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# Kuwait FM appreciates US commitment to security

## Kuwait, US sign agreement on disease surveillance and control



WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah hold a joint press availability in the Benjamin Franklin Room at the US Department of State on Wednesday. — KUNA

WASHINGTON: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah said on Wednesday partnership with the United States has strengthened since the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. "My visit (to the US) comes after your visit to Kuwait at the end of last June and only a few days prior to the anniversary of Kuwait's liberation from the Iraqi invasion," Sheikh Ahmad told US Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

"It showcases the strength of our relationship and the commitment that the United States has shown again and again to the security and stability of Kuwait and the region," he said. Sheikh Ahmad made the comments in a joint statement with Blinken at the end of the Fifth Kuwait-US Strategic Dialogue, co-chaired by both men. On the Kuwaiti-US partnership, he said: "We are solid partners, great friends, and we are very

appreciative of this historically strong partnership and we are greatly appreciative of your effort in maintaining peace and security in the region."

"We have been partners throughout the three decades since the liberation of Kuwait and lots of hardships. We are partners in combating terrorism after 9/11. We were partners as well with the liberation of Kuwait. And lastly, last year, with the safe transitory corridors for all Afghans in need, US citizens and residents to have a safe passage through Kuwait, along with the biggest operation of its kind, we are proud to be part of that," Sheikh Ahmad pointed out.

Regarding security cooperation, he said: "We value the US continuous commitment to the security of Kuwait and the stability of the region. It really exhibits true friendship. This is an ironclad alliance, which was forged first by blood and treasured at a very

critical point in history."

"This year, we commemorate the 31st anniversary of the liberation of Kuwait that was led by United States and also celebrate the 65th anniversary of our diplomatic relationship. This meeting is the conclusion of our fifth strategic dialogue. Since the creation of the dialogue, it has moved at a very great pace that reflects the strong aspirations of our leadership and our people. We are looking forward for the next meeting for the sixth round to host you in Kuwait," Sheikh Ahmad said.

"Let me just say thank you for your friendship again and for this partnership. And we will continue to exchange views to cement the partnership through government institutions, private sector and people to people. I welcome you for the sixth round of dialogue in Kuwait," he added.

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### News in brief

#### Kuwait records 6,515 new cases

KUWAIT: Kuwait reported a record 6,515 new COVID-19 cases yesterday, in addition to one death and 5,063 recoveries, while the number of patients in ICUs increased from 73 on Wednesday to 86 yesterday. The number of patients hospitalized also increased from 408 to 410, as total active cases rose from 47,484 to 48,935. — KUNA

#### Jordan kills 27 drug smugglers

AMMAN: The Jordanian army killed 27 drug smugglers in a clash early yesterday as they tried to enter the kingdom from Syria, it said in a statement. The traffickers were supported by an armed group, the army said, adding that "a preliminary search was conducted in the area, and large quantities of narcotics were found". — AFP

#### Air India sold after 69 years

MUMBAI: India's beleaguered national carrier landed back in the hands of its founders yesterday, decades after it was nationalized and following years as a monumental burden on the public purse. Tata, a sprawling family-owned conglomerate with interests ranging from tea to software, is back in charge of Air India after concluding the 180-billion-rupee (\$2.4 billion) deal. — AFP

#### 'Wordle' spoiler account suspended

SAN FRANCISCO: Twitter suspended a bot account on Wednesday for spoiling the solution to the next day's Wordle, the wildly popular Internet word puzzle. The game, which only offers one puzzle per day, has amassed millions of players since it came online last year. But the Twitter profile @wordlinator seemed determined to ruin the fun for participants posting their scores on the social media site. — AFP

#### Gandhi: Twitter 'curbing free speech'

NEW DELHI: The de facto head of India's main opposition party has complained to Twitter about "strange" activity on his account, accusing the US giant of being the "unwitting" ally of the government in curbing free speech. Rahul Gandhi of the Congress party told Twitter's CEO in a letter that stopped in his new Twitter followers "suddenly" growth last August, falling from a monthly average of hundreds of thousands to nearly zero. — AFP

## Return to 'Plan A': England lifts Omicron curbs

LONDON: Commuters trooped back to the office in England yesterday, with public transport visibly busier, after the government scrapped restrictions imposed to combat the Omicron coronavirus variant. The return to "Plan A" measures - ditching legal requirements for face coverings and shelving vaccine passports - comes as the number of positive COVID-19 cases has fallen sharply

from record levels.

Infection rates are still high - more than 100,000 confirmed cases were recorded on Wednesday - but are plateauing, easing fears that health services will be overwhelmed. Prime Minister Boris Johnson said restrictions could be lifted due to "the success of our booster rollout, the tireless work of the NHS and the amazing public response". But he urged more people to get vaccinated and warned: "The pandemic is not over. Everyone should remain cautious."

Johnson, who was himself infected with COVID in 2020, introduced the so-called "Plan B" restrictions on December 8, after warning of

Continued on Page 2



LONDON: Pedestrians on their way to work cross the London Bridge back-dropped by the Tower Bridge yesterday. — AFP

## Rare Mideast snow brings joy, misery

JERUSALEM: Snow carpeted Jerusalem and the eastern Mediterranean yesterday as a rare storm turned the holy city into a winter wonderland but brought misery to the region's Syrian refugees. The cold snap, which has already caused major disruption in Athens and Istanbul, saw heavy snowfall in areas better known for their summer heat.

In the alleyways of Jerusalem's walled Old City, children pelted each other with slushy snowballs after the first flakes fell late on Wednesday. By morning, snow crowned the golden-tipped Dome of the Rock in the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, Islam's third holiest site, and carpeted the esplanade in front of the Western Wall, the holiest site where Jews can pray.

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JERUSALEM: Snow covers the Dome of the Rock at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound and the city yesterday. — AFP

## Dining with the undead in Riyadh

RIYADH: A restaurant in Saudi Arabia is offering patrons in the conservative kingdom a unique experience - dishes with a side of skull and blood in the company of zombies and vampires. The restaurant, "Shadows", caters to horror film buffs with strong stomachs, allowing them to savor their dishes while staff in gory costumes put on interactive shows.

It's located in the Boulevard entertainment district of the capital Riyadh and has opened as the

Gulf country seeks to soften its image. "I came here to have fun and laugh... but the atmosphere and the shows are actually very scary," one diner, Nora Al-Assad, told AFP.

Her friend, Jawaher Abdullah, a doctor, was more than thrilled to wolf down her dinner. "I like horror in general... I think the atmosphere is great and lots of fun," she said, before taking a selfie with a performer with a fake bleeding chest wound. For businessman Sleiman Al-Amri, the restaurant experience caters to his hunger for a good adrenaline rush. "We're always looking for new and exciting things to do in Riyadh," said the 45-year-old, dining with his family. — AFP (See Page 13)



RIYADH: Actors in zombie costumes liven up the atmosphere at the horror-themed "Shadows" restaurant. — AFP



## Local

# British Council Kuwait hosts lecture promoting efforts to abolish article 153

## One in every three women is subjected to violence, according to 2019 study



KUWAIT: The speakers (from left) Almaha Almari - Board member of Women's Cultural and Social Society, Sundus Hussein - Founding member of Abolish 153, Mae Al-Hajjaj - President of Soroptimist Kuwait and Leanah Al-Awadhi - Founding Member of Mudhawis. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



British Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis speaks during the lecture.

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The British Council Kuwait hosted a lecture on Wednesday titled 'Raising our Voices', calling on the Kuwaiti government to abolish article 153 of the Kuwait penal code that allegedly justifies honor killings of mothers, daughters, sisters and wives. The attendees agreed that Article 153 of the penal code denies an inherent right to women, which is considered one of the most important human rights, namely, the right to life.

The article states that "anyone who 'surprises' his wife in a state of adultery or 'surprises' his daughter or mother or sister in the presence of a man and kills her immediately or kills him or kills them together is punishable by imprisonment for a period not exceeding three years and a fine of not more than KD 225 or one of these two punishments".

The speakers at the event were from the Kuwaiti civil society, led by Sundus Hussein, Founding Member of Abolish 153, Mae Al-Hajjaj, President of Soroptimist Kuwait, Almaha Almari, Board Member of Women's Cultural and Social Society, and Founding Member of Mudhawis Leanah Al-Awadhi, who acted as the moderator.

Before the program started, British Council Director Michael Gordon welcomed the speakers and guests, including British Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis. "The British Council is committed to the principle of equality before the law, diversity

and inclusion. Equality means equal treatment and no discrimination on the basis of belonging to certain groups, which could be defined by gender, ethnicity, disabilities, religious affiliations, socioeconomic groups or sexual orientation or identity," Gordon said.

Ambassador Lewis recalled how lucky she was

“The road is long, but we have each other”

to be able to choose whatever she wanted in her life, but as time progressed, she realized she not only wanted to be lucky, but be equal to her peers, especially as she occupies the position as the representative and face of her country. "I saw the conditions attached to the fatwa on women who can join the armed forces in Kuwait. It's a step forward - there is freedom for women here. But there are still elements of control over their lives, like you can only join the army if your father agrees to it and if

you wear the hijab. The road is long, but we have each other to build more ideas and learn, and keep this conversation of equality, diversity and inclusion flowing," she said.

### Several achievements

Sundus Hussein presented several achievements of Abolish 153, from the time it was founded in 2015 till date. "We want to abolish the law that basically allows a man to be the judge over women. We were originally many at the start, but the concept of honor-killing is such a taboo, we ended up with only five founding members. But we are determined and lobbied for the law to be abolished from the Kuwait penal code," she said.

"We asked many Kuwaitis if they knew about article 153, but very few people did. This law is very discriminatory against women. We are talking about women in 2005 running for parliament and empowering women, but how can you empower women when there are laws against them. Article 153 is against the constitution and violates international conventions ratified by Kuwait, like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as the Convention on the Rights of the Child," Hussein said.

According to Hussein, this violates the Kuwaiti constitution's articles 9, 29 and 34, which call for

protecting the family as the basis of society and promoting the values of equality between men and women in law and in public duties, in addition to ensuring a fair trial, where the accused is innocent until proven guilty in a legal trial in which the country provides the necessary guarantees to exercise the right of defense.

"One in every three women is subjected to violence based on a study made in Kuwait in 2019," Hussein pointed out, adding 63 percent of Kuwaitis don't support the law; however, 86 percent of Kuwaitis don't even know the law exists. "We have become more aggressive in our lobbying to abolish article 153. We have conducted a lot of community training, lectures and workshops. We have trained social police, advocates and first responders. We believe that if we train many people and educate them, they will be able to help us," she said.

Mae Al-Hajjaj presented the work of Soroptimist International, which she said has 80,000 members worldwide. Soroptimist Kuwait was launched in 2015. "We focus on five major areas related to women's issues - economic empowerment, health, education, environment and ending violence and discrimination against women," she said. "We collaborate with Abolish 153 - they are one of our major supporters. We want our world to be a better place for women and girls. We are out not to kill men, but to give justice to poor women in the society who are voiceless," she said.

## Return to 'Plan A': England lifts...

Continued from Page 1

looming "tidal wave" of Omicron. Facemasks were required in all enclosed spaces and people were told to work remotely. Vaccine documentation to enter places such as nightclubs, football grounds and large-scale events was also controversially required.

In the British capital, public transport was busier after the restrictions were lifted at midnight. There were mixed feelings about the end to restrictions, which comes after more than 37 million people had booster jabs. "It's strange, I feel like it's a little bit too soon," said Jess Kelly, 22, who works for the state-run National Health Service. "I'm from Edinburgh and we still wear masks, so it is a bit odd to see people not wearing masks in London."

James Hughes, 57, said he would still wear a mask when needed. "I don't think it's back to normal," he told AFP. He saw the move as linked to fury at lockdown-breaking parties at Johnson's Downing Street office. "I think our beloved prime minister is trying to save his skin and he's trying to get the support of his MPs, his backbenchers and I think this is something they wanted to see, and not necessarily the British public." Jessie Wright, 19, said lifting the restrictions was "a bit scary" but "a massive relief because it's been nearly two years, and being trapped inside or being restricted outside has just

been exhausting".

England had lifted restrictions on July 19 last year but then re-introduced them as the Omicron wave hit. Limits on access to care homes in England will also be scrapped from next week, with residents able to have unlimited visits from family and friends. Businesses will still be able to impose restrictions but they will no longer be a legal requirement.

On public transport in London, for example, face coverings are still mandatory. But secondary school students will no longer have to wear masks. US holidaymaker Ethan Letson, 24, agreed with London Mayor Sadiq Khan's decision to keep face coverings as a condition of travel. "I still wear the mask on public transport. I will wear it in very crowded areas like the Underground. It's so tight down there, you could get sick at any time," he said.

Unlike Scotland and Wales, which set their own health policy, England kept nightclubs and bars open over the festive period. But businesses still took a heavy hit as people stayed at home. Hospitality workers in the business district around St Paul's said things had only just started to improve. "The last week, business has started to pick up again. Around Christmas it was dead," said bartender Lewis Colby, 39. "People aren't so scared anymore, trains are busier coming into work, people are starting to drink more."

Despite the lifting of restrictions, those who test positive for coronavirus must still self-isolate for a minimum of five days. Johnson said he also hopes to scrap those rules when they expire on March 24. — AFP

laboration between our countries is possible only because of the strong bonds that have been built together over the decades, forged in war and strengthened in peace. We have strong defense ties, and Kuwait has long hosted US forces. Our militaries work together in many ways, including by conducting exercises and training together."

On economic relations, Blinken said: "We have strong economic ties. Our bilateral trade relationship now amounts to more than \$4.5 billion a year. And we hope this figure will grow even more in the years ahead, as we find new opportunities to work together in areas like sustainable infrastructure and renewable energy."

"And finally, the beating heart of the relationship is our people-to-people ties - nearly 10,000 Kuwaitis choose to study in the US at universities and English language institutes every single year. Thousands of other Kuwaitis live in the United States, and tens of thousands of Americans live in Kuwait," Blinken said, noting, "Cultural educational ties are invaluable to us. And I know to the people of Kuwait as well. Since the liberation of Kuwait, the friendship between the United States has only grown stronger," he added. — KUNA

## Houthi drones pose challenge for UAE

DUBAI: Domestically assembled drones that can fly hundreds of kilometers are proving a security headache for the United Arab Emirates after consecutive attacks by Yemen's rebel warriors. The low-tech weapons, which use over-the-counter parts, were deployed in two attacks on the wealthy Gulf state, a member of the Saudi-led coalition, the Iran-backed rebels said.

Three Asian oil workers died in a drone-and-missile assault on Abu Dhabi on Jan 17 and on Monday, US forces based in the city fired Patriot interceptors to help shoot down two ballistic missiles. Drones were also used in the attack, the rebels said. The attacks, in response to a series of rebel defeats by a UAE-trained militia, pit the Houthis' home-grown weaponry against the Emirates' billion-dollar missile defense capabilities.

The Sammad-3 drones - named after the insurgents' former second-in-command Saleh Al-

Sammad, who was killed in a coalition air raid in 2018 - have a range of about 1,500 km, rebels and analysts say. They have frequently targeted Saudi Arabia, which neighbors Yemen, killing and injuring civilians, and damaging infrastructure, including oil facilities and airports.

"It is notoriously difficult to counter drone and missile attacks, especially when used in a 'swarm tactic' where multiple weapons are sent at once to overwhelm existing defenses," said James Rogers, an associate fellow at the London School of Economics. Experts stress the cost-effectiveness of a strategy also adopted by the Hamas movement in Gaza against the Zionist entity as well as Shiite militants targeting US forces in Iraq. Drones have long been used by conventional forces, including the Americans in the assassination of senior Iranian commander General Qassem Soleimani at Baghdad airport in 2020.

Rogers said the Houthis have been using attack drones and medium-range missiles "at low altitude and low speed so they are hard for conventional radar to detect". Saudi Arabia and the United States have repeatedly accused Iran of supplying the Houthis with drones, missiles and other weapons, a charge Tehran denies. — AFP

## Rare Mideast snow brings joy...

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The Zionist entity's meteorological service reported that between 15 and 25 cm of snow had fallen overnight. It took until midday for snow ploughs to reopen the main highways leading into Jerusalem from the north, south and west. Schools in Jerusalem and the northern Zionist entity were closed, leaving children free to play in the snow, which was not expected to last as temperatures rose and rain fell.

The Zionist Electric Company reported that power consumption reached an all-time high overnight as people switched on the heating. Snow also covered higher ground in the occupied West Bank, where the Palestinian Authority closed schools and some public services. In neighboring Jordan, heavy snowfall closed roads in the capital Amman and made driving conditions treacherous across much of the country.

Jordan's Meteorological Department forecast more snowfall on higher ground with temperatures expected to fall below freezing again on Thursday night. Egypt recorded its coldest winter in a decade, with temperatures as much as seven to eight degrees below the seasonal average. The storm whipped up waves of nearly six meters, dis-

rupting shipping in the eastern Mediterranean, the meteorological office said.

In Syria, days of heavy snowfall blanketed displaced persons' camps in the rebel-held northwest where families huddled together under canvas in temperatures well below zero Celsius. "We've been trapped in the snow for four days," said Abu Hussan, who lives with his family in a makeshift camp outside the city of Jisr Al-Shughur. "We have no shoes. We are soaked with water. The children are sick and walk barefoot. They have nothing."

The UN humanitarian agency OCHA said this week that at least 227 displacement sites across the northwest have been hit by severe winter weather since Jan 18. "545 tents have been reported destroyed and 9,125 tents damaged by snowfall, floods and winds, along with belongings of displaced people," it said.

In crisis-hit Lebanon, refugees and Lebanese alike struggled to secure fuel for heating as severe weather blocked mountain roads and left Syrian refugees shivering in flimsy tents. In the small Mediterranean country, where economic crisis has driven more than 80 percent of the population into poverty, fuel prices have skyrocketed after the cash-strapped government lifted subsidies last year.

Conditions have been particularly severe in the town of Aarsal, high in the mountains on the Syrian border, where Lebanese families and some 70,000 Syrian refugees have been struggling to cope with the cold. "Most of the people can't afford fuel for heating," Aarsal mayor Basel Hujjeiri said. — AFP

## Kuwait FM appreciates US...

Continued from Page 1

Meanwhile, Blinken said the United States and Kuwait signed a memorandum of understanding to prevent, detect and prepare for outbreaks caused by dangerous pathogens. "Under this partnership, Kuwait's ministry of health and the United States will share technical information and best practices on disease surveillance," he revealed.

"We'll meet regularly along with other participating GCC countries to share this knowledge more widely in the region. So that collectively, we're better prepared to respond to future pandemics. These efforts build on the work our countries are already doing to stop this pandemic. And I want to thank Kuwait again for the vital role that it's been playing in the COVID-19 response," Blinken pointed out.

On defense cooperation, he said: "This level of col-



Local

# US highly eyes Kuwait's role for promoting peace: Blinken

## US State Secretary sheds light on agreement to deal with potential disease outbreaks

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that the United States of America places "tremendous value" on the role that Kuwait plays as an "advancer of peace." In an exclusive interview to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), Blinken said, "We of course place tremendous value on the role that Kuwait plays, an almost unique role that it plays as a facilitator, mediator, advancer of peace and leading the way to resolve conflicts."

He added that "in many ways Kuwait has been an indispensable bridge to try to resolve challenges in the region and even beyond; the role that it has played in healing the Gulf rift was critical and essential, the role that it plays as well in Yemen in trying to end the war there is vital. We see that in Lebanon, we see that in the relationship it has developed with Iraq," Blinken said, affirming "it's something that we place tremendous value in."

### Strategic Dialogue

On the Fifth US-Kuwait Strategic Dialogue, Blinken said each dialogue "is building on the previous one and demonstrating in concrete ways how we are both deepening, strengthening, but also expanding our ties and the work we are doing together." "I think I come away from this fifth Strategic Dialogue convinced that this partnership continues to deepen but in ways that I think, benefiting both our peoples but also beyond people,

around the world," he added. He continued "I was in Kuwait last year; it coincided with the 30th anniversary of the liberation of Kuwait and the 60th anniversary of our (diplomatic) ties and what is so important, beyond the powerful symbolism of that is that day in day out," the two nations are working to further boost the collaboration and cooperation.

