



4 South Korea introduces smart farming technology to Kuwait



5 Putin lauds India with eye on military, energy ties



11 Fadel Othman: North Syria's one-legged kung fu master



16 'Clinical' India thrash New Zealand to top Test rankings



Tehran hopes to turn page in ties with UAE

Iran slams France for selling weapons to Gulf states



TEHRAN: Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi meets UAE National Security Advisor Sheikh Tahnoun bin Zayed Al-Nahyan yesterday. — AFP

TEHRAN: Iran expressed hopes yesterday to turn the page in its ties with the United Arab Emirates during a rare visit by a senior official from the Gulf Arab country. UAE National Security Advisor Sheikh Tahnoun bin Zayed Al-Nahyan arrived in the country earlier yesterday at the invitation of Ali Shamkhani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council. His visit also included a meeting with ultraconservative Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, state media said.

The trip was the first of its kind since relations between the two countries were downgraded in 2016. That came after UAE ally Saudi Arabia severed ties with the Islamic republic after protesters attacked Saudi diplomatic missions over Riyadh's execution of a revered Shiite cleric. "Good relations with the countries of the region are one of the priorities of the new government's foreign policy," Raisi said during the meeting, according to the official news agency IRNA.

"We therefore welcome the development of relations with the United Arab Emirates," he said. "Relations between two Muslim countries should not be affected by the interference of foreigners,"

Raisi added. Iran and Saudi Arabia, along with its allies in the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council, back opposite sides in various armed and political conflicts in the region, most notably in Yemen and Syria.

But in the past months there have been signs of rapprochement as Saudi Arabia and Iran have held several rounds of talks aimed at improving ties. Shamkhani "expressed hopes that the visit... would be the start of a new period of relations between the two countries", an official statement said. He also said he hopes it would "pave the way to the consolidation and overall expansion of bilateral relations", the statement added.

Earlier in the day, Tehran accused France of "destabilizing" the region by selling arms to Gulf countries, days after Paris struck a record 14-billion-euro deal with the United Arab Emirates for 80 Rafale fighter jets. The UAE security advisor's visit coincides with that of Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Al-Meqdad, who met his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir-Abdollahian yesterday. "We had a good discussion earlier," Amir-Abdollahian said at a joint news conference. — AFP

News in brief

'New mechanism' for driving licenses

KUWAIT: Senior interior ministry officials discussed proposals and studies on a new advanced mechanism to issue driving licenses to residents, the ministry said in a statement yesterday. This came during a meeting Undersecretary Lt Gen Sheikh Faisal Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah held with officials at the traffic department to discuss recommendations on addressing the problem of traffic jams in Kuwait. No other details were given about the nature of the new mechanism or when it would be put in place.

Arms firms avoid COVID slump

STOCKHOLM: The world's biggest weapons manufacturers largely avoided the economic downturn caused by COVID-19 and recorded a growth in profits last year for the sixth year in a row, according to a report published yesterday. Overall, the 100 top weapons firms saw their profits rise by 1.3 percent on 2019 to a record \$531 billion, despite the global economy contracting by more than three percent. — AFP (See Page 8)

Suu Kyi jailed for 2 years

YANGON: Myanmar's junta chief reduced the prison sentence of ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi to two years yesterday, after she was jailed for four years for incitement against the military and breaching COVID rules. Former president Win Myint was also initially jailed for four years on the same charges. Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing later "pardoned" the sentences of both to "two years imprisonment". — AFP (See Page 5)

'More lethal' pandemic seen

LONDON: The lead developer of the Oxford/AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine warned the next pandemic could be "more lethal", urging better preparedness in a speech set to be aired yesterday. Sarah Gilbert, who is credited with saving millions of lives through her role in designing the jab, said the world must build on key lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic. — AFP

Turkey, Qatar push to reopen Kabul airport

DOHA: Turkey and Qatar yesterday raised the possibility of jointly operating Afghanistan's Taliban-controlled airport, as President Recep Tayyip Erdogan arrived for two days of talks in Doha. Afghans and foreign nationals fled the country through the facility as the hardline Islamist movement took power in August following two decades of war.

But many are still seeking to flee

the conflict-scarred nation, which is facing the threat of winter food shortages and economic collapse. "We are going to act together," Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu told a joint press briefing with his Qatari counterpart ahead of Erdogan's arrival. "Qatar and Turkey are continuously working with the interim government in Afghanistan to reach an agreement to open the airport (so it can function) normally," Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani added.

Erdogan's visit comes as Turkey seeks to rebuild relations with former rivals in the energy-rich

Continued on Page 2

Anti-apartheid veteran Ebrahim dies aged 84

JOHANNESBURG: Ebrahim Ismail Ebrahim, a veteran of the fight against apartheid who spent years imprisoned on Robben Island alongside Nelson Mandela, died yesterday aged 84. South Africa's ruling party announced. Ebrahim passed away at his

Johannesburg home after a long illness, the African National Congress (ANC) said in a statement. He "was a longstanding member of the ANC, a patriot who served his country in different capacities with humility, dedication and distinction," the party said.

A largely unsung figure in the chronicles of apartheid, Ebrahim joined the struggle against white-minority rule in his early teens, becoming an ANC youth activist in 1952. His life followed the arc of the liberation movement - beginning with non-violent protests, becoming a guerrilla fighter, getting imprisoned on Robben Island twice, and eventually joining the democratic government.

Iraqi fishermen caught in net of water frontiers

AL-FAW, Iraq: On the banks of the Shatt al-Arab waterway, Iraqi fishermen live in constant fear of arrest by Iranian and Kuwaiti forces for mistakenly straying across frontiers with former enemy countries. About 15 km from where the mighty Tigris and the Euphrates rivers merge and flow out to the Gulf lies the fishing port of Al-Faw.

The port town has been on the front line of two wars that have shaped Iraq's modern history - in the 1980s against Iran and then after Saddam

Hussein's August 1990 invasion of Kuwait. On the opposite bank of the Shatt al-Arab, the green-white-red flag of Iran flutters in the wind, alongside portraits of Ayatollah Khomeini, founder of the Islamic republic, and his successor as supreme guide, Ali Khamenei.

"We have a lot of problems with the Iranians," said Abdallah, an Iraqi fisherman who preferred not to give his surname. "If we cross the border because of the current, they arrest us." In the past, the border along the invisible median line of the Shatt al-Arab has been a casus belli.

In Sept 1980, Saddam's forces invaded after scrapping the 1975 Algiers agreement that aimed to put an end to disputes over the borderline.

Continued on Page 2



DOHA: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his wife Emine are welcomed by Qatari Finance Minister Ali bin Ahmed Al-Kuwari upon their arrival at Hamad International Airport yesterday. — AFP



Ebrahim Ismail Ebrahim

Continued on Page 2



AL-FAW, Iraq: An Iraqi youth carries freshly-caught fish in this southern Iraqi port city on Oct 26, 2021. — AFP

Local

Kuwait Amir receives invitation for United Nations conference in Doha



KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Ambassador of Qatar to Kuwait Ali bin Abdullah Al-Mahmoud. — KUNA photos

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah reads the invitation.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday an invitation addressed to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah from Qatar's Amir Sheikh

Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, to participate in the fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries. The event will be on January 23-27, 2022 and will be held in Doha. Ambassador of Qatar to Kuwait Ali bin Abdullah

Al-Mahmoud delivered the invitation. The meeting was attended by Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, Amiri Diwan Undersecretary, Director of His Highness the Amir Bureau Ambassador Ahmad

Fahad Al-Fahad, Director of the Office of His Highness the Crown Prince Lt Gen Jamal Mohammad Al-Dhiyab, and Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs in the Office of His Highness the Crown Prince Mazen Al-Issa. — KUNA

Saudi Crown Prince Gulf tour to cement inter-GCC bonds

RIYADH: The Gulf tour by the Saudi Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Prince Mohammad bin Salman Al-Saud will feature examination of a host of files and cement inter-GCC solidarity, according to prominent personalities. Fadl Al-Bouainain, member of the Saudi Shura Council, said in a statement to KUNA that the Saudi leadership is keen on strengthening joint Gulf action and attaining optimum integration among the GCC states for sake of regional security and stability. Moreover, Riyadh aspires to bolster economic prosperity in the Councils

member states. The Crown Prince's Gulf tour is designed to bolster the joint GCC action, attain highest form of merger in various spheres namely in the security and economic sectors. Additionally, his mission will affirm significance of brotherly-level meetings for boosting the inter-GCC relations, tackling challenges and unifying views toward various crucial files, he said.

Bouainain elaborated, saying the Kingdom Vision 2030, launched by Crown Prince Mohammad, not only focuses on the local economy but also calls for creating economic links with the neighboring states. The security file, he has added, is a main basis upon which all development and economic objectives are placed, also noting that the GCC countries have been facing emerging dangers such as sabotage schemes. Meanwhile, Dr Ibrahim Al-Nahas, member of the Saudi Shura Council, said the tour is complementary to previous coordination among the GCC countries regarding key files that collectively affect the council member countries.

Dr Nahas indicated that among the topics on the tables of talks with the officials due to meet with the Crown Prince would be combating terrorism and extremism. Moreover, he said, the tour will address "a certain mechanism to beef up the confrontation against the Iranian regime that continues to support terrorist organizations and groups, meddle in internal affairs of the GCC and Arab States, thus the need arises in this context to unify the efforts of the GCC states." Furthermore, the Crown Prince's tour emits a message to the global and regional communities: that the GCC states share concerns and policies at the political and security levels.

Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman is kicking off his Gulf tour by visiting the Sultanate of Oman, due to its geopolitical role and status for tackling the Yemeni crisis — being a nation that shares borders with Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Mohammad Al-Jahni, editor-in-chief of the Saudi newspaper 'Al-Bilad', has affirmed that a



Prince Mohammad bin Salman Al-Saud

main objective of the tour is beefing up the GCC countries' solidarity. The GCC, established in the early 1980s, comprises Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain and Kuwait. — KUNA

Turkey, Qatar push to reopen...

Continued from Page 1

Gulf region, including the United Arab Emirates, whose crown prince last month visited Turkey for the first time since 2012. Simmering tensions between Ankara and its Gulf rivals escalated after a Saudi Arabia-led blockade on Qatar by Arab coun-

tries in 2017. Ankara backed Qatar in the dispute, and the two countries have grown closer ever since.

Erdogan, whose country is reeling from a fresh economic crisis and is searching foreign investment and trade, said he wanted to use the trip to foster closer relations with all Gulf states. "We are in favor of strengthening our relations with all the Gulf countries," Erdogan told reporters at an Istanbul airport before leaving for Doha. "The blockade and sanctions imposed on Qatar have been lifted as of the start of this year. Right now, solidarity is being restored among Gulf countries," Erdogan said. — AFP

Iraqi fishermen caught in net of...

Continued from Page 1

After the 2003 US-led invasion, Iraq and Iran said they wanted to return to the agreement, against the backdrop of growing Iranian influence in its Arab neighbor.

Iraqi fishermen at Al-Faw, such as Tareq Ziad, complain of "being harassed". When their boats leave the Shatt al-Arab and head for the open seas of the Gulf, they often find themselves in Kuwaiti and Iranian waters because of the currents. The Iranians "put you in prison and make you pay a fine of \$3,000. That is what happened to my brother a few days ago. He was arrested by an Iranian river patrol and he paid \$3,000," Ziad said. Iranian authorities, contacted by AFP, did not respond to a request for comment.

The head of the fishermen's union in Al-Faw, Badran Al-Tamimi, said they have "no support from the (Iraqi) government". Kuwait also arrests Iraqi fishermen who "inadvertently" venture into the territorial waters of the state, he said. "Yesterday evening,

I went to the Kuwaiti border to bring back three fishermen who were arrested. This week, I have been there three or four times," Tamimi said. A Kuwaiti security official, on condition of anonymity, told AFP: "People seized in the border areas are handed over, in good health, by the ground forces, in coordination with the Iraqi side."

The fishermen of Al-Faw also have environmental challenges to grapple with. "We go out to sea for eight to 10 days and when we return, we've caught between 500 kilograms and one ton, compared to three or four tons 20 years ago," complained fisherman Abdallah. Fishing expeditions have become much shorter and the boundaries are closely monitored by Iraq's neighbors. In addition, the price of fuel has shot up.

As Iraqi rivers dry up due to drought and the construction of dams in Iran and Turkey, so too does the amount of seasonal fish that locals relied on for food. And while the river waters ebb to ever lower levels, the Gulf rises. "We are seeing more and more marine species in the river as the water becomes saline," said Iyad Abdelmohsen, a marine biologist at Baghdad's Al-Mustansiriyah University. And "human activities, such as sewage and waste" that end up in Iraq's waterways are causing "digestive illnesses, diarrhea and even cholera," he said. — AFP

Robben Island, where he studied alongside Mandela and shared a cell with former president Jacob Zuma.

"In prison we were assaulted, starved, under-clothed and exposed to bitter cold weather," he wrote later in a memoir. "We were sworn at and humiliated in the most degrading manner. We broke stones and ate a measly meal. For years we were made to stand stark naked for long periods of time in an open courtyard, sometimes in biting cold weather. One of my close friends died of exposure."

Nonetheless, Ebrahim used his prison days to obtain two university degrees. After his release, he went into exile to rejoin the ANC. But in 1986 he was kidnapped by apartheid agents in neighboring Swaziland, tortured and then imprisoned again on Robben Island. Mandela tasked him with consulting fellow political prisoners on the talks that eventually led to the end of apartheid and the transition to democracy.

Ebrahim was freed in 1991 and won a seat in parliament in the first democratic elections. He later served as a diplomat and mediator in conflicts including between the Zionist entity and the Palestinians, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, as well as in Burundi, Kosovo, Bolivia and Nepal. In an interview with AFP in June 2021, Ebrahim said he was deeply concerned that the fruits of democracy had not been spread evenly, pointing to deep poverty and unemployment. — AFP

Reefs of western Indian Ocean at risk of collapse

NAIROBI: Rising sea temperatures and overfishing threaten coral reefs in the western Indian Ocean with complete collapse in the next 50 years, according to a groundbreaking study of these marine ecosystems. The findings, published in the journal Nature Sustainability yesterday, warned that reefs along the eastern coast of Africa and island nations like Mauritius and Seychelles faced a high risk of extinction unless urgent action was taken.

For the first time, researchers were able to assess the vulnerability of individual reefs across the vast western reaches of the Indian Ocean, and identify the main threats to coral health. They found that all reefs in this region faced "complete ecosystem collapse and irreversible damage" within decades, and that ocean warming meant some coral habitats were already critically endangered.

"The findings are quite serious. These reefs are vulnerable to collapse," lead author David Obura, founding director at CORDIO East Africa, a Kenya-based oceans research institute, told AFP. "There's nowhere in the region where the reefs are in full health. They've all declined somewhat, and that will continue."

The study, co-authored with the International Union for Conservation of Nature, assessed 11,919 sq km of reef, representing about five percent of the global total. Reefs fringing picturesque island nations like Mauritius, Seychelles, the Comoros and Madagascar - popular ecotourism destinations heavily reliant on their marine environment - were most at risk, researchers said.

Coral reefs cover only a tiny fraction - 0.2 percent - of the ocean floor, but they are home to at least a quarter of all marine animals and plants.



All coral reefs in the western Indian Ocean are 'at high risk of collapse in the next 50 years'.

Besides anchoring marine ecosystems, they also provide protein, jobs and protection from storms and shoreline erosion for hundreds of millions of people worldwide. Obura said healthy reefs were "very valuable" and their loss would prove "a double whammy". "For biodiversity, but also all sorts of coastal economies that depend on reefs," he said. Climate change posed the biggest threat to coral health overall in the western Indian Ocean, where scientists say seawater temperatures are warming faster than in other parts of the globe.

Oceans absorb more than 90 percent of the excess heat from greenhouse gas emissions, shielding land surfaces but generating huge, long-lasting marine heatwaves that are pushing many species of corals past their limits of tolerance. But along the east coast of continental Africa from Kenya to South Africa, pressure from overfishing was also identified in this latest study as another major scourge on reef ecosystems.

This underscored the need to urgently address both global threats to coral reefs from climate change, and local ones such as overfishing, Obura said. "We need to give these reefs the best chance. In order to do that, we have to reduce the drivers, reverse the pressure on reefs," he said. — AFP

Anti-apartheid veteran Ebrahim...

Continued from Page 1

resistance campaigns in India, Ebrahim attended speeches by Albert Luthuli, the ANC leader who in 1960 became the first African to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

He tried joining protest campaigns, but the liberation parties would not let him because of his young age. As an Indian, Ebrahim initially was not allowed to join the ANC. He instead joined the Natal Indian Congress and became a delegate to the landmark Congress of the People in 1955. That meeting gathered activists of all races, pulling together a massive public consultation on how South Africans wanted to be governed. The result was the Freedom Charter, now seen as a foundational document underpinning South African democracy.

As with many others in the movement, the Sharpeville massacre in 1960 changed Ebrahim's mind about peaceful resistance. The sight of police shooting 69 protesters dead pushed him to join the ANC's armed wing. He was arrested in 1963 and imprisoned on

Libya central banks to reunite after seven-year split

TRIPOLI: Libya's rival central banks said yesterday they had reached a reunification deal, seven years after they divided as conflict tore the country apart. The original bank, which manages the North African state's vast oil revenues, had been severed in 2014 when a complex civil war gave rise to rival administrations in the east and west.

But yesterday, the governor of the internationally recognized body in the western capital Tripoli, Seddik Al-Kabir and his eastern-based counterpart Ali Al-Hebri "agreed a detailed plan to launch the unification process", the Tripoli body said in a statement. The meeting was attended by consultants from Deloitte, which in July completed an audit of the two branches.

Libya collapsed into years of violence after the 2011 fall and killing of dictator Muammar Gaddafi in a NATO-backed revolt. A string of state institutions including the central bank split in two during the escalation in 2014 that divided the country, broadly speaking, into eastern and western camps. The existence of two central banks has complicated the handling of Libya's vital oil revenues and control over monetary policy, contributing to runaway inflation and a liquidity crisis despite its vast crude reserves.

But a ceasefire in mid-2020 allowed for reunification efforts to begin, and even before the truce was formalized, Deloitte International was charged with auditing the institutions. United Nations envoy Jan Kubic delivered the completed audit report to interim Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah in July this year. The division has caused major financial losses and a spike in public debt to more than \$100 billion, according to the bank. The reunification deal comes before Libya is set to hold elections on Dec 24 aimed at moving past the decade of violence. — AFP

Local

Askhanani awarded Knighthood of the Order of the Star of Italy

For his contributions in promoting relations between Kuwait and Italy

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: For his exemplary contribution to the promotion of friendly relations between Kuwait and Italy, Dr Hassan Askhanani, Director of the Archeology Museum and Laboratory at the College of Social Sciences, Kuwait University, was bestowed the Knighthood of the Order of the Star of Italy by the Italian president, one of the highest recognitions for foreigners. The merit and insignia reflect and affirms Italy's gratitude to the Kuwaiti people for their significant promotion and cooperation for bilateral ties.

"On behalf of the President of the Republic of Italy Sergio Mattarella, Dr Ashkhanani significantly contributed to the promotion of our warm and friendly ties, especially in the area of archeology," Carlo Baldocci, Ambassador of Italy to Kuwait, told Kuwait Times after the honoring ceremony. "This is not the first time we bestowed this award to the people of Kuwait. We have given this award to several people since the beginning of our diplomatic ties with Kuwait," he said.

"In the coming years, we are going to focus on collaboration in research,

especially on the archeological finds of our team on Failaka Island. We started archeological research on Failaka several years ago. Normally we have a camp for our team there, but in the past year, we stopped because of the pandemic. This year we shall restart once again from January and maybe up until February next year to see more in this area. Dr Ashkhanani has been very helpful and has been part of the archeological research. This is a very important recognition and we are honored to present this knighthood to the man of the hour - Dr Ashkhanani," he added.

