atlantic.

But the Ducor shut in 1989 at the outbreak of back-to-back civil wars which ran from 1989-1997 and from 1999-2003, and swiftly fell into disrepair. Today, little of Monrovia bears the visible marks of war, but the Ducor's decaying hulk stands as a reminder of the conflict that killed over 250,000 people. The hotel lies in limbo,

ministry official who previously offered tours of the hotel. Liberia's government once planned to restore the hotel to its former glory with the help of former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. But there has been no progress since his downfall in 2011, and time continues to chip away at the Ducor.

### Golden age

There were few hotels in Monrovia in

Toure.

Photos of the hotel from the era show a gleaming building and guests taking life easy. One of the persistent anecdotes related to the Ducor, which AFP was unable to verify, holds that former Ugandan dictator Idi Amin swam in the pool with his gun.

Another guest, Ivory Coast's first president Felix Houphouet-Boigny, was so taken with the hotel that he arranged for

World Bank report on Liberia describes the eight-story hotel as "quite run-down" - and mentions government plans to renovate it.

Liberian ex-warlord Charles Taylor positioned gunmen in the Ducor during the 2003 siege of Monrovia, at the close of the war. Later, squatters occupied the site. But president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who won office in Liberia's first post-war election, evicted them in 2007. She then

## Tourists question blizzard tragedy in scenic Pakistan town

**A**s unprecedented snowfall thawed at a popular Pakistan mountain resort on Sunday, rescued tourists were found reckoning with the deaths of 22 fellow travelers in a frozen traffic jam. "We didn't get any type of alert from society, from the government, from Google, from the news, from the weather," said 18-year-old Duaa Kashif Ali, a tourist from Islamabad. "Locals helped us," she told AFP, after emerging from a guesthouse where she waited out the worst snowstorm witnessed by Murree in decades.

The mountain-perch town - 70 kilometers northeast of Islamabad - has long been a favourite for tourists, who swarmed to see vistas dusted with fresh

snowfall this week. Roads were jammed with traffic from some 100,000 visitors when a blizzard dumped four feet of snow from Friday onwards. Stuck in their cars overnight, 22 people died from the cold or carbon monoxide poisoning from exhaust fumes. Among them were 10 children. "People here were literally weeping... when they heard," recalled 47-year-old tourist Kashif Ishaq.

As he spoke, a convoy of hulking heavy machinery cleared the ice-bitten roads behind him, ending two days of snowbound isolation for the satellite village of Ratti Gali. Ishaq arrived here with his daughter Duaa Kashif Ali on Friday night. Alongside 13 other family members and friends, they ditched three stranded cars and hiked 1.5 kilometers to where a guesthouse owner took them in. "The locals really helped us," said Ishaq. "They offered their services, they offered their homes, they offered their restaurants and hotels free of charge."

### A 'natural' disaster

In nearby Kuldana, about 5,000 people were taken in at the Army School of Logistics on Friday night. "It was like a natural disaster," said Major Muhammad Umar. "There was no electricity, no gas,



A general view shows houses covered with snow after a blizzard.

no telephone, nothing working." Eleven-year-old Arosh Yasir, warming up by a gas fire with her family, said they spent the night in their car on Friday before being rescued the following morning.

"Our food was cold and there was no way back or forward," she told AFP. "I started crying and praying." Many

Pakistanis complained on social media that hoteliers had pushed up prices to capitalize on stranded customers, prompting them to sleep in cars. Arosh said on Saturday hotels were "either very expensive or had no space", forcing them into the army camp. On Sunday afternoon, the rescue effort had largely mor-

phed to a repair and salvage operation, aided by steady sunshine winnowing away snowdrifts.

Workmen clambered mountainside pylons to knock free iced electricity wires, whilst others crowded around open car bonnets trying to coax engines back to life. Some vehicles still remained abandoned under vast snowbanks, forcing ploughs to slalom the precarious mountain tracks. Among clear spots in the ice were small scatterings of empty water bottles and snackfood packaging, marking where many tourists spent Friday night in their cars.