He affirmed that "ties in new areas, I think are quite extraordinary and powerful," shedding light on the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between the two countries "to deal with the potential outbreak of dangerous diseases and to make sure that we are working together, sharing information to detect the spread of dangerous pathogens and to be able to prevent that and deal with that." "That's exactly the kind of collaboration that is bringing us together not only to deal with traditional threats, but some ones that the entire world is facing," he stressed.

### Driving progress

He continued by saying that the strategic dialogue "even if it culminates or starts with a conversation between the (foreign) ministers, the critical work is done in the working groups, noting "that's how we actually make sure that we're driving concrete progress." He said that the work the working groups are doing "including the work that they do in between the dialogues, the communication they



WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah lead their respective countries' delegations at the Fifth US-Kuwait Strategic Dialogue. — KUNA

have, the efforts to advance the different initiatives that we're taking, that's what's important."

On the 18th anniversary of the designation of Kuwait as a major non-NATO ally of the US, Blinken said "it's a testimony to the importance of the partnership, the significant role that Kuwait plays, not only as a peacemaker, as a bridge, but also for example, in the coalition to counter Daesh, where Kuwait has played an essential role and con-

tinues to play one because unfortunately, even though the threat has been significantly reduced in recent years thanks to the good work that we have done together, it remains real and we remain very vigilant together." "It's a testimony to the, in many ways, unique role that Kuwait and our partnership plays both in trying to advance peace but also to deal with challenges to our common security," he remarked. — KUNA

## Kuwait FM, US official discuss ties, underscore liberation anniversary

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah conducted a telephone contact with Adam Smith, the head of the US House Armed Services Committee in the Congress. The two sides addressed the close bilateral relations between the two friendly countries and means of cementing the bonds in various sectors. Also during the conversation, the



Adam Smith



Sheikh Dr Ahmad

US historic role for the liberation of the State of Kuwait was recalled on the occasion of the 31st anniversary of the Desert Storm operation. Moreover, the Kuwaiti foreign minister and the US official discussed some regional and international topics. — KUNA

## Foreign Minister meets outgoing Hungary envoy



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah yesterday met the outgoing Hungarian Ambassador to Kuwait Dr Istvan Gyula Soos. During the meeting, the Kuwaiti foreign minister commended the ambassador's efforts and contributions to the promotion of close bilateral relations between both friendly countries. —KUNA

## Kuwait prime minister hosts Amiri Diwan adviser

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah yesterday at Seif Palace received Adviser at the Amiri Diwan Mohammad Abdullah Abulhassan who awarded the premier a copy of his book, "Facts and Secrets of my Memories." The book chronicles the State of Kuwait's role at the United Nations Security Council and General Assembly during Abulhassan's service as its delegate at the international organization (1981-2003). — KUNA



KUWAIT: Waleed Al-Khashti and Anwar Al-Refaie with Zain and Bait Al-Othman Museum's teams.

## Zain keen on promoting Kuwaiti heritage

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced its main sponsorship of the Late Abdullah Abdullatif Al-Othman's first Carrom Competition. The event, hosted and organized by Bait Al Othman Museum from 8-10 February, comes under supervision from the Public Authority for Sports, and is set to feature over 113 teams and 226 players.

The announcement came during Zain's visit to Bait Al-Othman Museum in Hawalli with the attendance of Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Communications and Relations Officer Waleed Al-Khashti, Head of Kuwaiti Heritage Team and Vice President of Volunteer Work Center Anwar Al-Refaie, as well as Zain's team and Bait Al-Othman Museum's officials.

Zain is proud to support this unique local event in collaboration with Bait Al Othman Museum, part

of the Kuwait Volunteer Work Center. The company's support springs from its corporate sustainability strategy towards supporting Kuwaiti sports, youth, and culture. Zain strongly believes in the private sector's vital and active role in supporting and progressing programs and initiatives that preserve Kuwait's rich history, culture, and heritage.

Bait Al-Othman Museum organizes the Late Abdullah Abdullatif Al-Othman's first Carrom Competition, which is set to feature over 113 teams and 226 players. The competition will be supervised and refereed by the Public Authority for Sports, and valuable cash prizes will be presented to the winners of the first four places. Many fun activities will also be held for visitors and spectators during the competition. Carrom is a traditional tabletop game that is wildly popular with Kuwaiti youth throughout the nation's history.

As a leading private sector company in Kuwait, Zain is constantly looking to identify and support the most unique community programs that directly support sports, youth, and culture. The company is proud to shoulder many initiatives that aim at introducing Kuwait's rich history and heritage to the nation's next generations.

## On the occasion of the



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## Crimes

Kuwait oil rises by  
\$1.95 to \$89.82 pb

KUWAIT: Kuwait oil price rose by \$1.95 in Wednesday's trading session to reach \$89.82 pb compared with \$87.87 pb Tuesday, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. Benchmark Brent gained \$1.76 to reach \$89.96 pb and West Texas Intermediate also increased by \$1.75 to settle at \$87.35 pb. The OPEC daily basket price went up by two US dollars to \$89.35 a barrel Wednesday, compared with \$87.35 the previous day, the cartel said yesterday. The annual average of the OPEC's basket price amounted to \$69.89 pb last year, the organization said in its bulletin. The OPEC+ alliance decided early January to proceed with a production hike of 400,000 barrels per day (bpd), keeping their current policy of slight monthly increases in output.

Symposium stresses  
need to care for orphans

KUWAIT: Participants in a recent symposium held in Kuwait stressed the necessity to provide orphans with a dignified life that keeps them from going astray and help qualify them to integrate in society away from racism and rejection. The symposium was organized by the specialized Arab woman Union - Kuwait branch Saturday January 22, 2022, on the occasion of the International Orphan Day. Participants said caring for orphans can help make them effective members in building the society, and goes in line with the principles of Islam. Participants stressed, in the symposium which was held under the slogan 'towards a secure life' on having government and private efforts come together to care for the orphans psychologically, socially, educationally and in the health field.

Italian chef hails Kuwait  
as country of opportunities

## Small-town kid opens two restaurants in Kuwait after starting as a waiter

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: According to Italian chef Marco Fiorot, Kuwait is a country of opportunities, and he plans to stay here for the rest of his life. Fiorot is a great example of the success expats can achieve in Kuwait. Fiorot came from a small town in northeast Italy called Vigonovo. "I came to Kuwait in 2014 by chance. I was only 24 years old and started working as a waiter at a tiny coffeeshop in Abul Hasania. Now I own two restaurants, which proves that Kuwait is the country of opportunities," he said in an interview with Kuwait Times. Some excerpts:

**Kuwait Times:** What did you think of Kuwait before coming here?

**Marco Fiorot:** I expected to find the desert and camels. I didn't know there were fancy skyscrapers here. Actually, they're fancier than in Italy.

**KT:** Why did you choose Kuwait?

**Fiorot:** By chance I met a Kuwaiti at a restaurant in Italy, where I was working as a waiter. This man invited me to visit Kuwait, as he was opening a coffeeshop and wanted to have an Italian collaborator, so I came. I worked with him as a waiter for about a year. Then he decided to close the business.

**KT:** Why did you stay in Kuwait after the coffeeshop closed?

**Fiorot:** I had begun to love Kuwait very much. I met many people in a very short time and made a lot of friends, as the community here is fabulous. So I decided to stay.

**KT:** How did you survive after you

lost your job?

**Fiorot:** I called my parents back in Italy and asked them to help me finance my business. They know this was my dream since I was a child, and they helped me make it come true. Now I believe I'm the only Italian in Kuwait who owns a restaurant.

**KT:** When did you open your restaurant?

**Fiorot:** I opened my first restaurant six years ago in Salmiya. It was a small restaurant, and I made zero profits in the first month. But I didn't give up, and decided to fight for my dream. After a month, a social media blogger came to dine at the restaurant. He liked it, as he found it unique. Then a lot of people started coming.

**KT:** Why did you leave this restaurant?

**Fiorot:** As it was small, and after it became successful, I wanted a larger one. So I moved to Kuwait City after three years. I love the location, as it's the first restaurant people see when entering Sharq. There were no real

“ The community here is fabulous ”

Italian restaurants in Kuwait, and this was one of the reasons for my success. We were the pioneers with only a few competitors. In 2021, I opened



KUWAIT: Italian chef Marco Fiorot speaks to Kuwait Times. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

my second restaurant in Shuwaikh with a different concept.

**KT:** What difficulties did you face in the beginning?

**Fiorot:** Life and work here is different from Italy. It was very complicated in the beginning. But people here helped me a lot. They are very friendly and helpful. You always need someone local to help you out - without locals you won't be able to finish your business. I was really lucky that I met these people, like my sponsor and my partners.

**KT:** How did the pandemic affect you?

**Fiorot:** We were struggling, but survived. It's mostly because we are solid in the market. It was hard but we didn't close. We paid all salaries and rent.

**KT:** Where did you learn cooking?

**Fiorot:** I used to cook pasta for my friends when we gathered, and they were always praising it. I learnt most recipes from my mother in the beginning, then I took cooking classes in Italy. My dishes are traditionally Italian with my personal touch.

**KT:** Any closing remarks?

**Fiorot:** Kuwait realized my dream. I started with five tables and now I have 80 employees. Before, the United States was the country of opportunity, but for me Kuwait is this country. If I was in Italy, I wouldn't have been able to realize this dream. Here even a young guy with a good idea can be successful. I recommend Kuwait as a business place. If you don't have friends, you may end up bored, as it's difficult to adapt. But I have a lot of friends!

Fire engineers undergo  
training program

KUWAIT: The prevention sector of Kuwait Fire Force presented a field training program to 23 engineers from the experts' department to inspect fire equipment and test them with the knowledge of engineering services. Kuwait Fire Force Deputy Director General for Prevention Maj Gen Khalid Abdallah Fahad visited the field training program which was held at high rise buildings. Trainee engineers were introduced to the mechanism of fire hydrants' work. KFF explained.



## CONDOLENCES

Kuwait Times  
Management and staff  
convey their deepest  
condolences to

Fathi Alhakeem  
Circulation Department Manager

on the sad demise of his

Aunt

May Allah Almighty bestow His mercy on her

Kuwait army  
blood donation  
drive concludes

KUWAIT: Kuwait Army concluded yesterday a blood donation campaign organized in cooperation with the Kuwait Blood Bank. The campaign, entitled 'My Blood for Kuwait', was arranged by the army's guidance and public relations department and has been ongoing since January 23, 2022. Kuwait Army General staff members were keen to participate in the campaign, which reflects their belief in the importance of blood donation, and out of the army's national and human duty, the guidance and



Colonel Mohammad Al-Awadhi

public relations department said in a statement. Their participation is also in line with efforts to meet national needs by extending all forms of support to the health ministry and help the central bank by backing up its reserves of various blood groups, the department added. Meanwhile, director of moral guidance and public relations

Colonel Mohammad Al-Awadhi said the campaign witnessed large turn out from various land, air and sea units.







Greece, Turkey reel from political fallout of snowstorm

## Texas man tries to smuggle migrants in flag-draped coffin



LONDONDERRY: Workers clean up the Bloody Sunday monument bearing the names of victims in the Bogside area in Londonderry (Derry) in Northern Ireland. Families mourning fathers and sons killed by British soldiers on 'Bloody Sunday' have long battled to prove their relatives' innocence and still hope to see justice served. —AFP

# 'Bloody Sunday' pain endures, 50 years on

## Northern Ireland commemorates one of the most painful episodes

LONDONDERRY: Fifty years after "Bloody Sunday", Northern Ireland this weekend commemorates one of the most painful episodes during more than three decades of violence between Catholic nationalists and Protestant unionists. "It's a major milestone in the journey we have travelled for all these years," said John Kelly, whose brother Michael was shot dead by British paratroopers during the January 30, 1972 rights march in Londonderry, or Derry as nationalists call it.

On Sunday, Kelly will march as he did with his brother half a century ago, before he was killed at the age of 17. Thirteen people died at the shooting, and one more afterwards. Kelly remembered his brother as "quiet, full of life". "He was a bit of a joker," he added, but said he respected his parents and had asked them for permission to join the civil rights demonstration on that fateful day.

The day's events - immortalized by Irish band U2 in their 1983 song "Sunday Bloody Sunday" - were one of the most dramatic episodes of the "Troubles" over British rule in Northern Ireland. On one side were nationalists in favor of reuniting Ireland and on the other unionists who wanted to remain part of the United Kingdom. The bloodletting claimed some 3,500 lives and largely ended in

1998 with the Good Friday peace deal.

UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Wednesday called "Bloody Sunday" a "tragic day in our history" and "one of the darkest days of the Troubles". Passions still simmer. Fifty years ago, the British army wrongly stated that paratroopers had first been fired upon by "terrorists" from the Irish Republican Army (IRA). It was not until an official inquiry concluded in 2010 that the truth emerged: the demonstrators were unarmed and some were shot in the back, or while on the ground, or while waving white handkerchiefs.

### 'Outright lies'

Kate Nash's brother, William, was shot dead aged 19 on "Bloody Sunday". "I'm so proud that we got here," she said, adding that the tragedy was "covered up, lies, distortions, delays, outright lies". Former Catholic priest Denis Bradley, who witnessed the bloodshed and gave prayers for the dying, said the killings sent many

young Catholics into the arms of the IRA.

One of them was Tony Doherty, who was just nine when his father was killed by a British paratrooper's bullet in his back. "The massacre was completely unjustifiable, the judicial process afterwards added travesty to tragedy, and had a long term effect on people like myself growing up in Derry at the time," he said. The angry youth ended up planting a bomb at the age of 18. The device did not explode, but Doherty was sent to prison from 1981-85. "It could have been much worse," he said. "People could have been killed or injured."

### New riots

In recent months, the fallout from the UK's departure from the European Union has underlined the fragility of the delicate balance created by the 1998 peace deal. Port checks introduced to avoid creating a "hard" border between Northern Ireland and Ireland have upset unionists who see them as a threat to the province's sta-

tus within the UK.

Anger spilled over into violence in April last year as hardcore unionists pelted police and nationalists with firebombs over several nights in the worst unrest seen in years. Parachute Regiment flags have recently been spotted in loyalist areas of Londonderry, local nationalist MP Colum Eastwood told the UK parliament on Wednesday. Elections for the Northern Ireland assembly in May are being closely watched for a tip in the fragile political balance in Northern Ireland. Sinn Fein, which was once the political wing of the IRA, is heading for a possible victory over the once dominant unionists.

In the Bogside neighborhood where "Bloody Sunday" took place, murals on every street corner recall the painful past that residents also recount daily to visitors. At the Free Derry Museum, John Kelly shows some teenage visitors a 7.62 mm caliber bullet like the one that killed his brother. Outside, Tony Doherty's brother Paul stands on the spot where their father was killed, recounting the events to visitors - "the real story from the people who were directly affected by this massacre". Relatives of those who died still dream of a peaceful and united Ireland. "I hope to see it," said Kelly. "This island's too small to be actually partitioned." —AFP

## 'Bloody Sunday': A long battle for truth and justice

LONDONDERRY: Families mourning fathers and sons killed by British soldiers on "Bloody Sunday" have long battled to prove their relatives' innocence and still hope to see justice served. After paratroopers opened fire on protesters on January 30, 1972, in Londonderry, Northern Ireland, it took 38 years for the 13 civilians shot dead to be recognized as innocent.

An initial report exonerated the soldiers, saying the protesters had been infiltrated by Irish Republican Army (IRA) paramilitaries. Victims' relatives derided the report by English judge John Widgery, published just three months after the killings. John Kelly, whose brother Michael was killed, slammed the inquiry as "set up by the British government to tell lies about our people".

He launched a campaign for a new investigation, which finally took place in 1998. The 12-year investigation, costing nearly £200 million (\$420 million at current rates), was led by another senior judge, Mark Saville, and was the longest and most costly in British history. It established that the victims were not armed and that the armed forces had given a misleading account of the events. The prime minister of the time, David Cameron, issued an official apology for the killings, calling them "both unjustified and unjustifiable".

### Halted prosecutions

The Saville report heavily criticized Lieutenant Colonel Derek Wilford, the commander of the troops involved, for sending soldiers into the area and disobeying orders. He rejected the report's conclusions. "We thought in fact that we were under attack. And we will remain convinced of that, actually, until the end of our days," he told the BBC in an interview in 2019.

Earlier that year, the Public Prosecution Service Northern Ireland charged a British ex-paratrooper known only as Soldier F with the murder of two people on "Bloody Sunday" and



DERRY: In this file photo, a British soldier drags a Catholic protester during the 'Bloody Sunday' killings when British paratroopers shot dead 13 Catholics civil rights marchers in Londonderry. —AFP

the attempted murder of four others. But in July 2021, it announced it was to halt the prosecution. It also opted not to prosecute another former soldier, known as Soldier B, for the murder of a 15-year-old boy who was killed with two bullets in the head in July 1972, also in Londonderry, which is known to nationalists as Derry.

The decision angered victims' families and Michael McKinney, whose brother William was shot in the back, is seeking a judicial review of the Soldier F case. A Belfast court in May 2021 acquitted two former soldiers of murdering an IRA paramilitary, Joe McCann. The British government last year presented a controversial bill to parliament to prevent "vexatious" criminal prosecutions over alleged past crimes in the three-decade "Troubles" over British rule in Northern Ireland.

Critics condemned it as an effective amnesty for both soldiers and ex-paramilitaries. Northern Ireland Secretary Brandon Lewis acknowledged that some would find such a move hard but called it "the best way to help Northern Ireland move further along the road to reconciliation". Kate Nash, whose brother William Nash was killed on "Bloody Sunday", has condemned the call to halt prosecutions, saying a country "has no right to call itself a democracy after putting anybody above the law". —AFP

## Violence between Catholic nationalists, Protestant unionists



## 30 years of killing: Northern Ireland's 'Troubles'

LONDONDERRY: Northern Ireland was torn apart by three decades of violence between nationalist and unionist communities that ended with the Good Friday Agreement signed 23 years ago. The province's majority Protestant unionists favored continued British rule. Catholic republicans wanted equal rights and reunification with the rest of Ireland. Here is an overview of "The Troubles" during which more than 3,500 people were killed.

### Trouble starts

Violence erupts in 1968 when police use force against a peaceful Catholic civil rights demonstration in Londonderry demanding an end to discrimination in voting, jobs and housing. The situation degenerates as Catholic meetings and demonstrations end in clashes with the police and Protestants. In August 1969 as sectarian violence grips the province, British troops are deployed.

### IRA steps in

In 1970 a Catholic guerrilla group, the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA), begins a campaign of bombings and shootings against the troops. Unionist paramilitary groups respond, mostly by killing Catholics, further driving a wedge between the communities. Violence explodes after January 1972 when 13 people are killed on "Bloody Sunday" after British soldiers open fire on a peaceful Catholic civil rights march in Londonderry. One protester dies later.

### Direct rule

London suspends the Northern Ireland provincial government three months later, leading to decades of direct rule from the British capital. In 1974 the IRA extends the bombing campaign to Britain with attacks on pubs in Guildford, Woolwich and Birmingham that kill about 30 people in all. It also assassinates key British establishment figures including Queen Elizabeth II's cousin Lord Louis Mountbatten in rural northwest Ireland in 1979. On the same day 18 British soldiers are killed in an IRA ambush at Warrenpoint in Northern Ireland.

### Hunger strikes, bombs

A turning point comes in 1981 when IRA inmate Bobby



LONDONDERRY: Photo shows a mural entitled 'Bloody Sunday Commemoration' made by the Bogside Artists in the Bogside area of Londonderry (Derry) in Northern Ireland. —AFP

Sands and nine comrades die on hunger strike at Maze Prison demanding political prisoner status. Their deaths draw global sympathy for the republican cause. The following year the IRA's political wing Sinn Fein wins its first seats in parliament. A year after Gerry Adams is elected party chief. The IRA continues to strike in England, with prime minister Margaret Thatcher narrowly escaping death in a bomb attack on the Grand Hotel in Brighton during the 1984 Conservative party conference in which five people die. Seven years later they attempt to assassinate her successor, John Major, in a mortar attack on 10 Downing Street. In 1992 and 1993 two massive bombings kill four people and cause major damage in the City of London financial hub.