Ashkhanani was glad to receive the award from the president of Italy. "This knighthood is highly appreciated, especially coming from President Sergio Mattarella himself. I am much honored to be awarded this very significant award. Thank you very much to all the people who were part of my work which landed me on this stage to receive the knighthood. I got the opportunity to collaborate with Rome University last year; Kuwait University was the host of the archeological research and we gained lots of experience and knowledge from them. We benefited from it, from our students to our professors," he said.



KUWAIT: Dr Hassan Askhanani poses with the Knighthood of the Order of the Star of Italy.



Ambassador of Italy to Kuwait Carlo Baldocci (center) receives a memento from Kuwait University's College of Social Sciences. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

He said he had connections with the Italian mission here because he was in the archeological institute and it was part of his PhD studies. "I've done my PhD in archeology (Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf) and have provided the Italian team with all the information needed for their archeological dig and

research, like photographs, laboratories and technical support for their team," Ashkhanani said.

The Order of the Star of Italy is a knighthood awarded by the President of the Republic of Italy to Italian individuals living abroad or foreigners who have made a significant

contribution to promoting friendly relations and cooperation between Italy and countries around the world. Italy has given this medal to a number of top officials as well as people and entrepreneurs in the sectors of politics, economy, justice and culture.

Visa transfer halt may create problems for schools

KUWAIT: As a full return to schools draws near with the start of the second school term on Feb 13, an educational source said the

decision of the Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) to suspend transfer of business visas to residency permits may create a crisis for some private schools, particularly Pakistani, Philippine and Indian schools, because some schools are suffering a severe shortage of teachers, drivers, janitors and administrators.

The source said timings of the school year differ for some communities. "There are some who start the school year in March or April

and there is no problem with that as far as full or partial return is concerned for the current hybrid system, but the important thing is for every school to be ready, mainly with regards to human resources," said the source.

The source further indicated that each school has its own circumstances that may differ from others, "and the education ministry must present all facilities to private schools and remove all obstacles from their path." The education sector must be excluded from the

business visa transfer ban because work in this sector is still unstable despite the full return of normal life to the country, the source argued.

He said all private schools are complying with health protocols and precautionary measures, but the major problem is in the procedures of the documentary cycle in issuing work permits. He hoped the education ministry in cooperation with other government agencies will exclude the education sector from this cycle.

Palestine thanks Kuwait for blocking Zionist entity's ships

KUWAIT: Ambassador of Palestine to Kuwait Rami Tahboub expressed appreciation to Kuwait for a recent government decision to suspend entry of cargo ships carrying goods to and from the Zionist entity. "On behalf of President of Palestine Mahmoud Abbas as well as the government and people of Palestine, I would like to express gratitude to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, his highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah for the Kuwaiti govern-

ment's decision taken by Minister of Public Works, Minister of Commerce and Information Technology Dr Rana Al-Fares to suspend entry of cargo ships carrying goods to and from occupied Palestine," he said in a statement.

This decision is yet another proof that the Palestinian cause remains a top priority for Kuwait, Tahboub said, noting that it further motivates the Palestinian people in their struggle against the Zionist entity. "The decision reasserts Kuwait's supportive position towards the Palestinian cause, and dealing with it as a non-negotiable issue of principle," he said.



Palestinian Ambassador Rami Tahboub

Kuwaitis in Germany urged to follow new coronavirus countermeasures

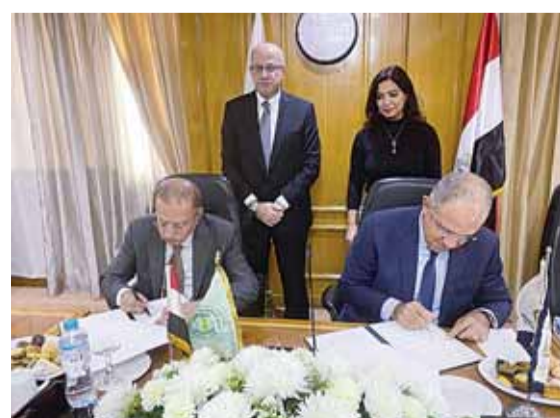
BERLIN: Kuwait's Embassy in Germany yesterday urged Kuwaiti citizens on German lands to follow new coronavirus countermeasures the German government put into effect. The embassy called on citizens to pay attention to new guidelines proposed by German authorities. It added that these measures are an expansion of what is known as the 2G rule, which states that those vaccinated or recovered could be admitted into restaurants, hotels, pools, gyms, theaters and other normal life practices. It added that the new requirements include tightening measures against unvaccinated people. For instance, they are not permitted to meet with more than two people from another family. It indicated that the only exception they are allowed is that they will be granted entry into convenience stores like super-

markets and pharmacies.

Additionally, pharmacists and dentist will be allowed to administer vaccine shots in order to expand vaccination campaign as much as possible and wearing masks will be mandatory in schools. As for sports activities and cultural events, attendance will be limited to vaccinated and recovered people, and will not exceed 30 to 50 percent of the total capacity. For example, audiences in closed halls must not exceed 5,000 people and 30,000 in open areas with committing to wearing masks. Gatherings in streets and piazzas, and fireworks to celebrate New Year's Eve will not be permitted. Moreover, it is indicated that there is a directive to impose mandatory vaccination by February 2022 via parliamentary voting. —KUNA

Kuwait, Egypt industry bodies sign cooperation agreement

CAIRO: A Kuwait-based industry body has signed an agreement with its counterpart in Egypt as part of efforts to bolster scientific research and give impetus to joint projects. As per the deal agreed between the Kuwait-headquartered Arab Planning Institute and the Federation of Egyptian Industries, the respective workforces of both bodies will be given opportunities to hone their skills with the desired goal of "more efficient" output, according to a memorandum of understanding. The deal will also allow both sides to hold joint workshops and seminars as viable platforms for the exchange of knowhow, with particular focus given to common development plans, the Arab Planning Institute said in a statement yesterday. The agreement was coinked by the institute's Director General Badr



CAIRO: Arab Planning Institute's Director General Badr Malallah and Chairman of the Federation of Egyptian Industries Mohammad Al-Swaidi sign the agreement in Cairo, Egypt. —KUNA

Malallah and Chairman of the Federation of Egyptian Industries Mohammad Al-Swaidi at the federation's headquarters in Cairo, Egypt. —KUNA

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Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A seagull feeds at a beach north of Kuwait City on Sunday. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

News in brief

Society announces
30 scholarships

KUWAIT: Director General of Kuwait Humanitarian Friendship Society Khaled bin Sabt said the administration is keen on reaching its goals for which the society was founded, and through one of its projects to support needy families. He said that due student fees were paid for a large number of students to enable them to continue their studies and move to the next stage of their education. He said that out of the society's keenness on the importance of education, it has allocated 30 scholarships for needy students, with 10 for each stage: elementary, intermediate and secondary, for those who meet the conditions. Bin Sabt thanked all contributors for easing the burden on the needy.



Khaled bin Sabt

Frontliners' rewards
for six departments

KUWAIT: The Civil Service Commission approved lists of frontliners' rewards for six new departments, raising the total of state departments whose lists were approved to 44. The new departments are the Kuwait Ports Authority, Public Authority for Disability Affairs, Directorate General of Civil Aviation, Financial Investigations Unit, Public Authority for Housing Welfare and General Administration of Customs. The lists were sent to the Ministry of Finance in preparation for payment.

Women's role in
voluntary work

DUBAI: Kuwaiti women have played an outstanding role in voluntary efforts on different local and international levels, Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) said. This came on the sidelines of the society's participation in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Secretary General's pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai on International Volunteer Day (IVD) on Sunday. Speaking to the press in a statement, Asrar Al-Qabandi said that female volunteers of the society made a distinguished example in voluntary action that shows their love of this field. There are many female volunteers in varied fields like medicine, engineering, law, education, and others, she added.

Authority holds event
to empower disabled

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Disability Affairs held yesterday an event dubbed 'empowering the disabled... a national policy' in collaboration with Human Construction Institute and Kuwait University's college of social sciences in United Nations house in Mishref. General Director of the authority Hind Al-Mbailesh said on the sidelines of the event that enabling people with special needs in the banking sector in the past few years was quite fruitful and goes accordingly to the Kuwait 2035 vision. Mbailesh affirmed that the event would contribute to boosting the role of disabled persons in society and start dialogue about affairs and issues relating to the matter.



Tareq El-Sheikh

UN Secretary General's Representative and Resident Coordinator to Kuwait Tareq El-Sheikh said meanwhile that Kuwait is a pioneer in integrating people with disabilities into society, especially in relation to digital inclusion and United Nations developmental program. Sheikh also stressed on the necessity of putting forth policies designed to facilitate the needs and requirements of people with disabilities, commending the role of those partaking in the event.

He reaffirmed intent on continuous collaboration with the Public Authority for Disability Affairs to highlight their ability on complementing the journey of development led by His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The event came as part of International Day of Disabled Persons' activities aiming to spread awareness in that regard. —KUNA

Korea introduces smart
farm technology to Kuwait

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The fourth Smart City Forum 2021 was held yesterday, focusing on the smart farming industry this year. Various presentations were made on smart farm project development, smart farm business promotion policy, Korean smart farm technology, digital agriculture and machine, solar power and smart city application cases among others.

Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to Kuwait Chung Byung-ha welcomed the guests and said the Embassy of the Republic of Korea has hosted the Smart City Forum since 2017. "Last year, we could not hold it, so this marks the fourth forum. By hosting a series of smart city forums, we have shared Korea's experiences in planning and building smart cities with Kuwaiti authorities and its people. This is not just a one-way sharing of our knowledge, but a two-way learning process. We are very pleased to continue this meaningful event."

Today's session will focus on the 'smart farm industry' in the context of smart city development. "We will take stock of the current situation and compare notes about challenges and advancements related to developing smart farms, which I believe is an important component of building smart cities in Kuwait," Chung added.

The concept of a smart farm is to provide optimized cultivating environments for various crops, which can lead to an improvement in production quality and more efficient management of resources. It should be with the application of cutting-edge technologies such as big data, internet of things (IoT) and so on. "It goes beyond the simple automation of facilities. It minimizes the role played by people and permits farmers to effectively control all aspects of growing their crops. It could be managed by mobile devices equipped with specialized applications," stressed Chung.

Some countries were concerned about a food shortage crisis due to logistical lockdowns during the pandemic - smart farming is one of the most competitive solutions to food security. Smart farming contributes to responding to climate change by reducing the release of methane gas. "It will also result in reducing plant diseases and improving the quality of harvested goods with limited resources. Consequently, it will lead to better income for agricultural households. People can cut the use of pesti-



KUWAIT: Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to Kuwait Chung Byung-ha speaks during the Smart City Forum. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Hamed Al-Shatti, the representative of the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources, delivers his speech.

cides and other resources with accurate data-based management," he pointed out.

Smart farming involves advanced technologies, following a training process that will give young farmers and engineers a chance to learn the latest technologies. "In Korea, the government is making an effort to foster young agricultural experts so they can rent plots of land for smart farming at reasonable fees and be provided with low-interest loans. I believe it could be a good food for thought for Kuwait," Chung said.

"I believe the smart farm industry will continue to play a bigger role in the world as the world population grows, coupled with climate changes. Korea has developed experiences in smart farm industry based on its agricultural and ICT technology. I believe that Kuwait and Korea could be good partners in this area," the ambassador said.

Korea and Kuwait have been working together in designing and developing the concept of innovative smart cities in Kuwait. "We believe that creating a sustainable habitation requires us to take a holistic approach. Smart farming is an essential part of building a smart living environment here. Today, I hope we will be able to share what we know and even what we don't know with each other. I am

absolutely sure that today's conversations will help us strengthen our cooperation and move us a bit closer to our smarter and brighter future," concluded Chung.

Hamed Al-Shatti, the representative of the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources, noted that the main goals of PAAAFR are the development of the agricultural, animal and fish resources in Kuwait through implementing food security projects to reach self-sufficiency, as well as focusing on production and sustainability of these projects. This in addition to providing the appropriate conditions to finance and invest by utilizing investments opportunities.

PAAAFR is not limited to agricultural projects - it also focuses on numerous environmental projects through the rehabilitation of terrestrial and marine environments by establishing protected areas and taking the initiative to restore native vegetation of areas affected by the Iraqi invasion, he added. "The Public Authority of Agriculture also focuses on forestation and greening urban areas to combat desertification, as well as park establishments aiming to reduce high temperatures, erosion and wind speed to provide ecosystem services to the public," explained Shatti.

Registration in
'TAMAKAN' training
program continues

KUWAIT: For the third year in a row, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) sponsors 'TAMAKAN' training program for fresh Kuwaiti graduates, as part of its strategic partnership with 'Creative Confidence'. The online registration for 'TAMAKAN' training program for fresh Kuwaiti graduates continues through <https://www.creativeconfidence.co/tamakan/> until December 28, 2021.

The program will start on January 18 until March 27, 2022. TAMAKAN is a full-time commitment program that extends for 10 weeks, five days a week, from 8:00 am - 4:00 pm. The program is a full-time commitment. NBK will be hosting the program and providing a real business challenge that participants will work on into the final stages of the training sessions. Asmaa Bin Hussain, NBK Public Relations Officer, said: "We encourage Kuwaiti nationals who recently graduated from university and are currently unemployed, from all majors to apply."

"The program helps participants gain real, relevant experience and develop their skills," she noted.

"Participants will get exposed to the latest methods and tools that helps them in designing solutions and shaping ideas in any field. After completing the program, participants can add this experience to their resume."

As for the process of joining the program, the applicants should fill an online form and accordingly if the candidate fits the required profile, they will be contacted via email and for an interview. Following all interviews, the candidates will be notified of the results.

NBK believes in the youth of Kuwait and is very keen and committed to support youth development. Its partnership in this program reflects the bank's beliefs and effort in offering unique opportunities for the Kuwaiti youth.

'TAMAKAN' program offers recent graduates a unique development opportunity before starting their first job. 'TAMAKAN' is organized by 'Creative Confidence' in collaboration with NBK. 'Creative Confidence' is a Kuwaiti-based consulting and training company that specializes in creativity, innovation and collaboration.



Asmaa Bin Hussain

ICSK-Junior holds
'Smarticus 2021'

KUWAIT: ICSK-Junior successfully concluded the first edition of inter-branch quiz competition 'Smarticus 2021' recently. Smarticus was an experiment in feeding the soul with thoughts and ideas which were not a part of the routine syllabus.

The theme of Smarticus was Kuwait-India, an enduring bond of friendship. The quiz comprised of eight rounds, addressing topics including personality, cuisine, vocabulary, architecture to name a few. The participants were the students of all the five branches of ICSK, who were accompanied by their mentors. In her inaugural address, Principal Sheryl Dennis mentioned all the participants as winners, since they were representing their schools. Students displayed smart thinking and sharp presence of mind. At the end of the quiz, the participants and mentors were thanked for their propitious presence.

The Chief Guest Secretary Amer Mohammed felicitated the winners and participants during the felicitation ceremony with prizes and certificates. He encouraged the students to take part in quizzing as it is a way to prepare oneself for the future. The winners and other participants shared their views on the Smarticus quiz.



Austria swears in new chancellor

Russia to send Japan tycoon to ISS in return to space tourism

Page 7

Page 6

Putin lauds India with eye on military ties

'We perceive India as a great power and a time-tested friend'

NEW DELHI: Russian President Vladimir Putin lauded India as "a great power" yesterday as he arrived in New Delhi to bolster military and energy ties with a traditional ally being courted by Washington. It is only the Russian leader's second trip abroad since the coronavirus pandemic began—he skipped both the G20 and COP26 summits this year—after a June summit with US President Joe Biden in Geneva.

"We perceive India as a great power, a friendly nation and a time-tested friend," Putin said in the Indian capital alongside Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In its efforts to address a rising China, Washington has set up the QUAD security dialogue with India, Japan, and Australia, raising concerns in both Beijing and Moscow. India was close to the Soviet Union during the Cold War, a relationship that has endured, with both calling it a "special privileged strategic partnership".

Putin's visit was "hugely symbolic", said Nandan Unnikrishnan from the New Delhi-based Observer Research Foundation think tank. "There has been a lot of speculation about the nature of the India-Russia relationship and whether it is fraying because of Russia's closeness with China and India's with the US, but this visit

puts all that to rest." Nonetheless Putin has to contend with complex regional dynamics, with tensions mounting between New Delhi and Beijing, traditionally an ally of Moscow, following deadly clashes in a disputed Himalayan region. "Russia's influence in the region is very limited," said Tatiana Belousova of OP

“Russia's influence in the region is very limited”

Jindal Global University in Haryana, "mostly because of its close ties with China and unwillingness to act in dissonance with the Chinese regional interests."

The Kremlin said last week the talks will be dominated by defence and energy issues, with the boss of Russian energy giant Rosneft, Igor Sechin, also attending as a "number of important energy agreements" were on the table. Russia has long been a key arms supplier to India, which is looking to modernise its armed forces, and

one of their most high-profile current contracts is for the long-range S-400 ground-to-air missile defence system.

The deal, worth over \$5 billion, was signed in 2018 and deliveries have reportedly begun, but it threatens to upend the burgeoning relationship between New Delhi and Washington. The United States has threatened sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), which is aimed at reining in Russia, and the state department said last week that no decisions had been made on any waivers for India.

"Our Indian friends clearly explained that they are a sovereign country and that they will decide whose weapons to buy and who will be India's partner," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters yesterday. New Delhi has long sought to diversify its military imports but analysts believe it could take some time before it moves away from Russia. Military equipment was "paramount" to India given "unabated" tensions with Pakistan, according to Unnikrishnan. "You're going to try and nurture whatever is required to ensure that."

India is also keen to increase domestic production and has launched a joint venture with Russia to manufacture AK-203



NEW DELHI: India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi (R) greets Russian President Vladimir Putin before a meeting at Hyderabad House in New Delhi yesterday. — AFP

assault rifles. India and Russia normally hold annual summits, but the leaders' last in-person meeting was on the sidelines of the 2019 BRICS Summit in Brazil.

"The leaders will review the state and prospects of bilateral relations and discuss ways to further strengthen the strategic partnership between the two countries," India's ministry of external affairs said in a statement last month. The two countries'

foreign and defence ministers held talks Monday ahead of Putin's arrival.

A number of agreements and contracts were signed on small arms and military co-operation, India's defence minister Rajnath Singh tweeted. Moscow and New Delhi hold "identical or near-identical positions on the most important global and security issues", said Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov. — AFP

Myanmar junta chief halves Suu Kyi jail term

YANGON: Myanmar's junta chief reduced the prison sentence of ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi to two years yesterday, after she was jailed for four years for incitement against the military and breaching COVID rules.

Suu Kyi, 76, has been detained since the generals staged a coup and ousted her government on February 1, ending the Southeast Asian country's brief period of democracy. She has since been hit with a series of charges, including violating the official secrets act, illegally importing walkie talkies and electoral fraud, and faces decades in prison.

Yesterday Suu Kyi was sentenced to two years for incitement against the military and another two years for breaching a natural disaster law relating to COVID, junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun told AFP by phone. Former president Win Myint was also initially jailed for four years on the same charges, which the US later blasted as an "affront" to justice.

Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing later "pardoned" the sentences of both to "two years imprisonment", according to a statement read out on state TV. They would serve their sentences under the house arrest they have been kept under in the capital of Naypyidaw, the statement said, without giving further details.

Yesterday evening residents in

parts of commercial capital Yangon banged pots and pans—a practice traditionally associated with driving out evil spirits but which has been used since February to show dissent against the military. Suu Kyi's incitement conviction related to statements her National League for Democracy party published shortly after the coup condemning the generals' takeover.

The COVID charge is linked to last year's election, which the NLD won in a landslide, but the details are not clear with the government imposing a gag order on the court proceedings. Journalists have been barred from attending the special court hearings in Naypyidaw and Suu Kyi's lawyers were recently banned from speaking to the media.