"It was my worst experience," said 21-year-old Aafia Ali, a visitor from Karachi among the party taking shelter at Ratti Gali. Several Pakistani newspapers published scathing articles on Sunday, attacking authorities for failing to close off the area despite ample warning of heavy snow. That sentiment was shared among those preparing to make their way off the mountain. "The management of this area, they are responsible for this," said Aafia Ali. — AFP



A man walks past truck stuck on a road after a blizzard that started on January 7 and led to visitors being trapped in vehicles along the roads to the resort hill town of Murree, some 70 Kms northeast of Islamabad.



A man stands next to snow-covered cars stuck along the roads to the resort hill town of Murree. — AFP photos



Sports

# Inter cruise to the top; Juve inflict 'psychological collapse' on Roma

## Petagna maintains Napoli's title hopes

**MILAN:** Inter Milan kept their lead in the Serie A title race thanks to a tight 2-1 win over Lazio on Sunday, while Juventus pulled off an incredible comeback to sink a distraught Roma 4-3. Milan Skriniar thumped home the decisive goal with a towering header from Alessandro Bastoni's cross in the 67th minute to put Inter back one point ahead of AC Milan, who had moved into first place after a 3-0 win at Venezia in Sunday's early match.

Simone Inzaghi's side have a game in hand on their local rivals after their match at Bologna on Thursday was not played due to COVID infections among the opposition squad. "We need to carry on like this, because all our direct rivals won today so there's no time to stop and think, we just have to keep winning," said Inzaghi after Inter's eighth straight league triumph.

It was a strong display at the San Siro for Inter against Inzaghi's old club, who however gave a good account of themselves and levelled in the 35th minute through Ciro Immobile's 15th league goal of the season after Bastoni had crashed the hosts into the lead with a long-range daisy cutter five minutes before. Maurizio Sarri's side even gave Inter some scares after Skriniar crashed in his third league goal of the campaign, with Immobile having a goal ruled out for an obvious offside, but they couldn't create anything clear cut and left Milan with their seventh defeat of the season.

Six points behind Inter in third are Napoli, whose faltering Serie A title hopes were kept alive by Andrea Petagna in a 1-0 win over Sampdoria. Burly

forward Petagna struck the winner with an uncharacteristically acrobatic bicycle kick just before half-time to keep Napoli - missing a number of key players to COVID-19 infections and the Africa Cup of Nations - just about in the hunt.

### 'Weak' Roma

Lazio meanwhile sit eighth, level on 32 points with local rivals Roma who completely fell apart in their loss to Juve, who are three points behind fourth-placed Atalanta in the race for the Champions League after their 6-2 win at COVID-hit Udinese.

Deservedly losing 3-1 in the 69th minute and having lost Federico Chiesa to a potentially serious knee injury in the first half, Juve were leading with 76 minutes on the clock at the Stadio Olimpico as Roma collapsed so dramatically that Jose Mourinho openly questioned his players' character. "It was 70 minutes of complete control... We did very well for 70 minutes, but after that it was a psychological collapse," Mourinho told

DAZN. "When you're in the shit you're supposed to get back up and show what you're made of, but there are people in the changing room here who are a bit too nice, a bit too weak."

Juve's win in what was probably the match of the season so far was all the more remarkable as soon after Mattia De Sciglio had lashed the away side ahead Lorenzo Pellegrini has the perfect chance to level the scores at four each but hit a dreadful penalty which Wojciech Szczesny easily pushed away. That was a disappointing end to the match for

he will be able to leave Paris on a free transfer this summer if he does not sign a new contract, twice hit the woodwork, once late on as PSG pushed in vain for the win.

Pochettino praised his makeshift team that was also missing goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma, defender Juan Bernat and midfielders Danilo Pereira, Julian Draxler and Angel Di Maria, who have all also tested positive for coronavirus. "Our changes had the aim of bringing some freshness," the coach said. "We're happy because the replacements brought the enthusiasm we needed. Xavi (Simons), Edouard and Thilo were all part of the build-up to the equalizer."