### Peace initiatives

An attempt by Conservative Prime Minister Edward Heath to establish a power-sharing executive founders in 1973 after a unionist general strike. Thatcher signs an Anglo-Irish accord in 1985, acknowledging Dublin's say in Northern Ireland's affairs. Behind-the-scenes talks lead to an IRA ceasefire in 1994, which breaks down as negotiations stall.

### Good Friday breakthrough

In July 1997, after Tony Blair becomes Labor prime minister, Sinn Fein gets a place at the negotiating table after the IRA declares a new ceasefire. The Good Friday Agreement is signed on April 10, 1998 between London, Dublin and the main Northern Ireland political parties. It leads to a new semi-autonomous Northern Ireland with a power-sharing government between Protestants and Catholics. —AFP



## International

# South Africa's gutted justice system struggles to keep up

## The number of murders rises 37 percent

### News in brief

#### Storm kills 70 in Africa

**ANTANANARIVO:** The death toll from a storm that struck three southern African countries rose to 70 yesterday as emergency teams battled to repair damaged infrastructure and help tens of thousands of victims. Packing torrential rains, Tropical Storm Ana made landfall Monday in Madagascar before plunging into Mozambique and Malawi. Rescue workers and authorities across the three countries were still assessing the full extent of the damage. Madagascar has reported 41 dead, with 18 others killed in Mozambique and 11 in Malawi. Remnants of the storm have passed over Zimbabwe, but no deaths have been reported there. In the three hardest-hit countries, tens of thousands of homes were damaged. Some collapsed under the heavy rain, trapping victims in the rubble. Bridges were washed away by swollen rivers, while livestock drowned and submerged fields, destroying the livelihoods of rural families. In Madagascar, 110,000 had to flee their homes. In the capital Antananarivo, schools and gyms were turned into emergency shelters. —AFP

#### Beijing warns Washington

**BEIJING:** China's top diplomat spoke with his US counterpart yesterday, warning Washington to "stop interfering" in the Winter Olympics and stressing that Russia's security concerns in Europe should be "taken seriously". Beijing hopes to turn next week's Games into a soft power triumph. But the lead-up has been clouded by a US-led diplomatic boycott over China's human rights record, particularly towards its Uyghur Muslim minority in the Xinjiang region. "The most urgent priority right now is that the US should stop interfering in the Beijing Winter Olympics," foreign minister Wang Yi said during a call with Secretary of State Antony Blinken, according to a foreign ministry statement. He added that Washington must also "stop playing with fire" on the Taiwan issue. Both officials also discussed the growing tensions in Europe over Ukraine, with Wang telling Blinken that Russia's security concerns "should be taken seriously". —AFP

#### Guns among LA train loot

**LOS ANGELES:** Dozens of guns have been stolen from freight trains that have been looted in Los Angeles, the city's police chief has said. Images of the detritus left behind by thieves who break into stationary wagons in the middle of the second biggest city in the United States swept around the world this month. Now the city's top policeman has said that the bandits got away with more than just Amazon packages. "People were... breaking into these containers and stealing firearms, tens of firearms," Michael Moore told the Police Commission this week. "That gave us great concern as a source again of further violence in the city." An AFP team filmed thousands of gutted boxes on the stretch of tracks near the city center, many from major retailers like Target, and being shipped by carriers including UPS and FedEx. The thieves wait until the long freight trains stop on the tracks and break the locks with bolt cutters. —AFP

#### Governor becomes teacher

**NEW MEXICO:** The governor of New Mexico started work Wednesday as a substitute teacher, replacing one of the thousands of educators across the United States who have been forced off work by the COVID-19 pandemic. Michelle Lujan Grisham—a lawyer by training—swapped the governor's mansion for the classroom as part of the "Supporting Teachers and Families" initiative designed to plug holes in staffing in schools and child care across the state. "It was maybe one of the best days in my entire career," Grisham said after the final school bell had rung. "It was easier than managing the cabinet," she quipped, but "it was more complicated than I was expecting." Last week, Grisham issued a plea for state workers and National Guard troops to sign up as licensed substitute teachers and child care workers. "Our schools are a critical source of stability for our children, we know they learn best in the classroom and thrive by being among their peers," the governor said in a statement announcing the program. —AFP



**TEGUCIGALPA:** Honduran president-elect Xiomara Castro (left) and Argentina's Vice President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner pose during a meeting in Tegucigalpa. —AFP

#### Honduras' 'first' woman leader

**TEGUCIGALPA:** Honduras president-elect Xiomara Castro was sworn in as the country's first woman president yesterday, as confusion reigns over who will be head of congress during her four-year term. Two rival factions in Castro's left-wing Libre party have voted in their own president of congress and negotiations to reach a solution stalled overnight on Wednesday. Luis Redondo, who has the support of Castro and much of her party, has been invited to preside over her inauguration. However, rebel deputy Jorge Calix, bolstered by the right-wing opposition National and Liberal parties, has the support of more than 70 of the 128-member congress, including close to 20 Libre deputies. Castro made a last-ditch attempt to resolve the dispute on Wednesday night by offering Calix the job of Cabinet Coordinator — a similar role to chief of staff — in her government, in a bid to convince him to drop his claim to the congress president role. —AFP

**JOHANNESBURG:** A soccer star shot dead. Parliament gutted by fire. People trampled to death in riots. Even with the most spectacular crimes, South Africa's criminal justice system can't seem to keep up. For months, the nation has engaged in a lengthy bout of public soul-searching over its failure to hold wrongdoers to account. Already weary from its globally high crime rate, South Africans watched their parliament burn on January 2 — as anti-apartheid icon Desmond Tutu was interred at a cathedral a few blocks away. A man was quickly arrested, after he simply walked through security, undetected by video surveillance for hours.

But questions immediately arose about whether he acted on his own, and how such a dramatic lapse in security could happen in the first place. At the highest levels, the justice system operates with a fierce independence and a strong check on executive power. The Constitutional Court ordered former president Jacob Zuma to prison in July for refusing to testify to anti-corruption investigators — and he went. But the ensuing riots instigated by his supporters cast a harsh light on the weaknesses of the criminal justice system on the streets.

Police intelligence failed to predict or stem the riots, which left more than 300 dead. Some were trampled to death at neighborhood grocery stores when the riots descended into widespread looting. Since then, the police's priority crimes unit says only eight people have appeared in court over the worst unrest of the democratic era. "People think they can get away with it," a police source said. "They think the police is unable to investigate their cases and bring them to justice."

## Hong Kongers move to Taiwan in record numbers

**TAIPEI:** The number of Hong Kongers settling in Taiwan hit a new record last year, official figures from the self-ruled island show, as China ramps up control of the financial hub. Democratic Taiwan has long attracted Hong Kong people seeking an alternative to their city's frenetic pace and sky-high rents. But the flow has accelerated since Beijing imposed a sweeping national security law on Hong Kong to smother dissent following massive and often violent pro-democracy protests in 2019.

The number of Hong Kongers securing the right to stay on the island reached almost 13,000 last year, according to Taiwan's National Immigration Agency. Some 11,173 of those acquired short-term residency while another 1,685 received perma-

nent residency. That followed a doubling of the number in 2020 compared to the year before, with 10,813 people granted short-term residency visas. The previous record was 7,506 in 2014 during Hong Kong's pro-democracy "umbrella movement" protests.

Taiwan does not have an asylum or refugee law, nor does it accept refugee applications—fearful of a potential influx from the authoritarian Chinese mainland. Hong Kongers can, however, apply to live on the island through other channels, including investment visas. The government of President Tsai Ing-wen has expressed support for Hong Kong's democracy movement and launched an office in 2020 to deal with fleeing Hong Kongers seeking to stay.

Several high-profile Hong Kong dissidents including bookseller Lam Wing-kee and visual artist Kacey Wong have sought sanctuary in Taiwan in recent years. But the island, which lives under constant threat of an invasion by China, has also rejected some immigration applications

## US hospital refuses heart transplant to unvaccinated man

**BOSTON:** A hospital in Boston refused to perform a heart transplant on a patient who had not been vaccinated for COVID-19, US television media reported Wednesday. A spokeswoman for Brigham and Women's Hospital confirmed in a statement to AFP that vaccination against the coronavirus is "required" for organ transplant recipients there. The patient's father, David Ferguson, appeared on news channels CNN and ABC to share the family's story, saying his 31-year-old son has been to the "edge of

death" and "pushed to the limit" waiting for a heart transplant. The patient, who had been in line for the transplant at the Boston hospital, has refused to receive a COVID vaccine. "It's kind of against his basic principles, he doesn't believe in it," Ferguson told ABC. "It's a policy they are enforcing and so because he won't get the shot, they took him off the list of a heart transplant," his father said. The hospital "requires several CDC-recommended vaccines, including the COVID-19 vaccine," Brigham and Women's said the statement.

The hospital also requires "lifestyle behaviors for transplant candidates to create both the best chance for a successful operation and to optimize the patient's survival after transplantation, given that their immune system is drastically suppressed," the statement read. Arthur Caplan, a medical ethicist at

New York University, told CBS: "Post any transplant your immune system is cut off. COVID could kill you." "The organs are scarce and they are not going to distribute them to someone who has a poor chance of living when others who are vaccinated have a better chance post-surgery of surviving," Caplan said.

That is why "patients are not active on the waitlist without" the vaccine, said the hospital, where Ferguson's son is still being treated. The father said he respected his son's choice and planned to get him transferred to another hospital. "But we are running out of time," Ferguson said of his son's condition. The United States, where only 62 percent of the total population is fully vaccinated — due partly to deep political divisions over the shots — has counted nearly 60 million COVID infections and 872,000 deaths. —AFP

over national security concerns. Last year the government refused to grant residency to Hong Kong entertain-

ment tycoon Charles Heung whose family have close ties with Chinese authorities. —AFP

## Intelligence fail to predict or stem riots

Zuma became president," said ISS expert Gareth Newham.

### Mafia-style killings

After nearly two decades of sustained decreases in violent crimes, the number of murders rose 37 percent from 2012 to 2020, he said. During that period, the budget for policing rose by 65 percent. Much of that additional spending simply covered pay rises for police. The number of actual police personnel fell by six percent. Police reservists, who could be called in for events like the riots,

plunged by 77 percent, Newham said.

Zuma also systematically appointed loyalists to head the police, public prosecution and intelligence agencies. A report released this month into corruption by Zuma, the product of three years of investigations, detailed how those appointments and other moves undermined the entire criminal justice system. The extent of corruption was so vast that South Africans call it "state capture" — to describe how the bribery and corruption dominated government operations.

"Between 2009 and 2018, if you were in an organized criminal group that was involved in state capture, there was a feeling that you would get away with it," said Guy Lamb, a political scientist at the University of Stellenbosch. That period included jaw-dropping cases like the murder of Senzo Meyiwa, the captain of the national football team who was gunned down at his girlfriend's home in 2014. At the time, police said it was a robbery gone wrong. Authorities now say it was a contract killing.

The alleged hitman was convicted Tuesday for other murders dating to 2015. He's still awaiting trial for Meyiwa's death. Delays in prosecuting organized crime, whether high-level corruption or mafia-style killings, stem from understaffing of law enforcement across the board, Lamb said. Prosecutors are negotiating for increased staff and budgets, but government coffers are thin after years of economic troubles dating to even before the pandemic. "The point is, going forward, it's about the police needing to work with communities to find ways to prevent crime and violence," he said. —AFP



**TAIPEI:** Local residents take photos in front of tiger statues, that marks the upcoming Lunar New Year of the tiger, in front of a department store in Taipei yesterday. —AFP

## Greece, Turkey reel from political fallout of snowstorm

**ISTANBUL:** Turkey's main airport stirred back to life on Wednesday and Greece's under-fire prime minister issued a formal apology as the east Mediterranean neighbors faced the political fallout of a paralyzing blizzard. Public anger has been boiling over in both countries over officials' seeming helplessness in the face of one of the heaviest snowstorms in years. Stranded passengers at Istanbul's international airport — Europe's busiest — chanted "we need a hotel" on the second day of a shutdown Tuesday that grounded flights spanning much of the world.

The Greek government woke up on Wednesday to newspaper headlines lamenting a "fiasco" and "mistakes that brought chaos" to the snowy streets of the capital Athens. "A government buried in snow," Greece's leftist Efsyn daily said. The problems at the Istanbul airport are a sensitive political issue for President Recep Erdogan ahead of an election due by mid-2023. Erdogan called the gleaming glass-and-steel structure the "pride of our country and example to the world" after making it one of the "mega-projects" of his two-decade rule.

But Erdogan's critics had long questioned his decision to place the airport on a remote patch by the Black Sea that is exposed to fog and strong winds. Turkish opposition newspapers pointed out that two top ministers had to land at the old Ataturk Airport on their arrival from Ankara on Tuesday. The airport handled just a few flights on Tuesday. Images on social media showed Turkish anti-riot police arriving in large numbers to deal with reports of rising public anger and protests.

The airport said on Wednesday that "operations which were temporarily suspended due to adverse



**ISTANBUL:** A picture taken in the Eminonu district of Istanbul after a snowstorm shows pigeons waiting to be fed. Istanbul is experiencing heavy snowfalls, with roads blocked, flights and intercity transportation canceled and thousands of vehicles stranded on major roads. —AFP

weather conditions have returned to normal". It said 681 flights were planned for the day. Istanbul's opposition Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu — seen by analysts as one of several leading politicians coveting Erdogan's job — also apologized "to our citizens, who became victims" of the disruption. But he said Erdogan had picked a "risky" location for the airport because of weather. Radiant sunshine in Istanbul on Wednesday was helping efforts to clear the streets of up to 85 centimeters of snow. The city's food delivery apps also resumed partial service after being down for two days.

The chaos and anger in Greece mostly revolved around the ring road around the capital Athens. The government was forced to call in the army to help dig out thousands of stranded drivers. Many abandoned their cars in snowdrifts and walked home on foot. Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis offered his "personal and sincere apology" on Wednesday to those stranded in the snow. He said "lessons" would be drawn and pledged 2,000 euros (\$2,300) to stranded motorists and 1,000 euros to train passengers stuck at a station north of Athens. —AFP



## International

# Hunger, cold stalks Syrians displaced by IS prison attack

## Syria Kurds hunt down jihadists after prison attack

**HASAKEH:** In a mosque-turned-shelter, Syrian mothers desperately tried to console hungry children crying in the cold, days after they escaped clashes near a prison attacked by jihadists. They included Maya, a mother of nine, who was among the hundreds of displaced women and children huddled together on Wednesday inside the mosque in the northeastern city of Hasakeh. "We want to go back home," the 38-year-old said, while trying to pacify one of her infants. "There is no bread, water, or sugar here." Maya and her children are among the 45,000 people the United Nations says have fled flashpoint areas near the prison targeted by the Islamic State group.

Most took refuge in the homes of relatives and friends within Hasakeh, while others had no choice but to move into the mosque or a wedding hall, said an AFP correspondent. Maya fled her home in Al-Zuhour neighborhood a day after the January 20 start of the attack which is considered the most sophisticated by IS since its territorial defeat in 2019. "The children were so scared, they started to cry, but we could not venture out because of the cold," Maya said, recalling the night IS launched the attack.

The assault triggered days of clashes in and around the facility as IS militants hunkered down in civilian homes, terrorizing residents. The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces said they fully recaptured the facility on Wednesday after all holdout jihadists surrendered. At least 181 people, including 124 IS jihadists, 50 Kurdish fighters and seven civilians, were killed in six days of violence, said the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

**'We want to be safe'**

Although Maya is safe now, she fears she may

not have a home to return to now that the fighting has largely stopped. "How could I not fear for my house? There is no other safe place for us to go," she said. She had already lost her house once before when it was destroyed in an air strike years ago, before her family rebuilt it. Mattresses were strewn across the floor in the mosque, where women and children sat in circles trying to keep the biting cold at bay. Most of them had no time to carry basic necessities and rely on scarce hand-outs of bread, canned food and vegetables. A rancid odor emanated from the crowded halls of the mosque where persistent coughs mixed with the wailing of children.

Fahima, 25, was displaced with her husband and four children. "We barely managed to escape," she said. "We left our homes against our will after IS militants barged in and the fighting began." They had spent a night sleeping in the open-air in freezing temperatures before they managed to find refuge in the mosque. Next to her, an exhausted mother of seven said all she wanted was to go back home. "We are dying from the cold here," she told AFP. "We want to be safe, and return to our homes."

### Kurds hunt jihadists

Meanwhile, Kurdish-led forces in northeastern Syria combed the area in and around a large prison compound yesterday, a day after wresting it back from Islamic State group fighters. The brazen IS jailbreak attempt and ensuing clashes around the prison in the city of Hasakeh left more than 200 people dead in the jihadists' most high-profile military operation since the loss of their "caliphate" nearly three years ago.

The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces said they retaken full control of Ghwayran prison on Wednesday, ending six days of battles that turned



**HASAKEH:** Members of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) deploy outside Ghwayran prison in Syria's northeastern city of Hasakeh. — AFP

the largest city in northeastern Syria into a war zone. Yesterday, SDF fighters backed by the US-led coalition battling IS, "combed cell blocks and districts around the jail for hideout jihadists," said the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

"Coalition aircraft overnight targeted IS fighters hunkered down in areas around the prison overnight, killing at least seven," according to the monitor, which relies on a network of sources inside Syria. Around 151 IS jihadists, 53 Kurdish fighters and seven civilians have been killed in violence in Hasakeh since the January 20 start of the prison

assault, according to the Observatory.

Ghwayran held an estimated 3,500 IS inmates, including around 700 minors, when the initial IS attack began with explosives-laden vehicles driven by suicide bombers. The Kurdish authorities have insisted no inmates escaped from the compound but the Observatory has said significant numbers got away. "The Kurdish-led forces' recapture of the prison ends this immediate deadly ordeal, but the broader crisis involving these prisoners is far from over," Human Rights Watch warned on Wednesday. — AFP

## Six sue Fukushima nuke plant operator over thyroid cancer

**TOKYO:** Six young people sued the operator of Japan's stricken Fukushima nuclear plant yesterday over claims they developed thyroid cancer due to exposure to radiation after the facility's meltdown. The plaintiffs, now aged between 17 and 27, were living in the Fukushima region when a huge earthquake on March 11, 2011 triggered a tsunami that caused the nuclear disaster.

Yesterday their lawyers marched into the Tokyo District Court, where dozens of supporters were gathered, to file the first ever class-action lawsuit over health issues against plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO). The group is seeking a total of 616 million yen (\$5.4 million) in compensation. No causal relationship between radiation exposure from the disaster and thyroid cancer has been recognized by an expert panel set up by the regional government, and whether such a link exists could become a focal point of the case.

A United Nations report published last year concluded that the Fukushima nuclear disaster had not directly harmed the health of local

residents a decade after the catastrophe. A higher rate of thyroid cancer detected among children exposed to the radiation was likely due to more stringent diagnostics, the UN's Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation concluded.

But the plaintiffs' lawyers say none of the cancers suffered by the group were hereditary, arguing it is highly likely the disease was caused by exposure to radiation. "When I was told I had cancer, I was told clearly there was no causal link. I remember how I felt at the time," one female plaintiff in her 20s, wearing a dark suit, said at a press conference after the lawsuit was filed. "Since I developed the disease, I have been forced to prioritize my health," she said, adding that she had quit her job to focus on recovery.

The plaintiffs were aged between six and 16 at the time of the disaster. They were diagnosed with thyroid cancer between 2012 and 2018. Two of them had one side of their thyroid removed, while the other four had their thyroid fully extracted and need to take hormonal drugs for the rest of their lives. "Some plaintiffs have had



**TOKYO:** Supporters and lawyers of the six young people who were living in the Fukushima region when the March 11, 2011 tsunami caused the nuclear disaster, arrive in front of the Tokyo district court in Tokyo yesterday to file a class-action lawsuit against plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) over claims they developed thyroid cancer due to exposure to radiation. — AFP

difficulties advancing to higher education and finding jobs, and have even given up on their dreams for their future," the group's lead lawyer Kenichi Ido told AFP this week.