In recent weeks, other senior members of the NLD have received long sentences. A former chief minister was sentenced to 75 years in jail, while a close Suu Kyi aide was jailed for 20. Suu Kyi also faces multiple corruption charges—each of which carries a possible sentence of 15 years in prison.

Yesterday's verdict was on "the soft charges which the regime could have spared her, but chose not to," independent analyst Soe Myint Aung, told AFP. "The military seems to have doubled down on its highly oppressive approach toward the NLD and Aung San Suu Kyi herself." — AFP



Thank You From NBK

We would like to extend our thanks to all the institutions and companies that played a key role in the success of NBK Run, held on Saturday 4 December 2021 including:

• Ministry of Interior	• Touristic Enterprises Company	• Kuwait Proteins Company
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• Kuwait Municipality	• DISC	• Oakberry
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South Africa urges vaccines 'without delay', cases surge

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa: South African President Cyril Ramaphosa yesterday urged citizens to get vaccinated as the country battles an unprecedented surge in cases driven by the new Omicron variant. The number of daily infections rose five-fold in the space of a week, from 2,828 on November 26 to 16,055 last Friday.

About a quarter of tests for coronavirus have been positive, compared to just around two percent of those tested a fortnight ago. "We are experiencing a rate of infections that we have not seen since the pandemic started," Ramaphosa warned in his weekly newsletter. Omicron, detected by South African scientists 10 days ago, "appears to be dominating new infections," he said.

"I call on all South Africans to go out and get vaccinated without delay," he said. Ramaphosa, whose country is the worst-hit in Africa for COVID, last week hinted at making coronavirus vaccines mandatory. Despite the rise in infections, fatalities remain relatively low. Just one coronavirus-related death was recorded on Sunday, when

11,125 new infections were diagnosed. Scientists are keeping a close eye on the new variant to see whether it may be more contagious or virulent, or can side-step existing vaccines. So far 14.8 million people have been fully vaccinated in South Africa, translating to around a quarter of the country's population. The rate of vaccination is higher among adults.

Children aged from 12 years are eligible for vaccines in South Africa. With adequate supplies of the Johnson & Johnson and Pfizer shots, the government has set a target of vaccinating 70 percent of the population by year's end. Seeking to overcome vaccine hesitancy, the authorities at the weekend opened up pop-up sites offering jabs at shopping malls, bus stations, airports, churches and recreation centres.

Highly populated Gauteng province, which hosts the capital Pretoria and the financial hub, Johannesburg, accounts for most infections. It is in Gauteng province where the first cases of Omicron were detected last month following a cluster of cases at a university.— AFP

International

Scholz to take charge of Germany as Merkel era ends

Three-party-alliance is the first such mix at federal level

BERLIN: Germany's parliament will officially elect Olaf Scholz tomorrow as the country's next chancellor, bringing the curtain down on Angela Merkel's 16-year reign and ushering in a new political era with the centre-left in charge. Scholz led his Social Democrats to victory against Merkel's conservative CDU-CSU bloc in an epochal election in September, as the veteran chancellor prepared to leave politics after four consecutive terms in office.

Together with the Greens and the liberal Free Democrats, Scholz's SPD managed in a far shorter time than expected to forge a coalition that aspires to make Germany greener and fairer. "I want the 20s to be a time of new beginnings," Scholz told *Die Zeit* weekly, declaring an ambition to push forward "the biggest industrial modernisation which will be capable of stopping climate change caused by mankind".

Putting equality rhetoric into practice, he unveiled the country's first gender-balanced cabinet yesterday, with women in key security portfolios. "That corresponds to the society we live in — half of the power belongs to women," said Scholz, who describes himself as a "feminist".

The centre-left's return to power in Europe's biggest economy could shift the balance on a continent still reeling from Brexit and with the other major player, France, heading into presidential elections in 2022. But even before it took office, Scholz's "traffic-light" coalition — named after the three parties' colours — was already given a baptism of fire in the form of a fierce fourth wave of the coronavirus pandemic.

'No red lines'

With intensive care beds running out in some regions and a rampant rise in infection numbers showing no signs of abating, Scholz and his new

team have been pressed — including by Merkel — to agree new curbs even before they are sworn in by parliament.

After Austria set the example and with Germany struggling to boost stagnating vaccination numbers, the parties also came under pressure to make an about-turn on a pledge made earlier in the pandemic not to make vaccinations compulsory. Scholz has since spoken out in favour of mandatory vaccination, saying he wanted MPs to vote on the issue before year's end with a view of implementing it in February.

"For my government, there are no red lines on what must be done. We're ruling nothing out," he

“ I want the 20s to be a time of new beginnings ”

told *Die Zeit*. "That's not something we can do during a huge natural disaster or a health catastrophe like a pandemic."

Balancing act

Dubbed "the discreet" by left-leaning daily *TAZ*, Scholz, 63, is often described as austere or robotic. But he also has a reputation for being a meticulous workhorse. An experienced hand in government, Scholz was labour minister in Merkel's first coalition from 2007 to 2009 before taking over as vice-chancellor and finance minister in 2015.



BERLIN: (L-R) Designated Family Minister Anne Spiegel, Green party co-leader and designated Economy and Climate Minister Robert Habeck, party co-leader and designated German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, designated German Minister for Food and Agriculture Cem Özdemir and designated Environment Minister Steffi Lemke announce the result of a ballot of Green members on whether to approve a coalition agreement with two other parties for a new German government in Berlin. —AFP

Yet his three-party-alliance is the first such mix at the federal level, as the FDP is not a natural partner for the SPD or the Greens. Keeping the trio together will require a delicate balancing act taking into account the FDP's business-friendly leanings, the SPD's social equality instincts and the Greens' demands for sustainability.

Under their coalition deal, the parties have

agreed to secure Germany's path to carbon neutrality, including through huge investments in sustainable energy. They also aim to return to a constitutional no-new-debt rule — suspended during the pandemic — by 2023.

Incoming foreign minister Annalena Baerbock of the Greens has vowed to put human rights at the centre of German diplomacy. — AFP

President Barrow wins second term in Gambia election

BANJUL: Adama Barrow comfortably won a second term in The Gambia's presidential election, with thousands of his supporters celebrating in the streets of Banjul, although his opponents disputed the results announced late Sunday. Barrow, whose assumption of the presidency five years ago ended more than 20 years of dictatorship, garnered more than 53 percent of the vote, according to results released by the electoral commission. His main challenger Ousainou Darboe won 27.7 percent.

Saturday's election, the first since former dictator Yahya Jammeh fled into exile, is seen as crucial for the young West African democracy. Electoral commission chairman Alieu Momarr Njai declared Barrow the winner, announcing the final results to journalists hours after rival candidates had challenged partial results that gave him a commanding lead.

Crowds of Barrow's supporters marched through the streets of the capital to a din of horns and danced on a vast esplanade. Barrow received a standing ovation when he addressed them with "a great sense of joy and humility" and called on his supporters to respect those who voted for his opponents in a "free, fair and transparent election". "I will do all I can and utilise every resource at my disposal to make The Gambia a better place for us all," he said. Before the full results were announced, three of Barrow's rivals had rejected partial results that gave him an early lead. "At this stage we reject the results announced so far", Darboe and two other candidates said in a joint statement. "All actions are on table."

Gambians flocked to the polling booths Saturday to choose who would lead their country—the smallest in mainland Africa—for the next five years, with turnout at 87 percent, according to official results. Earlier Sunday, Ernest Bai Koroma, head of an election observation mission from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), appealed to all the candidates "to accept the outcome of the election in good faith. "There will be no winner or loser but only one winner, The Gambian people," he said in his statement.

The election is being closely watched as a test of the democratic transition in The Gambia, where Jammeh ruled for 22 years after seizing power in a bloodless coup in 1994. He was forced into exile in Equatorial Guinea in January 2017 after Barrow, then a relative unknown, defeated him at the ballot box.

Barrow, 56, faced five challengers in his re-election bid, and the vote count was slow in part because of the country's unusual voting system. Illiteracy is widespread in The Gambia, so voters cast their ballot by dropping a marble into a tub marked with their candidate's colour and photo—a practice dating back to the country's past as a British colony.

Many of the roughly one million eligible voters in the nation of more than two million people are hoping for an improvement in their living standards. The Gambia, a sliver of land about 480 kilometres (300 miles) long surrounded by Senegal, is one of the poorest countries in the world. — AFP

Austria swears in new chancellor

VIENNA: Austria's Interior Minister Karl Nehammer was sworn in as the country's third chancellor in as many months yesterday, after the fallout from a corruption scandal shook his ruling People's Party.

President Alexander Van der Bellen formally swore Nehammer in at a ceremony at Vienna's Hofburg Palace just after 1 pm local time (1200 GMT). The previous Chancellor Alexander Schallenberg offered his resignation on Thursday, hours after his predecessor and close ally Sebastian Kurz announced he was resigning as head of the conservative People's Party (OeVP) in the wake of a corruption scandal.

On Friday the OeVP nominated Nehammer, 49, to take over as party head and chancellor. Kurz's resignation also prompted that of his close confidante Gernot Blumel as finance minister. Nehammer's first act has been to conduct a cabinet reshuffle, sending Schallenberg back to his previous post as foreign minister and appointing new finance, interior and education ministers.

The new cabinet members were sworn in along with Nehammer. The OeVP is hoping its coalition government with the Green party will now be able to move on from the saga surrounding Kurz.

Almost 50 killed in Sudan Darfur tribal clashes: Officials

KHARTOUM: Close to 50 people have been killed in the latest outbreak of tribal violence in Sudan's Darfur region, a government official and medics said yesterday. The latest flareup brings to around 100 the number of people killed over about three weeks in Sudan's westernmost region, which has been ravaged by unrest for years.

"The violence began with an argument and it spiralled into killing six people on Saturday and then on Sunday more than 40 people were killed," West Darfur governor Khamis Abdallah told AFP. The Doctors' Committee, an independent union, said that 48 people were killed in the Krink area of Darfur by live ammunition. Krink is about 80 kilometres (50 miles) from the state capital El Geneina.

Fifty people were killed last month in days of fighting between herders, the UN said. More than 1,000 homes were also set on fire. That violence broke out on November 17 between armed Arab herders in the rugged Jebel Moon mountains close to the border with Chad.

Darfur was ravaged by a civil war that erupted in 2003, pitting ethnic minority rebels who complained of discrimination against the Arab-dominated government of then president Omar al-Bashir. Khartoum responded by unleashing the Janjaweed militia, blamed for atrocities including murder, rape, looting and burning villages.

Paramilitary

The violence resulted in one of the world's worst humanitarian catastrophes. More than 300,000 people died and 2.5 million were displaced during the conflict, according to the United Nations. Thousands of Janjaweed were later integrated into the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces led by Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, currently the number two leader in Sudan's military-civilian transitional ruling council.

'Wunderkind' Kurz's fall

The scandal that brought down Kurz — who in 2017 became the world's youngest democratically elected head of government at 31 — erupted in early October.

Prosecutors ordered raids at his office and the finance ministry over allegations that Kurz's inner circle used public money to pay for polls tailored to boost his image and ensure positive coverage in one of the country's biggest tabloids.

Kurz has denied any wrongdoing, saying he hopes to have his day in court to prove his innocence. Kurz wrested control of the OeVP in 2017 and won two elections.

A hardline anti-immigration stance — shared by Nehammer — was key to his success. However, the OeVP's first coalition collapsed in 2019 when its far-right junior partner became engulfed in a corruption scandal.

That led to early elections in 2019 which Kurz again won, forming a coalition with the Greens.

After stepping down as chancellor in October, he had been widely viewed as biding his time for a political comeback, but announced on Thursday that he was leaving politics to spend more time with his partner and newborn son.

Difficult winter ahead

In contrast to Kurz, who had concentrated power around himself and a small group of trusted aides, under Nehammer the party's traditionally powerful regional heads are expected to wield more influ-



VIENNA: Newly appointed Austria's Chancellor Karl Nehammer gives a press statement during a handover ceremony at the Chancellery in Vienna, Austria yesterday. —AFP

ence. Born in Vienna, Nehammer worked in the army for several years before becoming a communications adviser. He became a lawmaker in 2017 and interior minister in January 2020 months before Austria faced its first jihadist attack, which killed four people last November.

He now faces the immediate challenge of steering the country through a difficult winter under the shadow of a fresh wave of the coronavirus. —AFP

Death toll from Kenya bus accident rises to 31

NAIROBI: Divers recovered seven more bodies Sunday from a bus that was swept off a bridge by a flooding river in Kenya, bringing the death toll from the tragedy to more than 30. The bus was taking a church choir and other revellers to a wedding in Kitui County on Saturday when it keeled over and sank beneath fast-flowing waters as the driver tried to navigate a submerged bridge.

Twelve passengers managed to scramble to safety but most aboard the stricken bus were unable to escape before it was swallowed by the muddy tide. Kitui governor Charity Ngilu said 31 bodies had been retrieved since Saturday by military divers, but warned the toll could rise further as the search and rescue operation continued. "Today we have been able to retrieve seven. We still have more bodies in the bus," she told reporters late Sunday. "It is very, very sad indeed. We have lost so many lives." It remains unclear how many passengers were aboard the bus when it tipped into the Enziu River, about 200 kilometres (125 miles) east of the capital Nairobi.

Witnesses said the driver had stopped to negotiate the river, and was close to the other side when the bus was swept beneath the churning currents. President Uhuru Kenyatta on Sunday sent his condolences to the families of the victims and urged Kenyans to be cautious on roads during the rainy season.

"Once again, the President wishes to remind Kenyans across the country to heed government advisory against attempting to cross swollen rivers especially during the current rainy season," read a statement from Kenyatta's office. — AFP



KHARTOUM: A Sudanese boy lifts a banner which reads in Arabic "imagine the fear of the military of chants on the streets", during a rally in the capital Khartoum, yesterday, to protest a deal that saw the Prime Minister reinstated after his ouster in a military coup in October. —AFP

Apart from Darfur's tribal unrest, nearly 45 people have been killed throughout Sudan during street rallies met with a crackdown from security forces since an October 25 military coup. Sudanese police fire tear gas yesterday when thousands rallied in the capital Khartoum against the military-dominated government.

Top general Abdel Fattah al-Burhan seized power and detained Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok but, following sustained political pressure domestically and internationally, reinstated Hamdok in a November 21 deal. Bashir, who is wanted by the International Criminal Court on charges of genocide in Darfur, was ousted and jailed in April 2019 after mass protests against his three-decade rule.

A peace deal struck with key rebel groups last year saw the main conflict in Darfur subside, but the arid region has remained awash with weapons. Violence often erupts over land, access to agriculture or water. West Darfur also hosts more than 305,000 internally displaced people who rely heavily on humanitarian assistance. — AFP

International

Myanmar jungle rebels struggle for cash and guns

Dozens of PDFs fight back against generals' bloody crackdown

KAYAH STATE: Young anti-coup recruits line up at a secret camp in Myanmar, hands behind their heads and stomachs braced, waiting for a drill instructor to deliver a punch to toughen them up for their fight against the military.

Since the February coup, dozens of "people's defence forces" (PDFs) have sprung up across the Southeast Asian country to fight back against the generals' putsch and bloody crackdown. The college dropouts and villagers that fill their ranks have dealt some painful blows to junta troops with guerilla ambushes and mine attacks against the heavily-armed military.

But while analysts say they have surprised the army with their effectiveness, the new militias are short of serious weaponry and-lacking the income from the illegal drug and jade trade enjoyed by more established rebel groups-short of money to buy it. At the camp hidden in a clearing in thick jungle in eastern Myanmar's Kayah state, Htet Htet struggles with the training regime for recruits to the Karenni Nationalities Defence Force (KNDF), one of the new civilian militias.

"I can't do push-ups and my hands hurt," the 18-year-old told AFP in between crawling through the mud and walking on the stomachs of her comrades. "It's very tiring and I even cry sometimes." She was in limbo after her end-of-school exams were cancelled following the coup, but found new resolve after a cousin was killed fighting against the army, and is now training to be a combat medic.

Across Kayah state "only areas around permanent Burmese military bases" are not under the control of

anti-junta fighters, a KNDF commander at the camp claimed in an interview with AFP. A few miles away, gun-toting fighters man a checkpoint wearing camouflage with gold, red and black KNDF insignia on their shoulders, their feet clad more casually in sneakers and flip-flops.

'Taken by surprise'

"The speed with which these local PDFs have mobilised, obtained weapons, and developed the tactics and capabilities to regularly ambush regime forces has been striking," International Crisis Group's Myanmar senior advisor Richard Horsey told AFP.

The military has been "taken by surprise, I think, and has struggled to put in place effective intelligence and tactical responses." State media say almost 400 roads and bridges have been hit by sabotage attacks since February, and local media have reported dozens of cell towers belonging to a military-owned telecoms firm being taken out of action.

But counting casualties is difficult. A shadow group

of lawmakers claims almost 3,000 junta troops died in fighting with PDFs between June and November. The junta—which has declared all PDFs to be "terrorists"—says 75 soldiers and 93 members of the police were killed between February and late October.

Both sides were likely "inflating and deflating casualty figures," said David Mathieson, an analyst formerly based in Myanmar. Putting a figure on how many have signed up to fight the military is also hard to do with any certainty. The KNDF commander would not say how many combatants the group had,



YANGON, Yangon division: Protesters taking part in a demonstration against the military coup run as security forces launched a crackdown on the protest in Yangon. —AFP

but fighters told AFP each battalion was between 300-400 strong, with at least a dozen across Kayah state. "We don't need to worry about manpower," he said. "We have a lot. We just need weapons."

Shelling out

But getting hold of them is not easy. KNDF territory is too far from the Thai border to go shopping in the country's black market for munitions. Gangs and militias that control territory in between are happy to smuggle—but the price is hefty for the KNDF, who mostly rely on donations from supporters to buy

weapons and supplies.

In March-April one M-16 rifle cost four million kyat (\$2,200) and an AK-47 five million kyat, an arms dealer who sells to the KNDF told AFP on condition of anonymity. Then the value of Myanmar's kyat currency plunged and now the weapons go for almost double the price, leaving the militias to improvise. "Most are using homemade guns," 18-year-old Byar Reh says of his battalion from a dripping tent in the camp that is his new home, and "only a few" of his comrades have automatic rifles. "If we had enough... we can kick the military out of our state entirely." —AFP



400 roads and bridges hit by sabotage attacks

Russia to send Japan tycoon to ISS in return to space tourism

BAIKONUR, Kazakhstan: Russia tomorrow will send Japanese billionaire Yusaku Maezawa to the International Space Station in a move marking Moscow's return to the now booming space tourism business after a decade-long break. One of Japan's richest men, Maezawa, 46, will blast off from the Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan accompanied by his assistant Yozo Hirano.

On Sunday morning, their Soyuz spacecraft with a Japanese flag and an "MZ" logo for Maezawa's name was moved onto the launch pad in unusually wet weather for Baikonur, an AFP journalist saw. The mission will end a decade-long pause in Russia's space tourism programme that has not accepted tourists since Canada's Cirque du Soleil co-founder Guy Laliberte in 2009.

However, in a historic first, the Russian space agency Roscosmos in October sent actress Yulia Peresild and director Klim Shipenko to the ISS to film scenes for the first movie in orbit in an effort to beat a rival Hollywood project. Maezawa's launch comes at a challenging time for Russia as its space industry struggles to remain relevant and keep up with

Western competitors in the modern space race.

Last year, the US company SpaceX of billionaire Elon Musk ended Russia's monopoly on manned flights to the ISS after it delivered astronauts to the orbiting laboratory in its Crew Dragon capsule. This, however, also freed up seats on Russia's Soyuz rockets that were previously purchased by NASA allowing Moscow to accept fee-paying tourists like Maezawa.