Pochettino added: "It was a tough spot, but we have to be satisfied. It's difficult to speak about progression, especially in the current circumstances



**MILAN:** Lazio's Italy's forward Ciro Immobile (right) fights for the ball with Inter Milan's Slovenian goalkeeper Samir Handanovic (left) on his way to scoring a goal during the Serie A football match between Inter Milan and Lazio on January 9, 2022. —AFP

Italy midfielder Pellegrini, who had lapped up the roar of the home crowd eight minutes after the break when his sumptuous free-kick looked to have given Roma the third goal they needed to seal what would have been Mourinho's biggest win to date as coach of the capital club.

However after Manuel Locatelli's free header cut the deficit with 20 minutes left, Roma collapsed, let-

ting Dejan Kulusevski sweep in a leveler two minutes later which was confirmed after a lengthy VAR check for offside. De Sciglio's strike left the previously buoyant home support in complete disbelief and after Pellegrini fluffed his spot-kick they knew the game was up, despite Juve's Matthijs de Ligt being sent off for handball after giving away the missed penalty. —AFP

## Kehrer goal helps PSG salvage Lyon 1-1 draw

**PARIS:** German defender Thilo Kehrer salvaged a 1-1 draw for Paris Saint-Germain against struggling Lyon with an equalizing goal 14 minutes from time in Ligue 1 action on Sunday. PSG already boast a seemingly insurmountable 11-point lead over second-placed Nice, but travelled to Lyon without Argentina ace Lionel Messi after he recuperates from Covid-19 and Neymar, who is receiving injury treatment in Brazil.

Mauricio Pochettino's team, which is building towards a Champions League clash against Real Madrid, left it late against a team lying 11th in the league.

Lucas Paqueta, himself back after contracting Covid, opened the scoring for Lyon after seven minutes. The Brazilian striker pounced on a pass by Bruno Guimaraes at the edge of the area, firing low past PSG goalkeeper Keylor Navas.

The home side dominated much of the game, but their record of conceding in the final quarter came back to haunt them as PSG league debutant Edouard Michut played in Kehrer. The German, whose last goal came in February 2020, saw his tame strike deflected past a sprawling Anthony Lopes in the Lyon goal. World Cup winner Kylian Mbappe, whose future is awash with rumours as

## Correa scores 50-yard stunner; Atletico settle for draw with Villarreal

**MADRID:** Angel Correa scored a wonder-goal from just inside the halfway-line on Sunday as Atletico Madrid fought back to claim a thrilling 2-2 draw with Villarreal. Atletico took an early lead at La Ceramica when Correa drove a stunning shot over Villarreal goalkeeper Geronimo Rulli but they fell behind in the second half, after Pau Torres and Alberto Moreno turned the game on its head.

Geoffrey Kondogbia pulled Atletico level again, with the midfielder then sent off in injury-time for a second yellow card. Amid the mayhem, Villarreal's Gerard Moreno also missed a penalty when Atletico were in front. Correa's goal was his seventh of the campaign and will be a strong contender for goal of the season, coming against Rulli, his fellow Argentinean.

"I know Rulli well and I know he has this way of standing a long way out of his goal," Correa said afterwards. "I thought I'd have a go and it came off pretty well." "It's an incredible goal, it could be goal of the season," said Atletico coach Diego Simeone. Villarreal came into the game on the back of losing 2-1 to Segunda side Sporting Gijon in the Copa del Rey in midweek and Unai Emery will likely be the more disappointed of the two coaches not to emerge with a victory.

### Thunderbolt

Simeone clenched his fists at the final whistle. Atletico regain fourth place, now level on points with Real Sociedad in fifth, and 16 behind leaders Real Madrid, albeit with a game in hand. Villarreal stay eighth, but only four points adrift of the Champions League qualification places. Sevilla earlier defeated Getafe 1-0 to reduce the gap again to Real Madrid to five points. Real Betis, who sit third, held on for a 1-1 draw away at Rayo Vallecano, despite having Alex Moreno sent off in the first half.