### Screening tests

The meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi plant was the worst nuclear accident since the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, after which larger numbers of thyroid cancers were detected. The 2011 disaster in northeast Japan left around 18,500 people dead or missing, with most killed by the

tsunami. Tens of thousands of residents around the Fukushima plant were ordered to evacuate their homes, or chose to do so. Several workers deployed to the plant contracted cancer after being exposed to radiation, and have received compensation from the government because the cases were recognized as occupational diseases. Since the disaster, Fukushima prefecture has been conducting screening tests on thyroid glands for roughly 380,000 people who were aged 18 or under at the time of the disaster. — AFP

## Fighting Taliban and mistrust, Pakistan marks polio-free year

**MARDAN:** Bathed in crisp morning light, Sidra Hussain grips a cooler stacked with glistening vials of polio vaccine in northwest Pakistan. Watching over Hussain and her partner, a policeman unslings his rifle and eyes the horizon. In concert they begin their task—going door-to-door on the outskirts of Mardan city, dripping bitter doses of rose-colored medicine into infants' mouths on the eve of a major milestone for the nation's anti-polio drive.

The last infection of the wild poliovirus was recorded on January 27, 2021, according to officials, and Friday marks the first time in Pakistan's history that a year has passed with no new cases. To formally eradicate the disease, a nation must be polio-free for three consecutive years—but even 12 months is a long time in a country where vaccination teams are in the crosshairs of a simmering insurgency.

Since the Taliban takeover of neighboring Afghanistan, the Pakistan version of the movement has become emboldened and its fighters frequently target polio teams. "Life or death is in God's hands," Hussain told AFP this week, amid a patchwork of high-walled compounds in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. "We have to come," she said defiantly. "We can't just turn back because it's difficult."

### Thriving in uncertainty

Nigeria officially eradicated wild polio in 2020, leaving Pakistan and Afghanistan as the only countries where the disease—which causes crippling paralysis—is still endemic. Spread through faeces and saliva, the virus has historically thrived in the blurred borders between the South Asian nations, where state infrastructure is weak and the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) have carved out a home.

A separate group sharing common heritage with the Afghan Taliban, the TTP was founded in 2007 and once held sway over large swathes of the restive tribal tracts of Pakistan. In 2014 it was largely ousted by an army offensive, its fighters retreating across the porous border with Afghanistan. But last year overall militant attacks surged by 56 per cent according to the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies, reversing a six-year downward trend.

The largest number of assaults came in August, coinciding with the Taliban takeover of Kabul. Pakistan's newspapers are regularly peppered with stories of police slain as they guard polio teams—and just this week a constable was gunned down in Kohat — 80 kilometers southwest of Mardan. Pakistani media has reported as many as 70 polio workers killed in militant attacks since 2012 — mostly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Still, a TTP spokesman told AFP it "never attacked any polio workers", and that security forces were their target. "They will be targeted wherever they perform their duties," he said Mardan deputy commissioner Habib Ullah Arif admits polio teams are "a very soft target", but says the fight to eradicate the disease is entwined with the security threat. "There is only one concept: we are going to defeat polio, we are going to defeat militancy," he pledged.

Pakistan anti-polio drives have been running since 1994, with up to 260,000 vaccinators staging regular waves of regional inoculation campaigns. But on the fringes of the country, the teams often face skepticism. "In certain areas of Pakistan, it was considered as a Western conspiracy," explained Shahzad Baig-head of the national polio eradication program. The theories ranged wildly: polio teams are spies, the vaccines cause infertility, or contain pig fat forbidden by Islam. — AFP

## Texas man tries to smuggle migrants in flag-draped coffin

**TEXAS:** A Texas man admitted to trying to smuggle two people into the United States in a coffin draped with an American flag — like those that carry soldiers killed in combat — the Justice Department said Wednesday. The suspect, 33-year-old Zachary Blood, was caught when in October he drove a van "modified to transport caskets" to a checkpoint near the US-Mexico border in Texas, federal prosecutor Jennifer Lowery's office said in a statement. When asked by agents what he was transporting, Blood responded "dead guy, Navy guy," according to the statement.

"However, the coffin was in poor condition and the American flag was taped to the top with packing tape," the Justice Department said. Upon further inspection, the agents discovered two living people, who the Department said were Mexican nationals "unlawfully present within the United States," in the coffin. The two men admitted to having crossed the Rio Grande river into the United States and paying a man to take them to the Texas city of San Antonio.

Blood faces up to five years in prison and a maximum fine of \$250,000. The United States recorded nearly two million migrant apprehensions for illegal entry into the country along its southern border with Mexico in 2021, according to official statistics. Migrant arrivals to the United States declined markedly during the initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic but began to pick up later in 2020, before surging since President Joe Biden took office in January last year. — AFP

## Why is North Korea firing many missiles?

**SEOUL:** From hypersonic to cruise missiles, North Korea started 2022 with its most intensive spate of weapons testing in years, but analysts said the barrage is more domestic political ploy than a diplomatic gambit. After a decade in power, leader Kim Jong Un has little to celebrate, with a Covid-battered economy causing food shortages at home, diplomacy with the United States stalled and biting sanctions taking their toll.

That may explain why North Korea has carried out five weapons tests in the last three weeks, analysts said — and a dramatic demonstration of the nuclear-armed country's military prowess offers a quick win ahead of important domestic anniversaries. "Missiles and weapon developments are probably the only things Kim Jong Un can confidently display as achievements," said defector-turned-researcher Ahn Chan-il. "He's not got much to offer the North Korean people right now."

This is particularly important as the country prepares to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the birth of Kim's father, late leader Kim Jong Il, in February, as well as the 110th birthday of the country's founding leader Kim Il Sung in April. Under North Korea's dynastic system, marking his forefather's birthdays with appropriate "grandeur" is politically crucial for Kim. Cheong Seong-chang of the Center for North Korea Studies at the Sejong Institute told AFP.

"For such important anniversaries, North Korea likes to hold a military parade to show off their new weapons," he said. The country often test fires new weaponry before wheeling it out publicly, which both demonstrates their capability and adds to the general festivities, he added. Pyongyang has not



**SEOUL:** People watch a television screen showing a news broadcast with file footage of a North Korean missile test, at a railway station in Seoul yesterday after North Korea fired an 'unidentified projectile' in the country's sixth apparent weapons test this year according to the South's military. — AFP

tested intercontinental ballistic missiles or nukes since 2017, putting launches on hold as Kim embarked on a blitz of high-level diplomacy through three meetings with then-US president Donald Trump and other top leaders.

But last week, the regime said it would examine restarting all temporarily-suspended activities, in response to what it called the "provocation" of new US sanctions imposed after this year's tests. The last time North Korea tested this many weapons in a month was in 2019, after high-profile negotiations collapsed between Kim and Trump. With reports of soaring food prices and worsening hunger, an economically-reeling Pyongyang earlier this month restarted cross-border trade with neighboring China. And Pyongyang's recent decision to accept Chinese aid — a first since the beginning of the pandemic — may have motivated the recent military show of force "to avoid looking weak," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Seoul's Ewha University. — AFP



# Business

## Boeing reports another loss due to widebody 787 woes

### Calhoun declined to offer a timetable for resuming 787 deliveries

NEW YORK: Boeing reported a hefty fourth-quarter loss Wednesday as mounting costs connected to the widebody 787's woes more than offset a boost from the comeback of the 737 MAX after a lengthy grounding. The US aviation giant reported a total of \$3.8 billion in one-time expenses associated with compensating airlines for delayed deliveries of the 787 and more costly production processes. Those costs were the biggest factor in a larger-than-expected quarterly loss that also pushed Boeing into the red in 2021 for the third straight year.

Chief Executive David Calhoun described 2021 as a "rebuilding year," noting the progress on the 737 MAX, the narrow-body jet that was grounded for 20 months following two fatal crashes. The 787's current travails date to late summer 2020, when the company uncovered manufacturing flaws with some jets. Boeing subsequently identified additional issues, including with the horizontal stabilizer.

The difficulties curtailed deliveries between November 2020 and March 2021. Boeing suspended deliveries again in May after more problems surfaced. Calhoun declined to offer a timetable for resuming 787 deliveries. "On the 787 program, we're progressing through a comprehensive effort to ensure every airplane in our production system conforms to our exacting specifications," he said. "While this continues to impact our near-term results, it is the right approach to building stability and predictability as demand returns for the long term."



#### Boeing prepared to commence deliveries in 2023

#### MAX comeback

For the quarter Boeing reported a \$4.1 billion loss as revenues fell 3.3 percent to \$14.8 billion. Boeing reported an annual loss of \$4.2 billion, compared with a loss of \$11.9 billion in 2020. Boeing also suffered an operating loss in its defense, space and security business following \$402 million in one-time costs on the KC-46A tanker program. The tanker costs are primarily due to shifting customer preferences and supply chain disruptions due to COVID-19, a Boeing spokesperson said.

The difficulties with the 787 dampened Boeing's momentum as the airline industry recovers from a devastating slump due to COVID-19. In another positive, though, Boeing has resumed deliveries of the 737 MAX, which was grounded for 20 months following two deadly crashes.

The company also has cheered a decision by Chinese authorities to approve the return of the MAX, although it has yet to resume deliveries to Chinese carriers. On a conference call with analysts, Boeing executives said they were prepared to commence deliveries in 2023 but that it will depend on customers. Chinese carriers "are warming up the planes they already have," said Calhoun, adding that deliveries of new planes would follow. Boeing has also seen an uptick in orders for commercial jets and cargo planes.

#### 'Conformance' issues

Calhoun told CNBC that it has made "significant"

platforms for most models—adding a new platform in 2024 to the existing four—as it ploughs 23 billion euros (\$25.7 billion) into its EV strategy.

Some of the headline figure had already been announced by each company, but it marks the first concrete target set collectively by the trio since the reorganisation of top executives at Japan's Nissan and France's Renault. That restructuring was triggered by the saga surrounding the 2018 arrest of former Nissan boss Carlos Ghosn, which exposed rifts in the alliance.

"Three years ago, the alliance was experiencing a crisis unprecedented in its history based on a lack of trust," alliance chair Jean-Dominique Senard told reporters. But "this period belongs to the past" and the partnership is "stronger than ever" due to solid foundations and flexible cooperation, he said.

"Together, we are making the difference for a new and global sustainable future," Senard added in a statement. To achieve its goals, the alliance said it aimed to increase cooperation on common platforms from 60 percent to 80 percent of its models

some \$20.5 billion of which it took in during the final three months, according to its earnings report. Profit in the quarter was \$4.6 billion, however, in a 21 percent decrease from the same period a year earlier.

Profit for 2021 totaled \$19.9 billion, about five percent less than the net income in the prior year. Last year was marked by "unprecedented demand tempered by supply chain constraints" that are expected to continue through this year into next year, Gelsinger said during an earnings call.

A global computer chip shortage has afflicted a broad array of industries from smartphones and laptops to cars and home appliances. US chip giant Intel finds itself at the heart of this phenomenon, benefiting from heightened demand but facing challenges producing ever more sophisticated semiconductors driving modern devices.

"The rate of growth will depend on our equipment capacity, operational efficiency and the capacity and stability of the supply chain," Tesla said. "Our own factories have been running below capacity for several quarters as supply chain became the main limiting factor, which is likely to continue through 2022."

Musk said he was heartened by announced new semiconductor capacity that should alleviate the imbalance by the end of 2022 or early 2023. But "there could be other issues" that surface this year, he said during a conference call with analysts and investors.

Musk cited the supply chain issues as a factor in a decision to defer rollouts of new products this year, adding that the company will do engineering of its "Cybertruck" electric pickup with an eye towards a possible launch in 2023.

"The fundamental focus of Tesla is scaling vehicles," Musk said, adding that had the company introduced new models in 2021, it would have resulted in lower overall production. Musk has previously also discussed introducing a \$25,000 electric vehicle, but said that product too was not on the front burner.



EVERETT, Washington: File photo taken on December 15, 2009, Boeing's new 787 Dreamliner taxis ready for take off at Paine Field in Everett, Washington. — AFP

progress on the 787 but "we can't rush it." "We are working through real conformance issues. Not safety issues, conformance issues," he told the network. "Meaning that the airplane is built exactly and precisely according to the engineering drawings."

Boeing did not offer a timetable for resuming deliveries amid ongoing talks with the Federal Aviation Administration. The company said it is currently producing the jet "at a very low rate." Boeing doubled its estimates for total "abnormal costs" associated with the 787 problems to \$2 billion after concluding in the fourth quarter that the issues "will

take longer than previously expected" to resolve.

Peter McNally, an analyst at Third Bridge, described Boeing's quarter as "turbulent," noting that the issues with the 787 "are dragging into 2022 with major financial consequences," he said in a note. "The company continues to lose ground to its primary competitor, Airbus," McNally said.

"However, there have been some bright spots as underlying demand for travel has picked up. Boeing is booking new orders for customers and the balance sheet has started to move in a more positive direction." Shares fell 4.8 percent to \$194.27. — AFP

## Nissan alliance to invest \$25bn in electric vehicles

TOKYO: The Nissan auto alliance said yesterday it will invest more than \$25 billion in electric vehicles over the next five years, marking the latest massive cash injection into the fast-growing sector by the auto industry. Nissan, Renault and Mitsubishi Motors said the latest outlay followed \$11 billion already spent on its "offensive strategy in electrification", promising 35 new electric models by 2030.

Major global carmakers are increasingly prioritising electric and hybrid vehicles as concern about climate change grows. At present, around 10 percent of European car sales are EVs, but the US figure is just two percent. The alliance vowed to boost cooperation by using five common manufacturing

## Intel sales hit record on chip demand

SAN FRANCISCO: Intel on Wednesday said 2021 was a record year for sales at the chip maker as it navigated unprecedented demand and supply chain constraints. The US-based firm also saw costs rise and margins shrink as it shifted to a more sophisticated line of semi-conductors, analysts noted. "The fourth quarter represented a great finish to a great year," said Intel chief executive Pat Gelsinger.

Intel revenue for last year tallied \$79 billion,

## Tesla reports record profit, sees more supply chain woes

NEW YORK: Tesla rode rising demand for electric vehicles to a record \$5.5 billion profit in 2021, but Elon Musk's company cautioned Wednesday that supply chain problems would continue to crimp production through 2022. The electric carmaker, which scored an 87 percent jump in auto deliveries last year in spite of the global semiconductor shortage, reported a 71 percent rise in revenues to \$53.8 billion.

But Tesla said it saw no immediate relief from supply chain woes that have hit activity "for several quarters," it said. "We plan to grow our manufacturing capacity as quickly as possible," it said in a news release that reiterated the company's target of 50 percent annual growth.



YOKOHAMA, Japan: File photo taken on March 12, 2019 shows a logo showing Renault, Nissan and Mitsubishi. — AFP

by 2026. The trio also announced a target of reaching a total EV battery production capacity of 220 Gigawatt hours by the end of the decade, with Nissan tasked with leading the development of solid-state battery technology. As demand grows for less polluting vehicles and pressure grows to reduce the auto industry's role in climate change, major automakers are announcing targets to gradually phase out fossil fuel-powered vehicles. — AFP

Intel has invested heavily in semiconductor production in the United States and Europe over the past year, with a recently announced strategy that relies on expanding in-house manufacturing and increased use of subcontracted factories. US lawmakers were studying proposals Wednesday to jumpstart high-tech research and manufacturing, boost competition with China and ease a global shortage of crucial computer chips.

The House Democrats' "America Competes" bill, unveiled late Tuesday, is their version of the Senate's \$200 billion US Innovation and Competition Act, aimed at addressing supply bottlenecks. US President Joe Biden has praised Intel's plans to spend \$20 billion on a new US semiconductor facility, hailing the "historic" investment even as a global chip shortage fans the inflation wave weighing on his leadership. — AFP



Elon Musk

"We have too much on our plate," Musk said.

In the most recent quarter, Tesla scored a \$2.3 billion profit, up more than eight times the year-ago level as revenues jumped 65 percent to \$17.7 billion. Tesla has been ramping up production at factories in California and Shanghai, while also building new facilities in Germany and Texas. — AFP

## EasyJet halves first-quarter loss despite Omicron

LONDON: British airline EasyJet slashed losses by half in the first quarter, despite the emergence of the Omicron coronavirus variant which disrupted the travel industry, the company said yesterday. Pre-tax losses stood at £213 million (\$288 million, 255 million euros) in the three months to the end of December, after a £423 million loss in the same period of the group's previous financial year, the no-frills carrier said in a statement.

Revenues jumped almost fivefold to £805 million in the reporting period, while cost-cutting helped offset the impact of inflation. "EasyJet produced a significant year-on-year improvement in the first quarter, despite the short-term impact of Omicron in December, halving losses," said Chief Executive Johan Lundgren.

"During the pandemic, EasyJet has transformed many areas of the business including optimising its network and flexibility and finding sustainable cost savings. This is helping partially offset inflationary pressure." The spread of the Omicron variant in December did hit travel bookings, but they were subsequently boosted by the UK government's recent decision to scrap COVID travel testing.

"Booking volumes jumped in the UK following the welcome reduction of travel restrictions announced on 5 January, which have been sustained and then given a further boost from the UK government's decision earlier this week to remove all testing requirements," said Lundgren. "We believe testing for travel across our network should soon become a thing of the past."

#### 'Strong summer ahead'

The airline, which is based in Luton north of London, now expects to return to near pre-pandemic capacity levels in the upcoming summer holiday season between July and August. "We see a strong summer ahead, with pent-up demand that will see EasyJet returning to near-2019 levels of capacity with UK beach and leisure routes performing particularly well," the CEO added.

The UK government had in December reimposed stricter travel rules-including mandatory pre-arrival tests and self-isolation until travellers had tested negative-after a surge in cases due to Omicron. However, the travel measures were eased earlier this month, as Prime Minister Boris Johnson argued they were having a "limited impact" while imposing "significant costs" on the industry.

On Monday, the government announced that it will scrap compulsory COVID tests from February 11 for fully jabbed arrivals and quarantine for unvaccinated travellers. Currently, fully vaccinated arrivals are required to take a lateral flow test within two days, while those not jabbed must self-isolate for 10 days and take several tests before and after travel. — AFP



Business

# EU launches WTO case against China over Lithuania row

## Taiwan to give Lithuania and EU 'the greatest solidarity and support'

**BRUSSELS:** The European Union angered China yesterday by launching a case against Beijing at the World Trade Organization (WTO) for targeting Lithuania over its stance on Taiwan. The move by Brussels was a further deterioration in ties between China and the bloc, with a long-negotiated investment deal already on the rocks after both sides exchanged tit-for-tat sanctions.

The latest spat is over Lithuania, one of the smallest countries in the European Union, which made waves in July when it allowed Taiwan to open a diplomatic outpost in Vilnius. The move outraged Beijing, which does not recognise Taiwan as a state and considers the self-ruled democratic island a rebellious territory of the mainland.



**'Our relationship requires mutual respect'**

"Launching a WTO case is not a step we take lightly," said EU trade chief Valdis Dombrovskis in a statement. "However, after repeated failed attempts to resolve the issue bilaterally, we see no other way forward than to request WTO dispute settlement consultations with China," he said. The European Commission handles trade policy for the EU's 27 member states and takes the lead on conflicts at the WTO in Geneva, even if they involve a single state.

By going to the WTO, the EU lent support to accusations by Lithuanian business leaders and officials that the row has resulted in China blocking imports from Lithuania and other economic restrictions. WTO arbitration is a slow-moving process, however, and any result could drag out over a long time. The move yesterday launches a 60-day window for the two sides to come to a solution before moving the dispute to a panel.

### 'So-called' coercion

Beijing responded bitterly to the move, calling accusations of the "so-called" Chinese coercion "groundless and inconsistent". "The issue between China and Lithuania is a political one, not an economic one," said Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian.

After weeks of investigating, the commission said that it had built up a trove of evidence of Chinese restrictions. These included "a refusal to clear Lithuanian goods

through customs, rejection of import applications from Lithuania, and pressuring EU companies operating out of other EU member states to remove Lithuanian inputs from their supply chains".

Reports have said firms in Germany, Finland and Sweden have been pressured to cut off Lithuania from their supply chains. Despite the evidence, Dombrovskis said that the bloc would continue to pursue diplomatic solutions to the feud, and has raised the problem with his Chinese counterparts in recent weeks.