Their three-seat Soyuz spacecraft will be piloted by Alexander Misurkin, a 44-year-old Russian cosmonaut who has already been on two missions to the ISS. The pair will spend 12 days aboard the space station where they plan to document their journey for Maezawa's YouTube channel with more than 750,000 subscribers.

The tycoon is the founder of Japan's largest online fashion mall and the country's 30th richest man, according to Forbes. "I am almost crying because of my impressions, this is so impressive," Maezawa said in late November after arriving at Baikonur for the final days of preparation.

Maezawa and Hirano have spent the past few months training at Star City, a town outside Moscow that has prepared generations of Soviet and Russian cosmonauts.

'Hardest training ever'

Maezawa said that training in the spinning chair "almost feels like torture". "It's the hardest training ever done," he tweeted in late November.



BAIKONUR, Kazakhstan: A woman walks under snowfall in front of a Soyuz rocket installed as a monument in Baikonur city. Space tourists Yusaku Maezawa and his assistant Yozo Hirano, led by Roscosmos cosmonaut Alexander Misurkin, will take part in a mission on the Soyuz MS-20 spacecraft to the International Space Station (ISS) scheduled for tomorrow. —AFP

So far Russia has sent seven self-funded tourists to space in partnership with the US-based company Space Adventures. Maezawa and Hirano will be the first from Japan. Maezawa's launch comes at the end of a year that became a milestone for amateur space travel.

In September, SpaceX operated a historic flight taking the first all-civilian crew on a three-day journey around the Earth's orbit in a mission called Inspiration4. Blue Origin, the company of Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, completed two missions beyond the Earth's atmosphere. The

passengers included 90-year-old Star Trek star William Shatner and Bezos himself.

Soon after, billionaire Richard Branson travelled aboard his Virgin Galactic spacecraft that also offered a few minutes of weightlessness before coming back to Earth. Those journeys mark the beginning of space opening up for non-professionals with more launches announced for the future. In 2023, SpaceX is planning to take eight amateur astronauts around the moon in a spaceflight that is bankrolled by Maezawa, who will also be onboard. —AFP

Indonesia volcano erupts again, rescue operations suspended

LUMAJANG, Indonesia: Indonesia's Mount Semeru spewed more ash yesterday, forcing rescuers to suspend the search for survivors as aerial images showed the extent of the devastation unleashed by the volcano's deadly weekend eruption. The biggest mountain on the island of Java thundered to life Saturday, ejecting a mushroom of volcanic ash high into the sky and raining hot mud as thousands of panicked people fled their homes. At least 14 were killed.

Aerial photos showed entire streets filled with grey volcanic ash and mud, which had swallowed many homes and vehicles, including whole trucks. Rescue operations were suspended because of fresh volcanic activity yesterday. "All evacuation teams have been pulled out... temporarily because there was a small fresh eruption and it could endanger the evacuation teams," said rescue worker Rizal Purnama.

"The search will continue today once the situation is a bit safer." Dozens of people remain missing, he added. Dangerous thick plumes of smoke continued to emerge from areas blanketed by the volcanic ash, while rescuers in hardhats tried to dig through the mud to try and find survivors-and recover bodies.

Their task was made more difficult as the volcanic debris had started to harden. "It's very difficult... with simple tools," Rizal Purnama said. "It is very likely bodies that have not been found are buried under the hot mudflow." Other rescuers helped desperate villagers salvage their belongings from wrecked homes. Some locals lifted mattresses and furniture on their shoulders while others carried goats in their arms.

'I could only pray'

Officials have advised locals not to travel within five kilometres (3.1 miles) of Semeru's crater, as the nearby air is highly polluted and could affect vulnerable groups. Ash from Semeru travelled up to four kilometres away after the Saturday eruption. Indonesia's geological agency reported.

A sand mine company's office in Kampung Renteng village was buried after the eruption, trapping 15 people inside, according to foreman Hasim, 65, who like many Indonesians goes by one name. "There's no news from them. Only one operator was rescued, he's now at the hospital with burns," he told AFP.

Hasim said he ran home after the eruption. "It was pitch dark," he added. "It was only 3 pm but it looked like night." Rescue officials said some were buried inside their vehicles, with no time to escape. Those who managed to find shelter recounted the horror after the eruption. Suwanti Ningsi and her daughter were trapped for five hours at home after the eruption.

"I couldn't see anything, it was just like at night. Everybody was panicking," said the 42-year-old. "I could only pray... for me and my daughter to be saved." —AFP

Solomons PM survives no confidence vote

HONIARA, Solomon Islands: Embattled Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare survived a no-confidence vote yesterday, while accusing "Taiwan's agents" of orchestrating recent political violence that plunged the Pacific island nation into crisis.

The pro-Beijing leader comfortably saw off an opposition attempt to oust him, winning 32 votes to 15 after a fractious and hot-tempered day-long debate. The febrile scenes in parliament — in which lawmakers traded claims of corruption, coups and shadowy foreign support — echoed recent anger on the streets that prompted the arrival of hundreds of international peacekeepers.

Three days of rioting late last month left the Chinatown area of the capital Honiara in ruins and claimed at least three lives, with dozens of buildings destroyed. Ahead of yesterday's vote, armed troops and police from neighbouring Australia, Fiji, Papua New Guinea and New Zealand helped operate checkpoints across rain-soaked downtown Honiara to forestall more unrest.

They used shipping containers to seal off areas of the rubble-strewn capital, closed the port to ferries from neighbouring islands and enforced a city-wide liquor ban.

Authorities also warned people against posting inflammatory statements on social media. The



HONIARA: People walk in the rain in Honiara yesterday as Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare faced a no-confidence vote yesterday. —AFP

prospect of further violence prompted the US consulate in Honiara to restrict operations.

The crisis erupted late last month when protests about Sogavare's policies turned violent, fuelled by poverty, unemployment and inter-island rivalries in the nation of 800,000.

The prime minister has refused protesters demands to step down, telling parliament yesterday that leaving office under such circumstances would be surrendering "to the dictates of hooligans and lawlessness". "We cannot entertain violence being used to tear down a democratically elected govern-

ment," he said. Large numbers of people were seen leaving the capital for the provinces on chartered ferries Sunday ahead of the no-confidence vote, expecting further trouble.

Many of Sogavare's detractors come from Malaita. Residents there believe the country's most populous island does not get a fair share of resource revenue and is neglected by the central government. An underlying complaint against Sogavare is his 2019 decision to switch Honiara's diplomatic allegiance to China from Taiwan, which had close ties with Malaita. —AFP

Business

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2021

Governments help arms firms avoid COVID slump: Report

100 top weapons firms saw their profits rise by 1.3% in 2019 to a record \$531bn

STOCKHOLM: The world's biggest weapons manufacturers largely avoided the economic downturn caused by COVID-19 and recorded a growth in profits last year for the sixth year in a row, according to a report published yesterday.

Governments around the world have continued to buy arms during the pandemic and some also passed measures to help their big weapons firms, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

Overall, the 100 top weapons firms saw their profits rise by 1.3 percent in 2019 to a record \$531 billion, despite the global economy contracting by more than three percent. "Military manufacturers were largely shielded by sustained government demand for military goods and services," said SIPRI researcher Alexandra Marksteiner in the institute's annual assessment of arms companies.

"In much of the world, military spending grew and some governments even accelerated payments to the arms industry in order to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis." The top five arms firms were all from the United States. Lockheed-Martin — which counts F-35 fighter jets and various types of missiles among its bestsellers — consolidating its first place with sales of \$58.2 billion.

Britain's BAE Systems, in sixth position, was the highest-placed European firm, just ahead of three Chinese groups.

Rise of China

"The rise of China as a major arms producer has been driven by its aim to become more self-reliant in weapons production and by the implementation of ambitious modernization programs," the report said. While China's arms sales have expanded, they still lag US and British firms, accounting for a total of 13 percent of the top 100 arms sales in 2020.

Sales by the five Chinese firms in the top 100 totaled an estimated \$66.8 billion in 2020, up 1.5 percent on the previous year. "In recent years, Chinese arms companies have benefited from the country's military modernization programs and focus on military-civil fusion," SIPRI senior researcher Nan Tian said.

"They have become some of the most advanced military technology producers in the world." Of the top-producing countries, only France and Russia saw their firms' sales decline last year. The institute said the firms had benefited from the broad injection of cash into economies, as well as specific measures designed to help arms companies such as accelerated payments or order schedules. And as military contracts usually span several years, firms were able to make gains before the health crisis took hold.

"However, despite these and other factors, global arms production was not fully immune to the impact of the pandemic," the report said,



VILLEPINTE, France: In this file photo taken on June 11, 2018 visitors speak to military personnel as they stand in front of models of military vehicles manufactured by the Chinese company Norinco, displayed at the Eurosatory Defense and Security international exhibition in Villepinte, near Paris. — AFP

pointing to France's Thales which blamed a 5.8 percent fall in arms sales on lockdown disruptions. The report highlighted that the rate of increase in profits had slowed substantially between 2019 and

2020, and noted that measures taken to halt the spread of the virus had disrupted supply chains in the weapons industry just as they had across the wider economy. —AFP



LONDON: Women protest against violence, the gender pay gap and economic discrimination in London in this file photo.

UK's gender pay gap barely shifts since mid-1990s

LONDON: Britain's gender pay gap remains wide and has barely narrowed over the last 25 years, according to a study published yesterday that blamed "deep-seated social norms". The report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) found the average working-age woman in the UK earned 40 percent less than her male counterpart in 2019.

This broad gap in average pay is due to fewer women being in paid work at all compared to male counterparts, while some of those that are employed do fewer hours per week than men. The 40 percent difference is about 13 points — or a quarter — lower than in the mid-1990s, but around three quarters of that reduction can be explained by "the rapid increase in women's educational attainment", the IFS noted.

Women of working age have gone from being five percentage points less likely, to five points more likely, to have a university degree than men.

"This suggests that it is only because of the increase in women's educational attainment that there has been any meaningful progress in closing

the gender earnings gap," the study concluded. In terms of hourly wages — the typical measure for gender pay gaps — women earn an average of 19 percent less per hour, down from 24 percent less in 1995, but this figure has barely shifted since 2005.

In addition, the hourly wage gap has narrowed for low-skilled employees, thanks in part to increases in the minimum wage, but has risen for the more highly educated. "Gender gaps in paid and unpaid work seem to be driven by deep-seated social norms and expectations," the IFS report stated, noting other countries showed that "progress is possible".

"Interventions that change established norms, perhaps through an accumulation of policies which consistently point in the same direction towards less radically different gender roles, could have transformative effects," it added. The report noted there are "large costs" to maintaining associated with the status quo, with proactive policies such as expanding free childcare could eventually pay for themselves in boosting the labor market.

"Some of these differences will originate from choices made by individuals and families relating to career and childcare decisions," said Mark Franks, of the Nuffield Foundation research charity. "However, the gender gap in total earnings in the UK is almost twice as large as in some other countries, which suggests the gender earnings gap is heavily influenced by the policy environment and cultural and social norms." — AFP

any change to their collective bargaining system in which companies negotiate pay directly with powerful unions, without state intervention.

"Work should pay," said Slovenian labor minister Janez Cigler Kralj, whose country holds the EU's six-month rotating presidency. "We cannot accept that people who put all their energy in their job still live in poverty and cannot afford a decent standard of living," he added. In the plan, countries without collective bargaining systems, which typically deliver better wage conditions for workers, are urged to implement them.

Countries with minimum wage systems are tasked to ensure that pay levels are updated in a regular and fair manner. An EU source said the compromise agreed was fragile and that negotiators will be under pressure to not give ground to the European Parliament, which passed its own version of the law last month. France takes over the EU presidency on January 1 and has made forging a compromise between both versions of the plan a priority of its six-month term. — AFP

BoE warns UK inflation to top 5.0% on energy costs

LONDON: British inflation will "comfortably" top five percent in April due to rocketing energy prices, well above the Bank of England's target, a high-ranking BoE official forecast yesterday. Ben Broadbent, deputy governor for monetary policy, made the prediction ahead of a central bank policy meeting next week during which the BoE could decide to lift its historically low interest rate, or leave it intact.

Broadbent said inflation would soar further when the domestic energy price cap is hiked by UK regulator Ofgem. "The chances are that (inflation) will comfortably exceed 5.0 percent when the Ofgem cap on retail energy prices is next adjusted, in April," Broadbent said in a speech in Leeds, northern England.

Ofgem had in October already raised the energy cap, which limits electricity and gas providers' standard variable tariffs. As a result, the UK inflation rate spiked close to a 10-year peak in October, buoyed also by resurgent post-lockdown demand. The Consumer Prices Index (CPI) rate soared to 4.2 percent, the highest level since November 2011.

That followed 3.1 percent in September and was more than double the BoE's 2.0-percent target. The energy cap is widely expected to surge



even higher in April, because it does not yet reflect rocketing wholesale gas prices from during the summer months.

Inflation has soared around the world due to high energy prices and resurgent post-lockdown demand, raising the prospect that central banks will hike interest rates sooner than expected. —AFP



FRANKFURT: German industrial orders dropped significantly in October after a revival in September, official figures showed yesterday.

German industrial orders go into reverse in October

FRANKFURT: German industrial orders dropped significantly in October after a revival in September, official figures showed yesterday, as continuing supply issues bedeviled industry. The federal statistics office Destatis calculated that industrial orders in Europe's largest economy fell by 6.9 percent in October compared with the previous month, after a small 1.8 percent rise in September. The indicator, which gives a foretaste of industrial produc-

tion, was also down one percent on the previous year, the first annual fall since September 2020.

Orders for capital goods fell 10.7 percent, while those for intermediate goods fell 2.7 percent compared with the previous month. Only orders of consumer goods rose, growing 4.3 percent on September. International demand suffered particularly in October, with orders from outside the European Union down 18.1 percent, while domestic orders were 3.4 percent higher than in September.

The coronavirus pandemic has led to disruptions in supply chains across the globe, causing shortages of everything from wood to semiconductors. These widespread bottlenecks were "slowing German industry in 2021", Destatis concluded. The figures were a "cold shower for German industry", said Carsten Brzeski, head of macro at ING. —AFP

EU ministers agree guarantees for low-paid workers

BRUSSELS: EU ministers yesterday agreed measures to better protect wage levels in Europe and give workers more power to oppose low pay. While the proposal does not set an EU-wide minimum wage, once confirmed it would mark a significant step in promoting the European social model, especially in eastern European countries where salaries are low.

The 27 member states are historically divided on the issue because national pay systems and minimum wages vary widely, from 312 euros (\$352) a month in Bulgaria to 2,142 euros (\$2,419) in Luxembourg, according to figures published last year. Some Nordic countries are especially against

Business

NBK Economic Report

Kuwait's inflation rate looks set to average around 3.0% in 2021

Price increases in food, clothing and transport segments to drive headline rate

KUWAIT: Kuwait's consumer price inflation edged down slightly to 3.2 percent y/y in July versus June but has trended higher over the past year. Price increases in the food, clothing, transport and recreation segments continue to drive the headline rate. Strong consumer demand and pandemic-linked supply chain disruptions have caused inflation to surge globally.

Recently released data from the Central Statistical Bureau (CSB) show that consumer price inflation moderated slightly in July to 3.2 percent y/y from 3.4 percent in June (+0.3 percent m/m). Still, inflation has trended higher so far this year and prices have now risen (m/m) in fourteen of the last fifteen months, driven by a combination of recovering demand, supply-side disruptions and higher international food prices. Disruptions to global supply chains is a worldwide phenomenon, as pandemic-linked economic reconfiguration and worker shortages struggle against the surge in post-lockdown consumer spending. Similar factors (as well as higher energy prices) have also pushed up inflation in a range of developed countries to much higher levels of late, including the eurozone (4.9 percent, November) and the US (6.2 percent, October).

Food prices

Price pressures in Kuwait have been most pronounced in the food and beverages category, which in July climbed 10.1 percent y/y. Price increases were recorded across most sub-indices but the largest was observed in the fruits (+25 percent), vegetables (+9.7 percent) and meat (+15.3 percent) categories. Some of this is a reflection of higher international food prices more generally. The Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) Food Price Index, a global food price barometer, was up 33 percent y/y in July (and it remained high in November). Upward price pressure on international food (and commodity) prices also stemmed from the US dollar's depreciation, especially over April and May; generally, a weaker dollar makes the price of USD-denominated foods and commodities more affordable for importers using other currencies, stimulating demand. However, the dollar has strengthened since then, suggesting that any such impact on food prices may have gone into reverse.

Meanwhile, prices in the housing services category - mostly rents - climbed only 0.2 percent y/y in July. A minor monthly rise was recorded on the back



KUWAIT: A vendor displays Zubaidi (silver pomfret) at the main fish market in Kuwait City. Kuwait's consumer price inflation edged down slightly to 3.2 percent y/y in July versus June. — AFP

of an increase in 'services and maintenance repairs', perhaps a reflection of higher construction/raw material costs. Recorded housing rents have barely changed in two years, yet even this minimal change seems on the high side relative to expectations: anecdotal evidence points to rent discounts being offered to both existing tenants (temporarily for a few months) and prospective tenants during the pandemic period. Indeed, in other Gulf countries, housing subcomponents of inflation indices have witnessed substantial declines.

Housing segment

Meanwhile, core inflation (i.e. excluding food and housing) has also risen modestly so far this year, reaching 2.9 percent y/y in July versus 2.7 percent in December 2020, though dipping slightly versus June (3.0 percent). Inflation in the transport (+5.4 percent), clothing (+6.5 percent) and recreation (+8.2 percent) categories continued to trend upwards. Transport prices were at a 3-year high, driven largely by the 'Travel by Air' component, which saw a 25 percent y/y

increase on surging ticket prices following the partial lifting of travel restrictions towards the end of 2021 (this may have eased in subsequent months on expanded flight availability). Prices in the recreation category experienced the highest inflation due primarily to an increase in the cost of personal computers and laptops, while computer-based learning and remote working were on the rise during the pandemic.

In contrast with the increase in price for most core components, education costs continued to record annual declines of 15.5 percent, after the Ministry of Education announced in September 2020 reductions of up to 25 percent in private school fees during the pandemic as physical schooling was replaced by online schooling. However, with students now largely back at school tuition fees have reverted, and this should be visible in the September and October CPI.

Wholesale prices

Wholesale price inflation, which measures the prices charged between businesses (rather than from

businesses to consumers), stood at a 3-year high of 1.5 percent y/y in June 2021, according to the CSB. This was slightly higher than the reading of 0.8 percent at the end of the previous quarter. Inflation in the price of imported goods was also at a 3-year high in June, at 2.1 percent, while prices for locally-produced goods were up 0.6 percent.

Similarly, the producer price index, which measures changes in the price of goods bought and sold by producers, in June reached its highest level since October 2018 (100.1), increasing by 75 percent y/y. However, much of this was driven by the higher price of oil: prices in the oil extraction segment rose 104 percent y/y. Prices in the manufacturing segment increased by 49 percent y/y, although this was skewed by big rises in the refining segment, which is also linked to oil prices. Upward pressures were not universal however: prices in some other manufacturing segments, including chemicals and electrical equipment, were actually down y/y.

Overall, domestic inflation so far this year has come in slightly higher than expected and internationally, upward pressures look set to persist for longer than previously anticipated. Personal consumption has been on a tear, supported by strong household savings rates, worker shortages are an issue in some sectors (leading to higher business costs which are then passed on to consumers) and global supply chains are taking longer than expected to untangle. These factors, along with the higher education costs from September, mean that the risks to our 2021 year-average inflation forecast for Kuwait of 2.6 percent are to the upside: a figure of around 3.0 percent looks more likely.

Looking ahead to 2022, inflation will ultimately be shaped by several factors: the pace of the global and local economic recovery amid a potential resurgence of COVID-19 infections (including the recent discovery of the potentially more infectious Omicron strain); the potential easing in supply-side frictions; the direction of commodity prices; and the extent and speed of monetary policy tightening by central banks around the world in an effort to dampen inflation.

