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UAE to introduce corporate tax of 9% from June 2023

Emiratis intercept Houthi missile as president of Zionist entity visits



AL JAWF, Yemen: This image grab from footage released by the UAE Ministry of Defense yesterday reportedly shows the destruction of a missile launch site operated by the Houthis in northern Yemen. — AFP

DUBAI: The United Arab Emirates will introduce a corporate tax from mid-2023, the finance ministry said yesterday, in a major change of course as the country seeks to diversify its income. The Gulf financial center, long known as a tax haven and the regional headquarters for a swathe of multinationals, will tax business profits over AED 375,000 (\$102,000) at 9.0 percent from June next year, a statement said.

The announcement is the latest significant move by the UAE, which switched from Friday-Saturday weekends to Saturdays and Sundays this year to align closer with global markets. "The UAE corporate tax regime will be amongst the most competitive in the world," said a statement carried by the official WAM news agency. Nine percent is at the lower end of corporate taxes worldwide.

There are no plans to introduce personal income tax or capital gains tax from real estate or other investments, the ministry said. The UAE, a major oil exporter but also a big player in business, trade, transport and tourism, is diversifying to reduce its reliance on crude. It is also facing rising competition from neighboring Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest oil exporter, which is pursuing its own drive to diversify its economy and attract

foreign businesses.

"With the introduction of corporate tax, the UAE reaffirms its commitment to meeting international standards for tax transparency and preventing harmful tax practices," Younis Haji Al-Khoori, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Finance, said in the statement. Tax incentives in the UAE's free-trade zones will remain in place, it added.

Meanwhile, the UAE shot down a ballistic missile fired by Yemen's Houthi rebels during a visit by the president of the Zionist entity yesterday, the latest attack to rattle the Middle East financial hub. Nobody was hurt in the early-hours attack, the third in consecutive weeks on the wealthy Gulf nation that is part of the Saudi-led coalition fighting Yemen's Iran-backed insurgents.

"Air defense forces... intercepted and destroyed a ballistic missile launched by the Houthi terrorist group at the UAE," the ministry said, according to the official WAM news agency. It said fragments of debris fell "outside of populated areas", without giving further details. The ministry said it responded by destroying the missile launch site in Yemen's northern Al-Jawf region, releasing black-and-white footage of the explosion.

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News in brief

Holiday from Feb 27-March 3

KUWAIT: The Cabinet decided yesterday to give a holiday for the public sector from February 27, 2022 to March 3, 2022 on the occasions of the National Day and Liberation Day, as well as the Israa and Miraj holidays, the Center for Government Communication announced yesterday.

Court to mull blocking Netflix

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti lawyer Abdulaziz Al-Subaei filed a case in court demanding that local authorities block Netflix in Kuwait after it screened the Arabic movie 'Perfect Strangers', which has caused an uproar in the Arab world. The court set May 25, 2022 as the date to look into the case.

German police arrest suspects

FRANKFURT: German police have arrested two suspects in connection with the fatal shooting of two police officers during a traffic stop yesterday, police said in a statement. "A 32-year-old suspect was taken into custody without resisting arrest," Saarland police said. A 38-year-old man was arrested moments earlier in the same western region, following a major manhunt. — AFP

Trudeau tests COVID positive

MONTREAL: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said yesterday he had tested positive for COVID-19 but was not experiencing severe symptoms. The 50-year-old Trudeau, who received his third vaccine dose in January, urged Canadians to get vaccinated and boosted as the nation battles a rise in COVID cases and hospitalizations due to the Omicron variant. — AFP

Rihanna expecting first baby

NEW YORK: Superstar Rihanna revealed her baby bump in Harlem over the weekend, dropping the news that she is pregnant with her first child. The entertainment and fashion mogul strolled hand in hand with boyfriend A\$AP Rocky, sporting a long pink jacket. — AFP

UK PM sorry for 'partygate', but won't quit

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson yesterday apologized after his government was criticized for "failures of leadership and judgment" in allowing lockdown-breaching parties at his offices. Johnson's position has been hanging by a thread because of the steady drip of revelations since late last year, but he has in the last week been given a lifeline as police stepped in.

"I'm sorry for the things that we simply didn't get right and also sorry for the way this matter has been han-

dled," Johnson told MPs in parliament. He vowed "to get on with the job" despite widespread political and public anger and calls for him to quit or be forced out. "I get it and I will fix it," he added, promising sweeping changes to his Downing Street operation following criticism about lack of accountability and managerial oversight.

The police probe meant that senior civil servant Sue Gray was forced to avoid going into detail in a long-awaited report about 16 events held in 2020 and last year, so as not to prejudice the Scotland Yard inquiry. But Gray still managed a stinging rebuke to the prime minister's authority, contrasting government officials' behavior with the sacrifices made by the public during the pandemic.

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LONDON: A video grab shows British Prime Minister Boris Johnson making a statement to MPs following the release of the Sue Gray report in the House of Commons yesterday. — AFP

Lebanon arrests 21 in Zionist 'spy networks' busts

BEIRUT: Lebanon said yesterday it had busted at least 17 suspected Zionist spy networks in one of the largest nationwide crackdowns in recent years, with a judicial source reporting 21 arrests. Interior minister Bassam Mawlawi told cabinet that security

forces had "clamped down on 17 spy networks working for (the Zionist entity)," acting information minister Abbas Halabi said after the meeting. Neighboring Lebanon and the Zionist entity remain in an official state of war.

Halabi said the rings operated both "locally and regionally," without giving elaborating or confirming how many people had been arrested. The arrests were part of an operation carried out by Lebanon's Internal Security Forces (ISF). Prime Minister Najib Mikati said the arrests had helped stop "efforts to tamper with security and sabotage the stability of the country," according to a cabinet statement read

by Halabi. Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri praised the operation as "unique achievement".

Al-Akhbar, a newspaper supportive of Lebanon's powerful Hezbollah movement, reported the busts yesterday, calling it the largest operation against suspected Zionist agents in the country for 13 years. It said that the ISF's intelligence unit started the crackdown four weeks ago and that the detained include Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian nationals - some of whom were later released. A prominent judicial source told AFP that 21 people had been arrested, with their cases referred to military courts.

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Nadal edges ahead in GOAT debate

LONDON: The numbers do not lie. Rafael Nadal stands alone on 21 Grand Slam titles, breaking a tie with Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic in the race to be crowned the greatest male tennis player of all time. The number of major titles is not the only factor used to determine where players sit in the pantheon but it is increasingly used as the go-to metric.

Nadal played down his astonishing achievement following his grueling five-set win over Daniil Medvedev in the Australian Open final in the early

hours of Monday. The 35-year-old Spaniard said he did not care much whether his 21st title made him the best player in history or not.

But many fans are captivated by the debate about who will ultimately emerge from the golden age of men's tennis on top, with each of the "Big Three" supported by their own phalanx of diehard supporters. Swiss great Federer was out on his own as the sport's alpha male when he overtook Pete Sampras' record of 14 Grand Slam wins at Wimbledon in 2009, with Nadal trailing on six majors and Djokovic on just one.

As the rush of big titles began to slow for Federer from 2010, his two great rivals stepped on the accelerator, consistently winning Grand Slams

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MELBOURNE: Spain's Rafael Nadal poses with the winner's trophy yesterday during a media photoshoot the morning after his victory at the Australian Open. — AFP

Local

Zain upgraded to A- in latest 'CDP Score Report - Climate Change 2021'

Commitment to programs for a more environmentally friendly organization



KUWAIT: Zain Group, a leading mobile telecom innovator in seven markets across the Middle East and Africa has scored an A- in the latest CDP Score Report - Climate Change 2021, which ranks the company within the Leadership band. This ranking is higher than the regional average for Asia of B-, and higher than the Media, Telecommunications and Data Center Services sector average of B.

CDP is a not-for-profit charity that runs the global disclosure system for investors, companies, cities, states and regions to manage their environmental impacts. Earlier in 2021, Zain announced its inclusion in the global list of the CDP, with an advanced rating in Management Scope B in the Climate Change Index.

The company's latest ranking of A- elevates it from being the highest ranked and only telecom operator in the Middle East and Africa to achieve



**First in region
and among
leaders globally**

this positive rating initially with respect to its efforts to address climate change, to joining respected global companies such as BT Group, Cogeco Inc, Deutsche Telekom AG, and LG Uplus in being regarded as among the leaders in their efforts to combat the effects of climate change.



Zain is committed to implement programs that make it a cleaner, more efficient, and environmentally friendly organization. As staunch advocates of managing the negative impacts of our activities on the climate, Zain will continue on delivering its promise to bring about systemic change by integrating technologies to generate safe energy to help reduce global warming.

The CDP Score Report allows companies to understand their score and indicate which categories require attention to reach higher scoring levels. This enables them to progress towards environmental stewardship through benchmarking and comparison with peers, in order to continuously improve their climate governance. Investors additionally receive a copy of the CDP Score Report upon request.

Zain's climate action plan has set targets to

reduce emissions, reduce waste, and align with UN Sustainable Development Goal number 13. The company is committed to building climate change scenarios that would help limit global warming to 1.5°C compared to pre-industrial levels, and Zain strongly believes this strategy will help achieve a reduction in emissions, and operating costs, while also mitigating risks related to climate change.

Zain's climate change initiatives and beyond are detailed in the company's comprehensive annual Sustainability Report, which can be found here: <https://www.zain.com/en/sustainability/>

Zain has been an active member of the GSMA Climate Action Team since in 2019, when the company began disclosing its environmental impacts, energy consumption and carbon emissions through the CDP. It remains one of the most transparent organizations in the region in disclosing these details.

Kuwait-Saudi talks mull future oil projects on divided zone

KUWAIT: A joint committee linking Kuwait and Saudi Arabia convened for talks yesterday aiming to explore future oil projects and plans in an area between the two Gulf Arab neighbors' borders, known as the Divided Zone. The talks examined any potential obstacles that could hinder the completion of strategic projects in the jointly run oilfields of Khafji and Wafrah, said an oil ministry statement, citing training programs for national workforces and the use of modern technology as part of these plans.

The close rapport established by the respective oil ministries of the two OPEC members is a testament to the closeness of bilateral ties, the statement cited ministry undersecretary Sheikh Dr Nimr Al-Sabah as saying, adding that the threat posed by the spread of the Omicron variant of COVID-19 on the oil industry could force "emergency plans."