While China was a "vital partner" and "we value this relationship", "our relationship requires mutual respect", Dombrovskis told reporters. Lithuania welcomed the "very clear message" that the EU "will not tolerate politically motivated economic coercion," said Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis.

Taiwan's foreign ministry issued a statement giving Lithuania and the EU "the greatest solidarity and support". It said China's "improper economic and trade measures" had "troubled and repelled many countries".

### 'Fix' the name

The row began in November when China downgraded diplomatic ties with Lithuania and stopped issuing visas there in protest at Vilnius's decision to allow Taiwan to open the representative office under its own name. The United States has signalled its support for the European Union and Lithuania in the fight.

Reports said that Lithuania, at the prodding of Washington, was considering renaming its mission to Taiwan to something less provocative for Beijing. Opinions are split in Vilnius. Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda, who previously called the mission naming a "mistake", has urged the government to "fix" the name. But the Lithuanian government on Wednesday said it had no intentions of modifying the name.

Under the stewardship of former German chancellor Angela Merkel, the EU has long pursued friendlier ties with China. But this has proven harder to defend as Chinese President Xi Jinping's leadership turns more centralised and hardline.

The relationship with Beijing grew even more complicated a year ago when an EU-China investment deal wanted by Germany was put on indefinite standby after both sides exchanged tit-for-tat sanctions over the treatment of the Uyghur Muslim minority in China.

Spurred on by the latest controversy, the EU is discussing draft regulation that would equip Brussels with new powers to swiftly retaliate against efforts by foreign governments to undermine the European economy and businesses. — AFP



QUEZON CITY, Philippines: Shop attendants wait for customers inside a dry goods market in Quezon city, suburban Manila yesterday. — AFP

## Philippine economy rebounds in 2021 as COVID rules relaxed

**MANILA:** The Philippine economy rebounded stronger than expected in 2021 after a relaxation of COVID-19 rules fuelled consumer spending and got more people back to work, officials said yesterday as they forecast a return to pre-pandemic growth this year. Gross domestic product expanded 5.6 percent, the statistics agency said, after a 9.6 percent slump the previous year—the worst since World War II—was fuelled by crippling lockdowns destroying millions of jobs and forcing people to stay home.

The latest reading beat the median forecast of 5.1 percent growth expected by analysts surveyed by Bloomberg. The surprising performance was driven by a pick-up in consumer spending and construction in the second half of the year as restrictions eased and coronavirus infections fell.

"The door to our economic recovery is now fully open," Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Karl Chua

told a briefing. "We are optimistic that we will not only recover to the pre-pandemic level in 2022, but achieve the upper middle income country status." Even factoring in the impact of Super Typhoon Rai, which devastated central and southern regions of the country in December and left hundreds of thousands homeless, the Philippines was "on track to rapid recovery", Chua said.

The main risk to the outlook was the emergence of another variant of the virus, he added. Chua said a change in the government's response to COVID-19 — from widespread lockdowns to more granular measures—and increased vaccination and hospital capacity had enabled greater economic activity.

"Our efforts to safely reopen the economy allowed more Filipinos to work and earn their income," he said. The government tightened restrictions across the national capital region and other provinces in recent weeks as the hyper-contagious Omicron variant fuelled a record surge in infections.

Chua said the spike appears to be "of a very temporary nature" and played down the impact on the first-quarter. "Growth is sustainable and we believe there is an opening for us to see a lower alert level in the coming weeks," he said. But Capital Economics Emerging Asia economist Alex Holmes warned the "overall recovery has a long way to go". —AFP



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار  
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

## KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 27 JANUARY 2022

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No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance										Valuation Multiples *				
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	1045	1043	1048	1035	13	18,704,204	-1	-0.10%	4.61%	1040	1052	22.6	2.18	2.9%	1.26
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	296	292	297	285	12	23,564,012	-4	-1.35%	4.66%	285	294	23.5	1.36	1.6%	1.13
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	224	223	224	220	4	12,149,346	-2	-0.89%	2.29%	222	226	78.4	0.97	0.0%	1.01
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	260	265	266	255	11	19,947,680	5	1.92%	5.58%	256	267	20.1	1.20	1.6%	1.05
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	908	905	910	897	13	33,880,854	-5	-0.55%	8.77%	899	908	35.5	3.96	1.0%	1.40
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	829	805	829	801	28	3,523,220	-23	-2.78%	1.90%	803	813	59.4	4.64	0.6%	1.05
204	National Investments	Financial Services	262	265	273	257	16	26,887,480	4	1.53%	21.00%	257	267	8.4	1.12	3.8%	1.25
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	168	165	170	158	12	52,310,347	-4	-2.37%	16.20%	161	168	37.6	2.04	2.3%	0.59
252	Al Imtiaz Investment	Financial Services	125	123	126	122	4	17,685,835	-2	-1.60%	4.24%	123	125	NM	0.75	0.0%	1.00
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	183	190	190	179	11	38,241,689	7	3.83%	6.15%	187	190	29.3	1.38	0.0%	0.97
413	Mabaneer	Real Estate	824	819	824	811	13	3,615,360	-1	-0.12%	3.28%	814	829	18.2	1.87	0.7%	1.10
501	National Industries	Financial Services	303	297	303	292	11	15,827,059	-6	-1.98%	4.95%	295	302	5.8	1.07	0.0%	1.44
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	930	920	948	909	39	1,924,515	-1	-0.11%	5.63%	914	929	32.5	0.93	5.4%	0.93
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	925	919	932	906	26	1,707,706	-11	-1.18%	7.86%	915	935	26.1	2.16	5.8%	0.74
526	Al Qurain	Basic Materials	372	387	388	371	17	8,959,842	12	3.20%	11.53%	382	388	NM	1.06	3.9%	0.75
603	Agility	Industrials	983	988	995	969	26	9,015,023	5	0.51%	4.55%	980	995	2.2	1.07	0.9%	1.48
605	Zain	Telecommunications	598	596	598	594	4	11,396,429	1	0.17%	0.17%	595	599	13.6	2.17	3.4%	1.34
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,214	3,180	3,214	3,179	35	1,154,479	-35	-1.09%	-1.36%	3170	3200	6.9	3.47	12.5%	0.49
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	217	219	221	215	6	3,772,191	2	0.92%	0.46%	217	222	NM	0.70	0.0%	0.88
818	Ahli United Bank	Banking	281	279	283	277	6	63,784,862	-2	-0.71%	0.36%	278	282	19.2	2.16	1.3%	1.15
821	Warba Bank	Banking	284	278	285	276	9	9,266,644	-6	-2.11%	1.46%	278	286	21.2	2.75	0.0%	1.00
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	592	591	597	588	9	3,355,315	-3	-0.51%	0.34%	590	596	18.4	1.67	2.9%	0.43
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	373	372	374	370	4	1,867,643	4	-1.06%	0.54%	371	375	NM	1.56	0.0%	0.47
826	Shamal Az-Zour	Utilities	226	223	226	221	5	6,679,670	-3	-1.33%	-2.19%	222	227	18.9	3.95	4.0%	0.62
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	2,012	2,035	2,015	2,005	10	909,768	11	0.54%	0.74%	2032	2045	26.1	7.24	2.0%	0.62

\* As of end of week closing



## Business

# Fitch ratings downgrade Kuwait to 'AA-', outlook stable

## Higher oil prices have relieved some immediate pressure

**HONG KONG:** Fitch Ratings has downgraded Kuwait's long-term foreign-currency Issuer Default Rating (IDR) to 'AA-', from 'AA'. The outlook is stable.

### Key rating drivers

The downgrade reflects ongoing political constraints on decision-making that hinder addressing structural challenges related to heavy oil dependence, a generous welfare state and a large public sector. There has been a lack of meaningful underlying fiscal adjustment to recent oil-price shocks and the outlook for reforms remains weak, despite some positive political developments as part of a national dialogue. While we assume a debt law will be agreed in 2022, this has been under discussion since 2017, reflecting slow processes for decision-making in Kuwait.

A new cabinet was formed in December 2021, three months after the Amir convened a national dialogue to resolve the impasse between the government and National Assembly, Kuwait's parliament, which has prevented agreement on a new law to allow the government to issue debt. The national dialogue addressed some points of contention with the opposition, notably an amnesty agreement that saw the return from abroad of a number of opposition figures. The cabinet also includes three opposition MPs, whereas it did not before.

We assume that a debt law will be agreed in 2022, although some uncertainty remains. Even without a debt law, the government would still be able to meet its financing obligations. However, the difficulties in passing the law and institutional gridlock have forced the government to rely on stop-gap measures, which is unusual for Kuwait's rating level. The debt law needs to be presented to the parliamentary finance and economic committee, before going to parliament for further discussion and voting. Higher oil prices have relieved some immediate pressure, which could slow decision-making.

Political divisions remain, despite the national dialogue, and are likely to prevent broader reform of Kuwait's fiscal rigidities. More than 70% of government spending consists of sticky current spending, including salaries and subsidies, and about 80% of Kuwaiti nationals are employed in the public sector. We forecast a sharp rise in debt to around 50% of GDP over the medium term after the debt law is approved, from the current low level of 10% of GDP. Further periods of political paralysis also remain a risk. In November, the Amir, who took over the leadership in 2020, handed over some powers to his half-brother, the Crown Prince. While succession processes in Kuwait have generally been smooth, they can present a further headwind to decision-making.

Kuwait's IDRs also reflect the following key rating drivers: Kuwait remains committed to meeting its obligations, even in the absence of a debt law. The government will rely on the assets of the General Reserve Fund (GRF) - the government's treasury account - to meet gross financing needs until new financing arrangements are secured. The bulk of the GRF's liquid assets were drawn down during 2020-2021, necessitating the sale of illiquid assets to the

Future Generation Fund (FGF), which contains the bulk of Kuwait's foreign assets. The GRF's current level of liquid assets is not disclosed, although the government has indicated that it more than covers the sovereign's \$3.5 billion eurobond maturity in March and that the GRF still owns extensive illiquid assets that could be sold quickly to the FGF if necessary. This occurred in 2020-2021, when the FGF purchased close to \$16 billion of GRF assets and a previous transfer of around \$7 billion from the GRF to the FGF was reversed.

The government is also proposing an FGF contribution law to allow for dividend payments from the FGF to help finance budget deficits subject to an annual cap. The current law prevents the government from direct access to FGF assets. The contribution law would represent an important financing tool and would allow for a slower rise in government debt. Discussions on the contribution law are more fledgling than discussions over the debt law.

Kuwait's fiscal and external balance sheets remain among the strongest of Fitch-rated sovereigns, despite severe oil-price swings since 2014 and intermittent political gridlock. We estimate Kuwait's sovereign net foreign asset position at more than 500% of GDP, the highest among all Fitch-rated sovereigns and 10x the 'AA' median. The bulk of the foreign assets are held in the FGF. Gross government debt/GDP is low and we expect it to fall to 10% of GDP in the fiscal year ending March 2022 (FY21), against a 'AA' median of 47%, although government debt is likely to rise to 50% of GDP over the medium term.

We forecast the general government budget deficit to narrow to 1.6% of GDP in FY21 from 20.6% of GDP in FY20, largely due to higher oil prices. Attempts to control budget spending have also helped and we expect total spending to be less than budgeted. We forecast the budget deficit to widen to 2.4% of GDP in FY22 and 5.7% in FY23 as oil prices fall back, spending pressure continues and progress on fiscal reforms remains limited. We do not assume the implementation of a value added tax in the next few years.

Fitch's budget calculations include estimated investment interest income of the Kuwait Investment Authority, which is not officially disclosed. Our forecast budget deficit would be 10% of GDP (KD 4.3 billion) in FY21 under the government's reporting convention, which excludes the investment income from revenue, followed by deficits averaging 12% of GDP in FY22-FY23. This corresponds to the government's budget financing needs, as investment income relates to the FGF and is retained by the Kuwait Investment Authority.

Persistently high oil prices would lower financing needs, as budget outcomes are sensitive to changes in oil prices and production. We assume annual Brent crude prices of \$70/barrel (bbl) in 2022 and \$60/bbl in 2023 and expect Kuwait's average oil production to increase to 2.7 million bbl a day in FY22, in line with the OPEC+ taper, and 2.8 million bbl a day in FY23, from the current level of 2.5 million bbl a day. A \$10/bbl change in the oil price impacts the budget by around 5.5% of GDP, all things being equal. A change of

100,000bbl a day of production affects the budget by about 1.7% of GDP.

**ESG - Governance:** Kuwait has an ESG Relevance Score of '5[+]' for both Political Stability and Rights and for the Rule of Law, Institutional and Regulatory Quality and Control of Corruption. These scores reflect the high weight that the World Bank Governance Indicators (WBGIs) have in our proprietary Sovereign Rating Model. Kuwait has a medium WBI ranking at the 52nd percentile, reflecting low scores for voice and accountability, weak government effectiveness and middling scores across other governance indicators.

### Rating sensitivities

Factors that could, individually or collectively, lead to negative rating action/downgrade:

- **Structural Features:** Depletion of the GRF in the absence of a new debt law, legislation permitting access to the FGF or other extraordinary measures to ensure that the government can continue to make good on its payment obligations, including but not limited to debt service.

- **Public Finances:** Significant deterioration in fiscal and external positions, for example, due to a sustained period of low oil prices or an inability to address structural drains on public finances.

Factors that could, individually or collectively, lead to positive rating action/upgrade:

- **Structural Features/Public Finances:** Evidence that Kuwait's institutions and political system are able to tackle long-term fiscal challenges, for example, through actions to implement a clear deficit reduction plan that is resilient to lower oil prices, as well as adopting a transparent and sustainable government funding strategy.

### Sovereign rating model (SRM) and qualitative overlay (QO)

Fitch's proprietary SRM assigns Kuwait a score equivalent to a rating of 'AA+' on the Long-Term Foreign-Currency IDR scale.

Fitch's sovereign rating committee adjusted the output from the SRM to arrive at the final Long-Term Foreign-Currency IDR by applying its QO, relative to SRM data and output, as follows:

- **Structural:** -1 notch to reflect political constraints on enacting key economic and fiscal reforms, as illustrated by the difficulties in passing a debt law and the lack of progress on addressing structural public finance challenges stemming from heavy oil dependence, a generous welfare state and a large public sector.

- **External Finances:** -1 notch to offset the increase in the sovereign net foreign assets/GDP ratio feeding into the SRM, which has been driven in part by the sharp decline in nominal GDP in 2020 (as well as by buoyant global financial markets driving strong investment gains) and which should moderate as nominal GDP bounces back with higher oil prices.

Fitch's SRM is the agency's proprietary multiple regression rating model that employs 18 variables based on three-year centred averages, including one year of forecasts, to produce a score equivalent to a Long-Term Foreign-Currency IDR. Fitch's QO is a

forward-looking qualitative framework designed to allow for adjustment to the SRM output to assign the final rating, reflecting factors within our criteria that are not fully quantifiable and/or not fully reflected in the SRM.

### Best/worst case rating scenario

International scale credit ratings of Sovereigns, Public Finance and Infrastructure issuers have a best-case rating upgrade scenario (defined as the 99th percentile of rating transitions, measured in a positive direction) of three notches over a three-year rating horizon; and a worst-case rating downgrade scenario (defined as the 99th percentile of rating transitions, measured in a negative direction) of three notches over three years. The complete span of best- and worst-case scenario credit ratings for all rating categories ranges from 'AAA' to 'D'. Best- and worst-case scenario credit ratings are based on historical performance. For more information about the methodology used to determine sector-specific best- and worst-case scenario credit ratings, visit <https://www.fitchratings.com/site/re/10111579>.

### References for substantially material source cited

The principal sources of information used in the analysis are described in the Applicable Criteria.

### ESG considerations

Kuwait has an ESG Relevance Score of '5[+]' for Political Stability and Rights, as WBGI's have the highest weight in Fitch's SRM and are therefore highly relevant to the rating and a key rating driver with a high weight. As Kuwait has a percentile rank above 50 for the respective Governance Indicator, this has a positive impact on the credit profile.

Kuwait has an ESG Relevance Score of '5[+]' for Rule of Law, Institutional & Regulatory Quality and Control of Corruption, as WBGI's have the highest weight in Fitch's SRM and are therefore highly relevant to the rating and are a key rating driver with a high weight. As Kuwait has a percentile rank above 50 for the respective Governance Indicators, this has a positive impact on the credit profile.

Kuwait has an ESG Relevance Score of '4' for Human Rights and Political Freedoms, as the Voice and Accountability pillar of the WBGI's is relevant to the rating and a rating driver. As Kuwait has a percentile rank below 50 for the respective Governance Indicator, this has a negative impact on the credit profile.

Kuwait has an ESG Relevance Score of '4[+]' for Creditor Rights, as willingness to service and repay debt is relevant to the rating and is a rating driver for Kuwait, as for all sovereigns. As Kuwait has track record of 20+ years without a restructuring of public debt and captured in our SRM variable, this has a positive impact on the credit profile.

Except for the matters discussed above, the highest level of ESG credit relevance, if present, is a score of '3'. This means ESG issues are credit-neutral or have only a minimal credit impact on the entity(ies), either due to their nature or to the way in which they are being managed by the entity(ies).

## Minimum wage in focus as Portugal heads to polls

**LISBON:** Like nearly one in four workers in Portugal, Fernanda Moreira, a food services worker at a hospital in a Lisbon suburb, earns the minimum wage. "We don't live, we survive," said the 40-year-old mother of a 12-year-old boy whose husband earns just a bit more than her.

"We learn to live with the essentials. It is frustrating and sad." Portugal's large and growing pool of workers like Moreira who earn the minimum wage-and the incumbent Socialist party's plans to raise it further-is a key issue in Sunday's snap election. Nearly 900,000 workers in Portugal earn the minimum wage, which was raised this year by 47 euros to 822 euros (\$927) per month, still one of the lowest in western Europe.

Their numbers have doubled over the past decade, according to a study by economist Eugenio Rosa, who warns Portugal "is becoming a nation of minimum wages." Prime Minister Antonio Costa has vowed to raise the minimum wage above 1,000 euros a month by 2026 if he is re-elected. It stood at 589 euros when he took office in 2015.

"It is even possible to go beyond that," Costa said Monday during a radio interview. But the two hard-left parties that have propped up his minority government have slammed the proposed increase as too little while the main opposition centre-right PSD party argues it goes too far.

### 'Miserable wages'

The Communist party voted against Costa's proposed 2022 budget, prompting the early election, in part because it deemed this year's minimum wage hike too small. The PSD argues minimum wage increases should track growth in productivity and the economy. PSD leader Rui Rio points out that Portugal's GDP per capita has increased by an annual average of just 0.3 percent between 2001 and 2020, less than half the EU growth rate.

Rio, an economist by training, says the government should focus instead on raising the medium wage since qualified graduates are being forced to choose between "miserable wages" at home and emigration. While the minimum wage has steadily



**LISBON:** A catering maid is pictured at her work site, a Portuguese custard tart coffee shop in Lisbon. Nearly 900,000 workers in Portugal earn the minimum wage, which was raised this year by 47 euros to 822 euros (\$927) per month, still one of the lowest in western Europe. —AFP

risen, the medium wage has stagnated at 1,160 euros per month, reducing the gap between the two.

"Companies have raised their minimum wages because they were forced to by law, but they left other salaries untouched," said Joao Duque, an economist at Lisbon's School of Economics and Management (ISEG). The government's strategy to achieve full employment has led to the development of an economy based on low wages centred on sectors like tourism and construction, he added. This has "encouraged the emigration of more qualified workers to countries where they are paid better, and the immigration of less qualified workers," Duque said.

### 'Not our recipe'

Portugal's unemployment rate fell to around six percent last year, its lowest level in two decades—a figure highlighted by the Socialists throughout the campaign. Labour Minister Ana Mendes Godinho said the "significant" rise in the minimum wage has boosted economic growth. "Austerity advocates claimed that freezing wages is the only way to become a competitive country. It's not our recipe," she told AFP.