Correa's thunderbolt came in the tenth minute and caught everyone by surprise, not just Rulli. Dani Parejo

was guilty of giving the ball away on the halfway line but Correa made it into an error by intercepting, touching the ball into the Villarreal half and then arrowing a superb lob from 50 yards over the leaping Rulli and in.

Gerard Moreno missed the chance to equalize from the penalty spot, Jan Oblak making the save, and while Parejo bundled in the rebound, his equalizer was chalked off after VAR ruled the ball had come off his hand. Parejo was involved in the equalizer when it came, though, his dipping cross from out wide dropping awkwardly in front of Oblak, who still should have collected but instead spilled for Pau Torres to prod in. Villarreal were in the ascendancy and took the lead just before the hour, with left-back Alberto Moreno doing an excellent impression of an elite striker as he laid the ball off with his head and then span in behind, latching onto Gerard Moreno's through ball and finishing past Oblak. Yet Atletico were not done yet, with Kondogbia pulling them level again nine minutes later when a Yannick Carrasco run and cross gave Correa a chance on the turn. Rulli's right foot made the block but Kondogbia fired in, through the cluster of bodies and under the unsuspecting goalkeeper. —AFP

## Modeste strikes again as Cologne win at Hertha

**BERLIN:** French forward Anthony Modeste claimed his fourth goal in three Bundesliga games as Cologne climbed the table with a 3-1 win at Hertha Berlin on Sunday. Modeste headed home a cross from fellow striker Mark Uth at Berlin's Olympic Stadium to give Cologne an early lead. Slovakian midfielder Ondrej Duda then doubled Cologne's lead four minutes later when he smashed home from the edge of the area. Hertha midfielder Vladimir Darida clawed a goal back by drilling in a free-kick at the start of the second half.

Cologne substitute Jan Thielmann sealed victory in added time by winning the ball off Darida, rounding Hertha goalkeeper Alexander Scholz and firing into the empty net. Modeste, a cult hero with Cologne fans, has scored 12 goals in 18 league games this season, putting him fourth on the Bundesliga goalscoring charts, behind only Bayern Munich star Robert Lewandowski, Bayer Leverkusen's Patrik Schick and Borussia Dortmund striker Erling Haaland.

The win lifted Cologne to sixth in the table, while Hertha drop to 12th, just three points above the relegation play-off place. With nine members of their squad sidelined by COVID, league leaders Bayern lost 2-1 at home to Borussia Muenchengladbach on Friday. Their lead was cut to six points on Saturday when second-placed Dortmund staged a remarkable comeback from 2-0 down with 20 minutes to play, winning 3-2 at Eintracht Frankfurt. —AFP

# Classifieds

## Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000	Kaizen center	25716707
Amiri Hospital	22450005	Rawda	22517733
Maternity Hospital	24843100	Adaliya	22517144
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700	Khaldiya	24848075
Chest Hospital	24849400	Kaifan	24849807
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010	Shamiya	24848913
Adan Hospital	23940620	Shuwaikh	24814507
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300	Abdullah Salem	22549134
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000	Nuzha	22526804
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9	Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
		Qadsiya	22515088
		Dasmah	22532265
		Bneid Al-Gar	22531908

### Clinics

### CHANGE OF NAME

**I, Satvinder Singh** s/o Gurcharan Singh R/o st. no. 1-A, Near Poly Technical College W.No. 08, New Gobind Nagar Hoshiarpur Punjab have changed my name from Satvinder Singh to Satwinder Singh. Concerned Note. (C 1403) 10-1-2022

**I, Irfan S/O Munevar Khan** holder of Indian Passport no. L1433185 issued at Kuwait on 03/09/2013 & Civil ID no. 281080104232 has changed my name from Irfan to Irfan Khan in all my dealings and documents, I will be known by name of Irfan (Given Name) and Khan (Surname). (C 1000).