The Kuwaiti official hailed as "historic" a 2019 accord between his country and Riyadh to resume oil output from the divided zone after a more than four-year halt, attributing the breakthrough to the diligent efforts of the two Gulf Arab neighbors. Oil production in the Kuwait-Saudi Neutral Zone is divided equally between the two countries. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Members of the Kuwaiti-Saudi joint committee are seen during the meeting. — KUNA

Kuwait affirms keenness to fight desertification

CAIRO: Kuwait is bent on tackling desertification and has manifested its determination to achieve this objective with various ventures such as establishing natural reserves, officials have affirmed. Director of Kuwait's Biodiversity Department Leena Al-Awadhi and Head of Desertification Department at the Environment Public Authority Dr Ali Hassan affirmed yesterday the Gulf country's keenness to implement international agreements to combat desertification and preserve biodiversity, along with the other countries that suffer from desertification. This came in a statements to the press on sidelines of the 20th meeting of the Arab team tasked with following up on international environmental agreements to combat desertification and preserve biological diversity.

Awadhi pointed out that the goal of the meeting is to set a plan for all Arab countries, recording their implementation of relevant international accords. She noted that Kuwait is one of the signatory states of international conventions on the environment and other relevant conventions, adding that Kuwait represents the Asian region in the office of the Convention on Biological Diversity. — KUNA

UAE to introduce corporate tax of 9%...

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The latest rebel missile was fired as Isaac Herzog makes the first visit to the UAE by a Zionist president, after the countries established diplomatic ties under the 2020 Abraham Accords. Herzog, who met Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan on Sunday, visited Dubai's Expo 2020 site yesterday and held talks with the UAE Prime Minister and ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum.

Herzog said his visit "symbolizes hope, peace, and a great future for our nations, the region, and the world at large" in contrast with Iran which he accused of "destabilizing the region and using its proxies to employ terror". The Houthis' top political leader, Mahdi Al-Mashat, said "these three consecutive weekly operations show our ability and determination to carry out what we threatened until the Emirates gives up its aggression and siege", quoted by the Houthi-run Saba news agency.

Saudi Arabia and France joined the United States in condemning the Houthi attack. Yesterday's attack was the latest in a series against the Emirates. Three oil workers were killed in a drone-and-missile attack on Abu Dhabi on Jan 17 - the first deadly assault in the UAE claimed by the Houthis - and two ballistic missiles were intercepted over the capital a week later.

The attacks, which follow a spike in hostilities in Yemen, have raised Gulf tensions further at a time when interna-

tional talks over Iran's nuclear program are floundering and have helped push oil prices to seven-year highs. The Iran-backed Houthis began attacking UAE interests after a series of defeats on the ground in Yemen, inflicted by the UAE-trained Giants Brigade militia. In early January, the rebels seized a UAE-flagged ship in the Red Sea, saying it was carrying weapons - a claim denied by the Emirates.

Houthi military spokesman Yahya Saree said the rebels targeted Abu Dhabi with a number of ballistic missiles and Dubai with multiple drones. He also warned "citizens, residents and companies to stay away from... vital facilities as they are at risk of being targeted in the coming period". The UAE's defense ministry said it blew up the launch site at 12:50 am UAE time (20:50 GMT), exactly 30 minutes after the missile was intercepted.

The Emirates affirms its "full readiness to deal with any threats" and will "take all necessary measures to protect the UAE from any attacks", it added. The UAE authorities said that the incident had no impact on air traffic, with flight operations proceeding normally. A senior Emirati official last week vowed that Houthi attacks will not become a "new normal" for the Gulf country, a trade, business and tourism center and a major oil exporter. The UAE withdrew its troops from Yemen in 2019 but remains an influential player. It also hosts American troops and is one of the world's biggest arms buyers. — AFP

UK PM sorry for 'partygate'....

Continued from Page 1

"Too little thought" had been given about how appropriate boozy events were and would be seen as others stuck to the rules, unable to comfort loved ones sick and dying with COVID. "There were failures of leadership and judgment by different parts of No 10 (Downing Street) and the Cabinet Office at different times," Gray wrote in her 12-page report. "Some of the events should not have been allowed to take place. Other events should not have been allowed to develop as they did."

Gray questioned more than 70 individuals and examined emails, WhatsApp and text messages, photos and Downing Street's entry and exit logs. She condemned "excessive" drinking in Downing Street, as well as unwieldy expansion of

the prime minister's office in recent years that had blurred lines of accountability.

Johnson's opponents have accused him of misleading parliament by insisting the events at Downing Street were within the rules at the time and were work-related. Ministers found to have misled MPs are normally expected to resign. In angry exchanges in the House of Commons, Johnson urged all sides to await the Metropolitan Police's own findings.

But opposition Labour leader Keir Starmer said the fact that 12 of the 16 parties, including one in Johnson's own flat, were subject to a police probe was "a mark of shame". "He is a man without shame," the former chief prosecutor said, urging Johnson's Conservative cabinet allies to depose him instead of "supporting further misconduct, cover-up and deceit". — AFP

Nadal edges ahead in GOAT...

Continued from Page 1

over the following decade, even though Federer returned to winning ways in 2017 and 2018. Nadal pulled level on 20 Slams after winning the French Open in 2020 and Djokovic joined the party after scooping three majors during a stellar 2021 season.

But the Spaniard is now out on his own after what he called "the biggest comeback of my career" to complete a 2-6, 6-7 (5/7), 6-4, 6-4, 7-5 win in Melbourne. Nadal now has 58 "Big Titles", defined by the men's ATP Tour as a trophy at a Grand Slam championship, ATP Finals, Masters 1000 tournament or an

Olympic singles gold medal.

He is the fourth man in history to capture at least two trophies at all four Grand Slams, a feat also achieved by Djokovic. Federer has won the most overall career singles titles of the three, with his tally of 103 only bettered by American Jimmy Connors, who won 109. Djokovic is out on his own in terms of time spent at number one, notching 358 weeks at the top so far, with Federer on 310 and Nadal on 209.

The Serbian, who lags behind his two major rivals in the popularity stakes, also boasts a winning record in head-to-head matches against both, although Nadal edges Djokovic in their Grand Slam meetings.

So what next in the battle for tennis immortality? Nadal did not have to confront either of his great rivals in Melbourne. Federer was absent injured and Djokovic, unvaccinated against coronavirus, was deported on the eve of the tournament after Australia cancelled his visa. — AFP

Lebanon arrests 21 in Zionist 'spy...

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Their main tasks were to "collect data on Hezbollah's military and security sites" in the group's strongholds in south Lebanon, the southern suburbs of the capital Beirut and the Bekaa valley, the judicial source said.

The alleged spies also gathered information about other party leaders and political figures, the source said, adding that one of the suspects is a Hezbollah member that the group has "refused to hand over to the Lebanese judiciary". The source said that the alleged spies' handlers had exploited their "difficult living and social conditions, which made it easier to recruit them for these missions".

Lebanon is mired in a deep economic crisis, and around 80 percent of Lebanese live in poverty, amid rampant inflation and extended power cuts. The Al-Akhbar report claimed that at least 12 of the suspects in detention were aware they were working for the Zionist entity, while the rest believed they were providing information for global companies or nonprofit organizations. — AFP

Local

Kuwait, Algeria see eye-to-eye on regional, international issues

Amir receives letter from Algerian president



KUWAIT: His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah reads a letter from the President of Algeria Abdelmajid Tebboune addressed to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, delivered by the Algerian Foreign Minister Ramtane Lamamra.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets Algerian Foreign Minister Ramtane Lamamra. —Photos by KUNA and Yasser Al-Zayyat

KUWAIT: His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday at Bayan Palace a written letter from the President of Algeria Abdelmajid Tebboune addressed to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The letter, delivered by the Algerian Foreign Minister Ramtane Lamamra, touched on bilateral relation, topics of common interest, as well as the latest regional and international developments. The meeting was attended by the Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and other senior officials.

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah also received the Algerian Foreign Minister at Seif Palace. The meeting, in attendance of Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Sabah, was on occasion of the Algerian top diplomat's visit to the country to participate in Arab ministerial consultative meeting. Head of Prime

Minister's Diwan Abdulaziz Al-Dakheel, and Assistant Foreign Minister for office affairs Salah Hamdan and Assistant Foreign Minister for Arab affairs Nasser Al-Qahtani, were also in attendance. Kuwait's Foreign Minister then held talks with his Algerian counterpart at the Foreign Ministry headquarters. The discussions between the two sides dealt with means of cementing further the bilateral relations and various issues on the regional and international arenas.



Algeria to host upcoming Arab summit

Eye-to-eye

Sheikh Dr Ahmad affirmed the identical views and visions between Kuwait and Algeria regarding regional and international issues. In a press conference after the official talks, Sheikh

Ahmad stressed the need to strengthen the process of joint Arab action and supporting Algeria in the upcoming Arab summit based on the directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The Kuwaiti minister praised the Algerian role and its participation in the consultative ministerial meeting of Arab foreign ministers hosted by Kuwait on Sunday, pointing out that the



Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah speaks during a press conference with his Algerian counterpart Ramtane Lamamra.

meeting included several proposals regarding the development of the joint Arab action mechanism to cope with the challenges the Arab world is going through.

Meanwhile, Lamamra praised bilateral talks between the two countries, the valuable ideas that were discussed and the precise commitments to support joint action in various economic, social and banking fields, and to support and integrate diplomatic work at all levels. The Algerian minister added that his visit to Kuwait was "successful" and will be

followed by multiple meetings on various levels, adding that in the future, the bilateral economic cooperation committee will be directly responsible between the foreign ministers of the two countries. In response to a question about discussing Arab League reforms at the upcoming summit, he stressed the importance of developing the common Arab vision, developing the pace of work in the League, and matching ambitions with new challenges, and developing structures and curricula to reach the desired Arab unity. —KUNA

Kuwaiti FM meets Omani counterpart



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets his Omani counterpart Bader Al-Busaidi. —KUNA

KUWAIT: Kuwait Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah on Sunday met his Omani counterpart Bader Al-Busaidi on the occasion of his visit to Kuwait for taking part in the consultative

meeting of Arab foreign ministers. During the meeting, they discussed bilateral relations and topics related to bettering the future of both nations, in addition to latest regional and international developments. —KUNA

Info Minister meets Indian Ambassador



KUWAIT: Minister of Information and Culture Dr Hamad Rouh El-Din meets Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Sibi George.

KUWAIT: Minister of Information and Culture Dr Hamad Rouh El-Din met with Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Sibi George yesterday. They discussed bilateral ties and ways of further strengthening

cooperation particularly in the domain of media and information. They agreed to enhance media cooperation between the countries in various Indian languages, the Indian embassy said in a statement.

