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7 Fighting Taliban and mistrust, Pak marks one year polio-free



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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 a

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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