In Kuwait, our base case is for inflation to ease slightly from 2021 levels, with non-oil growth expected to slow from this year's expected rebound, current record rates of consumer spending moderating and as the government adopts a more restrained spending stance amid expectations of lower oil prices.

Texas bears brunt of US plastic pollution

HOUSTON: Former shrimper Diane Wilson watches in disgust as a Taiwan-owned factory in Texas spews millions of plastic pellets into the Matagorda Bay. For years Wilson has been documenting this pollution by Formosa Plastics Group, the world's fourth largest plastic manufacturer. It set up shop in 1983 south of Houston in Point Comfort, near the waters where she used to catch shrimp in abundance.

"When we did the sampling on Formosa, we found 2,000 violations. How many did the state of Texas have? Zero," Wilson told AFP as she stood at the helm of a shrimp boat. She said regulators at environmental protection agencies in Texas, the second most populous US state, operate in a revolving door system.

"They leave the state agencies and get a job at the chemical plant because there is no money in being an inspector or an officer," Wilson said.

America the polluter

The United States is by far the world's biggest plastic polluter, according to a study released Wednesday. It generated 42 million tons of waste in 2016, more than twice as much as China and more than all the countries of the European Union combined, says the study by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. The US accounts for less than five percent of the world's people.

Point Comfort, population 737, is essentially a plastics town: it has 17 Formosa production units spread out over many acres. Wilson, a mother of



The United States is by far the world's biggest plastic polluter, according to a study released Wednesday.

five, comes from a family that has been shrimping for four generations and is the face of the local fight against Formosa's polluting practices.

In particular she is battling white pellets, called nurdles, that factories near the coast release by the millions. These little balls smaller than beans are the raw material that buyers melt down to make a variety of plastic products. The nurdles leak from faulty pipes at production plants and are so light they are easily carried off into nature by the slightest wind.

Few shrimpers left

Complaining that the state of Texas takes a hands-off approach, Wilson sued Formosa Plastics and managed to force it to sign in 2019 a consent decree under which it pays tens of thousands of dollars for each day in which it releases plastic pellets or powder into the environment.

"At this moment Formosa has had over 50 violations probably since June of this year, and they have been fined approximately \$1.1 million," Wilson said. "And the money that Formosa pays goes into a trust. It's called the Matagorda trust. It goes into environmental projects."

factors including the macroeconomic environment and the real estate industry", the company said in an exchange filing.

Sunshine 100 has repeatedly struggled to meet its debt obligations this year and also defaulted on a bond repayment in August. The company now has \$385 million of outstanding dollar notes, according to data compiled by Bloomberg.

Evergrande—which is drowning in \$300 billion of debt—has so far managed to avoid default, but it has dollar bond coupons worth \$82.5 million in total due yesterday, when a 30-day grace period ends, according to Bloomberg. On Friday, embattled founder Xu Jiayin was summoned by officials after the company released a statement warning it may not have enough money to "continue to perform its financial obligations".

The Guangdong provincial government later said it would send a working group to Evergrande to "supervise and promote enterprise risk management". Evergrande's shares in Hong Kong closed down 19.6 percent yesterday, while Sunshine 100 ended the day down more than 14 percent.

Rival developer Kaisa last week said it had failed in a bid for a debt swap that would have bought it crucial time to pay back some of its bonds. — AFP

But Formosa also dumps toxic liquid waste into the water, millions of gallons a day, she said. This discharge is legal—and it has ruined the local shrimp industry, Wilson added. "There used to probably be maybe 4, 5, 600 fishermen in this community and now you're lucky if there's more than a handful of them," she added.

Formosa Plastics Group also has factories in the US states of Louisiana, South Carolina and New Jersey, as well as in Vietnam and Taiwan itself. "We documented that within the next decade there will be more greenhouse gas emissions from plastic production than from coal plants in the United States," said Judith Enck, author of a report for Beyond Plastics, a project run by Bennington College in Vermont. Her study found that almost 80 percent of CO2 emissions from the plastics industry in America happen along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico—in Louisiana but mainly in Texas.

\$560 million in fines

Plastic is made using a variety of gases, ethane in particular. And the southern US offers advantages for producing it: cheap energy, skilled labor, and good port and energy infrastructure. Enck said the region has another lure: "A lot of fossil fuel companies like to do business in Texas because environmental laws are so weak and often not enforced."

In the last 21 years, Formosa plastics group—all of its affiliates and subsidiaries across various countries—have paid in total just over \$560 million of fines, said Jane Patton, who wrote a report entitled "Formosa Plastics Group: a Serial Offender of Environmental and Human Rights."

It was published in October by environmental advocacy group CIEL. Formosa Plastics declined to be interviewed for this story, referring AFP instead to the 2019 consent decree engineered by the shrimper Wilson. — AFP

British car sales stabilize after 4 months of falls

LONDON: New car sales in Britain stabilized last month, after slumping for four straight months on the global semiconductor shortage, industry data showed yesterday. The nation's mainly foreign-owned automakers sold a combined 115,706 vehicles in November, up 1.7 percent with the same month of last year, the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders said in a statement, noting solid demand for electric cars.

However, the SMMT stressed that Britain's coronavirus lockdowns weighed heavily on registrations throughout last year. UK sales in November 2021 meanwhile remained almost a third below their pre-pandemic five-year average, according to the SMMT.

"What looks like a positive performance (in November) belies the underlying weakness of the market," warned SMMT Chief Executive Mike Hawes. "Demand is there, with a slew of new, increasingly electrified, models ... but the global shortage of semiconductors continues to bedevil production and therefore new car registrations." Global car output has been held back in recent months by a worldwide shortage in computer chips—key components in all types of vehicle. UK new auto sales had already nosedived in October by almost a quarter as vehicle production was slammed by the scarcity of semiconductors. — AFP

Chinese developer misses \$179 million bond repayment

BEIJING: Another Chinese property developer said yesterday it had defaulted on a major bond repayment, citing liquidity problems amid a government crackdown on the debt-laden sector.

China's real estate industry—a key growth driver in the world's second-largest economy—has cooled in recent months after Beijing tightened home buying rules and launched a regulatory assault on speculation. The moves have created headaches for several major developers, notably China Evergrande, the country's second-largest by volume that is weighed down by billions of dollars in debt.

Yesterday, Hong Kong-listed Sunshine 100 China Holdings said it had missed a Sunday deadline to make \$179 million in principal and interest payments on a 10.5 percent bond. The default was due to "liquidity issues arising from the adverse impact of a number of



BEIJING: Another Chinese property developer said yesterday it had defaulted on a major bond repayment

Business

European stocks advance on Omicron hope, oil rebounds

Asia mixed, China tech firms struggle

LONDON: European equities advanced yesterday on hopes that the Omicron coronavirus variant might not be as damaging as initially feared, traders said. Oil rebounded after crude giant Saudi Aramco lifted the prices it charges Asian and US customers, in a sign of confidence in the COVID-sapped energy demand outlook.

London equities gained 0.8 percent in late morning deals, despite this week's reintroduction of tighter UK air travel curbs due to Omicron. Frankfurt won 0.3 percent and Paris added 0.7 percent in afternoon eurozone trade.

Riding Omicron hopes

"The (UK) travel industry may have been buffeted by yet another chill wind of more testing requirements, but airlines and hotel groups are riding higher amid hopes the new Omicron variant may not provoke more serious illness," said Hargreaves Lansdown analyst Susannah Streeter. Global stocks had sunk Friday on weak US payrolls data — and heightened Covid concerns that continue to linger.

Asia faced a mixed performance yesterday, but was also roiled by struggling Chinese tech firms. "Markets remain beset by uncertainty as the spread of the Omicron variant threatens to derail the general economic recovery," said Richard Hunter, head

of markets at Interactive Investor.

The Omicron variant has been detected across the globe but no deaths have yet been reported, with authorities worldwide racing to determine how contagious it is and how effective existing vaccines are. Top US pandemic advisor Anthony Fauci said Sunday that while more information was needed, preliminary data on the severity of the Omicron variant are "a bit encouraging."

Tech slumps

Hong Kong stocks slid yesterday as last week's news that Chinese ride-hailing giant Didi Chuxing would start the process of delisting from the New York Stock Exchange sent shares in tech firms tumbling. The move comes in the wake of a sweeping Chinese regulatory crackdown over the past year that has clipped the wings of major internet firms wielding huge influence on consumers' lives — including Alibaba and Tencent.

Shares on the Hang Seng Tech index, which represents the 30 largest tech companies in the southern Chinese city, slumped sharply yesterday. Piling on the woes in Hong Kong was continued uncertainty over the future of the Chinese property market, after developer Evergrande warned that in light of its current liquidity situation, there was "no guar-



TOKYO: Pedestrians walk past an electronic quotation board displaying share prices of the Tokyo Stock Exchange in Tokyo. —AFP

antee that the Group will have sufficient funds to continue to perform its financial obligations".

The property giant's shares sunk by up to 20 per-

cent yesterday on the news, Bloomberg reported. Bitcoin continued to struggle yesterday after a week-end collapse as investors fled risky assets. —AFP



'Hayatt' honors Sheraton Kuwait Hotels

KUWAIT: Since its inception in 1966, The Sheraton Kuwait Hotel, the first international hotel in the Marriott International chain outside the United States of America, has played a significant role in contributing to the welfare of the Kuwait community. Particularly, the Ruqayah Abdulwahab Alqatami Breast Cancer Foundation in raising awareness and supporting patients and their care.

The word "Hayatt" stems from the Ruqayah Abdulwahab Alqatami Breast Cancer Foundation, launched in 2003 and officially recognized in

2007 to alleviate the suffering of cancer patients in Kuwait. The foundation provides treatment for cancer patients, free of charge, as well as offer a social support group, and breast cancer awareness campaigns.

In appreciation of the countless efforts put together to support the humanitarian activities established by the foundation over the years, the Board of Directors represented by Laila Abdullah Thunayyan Al-Ghanem, Dr Labiba Tamim, Mona Al-Ghanem, Hala Al-Ghanem and Fouzia Al-Omair, honored Fahed Abushaar, General Manager of Sheraton Kuwait Hotels. Fahed Abushaar further thanked the committee and all the volunteers for their humanitarian work and emphasized the Sheraton Kuwait Hotels' keenness in supporting cancer patients as part of our social responsibilities towards our community in Kuwait.

Gulf Bank announces 10 winners of Al-Danah November draw

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

Rashed MUSAED Rashed Al-Haroun
Mohammad Saleh Mohammad Al-Faddaghi
Abdallah Abdalhamed Mohamed Ahmed
Mona Khalil Bahman Mohd Bahman
Saed Muhaibis Fahed Al-Anzi
Yahya Ahmad Ibrahim Al-Sharouni
Munther Yousef Bader Al-Ostath
Mohammad Rami Haidar Ali Qaraein
Jamal Ibrahim Rashed Al-Duajj
Rudaina Abdulla Bader Al-Kharafi

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

Numerous benefits

The Al-Danah account is the only account that

weighs approx. 1.43kg - making it gentle and comfortable when held.

Innovative technology

The Huawei MateBook 14s packs outstanding performance into its sleek and lightweight body. It is configured with the new 11th Gen Intel Core i7 11370H Processor and Intel Iris X? integrated graphics. The performance mode can be activated by pressing the Fn+P shortcut, which boosts the CPU TDP to 45W. With support for update ITB NVMe PCIe SSD, Huawei MateBook 14s allows users to stay productive, unleash creativity and multitask with ease. Huawei Shark fin fan system is further upgraded for an even more efficient and quiet cooling performance.

Super device capabilities

The new laptop expands on the Huawei Super Device capabilities with innovative all-scenario device connectivity features. This laptop can connect wirelessly with compatible smartphones such as the newly launched Huawei nova 9, or with tablets like the 12.6-inch Huawei MatePad 11 and with monitors like the new Huawei MateView via a USB-C cable or wirelessly providing futuristic multi-device collaboration and cross-device file sharing with simple drag and drop gestures.

The new Huawei MateBook 14s Leverages the distributed capabilities of the Super Device to boost productivity and creativity. Users can wirelessly project the 12.6-inch Huawei MatePad pro to the Huawei MateBook 14s to enjoy the new features of the PC-Tablet Multi-screen Collaboration that comes with three modes: Mirror, Extend and Collaborate. In Mirror Mode, as the name implies, a user can mirror the Huawei MateBook 14s screen to a tablet's display, allowing them directly work on files and annotate documents, or draw/sketch on your laptop with MPen of the tablet. There is also Extend Mode that transforms your tablet into a second screen, providing extra screen space to display more content, great for online shopping or when browsing the Internet and there are so many items to explore! Lastly, the innovative Collaborate Mode enables cross-platform interactions between Windows and Android, allowing users to transfer content such as text, images and documents between connected devices with a simple drag and drop!

Based on Huawei's distributed technologies, PC-Smartphone Multi-screen Collaboration features help bridge the gap between Windows and Android operating systems at the ground level, enabling seamless all-scenario cross-device collaboration, file

rewards customers for their loyalty by providing loyalty chances. Loyalty chances are the total chances gained in the previous year, which are then transferred to the current year to reward customers for their loyalty to the bank.

Accordingly, all chances gained by existing Al-Danah customers in 2020 (from January 1 to December 31, 2020) have been transferred to the 2021 draws. It is also worth noting that all account draws are attended by a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, with the quarterly and annual draws also reviewed by Ernst & Young.

Annual grand prize

To increase their chances of winning, account holders must either keep their account with a minimum deposit amount of KD 200 or increase their Al-Danah savings - the more deposits into an account, the more chances accumulated over time. Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account holders also have the opportunity to enter and win cash prizes all year long through monthly, quarterly and annual draws.

Opening an Al-Danah Account

To enter the upcoming draws, Gulf Bank customers can open Al-Danah account today with only KD 200. To open Al-Danah account, existing Gulf Bank customers can apply through Gulf Bank's online and mobile banking services or book an appointment at their nearest branch by using the new "Visit Gulf Bank" app for a faster and more convenient branch visit. New customers can also open Al-Danah account by visiting their nearest Gulf Bank branch or by scheduling an appointment through the app.

CBK announces winners of Al-Najma draws

KUWAIT: Commercial Bank conducted the weekly and monthly draws on Al-Najma Account and Salary Transfer Campaign on December 5, 2021. The draws were conducted in the presence of Ministry of Commerce and Industry representative Ahmed Al-Basman.

The results of the draws were as follows:

- 1) Al-Najma monthly draw - the prize of KD 20,000 went to the winner Farah Naaz Kaleemullah.
- 2) Al-Najma weekly draw - the prize of KD 5,000 went to the winner Amer Mohammad Medeth Samir.
- 3) Salary account campaign - the prize of up to KD 1,000 went to the winner Mariam Khaleel Mahmoud Sulaiman.

The bank stated that the salary campaign is aimed at customers who transfer their salaries of KD 500 or more to the bank, especially Kuwaiti employees and residents working in the government, oil sectors and companies listed with the bank as well as retirees, and take advantage of the benefits of this campaign and get an instant cash gift from KD 400 to KD 500 or an interest-free loan for a period of up to four years and up to KD 70,000, Kuwaiti pensioner, along with expatriate customers who transfer their debt to the bank will receive an instant cash gift of 2 percent from their transferred debt up to KD 1,000.

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

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

Huawei launches laptops MateBook 13s/14s in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Huawei Consumer Business Group (BG) yesterday announced the launch of the new Huawei MateBook 13s and the 14.2-inch Huawei MateBook 14s. As a new addition to the MateBook range designed for smart productivity, the new laptop is steeped in the MateBook DNA, combining aesthetic design, innovative features, and smart experience. Meanwhile, it breaks new ground with a 2.5K 90Hz Huawei FullView touch Display, 11th Gen Intel Core i7 high performance processor, Super Device capabilities, 90W Super Charge in addition to the mesmerizing Huawei sound features. The Huawei MateBook 13s | 14s laptops blend creativity into everyday life, delivering a brand-new, smart productivity experience.

The Huawei MateBook 13s comes in Mystic Silver while the Huawei MateBook 14s is available in Space Grey and an all-new colourway: Spruce Green. Both Laptops is now in Kuwait at a price of KD 439,900 from Huawei's online platforms as well as certified retailers.

Huawei MateBook 14s

The Huawei MateBook 14s comes with a 2.5KHz Huawei FullView touch Display that supports up to 90Hz refresh rate for smooth content browsing. By pressing the Fn key and R key simultaneously, it can toggle between 60Hz for a power-saving performance and a 90Hz for smoother visuals. The laptop features MateBook's signature FullView Display with four narrow bezels and a front-facing camera. It gets a high screen-to-body of 90 percent for an immersive viewing experience, and a 3:2 productivity aspect ratio that allows the screen to show more content vertically. With support for 100 percent sRGB wide color gamut, the display can render 1.07 billion colors to show vibrant colors and smooth transition. The 10-point multi-touch support allows users to be more efficient when handling tasks.

The strongest intelligent laptop provides dual eye protection for users with its T-V Rheinland Low Blue Light (Hardware Solution) and Flicker Free certifications, which helps users alleviate eye fatigue, thus protecting their eyes. The Huawei MateBook 14s comes with an aesthetically pleasing design that also makes it comfortable to hold. The metallic finish feels gentle and the whole device



sharing and multi-screen control. Under Multi-screen Collaboration, the recently launched Huawei nova 9 can be connected with the Huawei MateBook 14s to form a powerful Super Device. Once connected, the laptop can access mobile files, and open up to three mobile app windows while the smartphone can function as the PC's thumb device, enabling distributed folders and making cross-device file management easier than ever.

Moreover, users can connect the laptop with the new Huawei MateView via cable or wirelessly to have an extra screen providing an immersive viewing space while also wirelessly projecting the screen of the 12.6-inch Huawei MatePad Pro onto the Huawei MateBook 14s. The benefits of having this trio setup is the easy one-slide swapping of wireless and wired connections which lets easily switch between smart office mode, and personal time mode.

A large Battery with super charging features

As well as the high performance, the Huawei MateBook 14s offers great battery life with a 60Wh high-capacity battery that helps users get rid of low-battery anxiety. Coupled with a pocketable 90W power adapter, the laptop can work for up to 3 hours of productivity work on a 15-minute charge. The power adapter also supports Huawei SuperCharge for a selected range of Huawei smartphones and tablets. The versatile power adapter makes packing for travelling a lot easier.

Huawei sound makes its debut with the Huawei MateBook 14s to bring an enjoyable audio experience. A quad speaker array is included on the new laptop, consisting of two tweeters and two woofers that produce powerful bass, and crisp trebles. The speakers support Huawei's Sound Field Reproduction algorithms to create high quality sounds coming from each side.

NORTH SYRIA'S ONE-LEGGED KUNG FU MASTER



Fadel Othman, a Syrian 24-year-old amputee kung-fu teacher, and his young students pose for a picture outside his martial arts school in the rebel-held town of Abzimu in the western countryside of Aleppo province.—AFP photos



Syrian children train at a martial arts school.



Fadel Othman and his young students perform in an area near his martial arts school.

From butterfly kicks to power jabs, a group of children in rebel-held northern Syria are honing martial arts techniques under the instruction of an unlikely trainer: amputee kung fu master Fadel Othman. The 24-year-old runs a small martial arts school in the rebel-held town of Abzimu in the western countryside of Aleppo province. His 100 students include orphans and children who lost their fathers to Syria's decade-old war. "This is the first team I train after my injury," he told AFP from an open field where he often gives kung fu lessons. "I strongly believe they will one day grow up to become world champions," he said referring to his students.

Othman was hit by an artillery shell in 2015, during fighting between rebels and government forces in Aleppo. He became one of the more than 86,000 Syrians that the World Health Organization says have endured amputations due to conflict-related injuries. As a result, the young man who started his kung fu training at the age of 12, braced to forgo his life-long passion. "I felt like the world was closing doors in my face," Othman told AFP in his academy, beneath a large Syrian opposition flag.