Kuwait's crude oil exports to Japan up 14.7% in Dec

TOKYO: Kuwait's crude oil exports to Japan in December increased 14.7 percent from a year earlier to 6.79 million barrels, or 219,000 barrels per day (bpd), for the fourth straight monthly expansion, government data showed yesterday. As Japan's third-biggest oil provider, Kuwait supplied 7.4 percent of its total crude imports, the Japanese Natural Resources and Energy Agency said in a preliminary report. For the whole of 2021, Kuwait's crude oil

exports to Japan stood at 209,000 bpd, down 8.5 percent from the previous year, and took up 8.4 percent of total Japanese crude imports. Japan's overall imports of crude oil in December grew 13.6 percent year-on-year to 2.97 million bpd, up for the fifth month in a row. Shipments from the Middle East accounted for 95.2 percent of the total, up 2.7 percentage points from the year before. Saudi Arabia remained in the top spot, with imports from the kingdom jumping 21.1 percent from a year earlier to 1.28 million bpd, followed by the United Arab Emirates with 1.10 million bpd, up 31.4 percent. Qatar ranked fourth with 151,000 bpd and Russia fifth with 93,000 bpd, respectively. For the full year 2021, Japan's crude oil imports edged up 0.5 percent to 2.49 million bpd. Japan is the world's-third biggest oil consumer after China and the US. —KUNA

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News in brief

Kuwait reports 6,063 new COVID cases

KUWAIT: Kuwait reported 6,063 new COVID-19 cases yesterday in addition to one death and 5,129 recoveries. Meanwhile, the number of patients in ICUs increased from 89 on Sunday to 91 yesterday. The number of patients hospitalized dropped from 496 to 480, while total active cases rose from 50,785 to 51,718. The percentage of daily new cases to new tests increased from 18.4 percent to 20.7 percent, while the percentage of recovery remained unchanged at 90.1 percent, according to the health ministry's bulletin. Yesterdays' figures brought total infections since the start of the pandemic to 545,717, total deaths to 2,497 and total recoveries to 491,502.

Proposal approved for bikes only Causeway

KUWAIT: A Municipal Council committee approved member Maha Al-Baghly's proposal to close the Jaber Causeway on Friday mornings for vehicles, in order to allow cyclists to practice their hobby freely and safely. The proposal was sent to the council for a vote. The technical committee also approved a proposal by member Sayer Al-Azmi to allocate lands for independent clubs to practice various activities for the new residential cities.

Motorist injured in Subbiya Road crash

KUWAIT: A pickup truck hit a light pole on Subbiya Road leaving its driver in a critical condition, Kuwait Fire Force said yesterday. Subbiya Station firemen freed the injured man and handed him to paramedics, KFF noted in a press statement. An investigation was opened to reveal the cause of the accident, it added.

Kuwait condemns Houthi attacks

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Foreign Affairs strongly condemned the continuous Houthi militia attempts to attack the UAE by a ballistic missile. In a statement yesterday, the ministry said that Houthis' terrorist actions against civilians in the UAE constitute a violation of the international law and will escalate tension in the region. It called on the international community to take serious measures to stop these acts of terrorism. The ministry also affirmed Kuwait's full support to the Emirates in any measures taken to protect its peace and security.

Arab team finishes education plan draft

CAIRO: An Arab governmental experts' team chaired by Kuwait finished the final draft for the Arab plan for education 2022-2026 yesterday. The draft will be presented to the 49th ordinary meeting of the Arab Permanent Committee on Human Rights, to be held on February 22-24, head of the team and Undersecretary of legal affairs at the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education Dr Bader Al-Mutairi said. He underlined the importance of the plan in representing the true desire of Arab governments in improving the human rights field on all levels, adding that completing the final draft came after a year of meetings and discussions.

Joe Sudeep of ICSK Khaitan wins Guinness Record

KUWAIT: Joe Sudeep, a fifth-grade student at the Indian Community School Kuwait - Khaitan has made history in Kuwait by achieving a unique feat of winning the Indian Book of Records and Guinness World Records titles for the 'Most Flips of a Plastic Bottle in One Minute'.

Children generally pass time by playing with objects like flipping the bottles in their free time, but Joe turned this habit into an excellent dexterity and made it to the world title at this young age. He first made the record of flipping the bottle 38 times (on a table) in one minute with blindfolded eyes for the Indian Book of Records and then flipping the bottle 66 times for the Guinness

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A man walks by the Arabian Gulf Road's beach in this file photo. —Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Alghanim Industries boosts employees with massive third vaccination drive

KUWAIT: Alghanim Industries, one of the largest privately-owned companies in the region, held a sweeping vaccination drive providing the COVID-19 booster shot for over 2,000 customer-facing employees. The company-wide drive, held at the Royal Convention Center in the Free Trade Zone, was a culmination of coordinated efforts between the company and the Ministry of Health (MOH) to help curb the spread of the coronavirus.

As government officials and its frontline efforts do the utmost to protect nationals and residents alike against a wave of rising cases, Alghanim Industries prioritized protecting its employees and customers. The company conducted its third vaccination drive, safeguarding thousands of employees during the drive while directing thousands of other employees toward vaccinations provided by the government. Standing firm alongside the Ministry of Health and its well-appreciated protective measures securing the country, Alghanim Industries aims to continue its shoulder-to-shoulder combatting of the pandemic with the government.

Since the onset of the pandemic, Alghanim Industries has been committed to playing a key role in protecting employee and customer health. The company's businesses serve thousands of retail customers each day with more than 150 X-Cite, Safat Home and Costa Coffee stores across Kuwait. The company firmly believes the protection of its employees means the protection of its customers. Additional customer-facing operations, now fortified with fully vaccinated staff, also includes the company's various maintenance provision facilities such as Fixly by Alghanim Engineering, Bumper-to-Bumper, and several auto-



motive service centers.

In 2021, Alghanim Industries also conducted two vaccination drives ensuring its entire body of over 10,000 Kuwait-based employees received the first round of inoculations against the virus. Organizing these campaigns with MOH is a top priority for Alghanim Industries as it aligns with governmental protocols to mitigate the pandemic's impact on

employee and customer health. The latest drive specifically aimed to enhance protection against the wave of rising covid cases, in alignment with governmental efforts to combat the recent spread. Alghanim Industries will continue playing its part in protecting its employees and customers health throughout the pandemic, as the company similarly aims to bolster all of its protective methods for the future.



KUWAIT: The Abdurrahman Al-Kandari's sons diwan recently organized a banquet in honor of Bahrain's Ambassador to Kuwait Salah Al-Maliki, as well as Sheikh Bandar Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

World Record on September 9, 2021.

During his boredom lockdown times, Joe started learning trick shots and solve Rubik's cube in minimum time. Joe was inspired by YouTube channels like Dude Perfect and That's Amazing etc. He gradually cultivated his interest in bottle flips and various trick shots. The daily practice and his keen interest made him improve his bottle flipping counts in one minute. Attaining confidence, Joe attempted for India Book of Records (IBR) and claimed the title of Maximum Bottle Flips in One Minute Blindfolded. He flipped bottle 38 times in one minute to claim the title in IBR. Furthermore, Joe researched and found that to authenticate his skills at the international level, the best platform is Guinness World Record. So, he concentrated and practiced more on improving the timing to complete more flips in one minute and became confident that he can beat the current Guinness World Record titles.

Seeing Joe's interest and skills in flipping bottles, his parents applied for Guinness World Record. For flipping, Joe used a 500ml water bot-

tle with 1/3rd of water. Three timekeepers were monitoring the time using their stopwatches under cameras and Windows laptops. The final flipping count by Joe Sudeep was 66 bottle flips in one minute. The event was coordinated by T K Sharanya Devi (Rifle Shooter - Shooting Complex Kuwait and Teacher, The Indian Community School Kuwait) The event was witnessed by Dr Antony Joseph Chazhoor, Associate Research Scientist, Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research, Dr Mikki V Vinodu, Crystallography Research Associate- Kuwait University and Mahesh Silverjan, Chemical Expert and Al-Shohub International Company, Gourishankar T S, PE Teacher, The Indian Community School Kuwait, Dens Mathew, PE Teacher, The India International School and Nandu S Babu, PE Teacher, The India International School were the timekeepers to monitor the time taken to claim the title.

Joe Sudeep proved that the things taken for granted too is important and they can bring a person in limelight, once it's done with utmost



devotion and consciousness. His parents too played a pivotal role in supporting him and putting him forth on such a global pedestal. The Management, Principal and staff of ICSK Khaitan congratulated Joe for his achievement and assured of their full support for his future endeavors.



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LISBON: Portuguese incumbent Prime Minister and leader of the Socialist Party (PS) Antonio Costa gestures as he arrives to deliver a speech after the announcement of the exit polls at the Socialist Party campaign headquarters on the election night in Lisbon. —AFP

Portugal's Socialists re-elected

'An absolute majority doesn't mean absolute power'

LISBON: Portugal's ruling Socialists unexpectedly won an outright majority to govern solo after snap elections on Sunday that also saw the far right make huge gains. The results pave the way for a stronger government under Prime Minister Antonio Costa as the country tries to boost its tourism-dependent economy, which has been badly hit by the pandemic. A stable government is crucial for Portugal to make the most of a 16.6 billion euro (\$18.7 billion) package of European Union recovery funds it is due to receive by 2026.

Costa, 60, had previously relied on two far-left parties to underpin his minority Socialist governments since 2015. The Socialists received 41.7 percent of the vote giving it 117 seats in the 230-seat parliament, up from 108 in the outgoing assembly.

Despite predictions of a tight race, the main opposition centre-right PSD party landed 27.8 percent for 71 seats. Four seats still need to be attributed in the coming days with the results of votes cast abroad, but in 2019 the Socialists obtained two. "An absolute majority doesn't mean absolute power. It doesn't mean to govern alone. It's an increased responsibility," Costa said in his victory speech.

"The conditions have been created to carry out investments and reforms for Portugal to be more prosperous, fairer, more innovative." The results bucked the trend of declining fortunes for Socialist parties in other European nations, including in Greece and France where they have been virtually wiped off the map in recent years.

'Restore dignity'

The vote also handed gains to far-right party Chega, which became the third-biggest contingent with 12 seats, up from just one, mirroring the rise of such formations elsewhere in Europe. "Everything is going to be different in parliament," Chega leader Andre Ventura, a tough-talking former TV sports commentator, told his supporters.

"From now on there won't be a soft opposition. We will assume the role of being the real opposition

to the Socialists...and restore dignity to this country." Sunday's snap polls were called after two far-left parties that had propped up Costa's minority government sided with right-wing parties to reject his 2022 draft budget in October. The two far-left parties—the Left Bloc and the Communist Party—both lost seats.