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## Senegal thump Zimbabwe 1-0

Cape Verde thump Ethiopia at Cup of Nations; Victory for hosts Cameroon



**BAFOUSSAM:** Senegal's forward Sadio Mane (left) shoots and fails to score as Zimbabwe's goalkeeper Petros Mhari (right) prepares to make a save during the Group B Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) 2021 football match between Senegal and Zimbabwe yesterday. — AFP

**BAFOUSSAM:** Liverpool star Sadio Mane converted a penalty deep in added time to snatch a fortunate 1-0 win for Senegal over Zimbabwe in the Africa Cup of Nations Group B opener yesterday in Bafoussam. Disaster struck the gallant underdogs when a shot hit the right arm of Kelvin Madzongwe and Mane sent goalkeeper Petros Mhari the wrong way with the resulting penalty on 97 minutes to settle a lacklustre affair.

While Senegal, one of the favorites to win a competition delayed twice by COVID-19, dominated possession, they rarely threatened to break down a well-organized Zimbabwe defense. Senegal lacked Chelsea goalkeeper Edouard Mendy and Napoli centre-back Kalidou Koulibaly, who are recovering in Cameroon after testing positive for the coronavirus. Zimbabwe travelled to central Africa without a couple of their top players, Marvelous Nakamba from Aston Villa and fellow midfielder Marshall Munetsi from French Ligue 1 outfit Reims, due to injuries.

With reigning African Footballer of the Year Mane and Paris Saint-Germain midfielder Idrissa Gueye in the starting line-up, Senegal were expected to secure maximum points without undue difficulty. The opening 20 minutes were controlled by the Teranga Lions, who camped in the Zimbabwe half and passed the ball casually while their opponents did a lot of chasing at a sparsely populated Stade de Kouekong.

Senegal issued a declaration of their intentions within 45 seconds of the kick-off in 30 degrees Celsius heat when Bouna Sarr fired narrowly wide from just outside the box. Sarr from German and European giants Bayern Munich went even closer midway through the opening half with a shot across the goal that was just off target. After a quiet start, Mane burst between two defenders on 24 minutes only to see his low shot, aimed at the far corner of the net, blocked by goalkeeper Petros Mhari.

As the half progressed Zimbabwe began to move into Senegalese territory and should have done better from a free-kick inside the D with 30 minutes gone. Captain Knowledge Musona took the set-piece and should have at least found the target instead of watching his tame attempt go harmlessly wide. As half-time approached in the western highlands of Cameroon, Mane turned provider, setting up unmarked Gueye, who was let down by his first touch as he was poised to shoot at goal.

A goalless opening half ended with Senegal back on the attack and Fode Ballo Toure firing into the side netting. The second half followed a similar pattern to the first as Senegal dominated possession without seriously threatening to take the lead. Mhari rescued Zimbabwe 16 minutes from time when he dived to cut off a cross destined for Mane at the far post. Senegal survived a scare as full-time loomed with a Zimbabwe free-kick creating a half chance before the ball was

grasped by goalkeeper Seny Dieng.

Meanwhile, Julio Tavares scored the winner as Cape Verde began their Africa Cup of Nations campaign with a 1-0 victory on Sunday over Ethiopia who played most of the game with 10 men. The Saudi-based striker headed Cape Verde ahead in first-half stoppage time in Yaounde after Ethiopia had defender Yared Bayeh sent off with just 12 minutes gone.

Cape Verde, whose three Cup of Nations appearances have all come since 2013, won for just the second time at the tournament and sit level on points with hosts Cameroon at the top of Group A. Ethiopia faced an increasingly uphill challenge after Bayeh's yellow card was upgraded to red following a VAR review for his tackle on Tavares as the Cape Verde player ran through on goal.

Teklemariam Shanko produced a brilliant save to claw the ball to safety after Ethiopia defender Mignot Debebe diverted a cross towards his own goal. Cape Verde made their extra man count late in the first half as Garry Rodrigues hooked a cross back towards goal where it was nodded in from close range by Tavares. An inspired Shanko kept Ethiopia in the game with a string of stops, but they created little in attack to trouble Cape Verde and already look set for an early exit with games to come against Cameroon and Burkina Faso.