But over the course of the three years he spent in Turkey for medical treatment, he continued classes with martial arts trainers and even participated in several tournaments. Earlier this year, he set up a kung fu academy that trains students at different levels. Inside the gym equipped with punchbags and pull up bars, pictures of Othman participating in tournaments adorned the walls. During one lesson, he demonstrated a series of warm up exercises, without even using crutches. He looked on as students performed sophisticated kung fu sequences on colorful mats before helping



Fadel Othman trains children at his martial arts school.

them refine techniques to block kicks and punches.

The trainer said he wanted to teach children "useful moves they can use to defend themselves" and to boost their confidence. The gym has no mains electricity and when the batteries powering the converted warehouse's lights died, Othman propped himself up against a wall in one of the last rays of daylight slanting into the room to catch his young pupil's punches in his sparring mitts. In an open field in Abzimu, Othman gave another lesson to around 14 school-aged students dressed in matching uniforms. "I see them as my little brothers," he said. "My goal is to have a strong team and nurture a generation (of fighters) that can make it to international competitions," he said.—AFP



Fadel Othman trains children at his martial arts school.

Kennedy Center honors gala returns, with Biden in the house

Stevie Wonder headlined a star-studded gala Sunday saluting Motown founder Berry Gordy, folk legend Joni Mitchell and other recipients of the Kennedy Center Honors, one of America's highest arts awards—with the president back in the audience. Glitzy red carpet events are rare in the US capital, but on Sunday, Hollywood A-listers and Washington politicians flocked to celebrate the careers of Gordy, Mitchell, actress-singer Bette Midler, operatic bass-baritone Justino Diaz and Lorne Michaels, the creator of legendary comedy show "Saturday Night Live."

Joe Biden and his wife Jill sat with the honorees in the Kennedy Center opera house for the gala, marking the first time a sitting president had attended the event in five years—and the Democratic leader earned a rousing ovation. Donald Trump did not attend during his presidency, after several of the honored artists threatened to boycott the gala in his first year in office if he were present. "It is quite nice to see the presidential box once again being occupied," comedian and past honoree David Letterman told the audience to cheers.

Wonder—one of the many acts discovered by Gordy—was the final act in the four-hour event to be broadcast on US network CBS on December 22—and, due to the magic of TV, he started over when he was tripped up by technical difficulties. But the audience—vaccinated and masked under Covid-19 protocols—didn't mind the short delay, and danced along to a selection of Wonder's biggest hits includ-

ing "Superstition" and "Higher Ground." Smokey Robinson, who was discovered by Gordy when he was just a teenager, sang a song he wrote especially

for his mentor and friend.

Wonder and Robinson were not the only megawatt talents on hand: Paul Simon serenaded Michaels, Brandi Carlile honored Mitchell and soprano Denyce Graves was among the singers saluting Diaz with excerpts from "Carmen" and "Faust." A who's who of "Saturday Night Live" stars—from Jimmy Fallon to Amy Poehler to current cast members Colin Hanks, Michael Che and Pete Davidson—took the stage to pay tribute to Michaels.

Sunday's gala was in fact the Kennedy Center's second set of honors this year, after the 2020 gala was canceled due to the coronavirus pandemic.

In May, the center held a more subdued series of smaller, socially distanced events and tributes for the 43rd class of honorees, which included folk icon Joan Baez and Hollywood legend Dick Van Dyke. Though some of those events were held in person at the performing arts complex, which serves as a living monument to slain president John F. Kennedy, Biden did not attend.

The honorees

Mitchell, 78, is revered as one of the top songwriters of her generation, with hits including "Big Yellow Taxi" and "Both Sides Now." Gordy, who just turned 92, revolutionized music with his iconic Motown Records label, launched in 1959 after he borrowed \$800 from his family. He kickstarted the careers of an array of superstars such as Wonder, Robinson, Diana Ross, Marvin Gaye and Michael Jackson. "I think I'm in a dream... and it's a wonderful dream," Gordy told reporters on the red carpet.

Michaels, 77, has mentored scores of comedians who got their big breaks on "Saturday Night Live," the much-lauded sketch show that has been on the air for more than 40 years. "He gave me the chance to play in his playground," said Kenan Thompson, who is now the longest-tenured SNL cast member. Midler, 76, is a showbiz legend with a string of films ("The Rose," "Beaches"), albums and shows ("Fiddler on the Roof," "Hello, Dolly!") on her resume. During his decades-long career in opera, the 81-year-old Diaz—a bass-baritone born in Puerto Rico—performed on the world's great stages, from the Metropolitan Opera to La Scala, alongside legends such as Beverly Sills and Leontyne Price.—AFP

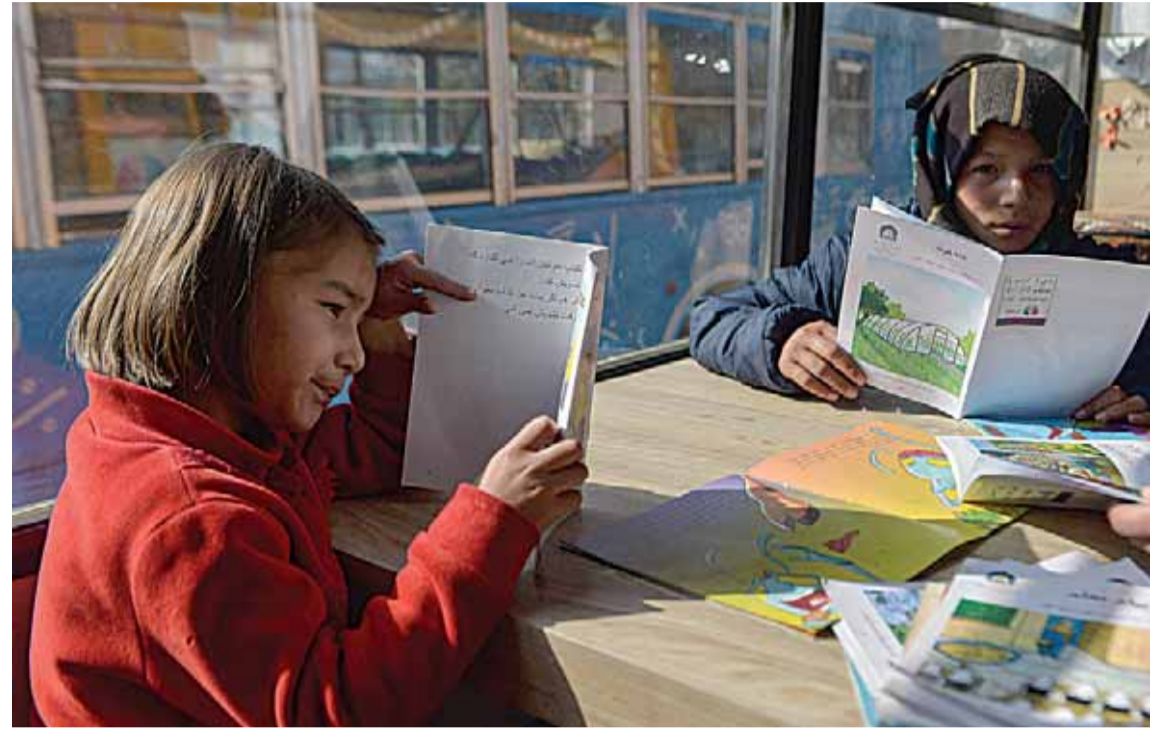


Singer and actress Bette Midler acknowledges applause as US President Joe Biden hosts the Kennedy Center Honorees Reception.

MOBILE LIBRARY restarts in Afghan capital, delighting children



Children stand inside a mobile library which opened its doors for the first time since the Taliban's return to power, in Kabul. —AFP photos



Children read their books inside a mobile library which opened its doors for the first time since the Taliban's return to power.

A mobile library bus chugged to a Kabul orphanage Sunday and opened its doors for the first time since the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan, eliciting beaming smiles from children. "I'm really feeling happy. I'm studying the books I love again," says 11-year-old Arezo Azizi, whose favorite tome is a counting aid about a cat who gets more pieces of cheese the higher it can count. The library "didn't come for three months, until now," she explains, sitting on a converted public bus and her voice rising above the excited chatter of her

peers. The mobile library is one of five buses leased by a local organization called Charmaghz, established by Fresha Karim, an Afghan graduate from Oxford University.

Hundreds of children have in recent years made use of the mobile libraries daily as they criss-crossed Kabul, as many schools lack their own library. But "we lost almost all of our sponsors after the government was taken (over) by the Taliban" in mid-August, says Ahmad Fahim Barakati, deputy head of the non-profit initiative. The Taliban's education ministry granted per-

mission for the mobile libraries to restart several weeks ago. But it was only a few days ago that agreement was reached with the transport ministry, which owns the buses, Barakati explained. Like the children, librarian Ramzia Abdi Khail, 22, is visibly happy that the show is back on the road.

"It's a lovely feeling. Currently, the schools are also closed," she notes. Girls' education has been hit particularly hard by the Taliban's return to power, as millions of girls across the country have been barred from secondary education in

state schools. "We have street kids and I love to serve them because they do not have the opportunity to go to school, and this is a way that I can serve them," adds Khail. "We have Islamic books, we have English and Dari storybooks ... we have painting books, different game books." Charmaghz has enough funds at present to keep the mobile libraries on the road for a month or so, Barakati says. "We are raising funds through online platforms and globally and I hope we have enough sponsors and donors" to keeping going beyond then, he says. —AFP



NEW 'HALO' GAME DEBUTS AS XBOX TURNS 20

Fans will this week get their hands on the latest "Halo" video game, as Microsoft marks 20 years of the franchise that turned its Xbox console into a hit. "Halo Infinite" is out Wednesday-but to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the cult sci-fi series, Microsoft and developer 343 Industries have already released a free-to-play "beta" test version. Within an hour of its launch on November 15 some 100,000 people were logged on to play simultaneously via online platform Steam, in a taste of the excitement around the sixth installment's return to a 26th-century space war.

"The entire Halo community has been anxiously awaiting the arrival of this game," said 28-year-old Jenn, a competitive Halo player who goes by the gaming alias Queen x3. "The beta was a lot of fun and created a lot more excitement leading up to the official launch." As for the appeal of the game, seen through the eyes of a heavily armed cyber-soldier, she said it was in the thrill of the challenge. "Halo is truly one of the most competitive first-person shooters out there-not many people can pick up a controller for the first time and be great."

Killer app

Set in a future where humans have colonized many planets, "Halo: Combat Evolved" arrived in November 2001 as the debut game for Microsoft's brand-new Xbox console. The series quickly became what is known as a "killer app"—the product driving sales of the Xbox-as Microsoft sought to turn itself into an American rival to Japan's Nintendo and Sony in the already-lucrative market for gaming consoles. Two decades later Xbox remains a key player in a video game industry now thought to be larger than the movie sector, with market research firm Mordor Intelligence valuing it at \$173.7 billion in 2020.

Its Xbox Live platform was a pioneer in turning online gaming into a social phenomenon, with people logging on to play against friends or strangers. It now has more than 100

million monthly users. The Xbox console still lags far behind the Japanese behemoths, with an estimated 6.7 million sold by 2021 compared to nearly 90 million Nintendo Switches and 12.8 million PlayStation 5s, according to an analysis by Ampere. But the latest versions of the Xbox, Series X and S, are the fastest-selling in the company's history, according to Microsoft. "It's not as if the title is needed to move consoles off shelves, although it will certainly help increase demand," NPD gaming analyst Mat Piscatella said of the new Halo release.

Red ring of death

The game series—which has sold 91 million copies—has spawned an entire media franchise, with films, books, comics and a forthcoming TV series starring "The Wire" actor Pablo Schreiber as protagonist Master Chief. It has even given rise to the expression "Halo Killer", meaning a game good enough to beat its success. Joshua "Mash" Mashlan, a professional coach for Halo e-sports tournaments, remembers its rise as a time when finally, "you weren't a nerd for liking the game." "Everybody wanted to play," the 28-year-old told AFP.

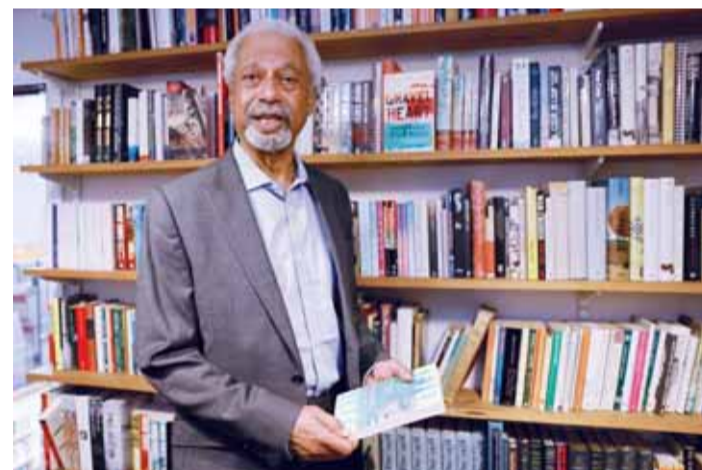
He was so excited about the release of the beta version last month that he scheduled a day off work to play it, and has been enjoying it despite "a lot of little glitches". "It's a fresh start to a game we've been playing for 20 years," he said. It's a pleasant surprise for a title whose release has been delayed by more than a year, due in part to complications linked to Covid-19 teleworking but also criticism from players of the early artwork, derided as basic. Microsoft has launched a host of initiatives to mark two decades of both Halo and the Xbox, including a virtual museum exploring key moments in the console's history. These include the infamous "red ring of death" crisis in 2007 when a defect prompted mass failures of the console, resulting in ominous red glowing light on the box. The resulting recall cost Microsoft more than \$1 billion. —AFP

NOBEL LITERATURE WINNER GURNAH TO RECEIVE MEDAL IN UK

British novelist Abdulrazak Gurnah, winner of this year's Nobel Prize for Literature, received his medal in London. Gurnah, 72, won the Literature Prize in October for his novels unflinchingly portraying the effects of colonialism and the plight of refugees. The Swedish ambassador to London, Mikaela Kumlin Granit, will present the writer with his Nobel medal and a diploma at her official residence at 1200 GMT, ahead of the main awards ceremony in Oslo on December 10. The prize also comes with a sum of 10 million Swedish kronor (about \$1.1 million).

The Nobel Foundation announced in September that the winners for medicine, physics, chemistry, literature and economics would receive their prizes in their home countries for the second straight year, due to "uncertainty about the course of the pandemic". Gurnah became the fifth African to win the Nobel Literature Prize, with the most recent previously being South African writer JM Coetzee in 2003. Born in Zanzibar off the coast of east Africa, now part of Tanzania, Gurnah fled to Britain as a refugee in the late 1960s, later acquiring British citizenship.

The Swedish Academy said Gurnah was honored "for his uncompromising and compassionate penetration of the effects



In this file photo Zanzibar-born author Abdulrazak Gurnah poses for a photo call prior to attending a press conference, after he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, in London. —AFP

of colonialism and the fate of the refugee in the gulf between cultures and continents". "I write about these conditions because I want to write about human interactions and... what is it that people go through when they are reconstructing lives," Gurnah told reporters at a news conference in London after his win.

'Something is getting through'

The head of the Academy's Nobel committee, Anders Olsson, said Gurnah's writings had particular resonance after a record 82 million people fled wars, persecution and violence in 2020.

"The Nobel prize, it's an enormous honor," Gurnah told AFP when the prize was announced. "It means that something is getting through—that's what the work attempts to do, persuading or successfully reaching through to people. I love that, I'm so happy about that." After his Nobel win, he urged Europe to see African refugees as people who "come out of need" and who "quite frankly... have something to give".

He has also spoken out against Brexit and the "Windrush" scandal, which saw immigrants from the Caribbean targeted by the government in recent years

despite moving to Britain legally in the 1950s and 1960s. "I'm speaking because this is how I would speak... whether I had won the Nobel prize or not. I'm not playing a role, I'm saying what I think," he told journalists. Gurnah began writing as a 21-year-old in England.

Although Swahili was his first language, he had learnt English in Zanzibar, a British protectorate until unification with Tanzania, and chose it as his literary tool. The author of 10 novels and a number of short stories, he is best known for his 1994 breakthrough novel "Paradise", set in colonial East Africa during World War I, which was shortlisted for the Booker Prize.

Gurnah also had a successful career in academia, recently retiring as professor of English and postcolonial literatures at the University of Kent in Canterbury. He lives in Brighton on the south coast of England. On Tuesday he will deliver his Nobel Prize lecture, which will be streamed live on the prize's website. This year has seen writers from Africa dominate top literary awards with South African Damon Galgut winning Britain's Booker Prize and 31-year-old Senegalese Mohamed Mbougar Sarr becoming the first writer from sub-Saharan Africa to win France's top literary award, the Prix Goncourt. —AFP

DISNEY'S SPELL UNBROKEN AS 'ENCANTO' STAYS TOP OF N AMERICAN BOX OFFICE

Disney's animated musical fantasy film "Encanto" stayed in top place at the North American box office this weekend, taking in an estimated \$12.7 million, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations said Sunday. With original music by Lin-Manuel Miranda, "Encanto" tells the story of a family in the mountains of Colombia endowed with special powers—except for daughter Mirabel, who ends up having to save the others. Voice actors include Stephanie Beatriz, John Leguizamo and Diane Guerrero.

Sony's "Ghostbusters: Afterlife," the latest chapter in the wacky supernatural franchise, took in an estimated \$10.4 million to place second for the Friday-through-Sunday period, cementing the hold of family-friendly films at the top of the box office. Directed by Jason Reitman, whose father Ivan Reitman made the original 37 years ago, "Afterlife" stars Paul Rudd, Carrie Coon and McKenna Grace in a ghostly tale that has shape-shifted from 1980s Manhattan to today's small-town Oklahoma. Ridley Scott's new crime drama "House of Gucci" placed third at \$6.8

million, continuing its healthy showing for an adult-oriented film at a time when COVID fears have kept many older viewers at home.

The MGM/United Artists film stars Adam Driver as Maurizio Gucci, the onetime head of the famed Gucci fashion house, and Lady Gaga—again drawing Oscar buzz three years after "A Star Is Born"—as Patrizia Reggiani, the vengeful ex-wife who in 1995 hired a hitman to murder Gucci outside his Milan office. The star-laden cast also includes Al Pacino, Salma Hayek, Jeremy Irons and Jared Leto. "Christmas with the Chosen: The Messengers," the first theatrical release of the popular streaming series from Fathom Events, took fourth place at \$4.1 million, while Disney/Marvel superhero film "Eternals" placed fifth, at \$3.9 million. Rounding out the top 10 were: "Resident Evil: Welcome to Raccoon City" (\$2.7 million) "Dune" (\$1.8 million) "Clifford the Big Red Dog" (\$1.8 million) "King Richard" (\$1.2 million) "Venom: Let There Be Carnage" (\$1.0 million)—AFP



Lifestyle | Features

FROM CINEMA BAN TO FILM FESTIVAL:
SAUDI ROLLS OUT RED CARPET

Less than four years after lifting a ban on cinemas, Saudi Arabia hosted its first major film festival yesterday as it eyes a lucrative new industry. Movie houses were barred for decades until April 2018, but over the next 10 days, actors and directors will tread the red carpet at Jeddah's Red Sea International Film Festival. The festival started a day after Jeddah hosted its first Formula One Grand Prix. It will showcase 138 long and short films from 67 countries in more than 30 languages.

Among them are Jordan's critically acclaimed "The Alleys", directed by Bassel Ghandour, and non-Arabic films including Joe Wright's "Cyrano" and "83", the story of India's 1983 cricket World Cup victory. The festival is also expected to honor Haifaa Al-Mansour, the first female Saudi director, who shot "Wadjda" in 2012, the winner of a number of international awards. The rise of Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, in 2017 has ushered in a number of reforms.