The Socialists had a comfortable lead when the election was called, but polls had suggested PSD managed to close the gap in recent days. During the final stretch of the campaign, Costa repeatedly warned that a PSD-led government would be held "hostage" by the far-right Chega, whose proposals

include castrating sex offenders and more support for the police. PSD leader Rui Rio had vowed not to include Chega in a government but indicated he was willing to head a minority government propped up by support from the far right.

“Everything is going to be different in parliament”

'Stability is needed'

Catia Reis, a 39-year-old human resources manager, said she had voted for the Socialists because "stability is needed". "It is not the moment for a political change," she added after casting her ballot at a Lisbon polling station. Under Costa's watch, Portugal has rolled back austerity measures, maintained fiscal discipline, increased the minimum wage significantly and slashed unemployment to pre-pandemic levels.

The country also achieved the highest immunisation rate against COVID-19 in Europe, with over 90 percent of its population fully vaccinated. "I voted for the Socialists because we need them at this difficult time," said Manuel Pinto, a retired 68-year-old former carpenter, after he voted in Lisbon.

PSD leader Rui Rio, 64, had argued the economy should expand faster. His party proposes corporate tax cuts to spur growth. He had called for lower corporate taxes and privatisations to spur growth. Before the final results, Rio hinted that he would step down as PSD leader if Costa won an absolute majority. —AFP

Roadside bomb kills six in Kenya

NAIROBI: Six people died yesterday when a minibus was destroyed by a roadside bomb during an ambush by armed men in northeastern Kenya near the border with Somalia, police said. The assailants opened fire on the 14-seater vehicle after it ran over the explosive device about eight kilometres (five miles) from the town of Mandera.

"Six people were killed during an attack on a vehicle," said national police spokesman Bruno Shioso. "A security operation is under way to get the attackers." There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the assault.

A police report said a General Service Unit patrol team, which was on foot and nearby, engaged the attackers, who fled towards the Somali border. The assailants used guns and rocket-propelled grenades during the assault, it added.

The minibus, which was completely mangled in the attack, was carrying an unknown number of passengers. Shioso told AFP seven people had survived but had "various degrees of injuries".

The Mandera region is prone to raids over its long and porous land border with Somalia, where the Al-Shabaab Islamist militant group controls swathes of countryside. Other regions bordering Somalia are also susceptible to attacks and Kenyan officials are often quick to blame the militants for assaults on its soil.

Terror alerts

Kenya has suffered several deadly Al-Shabaab attacks in retaliation for sending troops into Somalia in 2011 as part of an African Union force to oust the jihadists. Kenya is a major troop contributor to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). In 2015, an attack on a university in Garissa, another region sharing a border with Somalia, left 148 people dead, almost all were students. Most were shot at point blank range after being identified as Christians. Last week, a number of diplomatic missions in Nairobi warned of a possible terror attack targeting foreigners in the capital. —AFP

US, Britain ramp up sanctions pressure on Russia over Ukraine

WASHINGTON: The United States and Britain on Sunday flagged new and "devastating" economic sanctions against Russia, as Washington and its NATO allies step up efforts to deter any invasion of Ukraine. Fears of an imminent invasion have grown in recent days, despite denials from Moscow and pleas from Ukraine's president to avoid stirring "panic" over the massive Russian military build-up on the border.

In Washington, the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee said it was crucial that the United States send a powerful message to Russian President Vladimir Putin that any such aggression would come at a very high cost. "We cannot have a Munich moment again," Senator Bob Menendez said on CNN. "Putin will not stop with Ukraine." He indicated some penalties could be levied over actions Russia has already taken in Ukraine, including cyber attacks, but that "the devastating sanctions that ultimately would crush Russia" would come if Moscow were to invade.

US Undersecretary of State Victoria Nuland said the White House is working closely with the Senate and that any sanctions measures would be "very well aligned" with those coming from European allies. Putin "will feel it acutely, as will the Russian people," she said.

In London, Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said Britain would unveil sanctions legislation next week targeting "a much wider variety" of Russian economic targets. "There will be nowhere to hide for Putin's oligarchs," Truss told Sky News. Analysts say an array of sanctions hitting Russian banks and financial institutions would not only affect daily life throughout Russia but could roil major economies in Europe and elsewhere.

Carrots and sticks

Western leaders are continuing to pursue a carrot-and-sticks approach, stepping up military assistance to Ukraine but also undertaking a full-court



LONDON: Britain's Foreign Secretary Liz Truss (R) and British Ambassador to the EU, Tim Barrow (C), arrive at 10 Downing Street in central London yesterday. Britain will unveil new sanctions legislation next week to hit "a much wider variety" of Russian economic targets as part of efforts to deter Moscow from invading Ukraine, Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said. —AFP

diplomatic effort to defuse the crisis. Britain is preparing to offer NATO a "major" deployment of troops, weapons, warships and jets, Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced Saturday. At the same time, he is expected to speak with Putin next week.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg on Sunday welcomed the increased military support from Britain while also endorsing London's "diplomatic initiative." Russia has repeatedly denied posing a threat to the onetime Soviet republic and said Sunday it wants "respectful" dealings with Washington. "We want good, equal, mutually respectful relations with the United States, like with every country in the world," Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told Russian TV. He added, however, that Russia does not want to remain in a position "where our security is infringed daily." Citing NATO's presence near its eastern border, Russia has put forward security demands to Washington and the US-led military alliance. —AFP

Iran says differences persist on key issues at nuclear talks

TEHRAN: Iran said yesterday that differences with the United States remain over the issues of lifting sanctions and obtaining guarantees in Vienna talks aimed at reviving the 2015 nuclear deal. "Important and significant issues remain regarding the removal of sanctions that have not made an agreement possible so far," foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said at a news conference.

He reiterated calls for guarantees that the US will not withdraw from the 2015 deal, which was derailed in 2018 when the administration of then-president Donald Trump unilaterally pulled out of the pact. Khatibzadeh's remarks came as the eighth round of negotiations to restore the agreement-known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)—has been on pause since Friday, with the negotiators returning to their capitals for consultations.

The European Union's coordinator for the talks, Enrique Mora, said at the time that "political decisions" are required to break the deadlock, and that talks are expected to resume this week. The drive to salvage the nuclear deal resumed in late November, after talks were suspended in June as Iran elected ultraconservative President Ebrahim Raisi.

The deal-agreed by Iran, the US, China, Russia, Britain, France and Germany-offered Tehran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear programme. But the US reimposed severe economic sanctions after the 2018 withdrawal, prompting Tehran to begin rolling back on its commitments under the deal.

Khatibzadeh nonetheless noted "very significant progress" over the previous three weeks in negotiations over the lifting of sanctions and nuclear commitments, as well as obtaining guarantees. "We suggest that after returning from their capitals, (other parties) come with necessary decisions so that we can conclude quickly what has been prepared in drafts," he said. —AFP

International

Unvaccinated and undeterred: Austria holdouts dig in despite new law

More than 60 percent of Austrians support a vaccine mandate

NEUMARKT AM WALLERSEE, Austria: Despite vaccination against COVID-19 becoming mandatory in Austria on Friday, musician Katharina Teufel-Lieli insists she won't bow to pressure to get the jab. "I have the right to decide over my body... to simply say 'no,'" the harpist told AFP at her home in Neumarkt-am-Wallersee, not far from the western city of Salzburg.

Austria this week becomes the first European Union country to make COVID-19 vaccination legally compulsory for adults. Under the new law, those holding out against the jab can face fines of up to 3,600 euros (\$4,100) from mid-March after an introductory phase. Teufel-Lieli, 49, is one of tens of thousands to have joined massive demonstrations against the law and other coronavirus-related measures since November, when plans for the legal change were announced.

The mother of six said that she used to be "apolitical" but the state is "overstepping the mark" by "attacking people" through this act of "totalitarianism".

Parallel society

Access to certain services has already been restricted since last year under government-imposed measures. Entry to restaurants, hairdressers, hotels, non-essential shops, sports and cultural venues has only been permitted since November to those who are vaccinated or recently cured. This has sparked complaints within the retail sector about staff having to act as "an auxiliary police" in checking vaccine passes in shops.

Frustrations since the beginning of the pandemic have also led opponents to create a new political party, known by its acronym, MFG which stands for People, Freedom, Fundamental Rights.

One of three MFG representatives to have already won a state legislature seat, Dagmar Haeusler, said that she just did not see the point of compulsory COVID vaccination.

"If there was a valid reason, as with smallpox which has a mortality rate of 20 to 30 percent, we could talk about mandatory vaccination, which would benefit everyone. "But in the case of COVID-19, I don't see the point," the 38-year-old biomedical scientist and MFG co-founder told AFP. Demonstrators and other opponents say the meas-



State is 'overstepping the mark' by 'attacking people'

ures just create a "parallel society"-with the unvaccinated forced to do things under the radar.

According to Teufel-Lieli, there are already hairdressers willing to cater to those not vaccinated or cured, while people still have coffee together in private meet-ups, mostly organised over social networks. "In fact, there is already this parallel community. It's already being built. There is already everything," she said.

'Worrying development'

The government insists the law is needed to boost the currently 72-percent vaccination rate, but



VIENNA: File photo shows a woman holds a placard against mandatory vaccination during a protest, organized by the Evidence-Based Corona Information Initiative (ICI), against the safety measures during the new COVID-19 pandemic ordered by the Austrian government in Vienna, Austria. —AFP

says it will loosen restrictions for the unvaccinated as long as hospital capacities allow it. "Our top priority is to keep the restrictions as low as possible and only for as long as absolutely necessary," conservative Chancellor Karl Nehammer, who heads a coalition with the Greens, said last week.

As an incentive, a lottery solely for the vaccinated is being launched in mid-March, with 500-euro vouchers to be won. Those who don't comply with the new mandatory vaccination law can initially expect an official letter before being slapped with a

fine. Checks are also to be carried out including randomly in the street.

More than 60 percent of Austrians support a vaccine mandate, according to a recent opinion poll by Public Opinion Strategies. But MFG's co-founder Gerhard Poettler stressed it should be optional. "We are criticised for being opponents of vaccination... (but) we want to have the choice, that's all. And not to face restrictions if we refuse," the former health sector manager in his mid-40s told AFP. —AFP

Get vaccinated, or get punished? How jab mandates divide

PARIS: Vaccine mandates have been divisive ever since the first rollout two centuries ago, and they continue to split public opinion today as governments scramble to inoculate populations against coronavirus. With Austria set to become the first country in Europe to impose COVID-19 vaccinations on Friday, AFP looks at vaccine orders in Europe-and whether they work:

Backlash, workarounds

In Austria, those who do not become vaccinated against COVID under the new mandate will face a 600-euro (\$670) fine. Tens of thousands have taken to the streets almost weekly to protest the decision. In other countries, the authorities have flip-flopped on whether to impose a direct mandate or implement alternative measures to penalise the unjabbed.