In another development, Vincent Aboubakar

scored a brace of penalties to give hosts Cameroon a 2-1 win over Burkina Faso on Sunday in Yaounde as the Africa Cup of Nations finally got under way after a build-up troubled by the coronavirus. A raft of positive COVID-19 cases among competing teams has marked the days leading up to the tournament, while organizers chose to cap crowd limits at 60 percent of capacity, or 80 percent when the hosts play.

However, the party was not spoiled for the home team as they came from behind to beat the 2013 Cup of Nations runners-up at the 60,000-seat Olembe Stadium, where celebratory fireworks lit up the evening sky at the end of the game. Burkina Faso were dealt a blow on the eve of the tournament when it emerged that coach Kamou Malo and several players had tested positive for the coronavirus, leaving assistant coach Firmin Sanou to take charge.

Nevertheless, Gustavo Sangare gave the Stallions the lead midway through the first half in the Group A match before Aboubakar equalized from the spot five minutes prior to the interval after a VAR review confirmed a foul by Bertrand Traore on Andre-Frank Zambo Anguissa. The 29-year-old Aboubakar, who netted the winner in the 2017 Cup of Nations final against Egypt, then scored what proved to be the decider in first-half stoppage time and he was only denied a hat-trick by an offside flag after the break. — AFP

## 49ers stun Rams 27-24; Raiders edge Chargers

**LOS ANGELES:** The San Francisco 49ers punched their ticket to the NFL post-season for the second time in eight years on Sunday, rallying from a 17-point deficit for a thrilling 27-24 overtime win over the Los Angeles Rams. The 49ers, who started the season 3-5, were down 17-0 in the first half against the Rams before they orchestrated one of the biggest comebacks of the NFL regular season, which wrapped up Sunday.

"We are dangerous, real dangerous. It is about to get scary, let's go," said Niners running back Deebo Samuel, who ran for a touchdown and also finished off a trick play by throwing for one. The Rams clinched the NFC West title despite the defeat, but they dropped to the No 4 seed in the NFC. Gritty quarterback Jimmy Garoppolo played through a painful thumb injury for the 49ers, completing 23-of-32 passes for 316 yards with a touchdown.

"It was tested," Garoppolo said of the thumb. "We got the win and that is all that matters." Garoppolo drove the 49ers down the field in overtime, setting the stage for Robbie Gould's game-winning field goal from 24 yards. San Francisco cornerback Ambry Thomas helped seal the win late in the fourth with his first career interception.

The Las Vegas Raiders also needed overtime to punch their playoff ticket, eliminating the Los Angeles Chargers with a 35-32 victory. They reached the post-season for the first time since 2016 - and ensured that the Pittsburgh Steelers advanced. The Raiders led 29-14 after Daniel Carlson's 52-yard field goal with 8:23 left in the fourth quarter. But the Chargers roared back. Quarterback Justin Herbert connected with Joshua Palmer on a 23-yard touchdown pass on fourth down to pull within 29-20.

Herbert then engineered a 19-play, 83-yard drive that



**INGLEWOOD:** Matthew Stafford #9 of the Los Angeles Rams passes in the fourth quarter against the San Francisco 49ers at SoFi Stadium on January 09, 2022. — AFP

included three fourth-down conversions and finished with Herbert's touchdown pass to Mike Williams. Carlson booted his fourth field goal of the game to put the Raiders up 32-29 in overtime. But the Chargers responded with a 41-yard field goal from Dustin Hopkins.

From there a rare NFL tie result was possible-which would have seen both teams advance to the playoffs and the Steelers be shut out. The Raiders went for the win and Carlson came through. "We knew no matter what, we didn't want to tie, we wanted to win the football game," said Raiders quarterback Derek Carr, who completed 20 of 36 passes for 186 yards and two touchdowns. "Obviously if you tie you're in and all, you think all those things, but my mindset all day was to make sure we were the only team moving on after this."