The policy is popular with many low-wage voters ahead of Sunday's early election, with some polls suggesting the Socialists and the PSD are virtually tied. "We have never seen such a significant increase in the minimum wage," said Amelia Casquinha Fernandes, 60, who earns the minimum wage as a cleaner at Lisbon airport. —AFP

## Samsung reports 53% jump in profit despite supply chain woes

**SEOUL:** South Korean tech giant Samsung Electronics said yesterday its operating profit rose 53.3 percent in the fourth quarter of 2021, as record sales helped overcome pandemic-induced supply chain challenges.

The world's biggest smartphone maker said its operating profit rose to 13.87 trillion won (\$11.55 billion) for the October-December period in 2021, up from nine trillion won in the same quarter the previous year.

Thanks to high memory chip prices and strong consumer demand, Samsung had its highest annual sales of 279.6 trillion won in 2021, an 18 percent jump from a year earlier, the company said in a regulatory filing.

Samsung achieved "record sales thanks to competitive products, despite continuing uncertainty," the tech giant said in a statement, singling out solid demand for its premium smartphone lines. While the Covid-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc on the global economy, it has helped many tech companies boom.

Pandemic-driven working from home has boosted demand for devices powered by Samsung's chips, as well as home appliances such as televisions and washing machines. But LG Electronics, South Korea's second-largest appliance firm after Samsung, saw its operating profit shrink by 21.4 percent in the fourth quarter on-year to 677.7 billion won.

### Growing demand

The world's biggest memory chip maker, Samsung Electronics has aggressively stepped up investment in its semiconductor business as the world battles chip shortages that have hit everything from cars and home appliances to smartphones and gaming consoles.

The global chip supply shortage is expected to persist well into the new year, analysts have said. "In the Memory Business, demand is expected to grow as enterprises ramp up IT investments while the Company will expand supply of high-performance products," Samsung said. In November Samsung announced a new microchip factory in Texas, a \$17 billion investment. The plant is expected to be operational by the end of 2024.

Samsung is also investing in the development of advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence and robotics, as well as 5G and 6G communications.



**SEOUL:** The flags of South Korea (L) and Samsung are seen hoisted outside the company's Seochu building in Seoul yesterday. —AFP

Park Sung-soon, an analyst at Cape Investment & Securities, said that memory chip prices were likely to decline in the first half of 2022. "Samsung's profit is likely to dip for the January-June period. But we also expect chip prices to turn around in the second half, giving a boost to company profits," he said.

"We had forecast around a 10 percent fall in chip prices in the first months of 2022 but it appears now that the decline scope will be smaller with solid demands for PCs and improved supply chains." Consumer demand for high-end products, such as foldable phones, also helped to further boost profits around the holiday season.

Samsung said it expected the smartphone and premium television market to grow in the third year of the pandemic, though it anticipated sustained "uncertainties triggered by COVID 19 and supply and logistics issues". Operating profits generated from Samsung's semiconductor business accounted for over 63.7 percent of the Q4 total, illustrating the major role the division plays in the sprawling group.

Samsung's operating profit from the semiconductor division stood at 8.8 trillion won for the October-December period. Samsung Electronics is the flagship subsidiary of the giant Samsung group, by far the largest of the family-controlled empires known as chaebols that dominate business in South Korea. The conglomerate's overall turnover is equivalent to around one-fifth of South Korea's gross domestic product. —AFP



## Prince Harry to team up with Serena Williams



**P**rince Harry will be joined by Serena Williams at an event next month. The Duke of Sussex will be in his role as Chief Impact Officer for professional coaching and mental health organization BetterUp when he teams up with the tennis ace - who is close friends with his wife, Meghan, Duchess of Sussex - and the company's CEO Alexi Robichaux for a conversation about "cultivating the power of mental fitness through a bold commitment to Inner Work on 3 February. The discussion will form part of the company's virtual Inner Work Day and will see the trio share "personal stories" about their own experiences. An agenda for the event stated: "From creating companies and foundations designed to inspire others to achieve their best to tackling challenges and finding success both in and outside of work,

Serena, Prince Harry and Alexi share their personal stories and unique perspectives." Harry's role with BetterUp was announced in March 2021 and last month, the prince - who stepped down as a working royal two years ago - caused a stir when he said people who quit their jobs because it doesn't bring them joy should be "celebrated". In an interview with tech news website Fast Company in his role for BetterUp, Harry was asked about the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on increased job resignations. He replied: "While on the surface it looks like these last couple of years brought all these issues to the foreground, the reality is these struggles and issues have been brewing for quite some time. "We're just at the beginning of the mental health awakening. "This work has never been more important because people are finally paying attention, and a big compo-

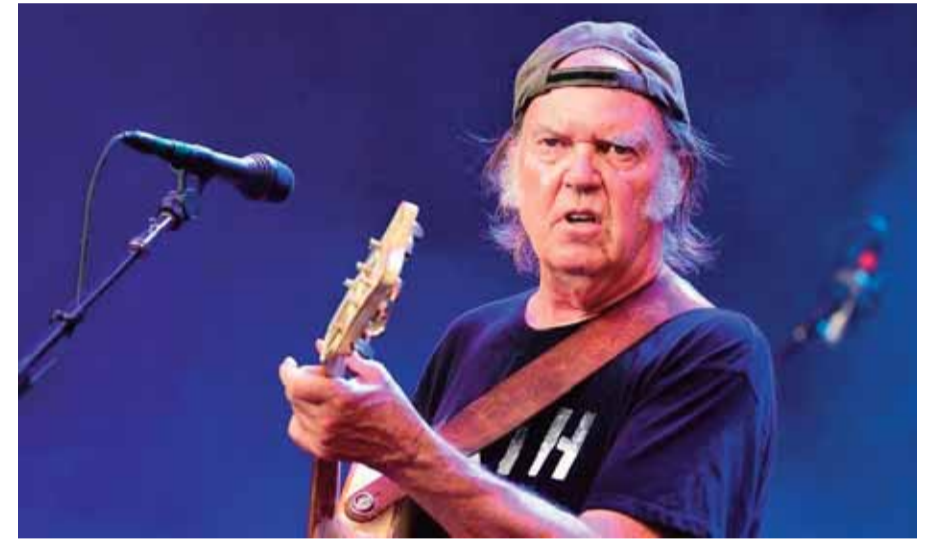
nent of this mission is building awareness and continuing to pioneer the conversation. "I have actually discovered recently, courtesy of a chat with [BetterUp science board member] Adam Grant, that a lot of the job resignations you mention aren't all bad. "In fact, it is a sign that with self-awareness comes the need for change. "Many people around the world have been stuck in jobs that didn't bring them joy, and now they're putting their mental health and happiness first. This is something to be celebrated." The BetterUp app charges users £364 a month, but Harry revealed 1,000 free memberships had been offered to young leaders from the Queen's Commonwealth Trust, a charity of which he was formerly president.

## Bradley Cooper has a 'crazy' work ethic

**T**he 47-year-old actor admits that his passionate approach to work can occasionally make life difficult for some of his co-stars. Bradley - who has starred in films such as 'American Sniper', 'A Star Is Born', and the 'Hangover' franchise - explained: "Love equals discipline. If I love something, I can have the discipline. "I have a crazy work ethic. That is definitely true. So much so that the jobs that I have taken in the last five or six years, the people that I've worked with, I have said, 'I work really hard, and this isn't going to be easy.' And



it's because I love it so much." Bradley dreamed of working in the movie industry during his younger years. And he's now desperate to make the most of every opportunity that comes his way. The Hollywood star told Variety: "The thing that I just cannot live with myself is if I didn't use that time to work as hard as I could to get it to the best place it could be. I grew up with this idea that we do what we do for a living; I dreamt it." Bradley suggested he's already surpassed his own career expectations. However, he doesn't have any intention of slowing down anytime soon and his passion for making movies remains as strong as ever. He shared: "I don't know if I ever dreamt this big. I don't even know if I allowed myself to. Shame on me if I don't work hard, and I'm here now. I'm not going to squander this. No way, man. No way. It all comes from love."



## Neil Young's music is being removed from Spotify

**T**he 'Heart of Gold' hitmaker issued an ultimatum to the streaming service earlier this week over his frustration that they are "spreading fake information about vaccines" through some of its output, citing comedian Joe Rogan's podcast 'The Joe Rogan Experience' as an example, and now the company have confirmed they are in the process of taking his songs down, though they hope to "welcome him back soon". A Spotify spokesperson told The Hollywood Reporter: "We want all the world's music and audio content to be available to Spotify users. With that comes great responsibility in balancing both safety for listeners and freedom for creators. We have detailed content policies in place and we've removed over 20,000 podcast episodes related to COVID since the start of the pandemic. We regret Neil's decision to remove his music from Spotify, but hope to welcome him back soon." The 76-year-old singer/songwriter had made the request in an online letter to his record

company. He stated: "I want you to let Spotify know immediately TODAY that I want all my music off their platform. They can have [Joe] Rogan or Young. Not both. "I am doing this because Spotify is spreading fake information about vaccines - potentially causing death to those who believe the disinformation being spread by them. Please act on this immediately today and keep me informed of the time schedule." Rogan, 54, has come under fire many times throughout the ongoing pandemic due to comments he has made about coronavirus on his podcast. Earlier this month, 270 doctors, scientists, health-care professionals and professionals addressed an open letter to Spotify expressing their concerns about the medical misinformation being shared by Joe on his show, which reaches 11 million listeners. They requested the streamer to "establish a clear and public policy to moderate misinformation on its platform" and said the popular show had a "concerning history of broadcasting misinformation, particularly regarding the Covid-19 pandemic". They argued that the company had a "responsibility" to minimize the falsehoods stemming from their service. It read: "Spotify has a responsibility to mitigate the spread of misinformation on its platform, though the company presently has no misinformation policy." This is not the first time Young has wanted to take his songs off the streaming service. In 2015, he removed most of his back catalogue from Spotify - and their competitor Apple Music - citing concerns over sound quality.

## Aziz Ansari has stopped using the internet

**T**he 38-year-old actor has revealed he's totally disconnected himself from the internet and stopped using email four years ago. He shared: "However many years ago, I kind of started turning off the internet and, you know, I deleted all social media and all this stuff, and I've slowly just kept going further and further. I stopped using email maybe like four years ago." Aziz described his decision to disconnect from social media and email as a "mental diet". He told Kevin Hart on Sirius XM's 'Comedy Gold Minds

with Kevin Hart: "It all kind of ... it's almost like I kind of started thinking about, you know, everyone thinks about their diet and what they eat - at a certain point, it's also about thinking about your mental diet and what you're putting in your head. "Whether it's like, oh, looking at the same four websites, constantly checking The New York Times 50 times a day. At a certain point, yeah, that's not really helping." Despite this, Aziz acknowledges that a lot of people don't have the option of quitting social media or email. The comedy star knows that he lives a privileged lifestyle as a celebrity. Aziz - who played Tom Haverford in 'Parks and Recreation' - said: "I mean, look, I know all this stuff is like, oh yeah, I'm in a position where I can do that and have, you know, whatever certain privileges to be able to pull it off. "An assistant or whatever - but all that stuff I do I think helps me get more done, kinda



taking care of stuff or whatever, whether it's working out or meditating and all that kind of stuff."

## Mary J Blige likens half-time show to 'an Oscar nomination'

**M**ary J Blige thinks performing at the Super Bowl is like "getting an Oscar nomination". The 51-year-old star - who has been nominated for two Academy Awards during her career - can't wait to take to the stage at the Super Bowl in Inglewood, California, on February 13. Mary - who only had a small role in her first Super Bowl performance in 2001 - said: "This time I'm going to be front and centre - Mary J. Blige, in her glory and greatness and swagger." This year's star-studded half-time show will also feature the likes of Dr Dre, Eminem, Snoop Dogg and Kendrick Lamar. And Mary thinks the Super Bowl is the perfect platform to introduce hip-hop music to the world. She told the February issue of Elle magazine: "Hip-hop is East Coast. Hip-hop is West Coast. Hip-hop is Europe. This is why it's going to be so major, because this is what the Super Bowl is showing to people: It's not just one thing. [Hip-hop] is everywhere." Last year, Snoop revealed he's preparing "one of the greatest Super Bowl half-time shows" of all time. The rap legend explained that he was about to ramp-up his plans. He said at the time: "Me, Dr Dre, Eminem, had a light discussion about what we're trying to do. It's about to go full speed ahead." Snoop, 50, is determined to give fans a show to remember. Looking forward to the event, he explained: "I tell you, this it's gonna be one of the greatest Super Bowl half-time shows that you ever witnessed."



## Dua Lipa feels proud of her family roots

**T**he 26-year-old pop star was born and raised in London, but her family hail from the Balkans and Dua thinks it's a "big part" of her identity. She explained: "It's such a big part of who I am. Given my parents and how they came to the U.K., [the refugee situation] has always been something that's really close to my heart." Dua - who lived in Kosovo during her teens - won't allow anyone to deny her "identity". She told WSJ Magazine: "I read a lot of comments from people telling me that I don't have a country, I don't have an identity, Kosovo doesn't exist. "I lived in Kosovo, I know the lives that were lost [during the war]. So for somebody to deny me my identity and my experience, it's hard for me to stand back and not speak up about it. So that's something that I will always do." The 'Levitating' hitmaker previously revealed that she loved her time in Kosovo and that she felt safer there than she did in London. Dua explained: "I got to Kosovo and I really loved it there. It's way safer than London. There was a sense of community and safeness - everyone knows everyone in Kosovo, especially in Pristina." Dua "learned a lot" from her time in Kosovo and she also has fond memories of her time at school. She recalled: "I was the youngest in my year, which was different and exciting. It was fun, we'd go out to the city center and they'd show me around, I learned a lot from being there. "My parents felt a lot more comfortable letting me go out with my friends, as long as I was back by a certain time."

## Sean Penn worries for the future of cinema

**T**he 61-year-old actor fell in love with cinema at an early age, but with the rise of streaming platforms and the impact of the pandemic, he wonders what the future holds. He shared: "The business I knew is not the business of today. Especially with the lingering effects of the COVID pandemic, you know, on every level of the business or the creative filmmaking, one wonders what the future is going to be. "With the injection of streaming, the convenience, capability of seeing films at home theatres and so on - which would not have been my guidance ... I'm still a guy who fell in love with the girl whose name is cinema in a movie theatre in the dark with strangers. I think the kinds of stories that interest me are the ones that want to be experienced in that way." Sean likened streaming to a huge bookstore in which people never cross paths. The acclaimed actor told Sky News: "It seems to be a less unifying experience for culture and society at any given time than it was when I fell in love with it." Sean also believes that the industry has become "very treacherous" for up-and-coming actors. He said: "For actors getting involved in the world today, you're talking about very prestigious things in terms of how the business is perceived, which is to get a part in a series. Well, that part in a series might mean you're not going to do any other parts for six years. "The actor's career, I would find it very treacherous were I starting today ... I think all of the things, from the audition process to the selectivity to the competition, I think it's all on a much higher level than it was." — Bang Showbiz



## JENNA USHKOWITZ IS PREGNANT

**T**he 'Glee' star - who played Tina Cohen-Chang in the musical comedy-drama series - and her husband David Stanley are expecting their first child, a daughter, together. She wrote on Instagram: "Our hearts are so full... Baby Girl Stanley coming in June" The couple's pregnancy news comes just six months after they got married. In July, the 35-year-old actress revealed she and David enjoyed "the day of [their] dreams", as they wed in an outdoor ceremony in Los Angeles. She said at the time: "We were elated and so grateful that we didn't have to push our wedding and that we got to have the day of our dreams. "It was such a gift that we were able to share it with our friends and family." The actress admitted the coronavirus pandemic had forced the pair to alter their original plans. However, she also revealed the restric-

tions helped to focus their attention during the planning phase. Jenna - whose wedding was attended by 104 guests - said: "We always dreamed of a wedding on the smaller side, but with COVID, we definitely had to scale back more than we anticipated. "Having our closest family and loved ones there (safely) was a priority for us. By setting the expectation from the get-go that we had to limit guests, we were able to focus our planning and ensure that we could stay flexible in case any element of the day needed to change." Jenna announced her engagement via social media in August 2020, revealing David popped the question after just over two years together. She showed off her engagement ring in a photo and captioned the image: "Yes, a million times, yes."







This handout from the World Wide Fund For Nature (WWF) shows the *Trachypithecus popa* of the Popa langur species walking in the North Zamari Wildlife Sanctuary (NZWS) in Myanmar's Bago region. — AFP photos



This handout photo shows the *Cyrtodactylus phnomchiensis* bent-toed gecko in Phnom Chi in the Prey Lang Wildlife Sanctuary in Cambodia.



This handout photo shows the *Megophrys frigida* or Mount Ky Quan San horned frog in the Bat Xat Nature Reserve on Mount Ky Quan San in Vietnam.



This handout photo shows a camera trap being set up in an undisclosed location in Myanmar.

## More than 200 new species found in Mekong region

Scientists discovered more than 200 new species across the greater Mekong region in 2020, according to a WWF report, despite the threats posed by climate change and human activities such as logging. The finds include a new primate, a colorless cavefish and an iridescent snake with an unusual non-overlapping pattern of scales.

In all, 224 new species of plants and vertebrate animals were found in the region—which includes Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam—WWF said in its “New Species Discoveries” report. Images

of the Popa langur monkey, which takes its name from the extinct volcano Mount Popa in central Myanmar, were caught by camera traps. The mountain is still home to the largest population of the reclusive simian, around 100 individuals, WWF said.

Only around 200 to 250 of the monkeys—which are threatened by hunting, logging and loss of habitat—are thought to survive in total. In Vietnam, researchers found the vivid-colored Mount Ky Quan San horned frog at an altitude of more than 2,000 meters (6,500 feet) on the peak which gives it its name. The greater Mekong region, with

landscapes ranging from jungles to mountains and karst formations, is a hugely important biodiversity hotspot.

It is home to some of the world's most impressive and most endangered species including the tiger, the Asian elephant and the Mekong giant catfish. WWF have said the rate of discovery of new species—more than 3,000 since 1997 — shows the importance of preserving the region's fragile ecosystems. — AFP



This handout photo shows the *Pareas geminatus* slug snake in Long Tien in Laos' Xaisomboun.



This handout photo shows the *Capparidaceae* plant of the caper bush family in the Nam Kading National Protected Area in Laos' Bolikhamxay province.

## Object found in the Milky Way 'unlike anything astronomers have seen'

Australian researchers have discovered a strange spinning object in the Milky Way they say is unlike anything astronomers have ever seen. The object, first spotted by a university student working on his undergraduate thesis, releases a huge burst of radio energy three times every hour. The pulse comes “every 18.18 minutes, like clockwork,” said astrophysicist Natasha Hurley-Walker, who led the investigation after the student's discovery, using a telescope in the Western Australian outback known as the Murchison Widefield Array.

While there are other objects in the universe that switch on and off—such as pulsars—Hurley-Walker said 18.18 minutes is a frequency that has never been observed before. Finding this object was “kind of spooky for an astronomer,” she said, “because there's nothing known in the sky that does that.” The research team is now working to understand what they have found. Trawling back through years of data, they have been able to establish a few facts: the object is about 4,000 light-years from Earth, is incredibly bright and has an extremely strong magnetic field.



This undated handout image shows the Milky Way as viewed from Earth, with a star icon (at R-placed by source) marking the position of a mysterious repeating transient in space. — AFP

But there are still many mysteries to untangle.

“If you do all of the mathematics, you find that they shouldn't have enough power to produce these kind of radio waves every 20 minutes,” Hurley-Walker said. “It just shouldn't be possible.” The object may be something researchers have theorized could exist but have never seen called an “ultra-long period magnetar”. It could also be a white dwarf, a remnant of a collapsed star. “But that's quite unusual as well. We only know of one white dwarf pulsar, and nothing as great as this,” Hurley-Walker said. “Of course, it could be something that we've never even thought of—it could be some entirely new type of object.” On the question of whether the powerful, consistent radio signal from space could have been sent by some other life form, Hurley-Walker conceded: “I was concerned that it was aliens.”