But doctor and philosopher Anne-Marie Moulin, who advises vaccine policy in France, said hesitant governments can give the impression, true or not, of political motivations-not just health concerns-behind the measures. And in France, even though no direct mandate exists, many have accused their government of infringing on their civil liberties.

There is evidence, meanwhile, that mandates may end up driving people away from jabs, while leaving people the choice can have positive results. In September, when UK media reported the government was considering requiring health workers to get COVID-19 jabs, physician and vaccine expert Peter English warned that taking choice away could stimulate backlash.

"Most health care workers already choose to be vaccinated... and, as long as they are given the time required to get vaccinated, they do so," he commented at the time. He said some of those not yet jabbed were hesitant, while very few held "irrational, faith-like anti-vaccine beliefs".

"You are unlikely... to shift the latter's beliefs, but you may be able to persuade the hesitant," he said, adding that a mandate risked hardening the undecided against jabs. By some estimates, Sweden has managed to vaccinate over 90 percent of its population with no mandate.

And other Scandinavian countries also report high levels of vaccination without imposing consequences. In France, jabs against Covid are not obligatory, but the state has imposed a compulsory vaccination pass to access most social activities, thus punishing the unvaccinated by barring them from places like restaurants and museums.

Historian Laurent-Henri Vignaud insisted, however, it was very different from a law requiring vaccination. "In one case you're saying, 'the protective state is... telling you what you must do,'" he told AFP of the option that was rejected. "And in the other you're saying, 'do what you want, but your choice will be the difference between whether you can participate fully in social activities or not.'"

Sweden was one of the first countries to impose a vaccine mandate in the early 19th century to contain a deadly smallpox outbreak. Europe had for decades been ravaged by the highly contagious disease, which causes fever and a horrifying skin rash, and can lead to death. Sweden lost as many as 300,000 lives between 1750 and 1800, before the world's first smallpox vaccine became widespread. —AFP

Weekend-long Canada anti-vax protest riles Ottawa

OTTAWA: A "Freedom Convoy" of trucks joined by thousands of demonstrators brought Ottawa to a virtual standstill for a second day Sunday to protest Canada's vaccine mandates, as other sympathetic truckers blocked a border highway into the United States. The chaos clogged the capital's downtown near parliament throughout the weekend and brought criticism from officials including Ottawa's mayor.

"This afternoon, a large presence of police continues throughout the downtown core and the movement of protestors and trucks continues to be managed," the Ottawa police said in a statement. "These high-risk situations were de-escalated and resolved with no arrests," the authorities said, adding that "police resources are fully stretched" in dealing with the obstruction, which appeared to involve hundreds of trucks.

The boisterous protests threatened to disrupt business yesterday, with authorities stating that City Hall will remain closed, traffic will be disrupted and some other services stalled. The

protest originated last week in western Canada, where dozens of truckers organized a convoy to drive from Vancouver to the Canadian capital to demonstrate against COVID-related restrictions, particularly a recent vaccination requirement for truck drivers crossing the long US-Canada border.

Multiple convoys began arriving in Ottawa on Friday, and were joined by thousands of other anti-vaccination protesters. In solidarity with the convergence on Ottawa, truckers Sunday staged what police described as a "complete blockage" of Highway 4 in Canada's western Alberta province along the US border. The road is a major artery for commercial goods between the nations.

"As of right now... the port of entry remains open technically speaking, however nobody would be able to get to them except on foot," Curtis Peters, a spokesman for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in Alberta, told AFP, adding that some 100 trucks were blocking the roadway. In Ottawa, the desecration of a war memorial and harassment of some city officials and



OTTAWA: Supporters of the Freedom Convoy protest COVID-19 vaccine mandates and restrictions in front of Parliament in Ottawa, Canada. —AFP

NGO volunteers sparked an angry response, and the police said they had launched "several investigations."

"I am sickened to see protesters dance on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and desecrate the National War Memorial," Wayne Eyre, chief of the country's Defense Staff, said on Twitter. "Those involved should hang their heads in shame."

'Show some respect'

Barricades were installed Sunday to block vehicle access to the area

around the war memorial, after several illegally parked vehicles were towed away. And an organization advocating for the homeless, Shepherds of Good Hope, said its workers had been "harassed" by protesters demanding meals on a particularly cold weekend. It said it had briefly given free meals to some demonstrators in an effort to defuse tensions, but added, "This weekend's events have caused significant strain to our operations at an already difficult time." —AFP

Zuma in fresh bid to drop graft trial prosecutor

PIETERMARITZBURG: South African ex-president Jacob Zuma was back in court yesterday in a fresh bid to replace the chief prosecutor in his long-running corruption trial over a 1990s arms deal. High Court judge Piet Koen last year rejected Zuma's application to have prosecutor Billy Downer dropped from the case.

Zuma had argued that the state attorney was neither independent nor impartial. Returning to court, Zuma is seeking permission to appeal the earlier ruling—a request that could delay resumption of the trial if granted. The case is scheduled to resume on April

11. Defence lawyer Dali Mpofu said Monday that Zuma was of the "strong view" his case was being "treated differently" from others.

"If we speak of law, let's speak of the law, let's not have the Zuma law, let's not have laws that are uniquely reserved for him," said Mpofu. Zuma, who was in court in the southeastern city of Pietermaritzburg on Monday, faces 16 counts of fraud, graft and racketeering related to the purchase of fighter jets, patrol boats and equipment from five European arms firms.

The accusation arise from a contract that was sealed in 1999, when he was vice president. Zuma is accused of taking bribes from one of the firms, French defence giant Thales, which has also been charged with corruption and money laundering. Both have denied any wrongdoing.

The trial started in May after repeated postponements as Zuma's legal team battled to have the charges dropped. Zuma, who turns 80 on April 12, was president from 2009 to 2018.



PIETERMARITZBURG: Former South African President Jacob Zuma arrives at the High Court in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, yesterday. — AFP

He was forced to step down by the ruling African National Congress (ANC) as graft scandals surrounding his government brewed into a political storm.

Last year he was given a 15-month jail sentence for contempt of court

after refusing to give testimony to a panel probing "state capture"—financial sleaze and cronyism that proliferated under his presidency. He was released on health grounds two months into the term. —AFP

Syrian Kurdish forces end mop-up operations

HASAKEH: US-backed Kurdish forces on Sunday said they had defeated all Islamic State group fighters left inside the Syrian jail that the jihadists stormed 10 days ago sparking battles that left over 370 dead. The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) announced the end of its mop-up campaign inside the prison "after ending the last pockets in which IS terrorists were present", according to a statement.

IS fighters on January 20 launched their

biggest assault in years, attacking the Ghwayran prison in the Kurdish-controlled northeast Syrian city of Hasakeh, aiming to free fellow jihadists. After six days of intense fighting, the SDF announced on Wednesday they had recaptured the prison, but intermittent clashes continued until Saturday between Kurdish fighters and jihadists near the jail.

Several IS fighters had been holed up in "northern dormitories" inside the prison, but the SDF on Sunday said they had been defeated. IS gunmen had been hiding in prison "cellars that are difficult to target with air strikes or infiltrate", the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

Hunt for fugitives

The war monitor, which relies on a network of sources inside Syria, said operations were still

ongoing near the prison hunting for escaped IS fugitives. "Dozens of IS members managed to escape from Ghwayran prison... in the early hours of the attack," the war monitor said.

It reported that 20 IS fighters had surrendered on Saturday, while the SDF killed another five in an exchange of fire inside the prison. The Britain-based group said 373 people had been killed since the onset of the attack, including 268 jihadists, 98 Kurdish-led fighters and seven civilians, and warned that the numbers could still rise.

The toll jumped from 332 reported earlier Sunday after more bodies of both extremists and Kurdish fighters were found during search operations inside the prison buildings and in areas near the facility, the Observatory said. The SDF had found over 50 more bodies overnight Saturday to Sunday, the war monitor had reported. —AFP

International

Taleban killed 100 ex-Afghan govt officials, others: UN

Taleban officials reject claims, insists deaths linked to 'personal enmity' cases

UNITED NATIONS, United States: The Taleban and their allies have killed more than 100 security and civilian personnel linked to the former US-backed Afghan government since seizing power in August, according to a new United Nations report.

The report, an advance copy of which was seen by AFP on Sunday, describes severe curtailing of human rights by Afghanistan's fundamentalist new rulers. Taleban officials yesterday rejected the claims, insisting that the reported deaths were linked to "personal enmity" cases and were under investigation.

"The Islamic Emirate has not killed anyone since the amnesty was announced," the interior ministry said on Twitter. The UN report said that, in addition to the political killings, women's freedoms and the right to protest had also been curbed. Despite the Taleban's promise of general amnesties, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Afghanistan "continued to receive credible allegations of killings, enforced disappearances, and other violations", the report said.

The UN said its Afghan mission had received more than 100 reports of killings that it deems credible. More than two-thirds were "extra-judicial killings committed by the de facto authorities or

their affiliates." Additionally, "human rights defenders and media workers continue to come under attack, intimidation, harassment, arbitrary arrest, ill-treatment and killings," it said.

The report also detailed a government clampdown on peaceful protests, as well as a lack of access for women and girls to work and education. "An entire complex social and economic system is shutting down," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said.

Afghanistan is in the grip of a humanitarian disaster made worse by the Taleban takeover, which prompted Western countries to freeze international aid and assets worth billions of dollars held abroad.

The country was almost entirely dependent on foreign aid under the previous government, but jobs have dried up and most civil servants have not been paid for months. No country has yet recognized the Taleban government, with most watching to see how the hardline Islamists-notorious for human rights abuses during their first stint in power—restrict freedoms.

With poverty deepening and a drought devastating farming in many areas, the United Nations has warned that half the 38 million population faces food shortages. The UN Security Council last month



KABUL: A Taleban fighter stands guard at the Wazir Akbar Khan hill in Kabul yesterday. —AFP

Women's freedoms had also been curbed



HK sees first 'seditious publication' jailings

HONG KONG: Hong Kong's courts jailed two people for publishing seditious content yesterday, the first time the colonial-era law has been used to secure a conviction for printed content since the city's 1997 handover to China. Seditious is a throwback to Hong Kong's British colonial past but has been dusted off as authorities carry out a widespread crackdown on dissent in the wake of 2019's democracy protests.