The Steelers had kept their hopes alive with a 16-13 overtime win over the Baltimore Ravens. The victory, coupled with the Jacksonville Jaguars' 26-11 victory over the Indianapolis Colts, meant the Steelers would advance as long as the Chargers and Raiders didn't tie. Kicker Chris Boswell booted a 36-yard field goal with just under two minutes left in overtime to seal the Steelers win. — AFP

## Warriors celebrate Thompson's NBA return with a win

**LOS ANGELES:** Three-time NBA champion Klay Thompson returned from a 31-month injury absence on Sunday as the Golden State Warriors celebrated "Klay Day" with a 96-82 victory over the Cleveland Cavaliers. Thompson - who won titles with the Warriors in 2015, 2017 and 2018 - received a rapturous welcome at Chase Center in San Francisco. It was his first game in the arena, which the Warriors have only called home since September 2019.

Thompson scored the Warriors' first basket of the game on their first possession, dispelling any doubt that he was back with a thundering dunk with 2:56 remaining in the first half, driving past Cleveland center Jarrett Allen and ramming the ball home over two Cavs defenders. It brought fans to their feet, as did the scowl he threw over his shoulder as he ran back down the court on defense. Before the half ended, he also had the first of his three three-pointers.

There was nothing tentative in Thompson's game as he played just under 20 minutes in bursts of four to five minutes in each quarter. He scored 17 points on 7-of-18 shooting, grabbed three rebounds and blocked a shot as the Warriors snapped a two-game skid and improved to 30-9 - matching the Phoenix Suns for best record in the league. "I was just happy to be out there doing what I love again," Thompson told NBA TV. "Getting my rhythm back, it feels really good."

Thompson last played in an NBA game on June 13, 2019, when he tore the anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee in game six of the NBA Finals. He was on his way back from that injury when, more than 17 months later, he tore his right Achilles tendon. Thompson's teammates, including Stephen Curry and Draymond

Green, started celebrating his return early, all entering the arena and warming up in various versions of Thompson's No. 11 jersey. The roar when he was introduced before the game was deafening. "I got a lot of old feelings again about game days - it was surreal," Thompson said.

"The ovation to start the game, I just am so grateful for these fans. It was special. "I'm never going to forget this night," added Thompson, who departed in the fourth quarter to chants of "Klay! Klay! Klay!" Curry led the Warriors with 28 points. Green was injured but was in the starting lineup for the tip-off of Thompson's comeback before sitting out the rest of the contest. "I was amazed at his poise out there, his confidence after being out for so long," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said.

Elsewhere, Ja Morant contributed to the day's highlight reel in the Memphis Grizzlies' 127-119 victory over the Los Angeles Lakers. The Grizzlies set a club record with their ninth straight victory. Morant scored 16 points and set a tone with a monster block on Avery Bradley in the first quarter and threw down an alley-oop dunk off a feed from Desmond Bane in the third. The Grizzlies connected on 54 percent of their shots from the field. Bane chipped in 23 points as Memphis withstood a 35-point performance from Lakers star LeBron James to halt Los Angeles' four-game winning streak.

In Brooklyn, rookie Cam Thomas drove for the game-winning basket with 1.7 seconds left in overtime as the Nets salvaged a 121-119 victory over the San Antonio Spurs. The Nets, coming off an emphatic loss to the reigning NBA champion Milwaukee Bucks on Friday, got a much-needed victory on their Barclays Center home court, where they hadn't won since December 16. The star-studded Nets - led by 28 points from Kevin Durant, plus 26 points, 12 assists and seven rebounds from James Harden - squandered a 12-point lead with 4:59 remaining in regulation against a Spurs team lying 10th in the Western Conference.

In Dallas, Luka Doncic posted a triple-double of 22 points, 14 rebounds and 14 assists to lead the Mavericks to a 113-99 victory over Chicago that ended the Bulls' nine-game win streak. — AFP