"The thought of organizing a film festival

in Saudi Arabia was unimaginable just five years ago," said Egyptian art critic Mohamed Abdel Rahman. The festival also has an eye on a burgeoning market for shooting and consuming films in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia's annual box office could reach \$950 million by 2030, according to a report by multinational accountancy firm PwC. It estimates the kingdom's forecast population of nearly 40 million could absorb up to 2,600 cinema screens.

Underground industry

A social shift in the conservative Gulf state has included the lifting of a ban on women driving and allowing mixed-gender concerts and other events, even as a strict crackdown on dissent remains in place. "Before cinemas reopened in 2018, the industry was working underground," said Saudi director Ahmed Al-Mulla who has run an annual Saudi Film Festival in the eastern city of Dammam since 2008. "There were no capabilities to film or get financing. It all depended on the individual's efforts."

Industry observers, however, say the Saudi film sector still lacks expertise, as well as investment. But some big projects are now becoming reality.

MBC Studios, the production arm of Saudi-owned Arab media giant MBC Group, went online in 2018 with huge budgets. It is currently filming the action movie "Desert Warrior" in the Neom region, also on the Red Sea. But it's not just about big budgets, said Al-Mulla. Cinema needs "a high standard of freedom of expression... from featuring women to the freedom of addressing different topics", he said. "Cinema is the soft power that can pave the way for the success of the social and economic changes that are underway (in the kingdom)." Saudi Arabia has for decades had a strict interpretation of Islam and despite the modernization drive, social restrictions remain in place. "Cinema is not only an art but needs to be transformed into a culture in Saudi Arabia," Al-Mulla said. —AFP

ASIA'S BIGGEST FLOWER MARKET
MAKES STARS OUT OF INFLUENCERS

Boxes of roses, lilies and carnations pile up as influencer Cai Cai speaks into her smartphone from a small studio at Asia's biggest flower market—with thousands of customers eagerly awaiting her view on the best deals. E-commerce is big business in China and influencers and livestreamers have made their fortunes showcasing products for luxury brands and cosmetics firms. Now the nation's horticulture industry, worth an estimated 160 billion yuan (\$25.1 billion), is getting in on the action. And where once people visited markets and florists themselves, they are increasingly shopping for blooms via their smartphones.

Online retail now represents more than half the sector's turnover. "Five bouquets, only 39.8 yuan (6.25 dollars) for those that order right away," the 23-year-old says—a sales pitch she hones for eight hours a day delivered at lightning speed. "When you sell something for a long time, the words come naturally," she tells AFP. Earnings can be unreliable, however.

"Flower sales vary in busy and slack seasons, so a livestreamer's daily income is very variable. All I can say is that the more you work, the luckier you will be," she explains, as colleagues next to her put the bouquets in cardboard boxes ready to be shipped. Demand for cut flowers has soared in China as standards of living have risen, with the southern province of Yunnan at the epicenter of that boom thanks to its all-year mild climate. Provincial capital Kunming boasts the biggest flower market in Asia—the second biggest in the world after Aalsmeer in the Netherlands.

'Flowers are vital'

Everyday at 3 pm, a rose auction starts in a huge room where over 600 buyers share the day's supply behind their screens. "Yunnan represents around 80 percent of flower production in China and 70-80 percent of the flowers on sale pass through our auction room," says Zhang Tao, responsible for the market's logistics—a crucial role when the goods are so perishable. "That represents on average more than four million flowers sold every day. For Chinese Valentine's day, we sold 9.3 million in a day." They



This photo shows a vendor selling preserved flowers at his stall at the Dounan Flower Market in Kunming in southwestern China's Yunnan province. —AFP photos

are shipped across China within 48 hours. On the retail side of the market, another influencer, Bi Xixi, showcases flowers and bouquets from stalls to sell on to her own online subscribers. Wearing a traditional Chinese dress known as a hanfu, passing from one stand to another with her phone at the end of a cane, the 32-year-old has racked up around 60,000 subscribers.

She picks up flowers, shows them on her screen while followers hurry to place their orders. Bi Xixi started livestreaming early last year, when China was paralyzed by the COVID pandemic. That's when she realized people were eager to see online the flowers they could no longer buy outside. Now,

on a good day, she says she manages to sell 150,000 yuan (\$23,500) worth of flowers in three hours of live streaming. She takes around ten percent commission and is optimistic about the future of the trade. "People appreciate rituals more and more. Flowers give them a feeling of being happy and young people are beginning to like buying flowers," she says.

The market is still very far from saturation, says Qian Chongjun, head of the Dounan Flower Corporation, one of the largest entities on the market. "Buying flowers every week has become a habit in many families," says Qian. "I think that one day they will become a vital need, like air and water." —AFP



Livestreamer Cai Cai selling flowers in a makeshift studio at the Dounan Flower Market.



Various flowers in rectangular boxes piled up in a warehouse at the Dounan Flower Market.



A flower buyer checking flowers in a warehouse at the Dounan Flower Market.



Flower buyers checking flowers in a warehouse at the Dounan Flower Market.



Influencer Bi Xixi (left) dressed in traditional costume doing a livestream at the Dounan Flower Market to sell flowers with her phone in Kunming in southwestern China's Yunnan province.

100 dead cats
found in French
pensioner's home

Around 100 dead cats were found in the home of a retired man in southern France, animal protection associations said yesterday. The volunteers were alerted by the niece of the 81-year-old who entered his house on Sunday after he was taken to hospital in Nice on the

French Riviera and discovered the lifeless pets. Most of the dead cats were stored in sealed plastic or wooden containers, the regional daily Nice-Matin reported.

In addition to the cats found in and around the house, there were also remains of squirrels and rats, and a dog's jaw. More than 20 severely undernourished cats were rescued from the house alive and handed over to veterinarians or placed in foster homes. "Judging from their positions most of the cats were already dead when they were put in these boxes," Philippe Desjacques, president of the La Tribu du Fourmilier association, told AFP. "But we

think that at least two were locked in alive." The mangled remains of one cat were found on the living room sofa, partly devoured by other cats.

Desjacques said the pensioner was probably suffering from Noah syndrome, which describes people hoarding a large number of animals, often out of loneliness, without being able to look after their needs. Noah syndrome is a category of the Diogenes syndrome that describes people hoarding objects. Desjacques said the animal protection associations would file criminal charges against the man for mistreatment of animals and negligence. —AFP



Sports

Hamilton wins Saudi thriller, levels with Verstappen for a title decider

Bottas pips Ocon on the line for third place

JEDDAH: Lewis Hamilton kept his hopes of an eighth world championship title alive with a thrilling victory in a dramatic and at times chaotic Saudi Arabian Grand Prix on Sunday. The result left the seven-time champion level on 369.5 points with title rival Max Verstappen ahead of the final race in Abu Dhabi next weekend. Hamilton was behind Verstappen for much of the 50-lap race which was stopped twice because of crashes and interrupted numerous times by the safety car and virtual safety car.

But Hamilton, nursing a damaged front wing caused by a collision with Verstappen, came through late, to claim his eighth win of the season and the 103rd of his career. The title will be settled in Abu Dhabi, although if neither finishes in the points it will be Verstappen, who has nine victories, who will take the title. "I have been racing a long time but that was incredibly tough," said Hamilton who gained an extra point for the fastest lap.

Verstappen finished second, 11.825secs behind in spite of being given a five-second penalty after colliding with the Mercedes star.

He was later sanctioned by 10 seconds by the stewards although that did not impact his finishing position. "Just trying to race and this sport is more about penalties than racing," said Verstappen. "For me this is not Formula 1, but at least the fans enjoyed it and I gave it all today, but clearly not quick enough." Hamilton's teammate Valtteri Bottas pipped Alpine's Esteban Ocon on the line for third place to give Mercedes a 28-point lead in the constructors' championship.



Title will be settled in Abu Dhabi

the crash barriers.

That handed Verstappen a 'free' pitstop and allowed him to begin from the front when the race restarted, ahead of Hamilton and Bottas. When the race resumed, Hamilton slipped past Verstappen who then barged his way around the outside, going off the track, to regain the advantage. Behind them Sergio Perez was clipped by Charles Leclerc's Ferrari, causing the Red Bull to spin off. That in turn triggered a domino effect with George Russell (Williams) and Nikita Mazepin (Haas) also going off.

Jeddah first

It was the first time that Jeddah had hosted a Grand Prix and the problems that the drivers, including Verstappen, had had in practice and qualifying were apparent again. It was also the first Grand Prix since the death last month of Frank Williams and was played out against a backdrop of concerns about Saudi Arabia 'sportswashing' their human rights record.

For once Mercedes made the perfect start. Having locked out the front row, they succeeded in holding Verstappen at bay. The safety car made its first appearance on lap 10 when Mick Schumacher spun on Turn 22 and slammed his Haas into the wall. Hamilton pitted immediately to switch tyres with Bottas following a lap later while Verstappen stayed out to take the race lead. Red Bull's gamble looked to have paid off when the race was red-flagged shortly after in order for repairs to be done on



JEDDAH: Winner Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton (right) reacts with his trophy flanked by second-placed Red Bull's Dutch driver Max Verstappen during the podium ceremony after the Formula One Saudi Arabian Grand Prix at the Jeddah Corniche Circuit in Jeddah. —AFP

Collision

The stewards decided that Verstappen's manoeuvre was illegal and promoted Alpine's Ocon to pole for the third start of the race, with Hamilton in second and Verstappen in third. It was the Dutchman who was quickest out of the blocks, blasting past the other two on the opening corner and setting the world championship title in his sights. Hamilton soon breezed past Ocon and was breathing down Verstappen's neck.

On lap 36 he attempted to overtake but in a move

evocative of their tussle in Brazil, Verstappen cut across Hamilton to keep the lead. Verstappen was ordered to give the place back but as he braked Hamilton ran into the back of him damaging his front wing. When the Dutchman was again instructed to make way, he pulled over to let Hamilton pass and then immediately retook the lead. A lap later Hamilton slipped past again to move back in front and this time, with Verstappen also hit by the five-second penalty, he was able to lead all the way to the chequered flag.—AFP

Russia stun Croatia to win 3rd Davis Cup

MADRID: Russia claimed a third Davis Cup title on Sunday after Daniil Medvedev and Andrey Rublev both won their singles matches to defeat Croatia. Medvedev's 7-6 (9/7), 6-2 victory over Marin Cilic came after Rublev had earlier prevailed 6-4, 7-6 (7/5) over Borna Gojo, giving Russia an unassailable 2-0 lead in Madrid. Croatia's greatest chance would have been in the doubles with world number one pair Nikola Pietrangeli and Mate Pavic, but they always needed a surprise in the singles to take the tie to the final rubber.

Instead, Medvedev and Rublev, ranked two and five in the world respectively, held their nerve to make it nine out of 10 victories for Russia's power pair in the tournament. "I can say that for all of us it's very important to win here. It's still the Davis Cup," said Medvedev in a press conference. "We still see Novak (Djokovic) playing. Rafa (Nadal) won it last time. "No matter the format, the best players in the world are happy to represent their country."

It's Davis Cup and we are the winners of it. That's the most important thing." Cilic and Gojo were far from overwhelmed and, with Real Madrid's Luka Modric supporting in the crowd, they rose to the occasion in a compelling final that in the end turned on two close tie-breaks. Russia have not won the Davis Cup since 2006 and failed to reach a single quarter-final between 2011 and 2018. But Medvedev and Rublev are the leaders of a new generation of talent that could enjoy repeat successes in the future, with Aslan Karatsev and Karen Khachanov also ranked in the top 30.

Victory for the men also completes a Russian one-two after the women's team won the Billie Jean King Cup in Prague last month. The last country to do the double was the Czech Republic in 2012. Croatia were no strangers to this stage, this their third Davis Cup final in five years after their 2016 defeat to Argentina and 2018 victory over France. But Russia were firm favorites and it was always going to take something special either from Cilic, the 33-year-old former US Open champion, or Gojo, who is ranked 279th in the world.

Cilic had chances in the first set, including a break point on Medvedev's second serve at 4-3 but an aggressive backhand return hit the tape and instead it went to a tie-break. They changed over with Cilic up 4-2 after a Medvedev forehand skimmed wide but Medvedev won four out of the next five points to create a set point on the Cilic serve. Cilic saved it with a courageous smash only to send a forehand approach just out to give Medvedev a second chance, which he spurned with a double fault.

A big serve down the middle though gave Medvedev 8-7 and this time Cilic caved, a backhand going awry to hand away the set. With Cilic tiring and Medvedev growing in confidence, the second set was more of a stroll. Medvedev secured a break in the fourth game when a Cilic forehand popped up kindly off the net-chord before confirming victory with a second break when a Cilic forehand fell short.

Rublev's precision from the baseline had earlier proved decisive but Gojo pushed him hard, particularly in the second set, when the Croatian led 5-4 in the tie-break. Yet Rublev delivered under pressure, arrowing a superb pass down the line before an inside-out forehand winner opened up match point, which he converted when a Gojo backhand drifted long.—AFP

Kuwait's Paralympic players win medals



KUWAIT: Kuwait Paralympic Table Tennis player Mohammad Al-Rashidi won the silver medal in the teams Category 8 standing, while Hussain Al-Bannai won bronze during the Asian Youths Para Games. Kuwait collected 3 medals (Gold, Silver and Bronze) during the games. More than 1,500 players (30 coun-

tries) participated in the game.

Chairman of the Paralympic committee, head of the delegation Nasser Al-Ajmi said he is proud of the Kuwaiti players' achievements adding that "we participated with six players only and the results reflect the great development the Para sports are witnessing

with cooperation of all clubs." Secretary General of Kuwait Paralympic Committee Shareefa Al-Ghanim praised Kuwait's athletes. She said it is a major achievement that can be added to other achievements Kuwait athletes made over the decades - urging the youth to continue in their winning path.

Arab Masters Tennis tournament kicks off



Waleed Sami



Rabei Sleem

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The draws for the Arab Masters Tennis tournament will be made today at Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah International Tennis Complex in preparation for the competitions tomorrow - with the best players from 16 Arab countries. The top ranked players in Arab countries started arriving yesterday and were received by Public Relation Committee at Kuwait Tennis Federation.

Referees of the Masters tournament held a meet-



ing yesterday evening in order to discuss the technical preparations. 20 referees will officiate the event which will be led by Abdelraouf Abdelsalam. Meanwhile, Secretary General of the Arab Tennis Federation Waleed Sami appreciated Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah International Tennis Complex saying "this complex will give Arab Tennis a quality move. The integrated facilities, courts, and high level equipment make this one of the best sports complexes in the Middle East and the best in the world".

after 54-hole leader Collin Morikawa unraveled. Ninth-ranked Hovland began the day six strokes adrift but fired a six-under par 66 to end 72 holes on 18-under 270 at the Albany resort in the Bahamas. That was good enough for a one-stroke victory in the 20-man invitational hosted by Tiger Woods.

"It's really cool," Hovland said. "Being Tiger's event, that's incredible to be a part of and especially to win it. "I haven't really done all that well in these limited field events so hopefully that's going to change." The 24-year-old from Oslo matched the best final-round fight-back by any Challenge champion. "I didn't think a win

was going to be very plausible," Hovland said. "But I know this golf course is tricky. You can make a lot of birdies and you can make up a lot of ground but it's very easy to make bogeys and doubles. "I knew if I put a good score up there you never know what's going to happen."

Hovland, who defended a US PGA title last month at Mayakoba, also won a European Tour title this year in June at Munich. He took full advantage of a collapse by reigning British Open champion Morikawa, who squandered a five-stroke lead with a chance to become world number one by winning.—AFP

Sports

Saint-Etienne sack Puel after Rennes thrashing

Monaco hammer Metz 4-0; Bordeaux hold Lyon 2-2

PARIS: Claude Puel became the first Ligue 1 coach to be dismissed this season after bottom side Saint-Etienne suffered a 5-0 loss at home to Rennes on Sunday. The former Monaco, Lyon and Leicester City boss paid the price for winning just two of 17 matches this term, leaving Saint-Etienne behind Metz on goal difference at the foot of the table. Saint-Etienne released a statement that said Puel had been relieved of his duties in charge of the first team until further notice. He will meet with club management on Monday.

It effectively brings an end to Puel's two-year spell in charge at a club that was put up for sale in April. Rennes heaped more misery on Saint-Etienne as Martin Terrier scored his first career hat-trick. A comical own goal by Yvann Macon and a late strike by 17-year-old Lesley Ugochukwu completed the rout. "That really hurts," Saint-Etienne midfielder Zaydou Youssouf told Prime Video. "It is a disaster, to lose 5-0 at home is unacceptable, we have no right to lose like that. We have to show a different side to ourselves because that was rubbish."

Rennes reclaimed second place as they rebounded convincingly from a midweek loss to Lille — the only defeat in their past 15 matches in all competitions - but still trail leaders Paris Saint-Germain by

11 points. Bruno Genesio's team face a near impossible task of catching PSG, although the Qatar-owned club are hardly playing like a side filled with superstars. PSG needed an injury-time equaliser by Dutch international Georginio Wijnaldum on Saturday to draw 1-1 with Lens, their second draw in as many matches.

Nice lost at home for the third game in a row as they went down 3-0 to Strasbourg. Ludovic Ajorque gave Strasbourg a first-half lead before Habib Diallo and Adrien Thomasson added late goals. "Today was the worst of the lot," said Nice midfielder Mario Lemina. "I can't explain it in the heat of the moment, and it's better that I don't. I'm so angry and we'll sort it out internally. We have to put our heads back in the right place and rediscover that warrior spirit. We're off track right now."

Monaco are level on points with Strasbourg in seventh after thumping Metz 4-0. Sofiane Diop struck early for Monaco before Kevin Volland converted a penalty. Gelson Martins and Wissam Ben Yedder were also on target for Niko Kovac's side. Lyon drew 2-2 away to Bordeaux, keeping Peter Bosz's team in 12th place in what has been a middling first season in charge for the Dutchman. The visitors twice led through goals from Jason Denayer and Thiago Mendes, but a Malo Gusto own goal and Alberth Elis effort earned a point for Bordeaux.



SAINT-ETIENNE: Saint-Etienne's French coach Claude Puel reacts during the French L1 football match between AS Saint-Etienne and Stade Rennais FC at the Geoffroy Guichard stadium Saint-Etienne, central France on December 5, 2021. —AFP

Nantes won 1-0 at Lorient to snap a five-game winless run and Montpellier beat Clermont by the same scoreline, while Angers defeated Reims 2-1. —AFP

Barca, Atletico in danger of Champions League exit

PARIS: Xavi Hernandez faces his first critical test as Barcelona coach with the club at risk of failing to make the Champions League knockout stages for the first time in two decades. A goalless draw at home to Benfica last month left Barca with their destiny in their own hands, but with a much trickier final game away to Group E winners Bayern Munich. Spanish champions Atletico Madrid have their work cut to secure one of the five unclaimed last-16 tickets after three defeats on the spin, while all four teams remain in the hunt in an unpredictable Group G. AFP Sport looks at what's at stake going into the final round of Champions League group games.

Ballon d'Or backlash from Bayern?

Barca find themselves on the ropes ahead of tomorrow's trip to Germany, but it could have been far worse were it not for Benfica forward Haris Seferovic's glaring miss in stoppage time at Camp Nou. Bayern are one of three teams with a perfect record in this season's competition, and Robert Lewandowski's perceived Ballon d'Or snub may give the star striker extra incentive to prove a point.

Xavi suffered his first defeat as Barca coach on Saturday against Real Betis. He rested key players with a view to the game in Munich, where victory would guarantee Barca go through as runners-up in Group E, extending their 20-year run of reaching the knockout phase. A youthful Xavi was establishing himself as a mainstay of the midfield when Barca exited in the first group stage of the 2000-01 competition. Failure to secure maximum points would open the door for Benfica to pip them to second place, with the Portuguese needing to beat Dynamo Kiev in Lisbon.