Multiple people—including journalists, union members and a prominent radio DJ—have been detained under the law and are facing upcoming trials. A woman last year was jailed for "conspiracy to commit a seditious act" over a pro-democracy chat

group she ran which revealed personal details about police officers.

But yesterday's verdicts were the first seditious publication convictions since the return to Chinese rule. Kim Chiang Chung-sang, 41, a former property manager, was given eight months in jail for putting up posters outside a kindergarten and the city's High Court. The posters criticised the judiciary for convicting a man last year at the first trial under a national security law that Beijing imposed on Hong Kong to neuter dissent.

Acting Chief Magistrate Peter Law said Chiang was "challenging the rule of law" and trying to "poison children quietly". In a separate case that also concluded yesterday, the District

Court jailed former clerk Chloe Tso Suet-sum, 45, for over a year for asking a 17-year-old to design and print protests leaflets.

Prosecutors said the leaflets contained slogans urging Hong Kong people to build their own army and nation, and also carried black bauhinia flowers, a symbol of the city's now crushed democracy movement. The 17-year-old, who AFP has chosen not to name, was sent to a youth rehabilitation centre, a step short of a custodial sentence where juveniles usually stay for two to five months.

The defendants in both cases pleaded guilty, which normally results in a sentence reduction. Seditious carries up to two years in jail for a first offence. During colonial rule it was deployed against pro-Beijing media and leftist government critics who slammed it as a tool to suppress free speech.

Now Chinese state media and

Hong Kong's pro-Beijing press have embraced its use against the current government's critics. Police and prosecutors now regularly use sedition alongside the national security law to clamp down on political speech and views.

It is treated like a national security crime which means those arrested are usually denied bail.

In recent months sedition charges have been brought against pro-democracy unionists who produced euphemistic children's books about a sheep village defending itself from invading wolves, as well as journalists from now shuttered pro-democracy news outlets Apple Daily and StandNews.

Ming Pao, a Chinese mainstream newspaper in Hong Kong, recently adding a disclaimer to its columns saying it had no intention of committing sedition when criticising government policy. —AFP

S Sudan still lives in fear of landmines

JUBA: The UN mine clearance worker gingerly sifts through a patch of dirt with a trowel in scrubland on the outskirts of a village near South Sudan's capital Juba. A colleague, also clad in safety gear of a see-through face shield and pale blue protective vest, scans for mines using a metal detector that whines as it hovers over the arid brown earth.

Nearby, there is a loud boom, the sound of a controlled blast that sends a plume of black smoke into the sky. After decades of conflict in the world's youngest country, landmines and unexploded bombs still litter vast tracts of South Sudan's landscape, threatening the lives and livelihoods of its residents. In the village of Gondokoro, just a few kilometres (miles) from Juba, staff from the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) are working to remove the deadly detritus of war.

'Scared of going into the bush'

According to UNMAS figures as of last year, a total of 1,404 people have been killed by landmines in recent years,

including more than 250 children, and 3,730 have been maimed. "Since mines have been identified in our area, we are now scared of going into the bush for daily work," says Gondokoro resident John Edward, who hunts for wood to make charcoal.

"We are here only with God's help." In Gondokoro, one "contamination" zone has been sealed off with tape linked by fenceposts bearing red and white signs with a skull and crossbones warning "Danger!! Mines!!" More than 18 square kilometres (seven square miles or the equivalent of about 2,570 football pitches) still needs to be cleared in South Sudan, UNMAS says on its website, without detailing the potential number of devices.

It's a task it says it hopes can be achieved in five years—depending on safety and funding. "These dangerous items, these mines and explosive remnants of war and conflict pose a real threat to the people of South Sudan," says Fran O'Grady, the head of the Mine Action Programme.

"Clearing them is about lives and livelihoods, it's about ensuring that the girls, boys, women and men across the country can take safe steps on safe ground free from the threat of explosive hazards." Since it began operations in South Sudan in 2004, UNMAS says it has cleared more than 90 sq. kms of mine-



JUBA: Demining experts from the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) in protective gear as they carry out a demining exercise on a mine field rigged up during the civil war at Gondokoro village in the capital Juba. —AFP

fields and battlefields, and checked more than 1,000 sq. kms of suspect areas.

It has destroyed 39,920 mines, 76,010 cluster munitions and 972,354 other items of unexploded ordnance, and made safe thousands of schools, water points and health clinics, its website says. The weapons are a brutal legacy of decades of war—the long fight for statehood from Sudan, and the civil war that erupted just two years after the country declared inde-

pendence in 2011.

A fragile 2018 peace agreement to end the bloodshed between forces loyal to President Salva Kiir and his deputy and historic foe, Riek Machar, is largely holding. But complicating the UN's clearance efforts, the remaining "contamination" zones are in the south, where the rebel National Salvation Front (NAS) — which did not sign up to the peace deal—operates and insecurity remains a serious problem. —AFP

Suu Kyi to face new trial for electoral fraud

YANGON: Myanmar's junta has charged Aung San Suu Kyi with influencing election officials during 2020 polls, a source said yesterday, a year after it staged a coup alleging massive voter fraud. Suu Kyi, 76, has been detained since the February 1 coup last year that triggered mass protests and a bloody crackdown on dissent with nearly 1,500 civilians killed, according to a local monitoring group.

The Nobel laureate is facing a raft of charges—including violating the country's official secrets laws—and if convicted of all of them could face sentences tallying more than 100 years in prison. She will face a further trial on charges of influencing the country's election commission during

the 2020 polls that saw her party defeat a military-aligned rival, a source with knowledge of the case said.

The case will be wrapped up within six months, the source added. Former president and stalwart of the National League for Democracy (NLD) party Win Myint will face the same charge, the source said. Several senior members of the national electoral commission have also been arrested since the coup, accused of masterminding the NLD's landslide victory.

The junta cancelled the results of the 2020 election in July last year, saying it had found some 11.3 million instances of fraud. Independent monitors said the polls were largely free and fair. The junta has promised to hold another election by August 2023 if the country—currently riven by fighting between the military and anti-coup fighters—is restored.

Ahead of the Tuesday anniversary of the putsch, the junta has warned that noisy protests or sharing "propaganda" against the military could be charged with high treason or under the anti-ter-



YANGON: File photo shows Myanmar's State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi attends the opening ceremony of the Yangon Innovation Centre in Yangon. —AFP

rorism law. Suu Kyi has already been sentenced to six years in jail for illegally importing and owning walkie talkies, incitement against the military and breaking COVID-19 rules. —AFP

News in brief

Search after jet disappears

TOKYO: Japan's military said yesterday it was searching for a fighter jet that disappeared from radar shortly after taking off. "The track of an F15 jet disappeared from the data of the Komatsu control tower after take-off," a spokesman for the Japan Air Self-Defense Force told AFP. The plane disappeared about five kilometres from the Komatsu airbase in central Ishikawa region, off the Sea of Japan, he added. The spokesman said the plane was designed for up to two crew but could not confirm how many people were on board. Japan has occasionally seen accidents involving its airforce, including in 2019 when an F-35A stealth jet crashed into the sea after the pilot suffered spatial disorientation. The crash sparked a scramble to recover the pilot and secrets onboard the plane. —AFP

Lioness kills keeper

TEHRAN: A female lion in an Iranian zoo attacked and killed a keeper and escaped with a mate before the pair was captured again, local media reported yesterday. "The lioness, which has been in the zoo for several years, managed to open a door of the cage, get out and then attack the 40-year-old guard who had just brought food to the pair of felines," a zoo employee told state broadcaster IRIB. He said "the two animals managed to escape" Sunday from their cage in the zoo in the city of Arak, Markazi province, about 200 kilometres (125 miles) southwest of Tehran. "Immediately after the incident, security forces took control of the zoo", Amir Hadi, the governor of the province was quoted as saying by state news agency IRNA. He added that "efforts to capture the two felines alive have been successful". —AFP

AU suspends Burkina Faso

ADDIS ABABA: The African Union said yesterday it had suspended Burkina Faso in response to the January 24 coup that ousted President Roch Marc Christian Kabore. The bloc's 15-member Peace and Security Council said on Twitter it had voted "to suspend the participation of #BurkinaFaso in all AU activities until the effective restoration of constitutional order in the country". Moussa Faki Mahamat, chair of the African Union Commission, had already condemned the coup the day it happened and before it was clear who was taking charge. The West African bloc ECOWAS suspended Burkina Faso on Friday and sent a delegation to meet with the ruling junta Saturday. The coup is the latest bout of turmoil to strike Burkina Faso, a landlocked state that has suffered chronic instability since gaining independence from France in 1960. —AFP

Two German police shot dead

FRANKFURT: Two German police officers were shot dead yesterday after pulling over a car during a routine traffic stop, prompting police to launch a major manhunt. The shooting happened at around 4:20 am in the Kusel district of western Rhineland-Palatinate state during a routine patrol. A 24-year-old female police officer and her 29-year-old male colleague were killed. "We are urgently searching for the fugitive perpetrators," regional police said in a statement. "At least one of the suspects is armed," they warned, urging residents not to pick up hitchhikers. The police said they had no description of the vehicle and did not know the direction in which the suspects had fled. Kaiserslautern city police said they had extended their search area to the neighbouring state of Saarland. "Please do not pick up any hitchhikers in the Kusel district!" they tweeted. —AFP

Business

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2022

Top oil producers to meet amid record crude prices

High gas prices to hit demand in 2022: IEA

LONDON: The world's top oil-producing countries will meet tomorrow to discuss a further increase in output, while crude prices have reached seven-year highs rattled by geopolitical tensions.

Part of their regular meetings since the COVID-19 pandemic shook markets, the 13 members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and their 10 allies convene by videoconference to set output. Many analysts expect the grouping, including Saudi Arabia and Russia, to decide to continue to boost output by 400,000 barrels per day in March.

This will be in line with their strategy to slowly re-open the taps since May last year, after drastic cuts to curb slumping prices when the coronavirus first started spreading. "With that said, we wouldn't completely rule out a larger increase, given high oil prices and recent OPEC+ underproduction," Capital Economics analysts said.

Brent oil on Wednesday surpassed \$90 per barrel, attaining a level last seen in October 2014. The price of West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude hit its highest level in more than seven years earlier this month, fuelled by easing concerns about the Omicron COVID variant and geopolitical tensions.

Russia sanctions?

The United States and Britain on Sunday flagged new and "devastating" economic sanctions against Russia, as Washington and its NATO allies step up efforts to deter any invasion of Ukraine. Fears of an imminent invasion have grown in recent days, despite denials from Moscow and pleas from Ukraine's president to avoid stirring "panic" over the massive Russian military build-up on the border. A Russian invasion of Ukraine would lead to "very hard sanctions" against Moscow, according to Bjarne Schieldrop, analyst at SEB.