But the research team was able to observe the signal across a wide range of frequencies. “That means it must be a natural process, this is not an artificial signal,” Hurley-Walker said. The next step for the researchers is to look for more of these strange objects across the universe. “More detections will tell astronomers whether this was a rare one-off event or a vast new population we'd never noticed before,” Hurley-Walker said. The team's paper on the object has been published in the latest edition of the journal *Nature*. — AFP

## Three, two, one: Astronomers predict SpaceX space junk will hit the Moon

A chunk of a SpaceX rocket that blasted off seven years ago and was abandoned in space after completing its mission will crash into the Moon in March, experts say. The rocket was deployed in 2015 to put into orbit a NASA satellite called the Deep Space Climate Observatory (DSCOVR). Since then, the second stage of the rocket, or booster, has been floating in what mathematicians call a chaotic orbit, astronomer Bill Gray told AFP Wednesday. It was Gray who calculated the space junk's new collision course with the Moon.

The booster passed quite close to the Moon in January in a rendezvous that altered its orbit, said Gray. He is behind Project Pluto, software that allows for calculating the trajectory of asteroids and other objects in space and is used in NASA-financed space observation programs. A week after the rocket stage whizzed close to the Moon, Gray observed it again and concluded it would crash into the Moon's dark side on March 4 at more than 5,500 miles per hour (9,000 kilometers per hour). Gray appealed to the amateur astronomer community to join him in observing the booster, and his conclusion was confirmed.

The exact time and spot of impact may change slightly from his forecast but there is widespread agreement that there will be a collision on the Moon that day. “I've been tracking junk of this sort for about 15 years. And this is the first unintentional lunar impact that we've had,” Gray told AFP.

### 'Time to start regulating'

Astronomer Jonathan McDowell told AFP it's possible similar impacts have taken place unnoticed. “There're at least 50 objects that were left in deep Earth orbit in the '60s, '70s and '80s that were just abandoned there. We didn't track them,” he said. “Now we're picking up a couple of them... but a lot of them we're not finding and so they're not there anymore,” he

added. “Probably at least a few of them hit the moon accidentally and we just didn't notice.”

The impact of the SpaceX rocket chunk weighing four tons on the Moon will not be visible from Earth in real time. But it will leave a crater that scientists will be able to observe with spacecraft and satellites like

stage is recovered and reused. Gray said there could be more unintentional crashes into the Moon in the future as the US and Chinese space programs in particular leave more junk in orbit.

The US together with international partners is already planning a space station to orbit the Moon. McDowell noted these



This NASA handout file photo shows NOAA's DSCOVR satellite launching from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station in Florida. — AFP

NASA's Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter or India's Chandrayaan-2, and thus learn more about the geology of the Moon.

Spacecraft have been intentionally crashed into the Moon before for scientific purposes, such as during the Apollo missions to test seismometers. In 2009, NASA sent a rocket stage hurtling into the Moon near its south pole to look for water. But most rockets do not go so far from Earth. SpaceX brings its rocket boosters back through the Earth's atmosphere so they disintegrate over the ocean. The first

events “start to be problematic when there's a lot more traffic.” “It's actually no one's job to keep track of the junk that we leave out in deep earth orbit,” he added. “I think now's the time to start regulating it.” SpaceX did not immediately respond to request for comment from AFP. Elon Musk's company is currently developing a lunar lander that should allow NASA to send astronauts back to the Moon by 2025 at the earliest. — AFP





Actors in zombie costumes live up the atmosphere at the horror-themed 'Shadows' restaurant in the Saudi capital Riyadh's Boulevard entertainment city. — AFP photos



A woman takes pictures of a skeleton model seated at her table at the horror-themed 'Shadows' restaurant.



Actors in zombie costumes live up the atmosphere.

# Dining with the undead in Saudi



A zombie model is seated at a table with diners.

A restaurant in Saudi Arabia is offering patrons in the conservative kingdom a unique experience-dishes with a side of skull and blood in the company of zombies and vampires. The restaurant, "Shadows", caters to horror film buffs with strong stomachs, allowing them to savor their dishes while staff in gory costumes put on interactive shows. It's located in the Boulevard entertainment district of the capital Riyadh and has opened as the Gulf country seeks to soften its image. "I came here to have fun and laugh... but the atmosphere and the shows are actually very scary," one diner, Nora al-Assad, told AFP. "I've lost my

appetite," added the 26-year-old who works in human resources, as a waiter presented her meal on a tray with a smiling black skull.

Her friend, Jawaher Abdullah, a doctor, was more than thrilled to wolf down her dinner. "I like horror in general... I think the atmosphere is great and lots of fun," she said, before taking a selfie with a performer with a fake bleeding chest wound. For businessman Sleiman Al-Amri, the restaurant experience caters to his hunger for a good adrenaline rush. "We're always looking for new and exciting things to do in Riyadh," said the 45-year-old, dining with his family.

Amri, donning the traditional dishdasha robe, added: "Going to restaurants used to be about eating, getting full, chatting, and we'd go back home. "But now we are eating, we are enjoying our time-and we're also terrified." The rise of Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, in 2017 has ushered many sweeping reforms, with the kingdom opening its doors to tourists in 2020. In the past, Saudis would have to go abroad for entertainment, but a social shift-including the opening of cinemas and mixed-gender concerts-has changed the local dynamic. — AFP



A skeleton model is seated at a table with diners.



A skeleton model is seated at a table at the horror-themed 'Shadows' restaurant.



A zombie model is seated at a table at the horror-themed 'Shadows' restaurant.

## Elton John tests positive for COVID-19, postpones Dallas shows

Pop megastar Elton John on Tuesday postponed two concerts in Dallas-part of what is expected to be a lengthy farewell tour-after testing positive for COVID-19. "It's always a massive disappointment to move shows and I'm so sorry to anyone who's been inconvenienced by this but I want to keep myself and my team safe," said the British musician, 74, in a statement on social media. "Fortunately, I'm fully vaccinated and

boosted and my symptoms are mild." The concerts, part of John's "Farewell Yellow Brick Road" tour, were scheduled for January 25 and January 26. Both John and the American Airlines Center, where the shows were to take place, said they will be rescheduled and fans should keep their tickets.

John said he expected to be healthy enough to play his show on January 29 in Little Rock, Arkansas. The tour, which is anticipated to be Sir Elton's last, has run into pandemic-era cancellations and postponements, like many other performing arts events. The pop legend also recently had a hip operation that forced him to push back several dates. Last year, John released an album entitled "The Lockdown Sessions," which was recorded entirely under COVID-19 restrictions. — AFP



In this file photo Elton John performs onstage during the 92nd Annual Academy Awards at Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, California. — AFP

## Art Basel wins Paris slot over France's own art fair

The French art world was shaken Wednesday by news that the Art Basel fair has swooped in to replace France's own, long-running FIAC at the Grand Palais in Paris. The shock decision comes at a time when Paris is regaining its place as a pre-eminent center for art in the world, helped by a slew of new museums and the impact of Brexit on its main rival London. FIAC (Foire Internationale d'Art Contemporain) has been running for nearly half a century as France's leading international art fair, almost all that time at the Grand Palais, the illustrious glass-and-steel exhibition hall on the Champs-Élysées.

But it has lost its slot for the next seven years following a surprise bid in November from Art Basel, the international market-leader that is part-owned by billionaire investor James Murdoch and already has annual fairs in Basel, Miami and Hong Kong. RMN-GP, the French authority that oversees several museums including the Grand Palais, responded by putting FIAC's October dates up for tender along with the Paris Photo fair in November, both owned by French-Dutch group RX. On Wednesday, the authority announced its decision to grant the art fair slot to Art Basel's owner, the Swiss firm MCH. Paris Photo will, however, remain in RX's hands.

### 'Dynamism'

Murdoch, son of the media mogul Rupert, holds a controlling stake in MCH, and was reportedly a key driver behind the takeover move in Paris. "James Murdoch is very enthusiastic about this project. He will help us in every way possible," Art Basel's global director Marc Spiegler told AFP by phone. "No other town in Europe has this combination of art market dynamism and cultural importance," he added. "We want to make a very strong fair at the highest international level and create ties with different cultural sectors such as cinema, fashion, music and design."

FIAC had warned of the "danger" of handing its slot to a huge global player like Art Basel. The decision worries small galleries in Paris, who were strongly supported by FIAC with around a third of the slots every year. "It is part of a wider shake-up of the terrain, beyond just

France, with a concentration in the hands of the big players," said Marion Papillon, head of the Paris galleries association.

### 'Not just a satellite'

Chris Dercon, president of RMN-GP, said there was pressure from gallery owners, collectors and artists to come up with more innovative models for art fairs. "Nothing can compare to Art Basel's address book at a time when Paris is regaining a strong place globally in contemporary art," he told AFP. RMN-GP insisted that the new fair would not be "just a satellite of the Basel fair" and that it will have its own branding, yet to be decided. They also vowed to ensure that the price of a stall at the new fair "would not explode" for local galleries. — AFP



This file photograph shows visitors at the Paris International Contemporary Art Fair (Foire Internationale d'Art Contemporain - FIAC) at The Grand Palais, in Paris. — AFP



## Sports

# Powell powers West Indies to a T20 win over England

## Blistering century laid the foundation for West Indies

**BRIDGETOWN:** Rovman Powell's blistering century laid the foundation for West Indies' 20-run win over England in the third Twenty20 international at Bridgetown on Wednesday as they went 2-1 up in a five-match series. The recalled Powell's 107 off just 53 balls, as well as his fourth-wicket stand of 122 with Nicholas Pooran (70), helped take the West Indies to an imposing 224-5 after stand-in England captain Moeen Ali won the toss.

"I know I can strike the ball well," said player-of-the-match Powell. "I had a problem against wrist spin and the last seven months I went away and have been working on that and opening up the off side. "Everything came out of the middle today." Tom Banton hit six sixes in a rapid 73 and Phil Salt 57 on his T20 international debut as England tried to chase down 225, with Moeen leading a new-look side after regular captain Eoin Morgan pulled his quad during the warm-up.

But they lost wickets before finishing on 204-9 in a remarkable match yielding over 400 runs. "A fantastic partnership took the game away from us but I'm proud of the way the boys batted at the end," said Moeen. Powell's impressive display of ball-striking, including four fours and 10 soaring sixes, saw the 28-year-old Jamaican

become only the third West Indies batsman after Evin Lewis and Chris Gayle, who have both performed the feat twice, to make a Twenty20 international hundred.

England's side featured three debutants in Salt, fellow batsman Harry Brook and paceman George Garton and, even more unusually, a trio of left-arm quicks in Garton, Reece Topley and Tymal Mills. Garton bowled opener Brandon King but was hammered repeatedly when he missed his length in an expensive return costing 57 runs. Powell, selected in place of Odean Smith in the only change to the West Indies XI, smashed his second ball for six but also played some 'touch' shots en route to three figures.

He reached his hundred off 51 balls and then promptly celebrated by heaving Topley out of the ground. But, attempting a repeat, he was caught at long-off. Banton gave England hope of an improbable win in a 39-ball innings that ended when he holed out off West Indies captain Kieron Pollard. Salt got the target down to 36 off a last over where he hit the first two legal deliveries for six before being bowled by Romario Shepherd. The series continues when the teams return to the Kensington Oval tomorrow. — AFP



**BRIDGETOWN:** Kieron Pollard (center) of West Indies celebrates the dismissal of Tom Banton of England during the 3rd T20I between West Indies and England at Kensington Oval, Bridgetown, Barbados, on January 26, 2022. — AFP

## 'Massive blow' for England as captain out of Six Nations

**LONDON:** England captain Owen Farrell has been ruled out of the entire Six Nations with an ankle injury, coach Eddie Jones said on Wednesday. It had been hoped Farrell would be fit for England's tournament opener in Scotland on February 5 as he recovered from an earlier ankle injury suffered against Australia in November.

But Jones confirmed Farrell, who plays at fly-half or centre, needs surgery on an injury sustained while training with Saracens last week. "Owen's had his operation, or was going to, so he'll be out of the Six Nations," Jones said at the virtual launch of the tournament. Saracens said in a separate statement the operation would take place later on Wednesday, with the Premiership club estimating a recovery period of eight to 10 weeks until Farrell returns.

Jones, reflecting on 100-cap veteran Farrell's absence from the Six Nations, said: "It's a massive blow for him personally, and for the team it's a blow. "But it's obviously an opportunity for other guys to step up into leadership roles, for other players to play for that 12 jumper. We see it more as an opportunity. "In today's rugby having your best team on the field is a rare occurrence. We're pretty used to it."

Ireland head coach Andy Farrell, Owen's father, added: "I am sure he is gutted to have another injury, everyone would be at this time of year, the Six Nations is massive to anyone. "But I have no doubt he has the appetite to come back better and stronger." British and Irish Lions flanker Courtney Lawes is in line to replace Farrell as captain after leading England to wins over Tonga and world champions South Africa in November.

Lawes has been ruled out of England's pre-tournament training camp this week with concussion suffered playing for Northampton Saints against Ulster recently, but he is expected to be fit for the Scotland clash. "Courtney is progressing nicely and we're still hopeful he'll be available for Scotland," said Jones. Gloucester winger Jonny May, however, is set to miss the tournament because of a knee injury. "Jonny's more likely than not going to have some surgery, but the details on that are a bit sketchy at the moment. He's more than likely to be out of the Six Nations," Jones said.

### 'Courage'

It appeared Jones was planning to play the 30-year-old Farrell at inside centre, alongside fly-half Marcus Smith, one of English rugby union's rising stars, at Murrayfield. But Jones will now have to look again at his 10-12 pairing in the lead-up to the latest edition of the sport's oldest international fixture, with Henry Slade in line to take over the inside centre role.

"We've got other experienced backs - we may move Slade in one spot from 13 to 12," Jones said. "It's important for any 10 in the world whether it's Marcus Smith or Finn Russell or whether it's (Romain) Ntamack for France that the 12 is a good communicator and takes some of the pressure away from the 10 in terms of giving good information and assisting in the defense role."

Smith has played just five Tests but Jones was impressed by the way the 22-year-old handled himself on England duty when his last-gasp penalty sealed a 27-26 win over the Springboks. "It was one of those games where we were going to have win it two or three times," said Jones. "He (Smith) showed a lot of courage, a lot of composure and a lot of skill and he's only going to get better during the Six Nations." — AFP

## Olympic giants China face tough medal fight at home Games

**BEIJING:** China topped the medals table at its 2008 Summer Olympics but expectations are much lower for next month's Beijing Games as the country attempts to build a winter sports industry nearly from scratch. China did not appear at a Winter Olympics until 1980 at Lake Placid and has hardly sparkled since, winning one gold medal - in short track speed skating - at the last Games, in South Korea's Pyeongchang, in 2018. Cold weather sports have not historically been popular in the country, where the prohibitive cost and relative lack of infrastructure had kept the pool of athletes small.

But a huge government-led push to promote snow and ice activities and a soaring middle class looks set to yield some results when the Games begin on February 4, and home athletes always tend to overperform at their own Olympics. With foreign coaches drafted in to boost expertise, forecasters Gracenote expect China to win six golds at Beijing 2022 and enjoy its "best-ever Winter Olympics". Norway, who topped the medals table in 2018, are predicted to do so again, ahead of the Russians and Germany.

### 'Big crisis'

China set itself the goal of competing in all 109 events at Beijing 2022 - nearly double the number the country qualified for at Pyeongchang. The country has "no experience" in one-third of them, state media said. Underlining the challenge, winter sports official Ni Huizhong admitted to Xinhua news agency last year in unusually stark terms that the country had "clear weaknesses and disadvantages" and was facing "a big crisis" in some sports.

China will compete in at least 96 events in the Chinese capital. In some, such as men's ice hockey, avoiding embarrassment on home soil will count as

## Nine-under Horschel grabs early lead at Torrey Pines

**LOS ANGELES:** Billy Horschel fired a nine-under-par 63 to snatch the early lead the PGA Tour's Farmers Insurance Open at Torrey Pines on Wednesday. Horschel reeled off nine birdies and nine pars in a flawless opening round at the picturesque southern California layout's North Course to lead by one shot from Michael Thompson on eight under.

The 35-year-old's brilliant round saw him grab the lead on the 520-yard par-five 17th hole, when he reached the green in two before two-putting for birdie. Horschel revealed after his round he had been close to withdrawing after struggling to overcome a shoulder problem. "I didn't know if I was even going to tee it up today when I woke up," the 2014 FedEx Cup champion said. "Even when I was hitting balls I still wasn't sure whether I was going to tee it up."

A low-scoring opening round saw Germany's Stephan Jaeger and Kevin Tway finish the day on seven under after posting 65s, while there was a welcome return to form for Rickie Fowler, whose form and rankings position nosedived during a 2021 season that included nine missed cuts. World number 101 Fowler, who also missed the cut at last week's American Express at La Quinta, was tied in fifth place with Doug Ghim, Italy's Francesco Molinari and world number one Jon Rahm on six under.

Fowler's bogey-free 66 on the North Course included six birdies. "Definitely pleased," Fowler said afterwards. "Did a good job of kind of focusing on the things that we're working on, being deliberate swing-wise and staying patient in there." Spanish star Rahm meanwhile, making a happy return to Torrey Pines, the scene of his maiden major victory at the US Open last year, had a more erratic opening round on the South Course.

After three birdies on the front nine to reach the



**SCHIPHOL:** Dutch Olympian athletes arrive at Schiphol airport to take a flight to Beijing ahead of the 2022 Winter Olympics. — AFP

a small win. China has had to be creative in its search to grow its small pool of winter sports athletes, including scouring martial arts schools of Buddhist monasteries.

Authorities also sent a group of teenagers with zero experience - including a former gymnast and a sprinter - to Norway in 2018 for a crash course in ski jumping in the hope of producing 2022 competitors. China has also turned to naturalised athletes, including California natives Eileen Gu - who looks set to be the face of the Games-and ice skater Beverly Zhu. With an eye on the future, the country is on course to open 5,000 winter sports schools by 2025 and has set up massive training bases for athletes offering wind tunnels and virtual reality simulators.

### Prestige

Of China's 13 Winter Olympic golds, 10 have come in short track speed skating. Wu Dajing won 500m gold in 2018 and will defend his title in Beijing, while there are also hopes in the relay events. Pairs figure skaters Sui Wenjing and Han Cong will hope to go one better than their

Pyeongchang silver, while US-born freestyle skier Gu, just 18, is hotly tipped for gold. They are under pressure from the very top, with President Xi Jinping urging athletes to "struggle bravely and strive for success".

But medals will only be one part of what China hopes to reap from the Games. It sees an opportunity to demonstrate its sophistication and prowess, even as the COVID-19 pandemic and diplomatic boycotts from a handful of countries over human rights concerns cast a shadow. "By hosting the 2008 Summer Olympics (also in Beijing), China impressively demonstrated its economic development to the world," Jung Woo Lee, sport policy researcher at the University of Edinburgh, told AFP.

"(Now) China wants to display its cultural and technological merits to international audiences," Lee said, noting that Winter Olympics are "more exclusive competitions where the power of more advanced and affluent Western nations prevails". "The staging of the Winter Olympics in their capital city can symbolically mean that China is no longer lagging behind Western democracies in terms of its international privilege," Lee said. — AFP

## Benzema's cash seized by France

**VERSAILLES:** French bailiffs have seized 230,000 euros (\$260,000) from Real Madrid striker Karim Benzema over his conviction last year for complicity in a bid to blackmail former France team-mate Mathieu Valbuena with a sex tape, a source familiar with the case said yesterday. A court ordered Benzema in November to pay a fine, damages and legal costs for pressuring Valbuena to pay off his blackmailers, as well as handing him a one-year suspended jail sentence.

Benzema "implicated himself personally, through subterfuge and lies, to convince his teammate to submit to the blackmail", the court in Paris suburb Versailles said at the time. Benzema has appealed the ruling, which came in the same year he made a stunning return to France's national squad after being dropped in 2015 over the blackmail allegations.

The 34-year-old has scored nine times for France since being recalled by manager Didier Deschamps for the Euro 2020 finals-delayed by a year due to the coronavirus pandemic-making him the fifth-highest scorer in the history of Les Bleus. Benzema's performances have helped rehabilitate him in the eyes of many French fans and coach Didier Deschamps, and the seizure of his cash comes less than two weeks after he won France Football magazine's player of the year award.