Three-horse race

Porto, AC Milan and Atletico will battle it out for the second qualification spot behind Liverpool in Group B. Two-time former European champions Porto hold a one-point edge over both rivals ahead of the visit of Atletico. Milan host a Liverpool side that Jurgen Klopp could rotate heavily ahead of a busy festive schedule. Last season's Europa League winners Villarreal, beaten at home by two late Manchester United goals on matchday five, go to Atalanta knowing they will advance at the expense of the Italians if they avoid defeat in Bergamo.

Austrian champions Salzburg appeared to be coasting through after accruing seven points in three games, but back-to-back away losses mean they could still miss out. Lille top Group G with eight points and will progress if they get a point at Wolfsburg. The Germans are last in the section but victory would send them through instead. Salzburg can seal a knockout berth with a draw at home to Sevilla, who in turn would qualify if they win.

Already in the last-16 pot

Eleven clubs are assured of their place in the last-16 draw on December 13, five of which have already clinched top spot. Erik ten Hag's impressive Ajax will attempt to complete a perfect group stage for the first time in club history at home to Sporting, certain of second above Borussia Dortmund irrespective of Tuesday's results.

Manchester City cannot be caught by Paris Saint-Germain in Group A, while Real Madrid have a two-point lead over Inter Milan in Group D ahead of their Bernabeu showdown. Holders Chelsea, who go to Zenit Saint Petersburg for their final Group H game, will nail down top spot if they match Juventus' result at home to Swedish outfit Malmo. Ralf Rangnick made a winning start to his spell as United's interim manager and is safe in the knowledge his team will move on as winners of Group F come what may against Switzerland's Young Boys. —AFP

New York City beats COVID-hit Union to reach MLS Cup final

WASHINGTON: Brazilian teen striker Talles Magno scored in the 88th minute Sunday to give New York City FC a 2-1 victory over Philadelphia and a berth in the Major League Soccer final. A host Philadelphia side depleted with 11 players lost to COVID-19 safety protocols battled to the dying moments before Icelandic midfielder Gudmundur Thorarinnsson took a long pass and flicked on to the 19-year-old South American to net the game-winning goal.

Former Celtic manager Ronny Deila's City siders stretched their unbeaten streak to eight consecutive matches to capture the Eastern Conference title and advanced into Saturday's MLS Cup final against the host Portland Timbers. "I don't think we played very well," Norwegian manager Deila said. "Offensively we played very well but defensively we looked very tired. We always were a

step behind. "We have to give full credit to Philadelphia with all the problems they have had. They made it hard for us. But we've kept going all season and here we are again."

Philadelphia's Nathan Harriel nodded a header over the crossbar in the 87th minute, a heartbreaker just before the NYCFC counterattack delivered the winner. Philadelphia placed 11 players into MLS COVID-19 protocol on the eve of the match, including two goalkeepers and most of the backline, leaving the squad with only 17 players for a workout. The Union added three players under extreme hardship rules, but the short-handed side walked onto its home pitch clearly unfancied despite a better regular-season record than City.

Philadelphia seized the lead in the 63rd minute when Hungarian midfielder Daniel Gazdag lofted a centering pass into the box and New York City's



CHESTER: New York City FC celebrate after defeating Philadelphia Union during the MLS Eastern Conference Final at Subaru Park on December 05, 2021 in Chester, Pennsylvania. —AFP

Alexander Callens, a Peruvian defender, deflected the ball into his own goal. Just as Union supporters were raising their volume, City answered with the equalizer in the 65th minute off a right-footed volley by Argentine mid-

fielder Maxi Moralez. Union goalkeeper Matt Freeze, a hometown product who usually serves as a third-string reserve, made a diving save in the 76th minute to keep his side level into the dying minutes. —AFP

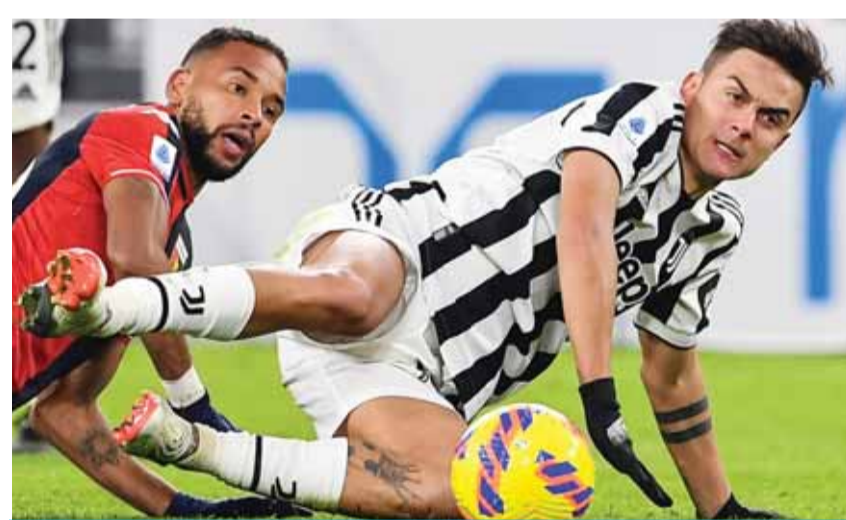
Juventus overwhelm lowly Genoa to keep Shevchenko winless

ROME: Juan Cuadrado and Paulo Dybala scored as Juventus eased to a 2-0 win over Andriy Shevchenko's Genoa on Sunday to register their fourth victory in five Serie A games. Cuadrado struck direct from a corner that sailed over the head of Genoa goalkeeper Salvatore Sirigu in the ninth minute, with Dybala drilling a second late on to send Juve up to fifth place.

The victory begins an important month for Massimiliano Allegri's side who will hope a run of favourable fixtures can allow them to close the seven-point gap to the Champions League places. Juve are 11 points adrift of leaders AC Milan ahead of matches against Venezia, Bologna and Cagliari in the run up to Christmas and the winter break. "We know we need to carry on like this, to try and get to the last game in December with as many wins as possible to get closer to the teams above," Dybala told DAZN.

Genoa have won once in 16 games this term, picking up just one point in four outings since the appointment of former Ukraine and Milan star Shevchenko. They have yet to score under the 2004 Ballon d'Or winner and did not attempt a single shot against Juve. The league's joint-top scorer Dusan Vlahovic scored the winner from the penalty spot in a 3-2 victory at Bologna to leave Fiorentina level on points with Juve. Vlahovic's 13th goal of the campaign moved the Tuscan side ahead of Jose Mourinho's Roma who lost 3-0 at home to champions Inter Milan on Saturday.

Vincenzo Italiano's Fiorentina ended a run of four consecutive defeats on the road to Venezia, Lazio, Juventus and Empoli. Fiorentina's Youssef Maleh opened the scoring with a header after half an hour at the Stadio Dall'Ara for his first Serie A goal. Musa Barrow pulled a goal back for Bologna before



TURIN: Juventus' Argentine forward Paulo Dybala (right) and Genoa's Brazil's midfielder Hernani stumble as they go for the ball during the Italian Serie A football match between Juventus and Genoa on December 5, 2021. —AFP

the break but a Cristiano Biraghi free-kick six minutes after the interval restored the visitors' advantage. Vlahovic added the third from the penalty spot after 67 minutes to seal all three points as Aaron Hickey

grabbed a late goal for Bologna. Ciro Immobile is level with the 21-year-old Vlahovic at the top of the Serie A scorers chart after he grabbed a pair of goals in Lazio's 3-1 victory at Sampdoria. —AFP

Freiburg humiliate Moenchengladbach

BERLIN: Borussia Moenchengladbach coach Adi Huetter was under mounting pressure Sunday after his side slumped to a historic 6-0 humiliation at home to Freiburg, leaving them just three places above the Bundesliga drop zone. Freiburg scored all six goals in an incredible first half as they rampaged to their highest ever Bundesliga win against a shellshocked Gladbach side. Gladbach's joint second-heaviest top-flight defeat heaped pressure on Huetter, who has endured a mixed start since taking the reins at the beginning of the season.

The Austrian led Gladbach to a memorable 5-0 cup win over Bayern Munich in October but has won just five of his 14 league games in charge so far. "First and foremost, I have to apologize for our per-

formance today which was unacceptable. I am unbelievably disappointed," Huetter told DAZN. Gladbach sporting director Max Eberl said the result was "surreal", but suggested that Huetter's job remained safe for the time being. "We've decided on a direction, and we will stick to it through thick and thin, and not look to change everything straight away," he told DAZN.

Gladbach were unbeaten at home going into this game, while Freiburg had not won a top-flight game in Moenchengladbach since 1995. All of that went out of the window as Freiburg tore through their hosts in a jaw-dropping first 20 minutes. Maximilian Eggestein and Kevin Schade both scored from open play in the first five minutes, while the next four goals all came from set pieces. Philipp Lienhart prodded in from close range at a free-kick and Nicolas Hoefler scored at a corner to make it 4-0 by the 20-minute mark.

Gladbach's calamitous dead-ball

defending continued as Lucas Hoeler headed in from close range after the hosts failed to clear yet another free-kick. That made Freiburg the first Bundesliga side to score five goals in the first 25 minutes of a game since Gladbach themselves beat Eintracht Braunschweig 10-0 back in 1984. Nico Schlottbeck made it six before half-time, heading home a Vincenzo Grifo set-piece via a deflection off Ramy Bensebaini. "It might be tough to find somewhere to celebrate on a Sunday evening with the Covid restrictions, but I'm sure we'll have a few glasses," said Schlottbeck.

In Sunday's earlier game, new Hertha Berlin coach Tayfun Korkut began his reign with a hard-fought 2-2 draw against former club and fellow Bundesliga strugglers Stuttgart. Montenegro striker Stevan Jovetic struck either side of half-time as Hertha fought back from two goals down to snatch a point in their first game under their new boss. —AFP



MONCHENGLADBACH: Freiburg's German forward Kevin Schade (2nd right) gets up to score during the German first division Bundesliga football match Borussia Moenchengladbach v SC Freiburg on December 5, 2021. —AFP

'Clinical' India thrash New Zealand

India top world's Test rankings



MUMBAI: India's cricketers pose for pictures with the trophy after winning the fourth day of the second Test cricket match between India and New Zealand at the Wankhede Stadium yesterday. — AFP

MUMBAI: Indian skipper Virat Kohli hailed his "clinical" side after they hammered New Zealand by 372 runs to win the second Test yesterday and clinch the series 1-0. Spinner Ravichandran Ashwin claimed a match tally of eight wickets - and 300th scalp on home soil - as India usurped the Black Caps as the world's top-ranked Test side.

New Zealand, who started day four on 140-5 in their chase of an improbable 540, were all out for 167 before lunch in Mumbai. It was tough on New Zealand's Mumbai-born spinner Ajaz Patel, who had made history with 10 wickets in the first innings. New Zealand, who doggedly hung on for a draw in the opening match of the two-Test series, were undone by their batting after Ajaz's heroics.

They collapsed to 62 all out in their first innings and were never in the chase against India's spin force. Kohli, who returned to lead India after he stepped down as national Twenty20 captain and took a short break, said: "To come back with a win is a great

feeling, returning as the captain it was a clinical performance, something we've seen time and again. "You want individuals to step up, and guys did that. Even the first Test match was good, this was better."

Ashwin, who struck three times in the final session on day three, sent back overnight batsman Henry Nicholls, stumped for 44, for the final wicket. Jayant Yadav bowled Rachin Ravindra for 18 and struck twice in one over, as he returned career-best figures of 4-49. Daryl Mitchell, who top-scored with 60, was the only bit of resistance for the tourists during his fourth-wicket stand of 73 with Nicholls on Sunday.

Lost for words

Ajaz, a left-arm spinner whose name went up on the Wankhede honours board on Saturday after his perfect 10, stood out with match figures of 14-225 - the best ever by a bowler against India. Ajaz remained the lone performer for New Zealand, who became the World Test champions after beating India in the title clash in June.

His 14 wickets against India surpassed England fast bowler Ian Botham's 13-106 in Mumbai in 1980. "It's a special occasion for me and my family. To be able to do that (10-for) is special," Ajaz said after the match. "I'm knackered but I'll use my quarantine time to recover. It's a different challenge to bowl back home. That's the beauty of Test cricket, it's about adapting your game plan and bowling accordingly."

But the 33-year-old's remarkable effort was part of a losing fight. He nevertheless had a memorable homecoming including taking the big wickets of Kohli and Cheteshwar Pujara for ducks. "To be honest, I still don't know how to put the 10-for into words," said Ajaz, who was born in Mumbai but moved to Auckland with his parents in 1996. "I'm trying to absorb it, been flooded with hundreds and thousands of messages. It's overwhelming at the moment."

New Zealand's stand-in skipper Tom Latham said their first-innings collapse was fatal for the tourists, but added he was taking the positives. "If you take



MUMBAI: India's Mayank Agarwal (right) catches the ball to dismiss New Zealand's Will Somerville during the fourth day of the second Test cricket match between India and New Zealand yesterday. — AFP

the first innings out of it, then obviously it's a little bit of a different story," said Latham, who took over as captain from the injured Kane Williamson. "I think it's one of those things in cricket, where

everything you do doesn't tend to work and it's just one of those days." New Zealand take a Christmas break before hosting Bangladesh for two Tests starting January 1. —AFP

Jazz thump Cavaliers as Hornets outgun Hawks

LOS ANGELES: Donovan Mitchell scored a team high 35 points, and Rudy Gobert had six points and 20 rebounds as the Utah Jazz held on to edge the Cleveland Cavaliers 109-108 on Sunday. The Jazz failed to hold onto a 15-point lead in the fourth quarter and the Cavaliers had a chance to win, but Darius Garland's jump shot missed with just three seconds remaining on the clock. Jarrett Allen tried to tip the ball in without success.

"That last possession, I knew it was going to go to (Garland)," Jazz coach Mike Conley said. "I just tried to stay up as high as I could and make sure it was contested. I told (Garland), it was like playing against myself." Gobert also had five blocks as Utah posted its fourth consecutive victory. Bojan Bogdanovic added 16 points, and Rudy Gay had 15 in the win.

"That's a really good team, and they made some shots," Jazz coach Quin Snyder said. "It's a really good win for us." Garland scored 31 points, Allen added 17 points and 11 rebounds and rookie Evan Mobley had 14 points and 12 rebounds for the Cavs, who had their win streak halted at four. Mobley shot six-of-16 from the floor in a team-high 36 minutes of playing time. "He's going to be a star in this league, really soon," Snyder said of Mobley. "He's a rare combination of size, length, quickness and skill."

Cleveland clawed their way back with a 15-0 surge in the fourth to tie it 97-97 after the Jazz had opened up a 15-point lead ear-

ly in the final quarter. Cedi Osman contributed to the offensive burst with a dunk, three-pointer and steal. Garland initially drove the lane in the final seconds but got turned away. He wound up with the ball at the top of the key and launched a long three-point attempt that missed, and the Jazz survived Allen's follow attempt. "I work on that shot every day," said Garland. "It felt good. I was open."

'Bring the effort'

Elsewhere, Pascal Siakam scored 17 of his 31 points in the second quarter and the Toronto Raptors beat the Washington Wizards 102-90. Precious Achiuwa chipped in with 10 points and 14 rebounds for the Raptors, who have won two in a row. "We don't have a seven-footer out there, but we have guys that can do multiple things and are great on defense," Siakam said. "We've just got to bring the effort every single night."

In Atlanta, Miles Bridges scored 32 points, Kelly Oubre chipped in 28 and the short-handed Charlotte Hornets halted a three-game road losing skid with a 130-127 win over the Atlanta Hawks. Bridges shot 11-for-15 from the floor, including four-for-six from beyond the arc. The Hornets made 17 of 37 threes. "I feel like that's a statement game, let people know that we're here," Bridges said. The Hornets played without four players who were sidelined because of Covid-19 health and safety protocols. —AFP

Buccaneers down Falcons; Lions win

LOS ANGELES: The Super Bowl champion Tampa Bay Buccaneers shrugged off a week of controversy to thump Atlanta 30-17 on Sunday, while the Detroit Lions set aside 12 months of NFL futility with a 29-27 victory over the Minnesota Vikings. For superstar quarterback Tom Brady and the Bucs, it was business as usual in Atlanta, despite the fact that wide receiver Antonio Brown and safety Mike Edwards were suspended midweek by the NFL after a probe into claims they used fake COVID-19 vaccination cards.

Brady didn't seem to miss Brown as a target, throwing for 368 yards and four touchdowns-two to Rob Gronkowski-as Tampa Bay moved closer to clinching the NFC South division title. The 9-3 Bucs have a four-game lead in the division over Atlanta, Carolina and New Orleans, who are all 5-7. Atlanta's Marlon Davidson picked off a Brady pass late in the first half and scrambled three yards for a touchdown. But that miscue was nothing compared to the rough day endured by Falcons quarterback Matt Ryan, who was sacked five times.

"We still haven't played our best game yet," Brady said. "Hopefully we can do that this coming week." If the Bucs' win had a business-as-usual feel, it was a celebration in Detroit, where the long-starved Lions let a double-digit lead slip only for quarterback Jared Goff to connect with rookie Amon-Ra St. Brown for a nine-yard touchdown with four seconds remaining that delivered the victory and sent the home fans into a frenzy.

The Lions hadn't won a game since December 6, 2020. They had come close this season but had failed to post a win through 11 games-although they managed a tie against Pittsburgh last month to halt a 12-game losing streak. "Oh, man, I don't know if I have the words right now," Goff said in an on-field post-game interview.

"We kind of let that thing slip away from us there at the end. There was a lot of feeling around here of it going one way and we made it go the other today." The Lions led 23-21 with 4:08 to play when Goff lost the ball on a sack by Vikings linebacker Blake Lynch. Vikings quarterback Kirk

Cousins then piloted a six-yard drive that ended with a pass to Justin Jefferson in the end zone for a touchdown that put Minnesota up 27-23.

'It's huge'

Goff responded, guiding a 75-yard, 14-play drive in less than two minutes capped by his TD toss to St. Brown as time expired. "It's huge," said Goff, who was traded from the Los Angeles Rams to the Lions at the end of last season after passing for a career-low 20 touchdowns in 2020. Goff completed 25 of 41 passes for 296 yards with three touchdowns and one interception on Sunday. "We've been just begging for one and when you get one, you feel what it's like to win," Goff said. In Seattle, Russell Wilson completed 30 of 37 passes for 231 yards and two touchdowns, and the Seattle Seahawks ended a three-game losing streak with a 30-23 victory over the San Francisco 49ers.

The 49ers' Trenton Cannon was taken off the field in an ambulance after a collision with a teammate on the opening kickoff. The team said he suffered a concussion and would remain overnight in a Seattle hospital for more tests. Cannon was on the ground when he accidentally hit a teammate, snapping his head back. The ambulance had to drive onto the field so paramedics could load Cannon into it.

Adrian Peterson scored on a one-yard run in his debut for the Seahawks. It was his 126th career touchdown, tying Jim Brown for 10th on the NFL's all-time list. In other early games, Gardner Minshew took over as quarterback in place of injured Jalen Hurts and piloted the Philadelphia Eagles to a 33-18 victory over the New York Jets. The mustachioed Minshew completed 20 of 25 passes for 242 yards and two touchdowns, a performance that will likely spark debate over whether he should get the starting nod over 23-year-old Hurts.

The Arizona Cardinals welcomed quarterback Kyler Murray back from an ankle injury and emerged with a 33-22 victory over the Chicago Bears, improving their league-leading record to 10-2. Murray completed 11 of 15 passes for 123 yards and two touchdowns, and ran for 59 yards and two touchdowns. The Cards looked sloppy at times, but they benefited from the four interceptions thrown by Bears quarterback Andy Dalton-the most for a Chicago quarterback since 2016. —AFP