"It would halt exports of natural gas to Europe even more. Natural gas and power prices in Europe would be much higher than the current extremely high prices we have now," he said. In the Middle East, Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels—which have frequently targeted Saudi Arabia—launched two missile attacks on the United Arab Emirates this month.

Struggling to meet targets

Besides the geopolitical uncertainties, analysts have noted that OPEC nations and other key producers are struggling to meet targets to lift output by 400,000 barrels a month, adding to the upward pressure on prices.

"OPEC+ underperformance and inaction support elevated oil prices as the group has underdelivered against

its stated production targets by hundreds of thousands of barrels," Rystad Energy analyst Louise Dickson said. The grouping "has committed to a passive role in the conversation despite external pressure primarily from the US, to increase production and ease fuel prices," she added. Schieldrop also noted that top producer Saudi Arabia in the last meeting "made it clear that they will not step up production beyond their cap to cover losses by other members. No rescue there."

Meanwhile, demand for natural gas is expected to fall sharply in Europe and slow in Asia this year as prices have rocketed to record heights, the International Energy Agency said yesterday. Gas demand rebounded last year as the world economy recovered from the COVID pandemic and restrictions were eased, while an unusually cold winter also drove up consumption, the Paris-based IEA said.

"Supply did not keep pace which, combined with unexpected outages, led to tight markets and steep price increases, putting the brakes on demand growth in the second half of 2021," the agency said in a report.

Consumption grew by 4.6 percent last year, more than double the decline experienced as the pandemic emerged in 2020, said the agency, which advises governments.

How demand will fare in the short-



LONDON: The world's top oil-producing countries will meet tomorrow to discuss a further increase in output, while crude prices have reached seven-year highs rattled by geopolitical tensions.

term will depend on the weather during the northern hemisphere's heating season, the report said.

"Assuming normal temperatures, growth of the natural gas market is expected to be slowed by higher gas prices and softer economic expansion, while supply tensions may ease as offline capacity gradually returns," the IEA said. Global demand is expected to grow by a more modest 0.9 percent this year to stand at 4.1 trillion cubic

meters after surging by 4.6 percent in 2021. Global production, meanwhile, is expected to increase by 1.6 percent to 4.2 trillion cubic meters.

Demand is expected to fall by more than four percent in Europe while it would slow in Asia, from a "robust" seven percent in 2021 to five percent this year. Fears of a potential Russian invasion of Ukraine could further fuel Europe's already sky-high energy prices. —AFP



India's Tata Motors in the red over chip shortages

MUMBAI: India's Tata Motors, the owners of the Jaguar and Land Rover brands, reported a fourth consecutive quarterly loss yesterday, weighed down by higher commodity prices and the global chip shortage. Microchips are a key component in car manufacturing but automakers around the world have been hamstrung by limited supplies due to semiconductor production cuts during the pandemic.

The Mumbai-headquartered firm reported a net loss of 15.2 billion rupees (\$203 million) in the three months to December 31, it said in a statement, compared to a net profit of 29.1 billion rupees a year earlier.

"The auto industry continued to witness rising demand in most segments even as the supply of semiconductors remained restricted resulting in adverse impact on production," Tata Motors' executive director Girish Wagh said in a statement. "The semiconductor supply situation is improving gradually whilst inflation worries persist," the company added.

Operational revenue slipped 4.5 percent to 722.3 billion (\$9.7 billion) from a year earlier. Retail sales for Tata Motors' British subsidiary, Britain's biggest carmaker Jaguar Land Rover, were "significantly constrained by chip shortages and low inventories" and fell 37.6 percent year-on-year.

But the company's India business saw revenue rise by 43.3 percent on the corresponding period, with sales up across all vehicle segments. Its electric-vehicle arm reported a new quarterly sales high of 5,592 cars. Shares in Tata Motors closed 4.04 percent higher at the end of Monday's trade in Mumbai ahead of the earnings announcement. —AFP

India forecasts world-beating growth on COVID recovery

MUMBAI: India expects to lead the world in economic growth this year in a post-pandemic bounceback, government forecasts showed yesterday, but with expansion slowing despite widespread vaccine coverage and recovering exports.

COVID pummeled Asia's third-largest economy, which suffered its worst recession since independence in 1947 after a drastic lockdown brought factories and consumer spending to a standstill. Last year saw the economy bounce back to pre-pandemic levels despite a devastating virus outbreak that overwhelmed hospitals, with 9.2 percent growth estimated for the 12 months to March 2022.

But with the recovery now tapering, India expects slower growth of 8.0-8.5 percent for the following financial year, according to the annual economic survey presented to parliament yesterday. "The economy is in a good place to grow strongly into the next year or two and all the macro stability indicators suggest that there is a fair amount of buffer," said Sanjeev Sanyal, the finance ministry's principal economic advisor.

The report puts India well ahead of the International Monetary Fund's 2022 calendar year forecasts for other major economies, with neighboring China expected to grow 4.8 percent in the year to December.

The IMF last week slashed its global growth outlook in the wake of the Omicron variant's

Ukraine crisis adds to inflation jitters as ECB meets

BRUSSELS: Soaring inflation will be in focus when European Central Bank governors meet on Thursday, as the threat of war in Ukraine risked further fuelling already sky-high energy prices in the region.

Prices rose in the eurozone at an annual rate of five percent in December, the highest value on record for the currency bloc, which began keeping track of inflation in 1997. New figures for January are set to be published by Eurostat tomorrow, ahead of the meeting, with policymakers looking for indications as to whether inflation will come off the boil in 2022, as the ECB has said it expects to happen. The Frankfurt-based institution projected a gradual return to inflation under its target of two percent when it published its most recent forecasts in December.

The forecast grounds the ECB's decision to initiate a "step-by-step" reduction in its asset-



MUMBAI: India's economy bounced back last year after a drastic COVID lockdown that brought factories and consumer spending to a standstill. —AFP

impact, but still forecast 9 percent growth for India in 2022.

Widespread COVID vaccinations, robust exports and rises in both private investment and public spending will maintain strong growth for the year ahead, India's survey said, provided there was "no further debilitating pandemic related economic disruption". But analysts warn the government's growth forecast may be "too optimistic", in light of elevated inflation, unemployment and other

headwinds.

"They've made certain assumptions. They've said there is no fourth wave, that crude oil prices will remain at \$70-75. All this can be debated," Bank of Baroda chief economist Madan Sabnavis told AFP.

Yesterday's survey comes a day before India's next budget is presented to parliament. The Mumbai stock exchange closed up 1.42 percent after the forecast was announced. —AFP

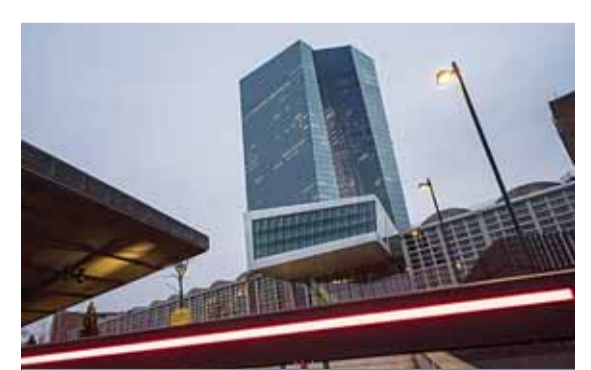
purchasing stimulus program, a more cautious approach than its peers in the United States and the United Kingdom. The massive bond-buying program has been the ECB's main crisis-fighting tool, aimed at keeping borrowing costs low and stoking economic growth in the 19-nation euro club.

The meeting on Thursday was "unlikely to bring any policy changes", said Carsten Brzeski, head of macro at ING. The 25 members of the governing council were increasingly sensitive to the risk that inflation could be higher than expected, Brzeski said, but would seek to "steer market expectations cautiously".

Difficult balance

The debate over future monetary policy at the ECB is closely linked to the progress of inflation and its return to the bank's target. As such, "the current spike in inflation seems to be challenging its commitment to leave interest rates unchanged throughout 2022", Elga Bartsch, head of macro research at Blackrock Investment, told AFP.

But the surge was driven by the persistence of supply bottlenecks and changes in consumer preferences, Bartsch said, "not by excessive demand or an overheating economy."



FRANKFURT: In this file photo taken on December 16, 2021 the European Central Bank (ECB) building is seen in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany.

In other words, any monetary tightening "would do little to ship containers faster from Asia to Europe or reduce energy prices", said Brzeski. Multi-year highs in the price for gas were one of the main forces behind record inflation at the end of last year. Policymakers will be wary that a further escalation in Ukraine, through which Russia supplies Europe with much of its gas, could send the price for energy up even further. —AFP

Business

Thailand's fishing crews fear 5-year recovery after oil spill

Devastated local crews brace for lost income, damaged fish stocks

RAYONG, Thailand: The nightly armada of bobbing green lights from squid boats has all but disappeared near the site of an oil spill in the Gulf of Thailand, as devastated local crews brace for lost income and damaged fish stocks. The Thai navy is scrambling to clean up Tuesday night's spill from a pipeline that leaked at least 60 tons of crude oil 20 kilometers (12 miles) off the coast of Rayong province. Authorities have declared Mae Ram Phueng Beach a disaster zone and closed it to swimmers as crews in yellow plastic protective suits begin the clean-up.

Rayong resorts and seafood restaurants say the spill is a "nail in the coffin" for their businesses after the tourism industry's continued pandemic downturn. For long-time fishermen who have been asked to halt their catches for at least a month in exchange for emergency payments, there is a feeling of déjà vu.

They recall the long road to environmental and economic recovery after another pipeline leak in the same area in 2013. Initial compensation for that accident was around \$900, but fisherman Tuem 46, says it is no substitute for regular work.

"I don't want compensation. I want a healthy sea that I can work in for my livelihood," he said. "The sea can give us money every day. The sea was good in the past few years. I do not know how many years before it becomes good again."

Five-year recovery

Tuem usually makes around \$30 a day from a 7-10 kilogram (15-22 pound) haul but he says now he will struggle to cover the cost of petrol to retrieve his fishing nets. "The impact is immediate and clear. I do not know what to do," he said.

AFP joined a group of fisherman on a boat trip Sunday — their fishing haul amounted to about 10 percent of their usual catch and many fish were dead. Burapha University marine scientist Thanomsak Boonphakdee, who was taking water samples at the beach over the weekend, says it will take a long time to fully assess environmental damage from the disaster.