Valbuena's lawyers turned to the bailiffs to recover the cash from Benzema after he did not pay up voluntarily. A source close to the case said the Real Madrid star's account had been partially frozen since Friday. Benzema's own lawyers want the money held in escrow while his appeal is heard. "This is the logical consequence of the decision for immediate payment. We asked for an amicable agreement on payment, which was never reached," said Valbuena's lawyer Paul-Albert Iweins. — AFP



**CALIFORNIA:** Billy Horschel hits his tee shot on the 17th hole during the first round of The Farmers Insurance Open at Torrey Pines Golf Course on January 26, 2022. — AFP

turn at three under, Rahm posted three birdies and two bogeys in five holes down the stretch to struggle to four under. But a superb eagle three on the par-five 18th - reaching the green in two before curling in an awkward 12-foot put - left him just three off the lead. Rahm was pleased at being able to salvage a low score despite the occasional wayward shot.

"I put myself in really good positions, and the few times I was off, for the most part I was able to give myself a chance to save the hole," Rahm said. "Nothing was really bad, I feel like everything was feeling good, everything was coming out and feeling the way it should and it showed in the score." A group of 22 players were a further shot behind Rahm, Fowler, Ghim and Molinari on five under. Former world number one Dustin Johnson was in a group of seven players on four under after opening with a 68. — AFP



Sports

# Minnows Equatorial Guinea win a shoot-out to set up Senegal clash

## Equatorial Guinea now face Sadio Mane-inspired Senegal

**LIMBE:** Santiago Eneme scored the decisive penalty as minnows Equatorial Guinea edged Mali 6-5 in a shoot-out after a drab 0-0 draw following extra time in Limbe on Wednesday to reach the Africa Cup of Nations quarter-finals. After France-based Eneme converted, Malian Falaye Sacko had a kick saved by Jesus Owono and his country bowed out in the first knockout stage for the second successive Cup of Nations. An ultra-cagey last-16 match produced minimal excitement for the crowd with both teams managing just one shot on target in 120 minutes. Equatorial Guinea now face Sadio Mane-inspired Senegal, one of the title favourites, in Yaounde on Sunday for a place in the semi-finals of the flagship African tournament.

While Senegal will be hot favorites to advance, Equatorial Guinea beat them in the only previous Cup of Nations clash 10 years ago. Ranked 114th in the world, the Equatoguineans have impressed throughout the tournament in their first appearance after qualifying, having previously competed as co-hosts and hosts. Unlucky losers to the Ivory Coast, the National Thunder then ended the 35-match unbeaten run of Algeria before defeating Sierra Leone to finish group runners-up.

It was the second 0-0 draw on Wednesday with Egypt defeating the Ivory Coast 5-4 on penalties in Douala just before the Limbe match kicked off. The players and match officials wore black armbands and observed a moment of silence before the kick-off in memory of the eight people who died in a stampede on Monday before Cameroon beat Comoros in Yaounde. Mali had two Premier League players available and Brighton midfielder Yves Bissouma started while Southampton winger Moussa Djenepo sat on the

bench and was introduced after 70 minutes.

### Foul-riddled

Ibrahima Kone, who scored three of the four Mali goals in the group stage, fired just wide on seven minutes at the 20,000-seat Stade Omnisport, which overlooks the Gulf of Guinea. Equatorial Guinea had a penalty appeal rejected after the referee checked the VAR monitor as a foul-riddled first half progressed. The Equatoguineans were overly physical and Ivan Edu and Jose Miranda were yellow-carded before Mali wasted a half chance to end the deadlock. A free-kick fell favourably for Amadou Haidara inside the box, but his timid shot was comfortably saved by Owono.

Veteran Mali coach Mohamed Magassouba looked on anxiously when Kone was injured, but the Norway-based forward was able to continue after lengthy treatment. It was then the turn of Mali to appeal for a penalty when Moussa Doumbia fell as half-time approached, but the referee changed his decision to initially award a spot-kick after reviewing the incident. A goalless opening half ended with a third yellow card to an Equatoguinean with Pablo Ganet the offender. His team committed 15 fouls during the half, but failed to get a single shot on target.

The best scoring chance so far came on 58 minutes when the perseverance of Bissouma set up Haidara, but he blazed over from close range. As the match entered the final quarter of regular time, Mali continued to dominate possession, pass more accurately and concede far fewer fouls, but Equatorial Guinea held firm under pressure. Djenepo enlivened the Mali attack, but could not force a breakthrough and after 95 goalless minutes, the final last-16 match went to extra time. —AFP



**LIMBE:** Mali's defender Falaye Sacko (left) jumps for the ball during the Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) 2021 round of 16 football match between Mali and Equatorial Guinea on January 26, 2022. —AFP

## Premier League clubs agree to postponement rules over COVID-19

**LONDON:** Premier League clubs must have at least four positive coronavirus cases in their squad before a match can be called off under new guidance issued Wednesday following a number of controversial postponements. The change comes after criticism of the way some clubs were perceived to be exploiting the previous rules.

If a club could not field 13 outfield players and a goalkeeper either from their squad list or appropriately experienced under-21 players, the match would be postponed. But

that rule included absences unrelated to COVID-19, such as injury or international duty. There was a growing belief that teams hit by absences of key players were using the flexibility in the rules to have matches called off. There have been 22 postponements in the Premier League under the COVID criteria since the Omicron variant led to a surge in cases among players and staff in December.

Aston Villa chief executive Christian Purslow recently said the rules were not fit for purpose, while Tottenham were furious at the league's decision to grant a postponement request to Arsenal for the north London derby. "Following a club meeting today, the Premier League's COVID-19 match postponement guidance has been updated to include a COVID-19 impact threshold," a Premier League statement said.

"From now on, if a club applies to postpone a match on the grounds of insufficient players due to COVID-19, they

must have a minimum of four positive cases within their squad." The league said the new rules would take effect before the next Premier League fixture, the rearranged match between Burnley and Watford on February 5. Some top-flight managers had complained that changing the rules mid-season could force them to play weakened teams if four players had COVID, while other sides had benefited from postponements.

But it was reported that no clubs spoke out against the change at Wednesday's meeting. "Throughout the pandemic, the Premier League has adapted its guidance in response to the wider public health situation. The guidance was last updated in December in response to the emergence of the Omicron variant," the statement added. "Club applications will continue to be assessed on a case-by-case basis." —AFP

## Celtic withstand Hearts attack to keep pressure on Rangers

**GLASGOW:** Celtic survived a second-half onslaught to beat Hearts 2-1 and remain four points behind Rangers at the top of the Scottish Premiership ahead of next week's Old Firm clash. Rangers were also victorious on Wednesday as they labored to a 1-0 home win over Livingston. Celtic were dominant in the first half at Tynecastle as Reo Hatate's long-range strike to net his first goal for the club and Giorgos Giakoumakis' inventive finish put the visitors 2-0 up at the break.

The Hoops were without a number of key players due to injury and international duty and it showed as they tired in the second period. Liam Boyce pulled a goal back just after the hour mark and third-placed Hearts looked set for at least a point when Matt O'Riley handled inside the area on his Celtic debut. Boyce sent Joe Hart the wrong way from the penalty spot, but the ball came back off the inside of the post and behind for a goal kick.

Ange Postecoglou's men were camped in their own half in the closing stages but held out for a vital three points in their quest to chase down Rangers at the top of the table. "It was a cracking game," said Postecoglou. "I'm super pleased and very proud of the players. "We had some challenges in terms of personnel but credit to the players, they were fantastic. We played well, created a lot of opportunities and probably should have killed the game off a bit earlier."

There are still three Old Firm clashes to come this season, the first of which is at Celtic Park next Wednesday. Rangers looked like they might drop points for the second consecutive league game for long spells at Ibrox. However, Scott Arfield came off the bench to score the only goal of the game 15 minutes from time with an exquisite lob over Max Stryjek into the far corner.

"Tonight was about getting the win," said Rangers manager Giovanni van Bronckhorst, who was also missing a number of first-team regulars due to injury, suspension and international duty. At the bottom of the table, St Johnstone snapped a 10-game losing streak, but remain two points behind Dundee after a 0-0 draw at Dens Park. Ross County remain just four points further in front after blowing the lead to lose 2-1 at Dundee United. Motherwell retain a two-point cushion over Hibs in the battle for fourth after they drew 0-0 at Fir Park. —AFP

## Super Bowl guests to be given KN95 masks

**LOS ANGELES:** All attendees at next month's Super Bowl will be provided with KN95 masks and reminded to wear face coverings at all times unless eating or drinking, Los Angeles health officials have said. Los Angeles County public health director Barbara Ferrer said masks would be given to all spectators and guests at SoFi Stadium for the NFL championship game on February 13, the biggest event on the US sporting calendar.

"At the Super Bowl, every fan will receive a KN95 mask, and safety team members will be reminding fans ... to keep their masks on unless they're actively eating or drinking," Ferrer said. "Masks are required at all times to enter all of the events, to be in common areas, to purchase at concession stands and at indoor shops," she added. The distribution of KN95 masks is part of a range of COVID-19 measures being implemented for the Super Bowl.

Ferrer said Los Angeles County was working with the NFL to offer free rapid tests and vaccinations at the Super Bowl Experience, a fan zone at the Los Angeles Convention Center which opens on February 5. Ferrer said individuals who got vaccinated at the site would gain free admission to the Convention Center. All attendees will also receive a free take-home rapid-test kit. Public health staff will be on duty at all Super Bowl-related events to ensure compliance of COVID-19 rules, Ferrer added.



**CALIFORNIA:** In this file photo, Los Angeles Rams fans get ready for the game between the Los Angeles Rams and the Arizona Cardinals in the NFC Wild Card Playoff game. All attendees at next month's Super Bowl will be provided with KN95 masks and reminded to wear face coverings at all times unless eating or drinking. —AFP

"All of these events will comply with vaccination and testing requirements for mega-events, and for some of the smaller events, they will comply with LA city's requirements for people to be fully vaccinated to enter into those venues," Ferrer said. "Staff will be assigned to be at all event locations that will ensure compliance with the require-

ments." Long-standing regulations in Los Angeles already require attendees at large sporting events to show proof of vaccination or evidence of a negative COVID-19 test. Los Angeles has seen an explosion of COVID-19 cases due to the Omicron variant, although health officials said Tuesday cases were trending downward. —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	Khalidiya	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
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## Clinics

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### CHANGE OF NAME

**Rajaraman Sundarraj** Son of Sundarraj and Janaki bearing an Indian passport number: Z5185102 and having an address No- 4A-1 Moongikollai street, Kumbakonam (po) Tanjore Dt., Tamilnadu 612001 had embraced Islam and changed the name as **RAJA MOHAMMED** is duly authenticated by AL-IFTA and Islamic Research sector AL-IFTA dept. Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Kuwait, under reference no. F2091979. **(C 1416)** 27-1-2022

**I, Kapil Mohan** holder of passport number V9364954, do declare adding surname George along with given name Kapil Mohan. Full name to be **Kapil Mohan George**. **(C1415)**

**I, Ramachandran Rajesh** Mappilatharayil, Mappilatharayil House, Thiruvanchoor P.O., Kottayam, holder of Indian Passport No 6 P0378133 issued at Kuwait, do hereby change of my name as **Rajesh Mappilatharayil Ramachandran** with immediate effect. **(C1414)**

**I have** changed my name from Steven Jaorawala to **Mustaali Muzaffar Hussain** as per affidavit. **(C1413)** 26-1-2022

**I, Alba Rodrigues**, r/o H.No. 114/1, Padriguelem Dramapur South Goa 403725, would like to change my name from **Alba Kadam** to **Alba Rodrigues**. Hereinafter in all my dealings and documents I will be known by name **Alba Rodrigues**. **(C 1412)** 25-1-2022



## Ruthless Barty books first Open final

Barty to meet powerhouse Collins in Australian Open final



MELBOURNE: Australia's Ashleigh Barty hits a shot against Madison Keys of the US during their women's singles semi-final match on day eleven of the Australian Open tennis tournament yesterday. (Inset) Danielle Collins of the US hits a return against Poland's Iga Swiatek during their women's singles semi-final match. — AFP

MELBOURNE: A ruthless Ashleigh Barty swept into her first Australian Open final yesterday with a clinical, straight-sets demolition of Madison Keys to set-up a title match with the hard-hitting Danielle Collins. The world number one overwhelmed 51st-ranked Keys 6-1, 6-3 in just 62 minutes with another American awaiting after the all-business Collins crushed Polish seventh seed Iga Swiatek 6-4, 6-1.

Barty is the first Australian woman into the decider of her home Grand Slam since Wendy Turnbull in 1980 and is aiming to become the first winner since Chris O'Neil two years earlier. But the tenacious Collins stands in her way on Saturday with the 28-year-old enjoying a second coming after surgery last year for endometriosis left her pain free. Nine months on and she has 32-7 win-loss record, capturing her maiden WTA singles titles last year in Palermo then San Jose.

After making the semi-finals at Melbourne in

2019, she is now in a first Slam final and will break into the top 10 for the first time to cap a remarkable comeback. "To play against the number one player in the world in her home country, it's going to be spectacular," said Collins of the final. "I couldn't be happier. It's been such a journey, so many years of hard work." Barty, though, has been rampant so far, dropping serve just once through six matches and is yet to drop a set as she powered through the top half of the women's draw.

She is also looking to add to her 2019 French Open and 2021 Wimbledon titles and is on a 10-match win streak to start the year. "To be in the finals weekend of your home Grand Slam is what a lot of Aussie players dream of. Yeah, it's going to be an incredible experience come Saturday," said Barty. "Obviously I was able to make Maddie uncomfortable and make her press, and that was kind of part of the plan, as well. I felt like we did a

really good job all in all of playing the match in kind of our terms." Barty paid tribute to Keys, a former top-10 player who is on the rise again after some difficult years. "It's just so nice to see her back where she belongs," said Barty. "She's an amazing human being."

The top seed, who played cricket with her team on Wednesday to relax, was once more in full command of her game with an attacking forehand and lethal backhand slice. The Australian immediately pressured Keys' serve to create a break point that she converted with a cross-court winner to assert early control. She consolidated as Keys struggled to get her racquet on the ball and the American was broken again in the fifth game.

Keys finally won her first points on the Barty serve in the next game, but it was a blip as the Australian stormed 5-1 in front before a double fault handed her two set points and she slammed a

forehand return to convert. It went with serve to 2-2 in set two before Barty stepped up a gear, with a passing shot earning another break to 4-2 clear and there was no way back for the American. Collins also flew out of the blocks against former French Open champion Swiatek, racing to a 4-0 first set lead.

A nervous Swiatek double faulted in the opening game to gift Collins an early break and the unrelenting American's fierce groundstrokes earned her another. But the gutsy Pole fought back as Collins double faulted to give a break-point opportunity. But the all-action American, who opted not to sit down and rest at each change of ends, recomposed herself to serve out the set. Collins was now on a mission and quickly broke to take charge of the second set as she jumped on Swiatek's second serve, breaking again to race 3-0 clear and it was all over for the 20-year-old. — AFP

## Surging Cavaliers surprise Bucks as Suns scorch Jazz

LOA ANGELES: The Cleveland Cavaliers continued their NBA resurgence Wednesday with a 115-99 victory over the reigning champion Milwaukee Bucks that helped propel them into third place in the Eastern Conference. As the Miami Heat maintained their hold on top spot in the east with a 110-96 victory over the New York Knicks, the Cavs slipped ahead of the Bucks and into fourth with their eighth win in nine games.

They moved up another spot when the short-handed Brooklyn Nets fell to Nikola Jokic and the Denver Nuggets 124-118. It's not so tight at the top in the West, where the Phoenix Suns improved their league-leading record with a 105-97 victory over the Utah Jazz. Devin Booker scored 43 points to lead the Suns, setting a franchise record with the 16th 40-point game of his career.

He signaled his intentions with 21 points in the first quarter, three more than the Jazz managed as the Suns took a 39-18 lead. Utah responded and trailed by just two at halftime. Down by 10 heading into the fourth quarter, the Jazz cut the deficit to two points with 2:14 to play only for the Suns to pull away for an eighth straight win. In Cleveland, Kevin Love scored 25 points, Cedi Osman added 23 and the Cavaliers drained 19 three-pointers as they continued their impressive run of form.

"It was huge," veteran Love said of the victory over the reigning champions. "We beat a very, very good team tonight." "And if we stay true to our principles and true to who we are as a team, I think the sky's the limit for us," Love added. Two-time NBA Most Valuable Player Giannis Antetokounmpo returned from a one-game injury absence to score 26 points for Milwaukee. But the Greek star had seven of the Bucks' 19 turnovers -



CLEVELAND: Khris Middleton #22 of the Milwaukee Bucks shoots against Isaac Okoro #35 and Cedi Osman #16 of the Cleveland Cavaliers during the fourth quarter on January 26, 2022. — AFP

which led to 31 Cavaliers points. Bobby Portis scored 22 points and Khris Middleton chipped in 21 for the Bucks, who led by 12 in the first quarter, trailed by eight at halftime and never led in the second half. In Miami, Duncan Robinson led the Heat with 25 points, Jimmy Butler scored 22 and Tyler Herro returned after missing three games over COVID concerns to score 21 off the bench as the Heat led wire-to-wire against the Knicks. They maintained a half-game lead atop the East over the Chicago Bulls, who beat the Toronto Raptors 111-105.

The Nets, third in the East going into the night, were still without injured Kevin Durant and Kyrie Irving - whose decision not to be vaccinated for COVID-19 means he cannot play home games. James Harden, who had a 33-point triple-double in a loss to the Lakers on Tuesday, sat out with a sore hamstring, but the Nets still managed to challenge a Nuggets team led by reigning MVP Jokic's 26 points and 10 rebounds. The Nets led 65-54 after a first half that featured 14 lead changes. But Denver out-scored them 42-26 in the third quarter and never trailed in the fourth.

Elsewhere, the Charlotte Hornets made 24 three-pointers in a 158-126 victory over the Indiana Pacers - racking up the highest points total in an NBA game this season and setting a club record for most points scored in a game. Kelly Oubre made 10 three-pointers on the way to a career-high 39 points. LaMelo Ball posted his fourth triple-double of the season with 29 points, 13 assists and 10 rebounds. In San Antonio, Ja Morant matched a season high with 41 points to lead the Memphis Grizzlies, who withstood a triple-double of 16 points, 10 rebounds and 11 assists by Dejounte Murray in a 118-110 victory over the Spurs.

The Los Angeles Clippers, coming off an epic comeback victory over the Washington Wizards on Tuesday, rallied again to beat the Magic 111-102 in Orlando. The Clippers erased a 14-point deficit - small change compared with the 35-point hole they escaped against Washington - and out-scored Orlando 35-24 in the fourth quarter to get to 25-25 for the season. Amir Coffey scored 19 points and Luke Kennard, whose four-point play sealed Tuesday's win, added 17. — AFP

## Japan beat China; 4th straight World Cup qualifying win

SAITAMA: Japan beat China 2-0 yesterday to continue their resurgence in World Cup qualifying with their fourth straight win. Yuya Osako buried a first-half penalty to put the four-time Asian champions in control in Saitama, north of Tokyo, before Junya Ito doubled their lead after the break. The win meant Japan stayed second in Group B behind leaders Saudi Arabia, who they host at the same stadium next Tuesday.

But Australia remained one point behind Japan in the battle for the two automatic qualifying places for Qatar, after a comfortable 4-0 home win over Vietnam. Japan took a 13th-minute lead after China defender Wang Shenchao slid in to block Junya Ito's cross but hit the ball with his arm. Osako made no mistake from the penalty spot despite China

goalkeeper Yan Junling diving the right way. The hosts pressed home their advantage in the 61st minute when Ito rose to head home substitute Yuta Nakayama's cross.

China, who were playing their first game under new manager Li Xiaopeng, saw their slim hopes of reaching the World Cup all but ended by the defeat. Australia, with manager Graham Arnold absent after testing positive for Covid-19, made light work of Vietnam in Melbourne. Jamie McLaren opened the scoring in the 30th minute before Tom Rogic notched a second in first-half injury time. Craig Goodwin and Riley McGree added two more after the break to wrap up the win for the home side. Whipping boys Vietnam stayed bottom of the group with no points from seven games. — AFP



SAITAMA: Japan's Yuya Osako (left) and China's Zheng Zheng (center) compete for the ball during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Asian zone qualification football match yesterday. — AFP