The marine life took at least five years to recover from the 2013 incident, he said. "Crabs, small fish and shrimp are the (creatures) that will be affected most," he told AFP. A dozen ships are spraying dispersant chemicals and so far more than 80,000 liters (21,000 US gallons) has been doused over the affected area.



RAYONG, Thailand: A helicopter flies overhead as workers clean up crude oil on Mae Ram Phueng beach following a spill caused by a leak in an undersea pipeline owned by Star Petroleum Refining Public Company Limited (SPRC) in Rayong on Sunday. — AFP

Star Petroleum Refining Public Company Limited, the operator of the pipeline and whose major shareholder is US giant Chevron, said it was trying to minimize the slick's ecological impact using booms.

But satellite imagery shows the slick had already spread to an area of 51 square kilometers (20 square miles) on Sunday, local media reported. There are also fears a national park on the island of Ko Samet will be affected and Thai authorities Sunday deployed absorbent material to Ao Prao beach as a precaution.

Transparency calls

Natural Resources and Environment Minister Varawut Silpa-archa urged oil companies in Thailand to ramp up prevention measures and boost inspections and maintenance programs on land and sea. "I do not

want this kind of accident to happen again. The expense of spending money to solve a major disaster after it happened, cannot compare with companies increasing the inspections," he told reporters in Rayong.

Greenpeace, which has called on the Thai government to set up an independent investigation into the spill, said incidents are becoming far too common. Between 1974 and present day there have been 240 oil spill incidents in Thailand, the environmental group said. "The oil spill will affect marine life and could be fatal for fish, shrimps, shellfish," Greenpeace warned. Another fisherwoman, Nid, 62, lamented it was heartbreaking to see another disaster after seeing the area's recovery in recent years. "We are just small insects who have no voice to be heard," she said. — AFP

Portugal posts strongest growth in over 30 years

LISBON: Portugal recorded its strongest economic growth in more than three decades last year, official data showed yesterday, boosting Socialist Prime Minister Antonio Costa's credentials after his weekend election triumph. The economy expanded by 4.9 percent as it bounced back from the COVID-19 crisis, lifted by high domestic demand as consumer spending and investments recovered, according to the INE national statistics institute.

It was the eurozone nation's strongest growth since 1990 and it beat the government's forecast of 4.6 percent. The news comes a day after Costa won a surprise absolute majority in parliament in an early election and prepares to start a third term.

Portugal's economy contracted by 8.4 percent in 2020 as lockdowns and travel restrictions crippled its key tourism sector. The return to growth in 2021 helped bring down the unemployment rate to 5.9 percent in December, INE said in a separate statement, down from 6.3 percent in November and its lowest level since 2002.

The Bank of Portugal predicts growth will accelerate to 5.8 percent in 2022, before slowing to 3.1 percent in 2023. Portugal is set to receive a 16.6 billion euro (\$18.7 billion) package of European Union recovery funds by 2026.

Costa, who has governed in a minority since 2015, has said he would like to use the bulk of the EU funds to modernize Portugal's infrastructure to make it more competitive. The eurozone as a whole, meanwhile, posted 5.2 percent growth last year as it bounced back from the pandemic-induced recession, official data showed yesterday. — AFP

Ukraine tensions jumble up Germany's energy puzzle

BERLIN: Rising tensions with Moscow over Ukraine have exposed Germany's problematic dependence on Russian gas, inflaming an already heated debate over soaring energy prices.

As Germany pursues its target to transition to cleaner energy sources over the next decade, Europe's biggest economy has counted on gas temporarily filling the gap while it builds up its sun and wind energy capacity to replace nuclear and coal plants. But with Russia now providing 55 percent of Germany's gas imports-up from 40 percent in 2012 — Berlin's best-laid plans may well go awry if Moscow were to march on Ukraine.

With gas making up 26.7 percent of Germany's total energy consumption and heating one in every two households, Chancellor Olaf Scholz's government has admitted that if sanctions had to be imposed on Russia, they will also hit the German economy. More precisely, the controversial Nord Stream 2 pipeline, which was set to double supplies of cheap natural gas from Russia to Germany, now hangs in the balance.

In a warning hailed by the United States as "very, very strong", German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock has said the pipeline will be part of a sanctions package if Russia made a move on Ukraine.

Energy security

Long viewed as a problem by Western allies and Ukraine, the 10-billion-euro (\$12 billion) pipeline had been seen by former chancellor Angela Merkel's government as a key stop-gap option while Germany shifts to renewables. But critics have repeatedly warned that it would only serve to increase German dependence on Russian energy, and Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky has branded it a "dangerous geopolitical weapon of the Kremlin".

Yet weaning Germany off Russian energy will be painful. "If we give up Russian gas and Nord Stream 2, it won't be lights out immediately, but it will be expensive, it will exacerbate unanswered gas supply questions for the future, and we'll have a problem," warned chairman of the mining, chemistry sector union IG BCE, Michael Vassiliadis. With time pressing, the German government is launching a massive program to build wind turbines covering two percent of the coun-



The Nord Stream 2 pipeline has become a key bargaining chip for the West in its bid to stop Moscow from invading Ukraine.

try's land surface, and require the installation of solar panels on roofs.

"Phasing out the burning of fossil fuels also strengthens Europe in geopolitical terms and protects the climate," Economy Minister Robert Habeck said earlier this month.

But with the nuclear energy phase-out due to be complete by year's end and coal power also to be halted by 2030, Germany will have to make up the difference by raising its gas capacity by a third over the next eight years, according to the Fraunhofer economic institute.

Already, Germany's gas consumption is on the rise. In 2021, it made use of 1,003 billion kWh, an increase of 3.9 percent on the previous year. But the longer-term strategy does not solve the looming energy emergency at hand.

'Alternative'

To reduce its dependency on Russia in the near future, the government is banking on diversifying its imports. One "alternative" would be to exhaust the capacity of Europe's liquefied natural gas terminals, a source in the economy ministry said.

This solution, in which fresh imports could be delivered from the United States, Australia or Qatar, would, however, come at a price, the source indicated. Higher costs could give a fresh push to inflation, which has hit multi-year highs in Germany and the eurozone in recent months. The situation is not made any easier by Germany's exceptionally low gas reserves, which currently sit below 42 percent of full capacity. Nevertheless, the government sought to put a brave face on the issue. Dismissing the risk of an acute shortage, Baerbock said on Friday that sufficient supply was "assured". — AFP

the travel measures are being eased, as Prime Minister Boris Johnson argued they were having a "limited impact" while imposing "significant costs" on the industry.

The government will scrap compulsory COVID tests from February 11 for fully jabbed arrivals and quarantine for unvaccinated travellers. Currently, fully vaccinated arrivals are required to take a lateral flow test within two days, while those not jabbed must self-isolate for 10 days and take several tests before and after travel. "In the short term, Ryanair is making no secret of the risk of further COVID disruption to come, with investors at least able to have some confidence it can steer a flight path through any turbulence," AJ Bell investment director Russ Mould said following the earnings update. With "one of the strongest balance sheets in the industry... it is very well placed for a full recovery in the aviation sector, with the means to invest in new routes and potentially even to swoop on ailing rivals". — AFP



TILBURY, UK: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson (left) speaks with Charles Hammond, Forth Ports chief executive officer, during a visit to Tilbury Docks in Tilbury yesterday. — AFP

UK vows 'Brexit Freedoms Bill' to scrap EU laws

LONDON: The UK government will introduce new legislation allowing it to change or scrap retained European Union laws, Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced yesterday to mark two years since Brexit. The new "Brexit Freedoms Bill" will make it easier to amend or remove what he called "outdated" EU laws that London has kept on its statute books as a "bridging measure" after leaving the bloc.

It will be part of what the British leader dubbed a "major cross-government drive to reform, repeal and replace" the European laws retained and cut red tape for businesses. "The plans we have set out today will further unleash the benefits of Brexit and ensure that businesses can spend more of their money investing, innovating and creating jobs," Johnson said in a statement.

"Our new Brexit Freedoms Bill will end the special status of EU law in our legal framework and ensure that we can more easily amend or remove outdated EU law in future."

The move is part of a flurry of announcements

Ryanair slashes losses but Omicron hit winter bookings

LONDON: Ryanair slashed losses in the final quarter of 2021 but the emergence of the Omicron variant cut into the normally busy winter holiday travel season, the no-frills airline said yesterday.

Chief executive Michael O'Leary said the reporting period started well, with strong bookings as there was "less confusion" about the British government's "absurd" traffic light system" to rank COVID risks from countries. Britain is a key market for the airline based in neighboring Ireland and which flies throughout Europe.

Bookings continued to improve in November but "the sudden emergence of the Omicron variant" and "the media hysteria it generated" forced European governments to reimpose travel restrictions towards the end of the quarter, O'Leary said. The measures in the run-up to Christmas "significantly weakened peak" Christmas and New Year bookings and fares, he said.

Net losses stood at 96 million euros (\$107 million) in the company's third quarter, a third of the figure for the same period in 2020.

'Expect further COVID disruptions'

Ryanair said its full-year traffic forecast was unchanged at "just under 100 million passengers". Its net loss guidance stayed at between 250 million and 450 million euros. "This outlook is hugely sensitive to any further positive or negative COVID news flow and so we would caution all shareholders to expect further COVID disruptions," O'Leary warned.

The UK government in December reimposed



DUBLIN: Ryanair passenger jets are seen on the tarmac at Dublin airport. Ryanair slashed losses in the final quarter of 2021 but the emergence of the Omicron variant cut into the normally busy winter holiday travel season. — AFP

stricter travel rules — including mandatory pre-arrival tests and self-isolation until travellers had tested negative — after a surge in cases due to Omicron. However,

Business

'Mind the (funding) gap!' London's 'Tube' seeks post-pandemic cash

COVID sparks an ongoing feud between city's mayor and UK govt

LONDON: The pandemic, which left London's transport system deserted for months on end, has decimated revenues and sparked an ongoing feud between the city's mayor and the UK government over funding current shortfalls. Transport for London (TfL), which runs the British capital's underground "Tube" network and buses, has received billions of pounds from central government in the last two years to stay afloat.

That followed passenger numbers across the network slumping as people were repeatedly told to stay home to stop the spread of COVID-19. Now, as numbers pick up again with the easing of all restrictions, the Conservative government has urged London's Labor mayor to find a sustainable funding model for state-owned TfL.

The issue has come into sharper focus as central government subsidies maintaining the current level of service are set to expire without renewal on February 4. Mayor Sadiq Khan has raised the specter of service cuts or even the closure of a tube line without new funding support, arguing TfL is fundamental to the success of the capital. "It is so important that the government urgently comes forward with the long-term funding TfL desperately needs so we can keep services running and deliver much-needed improvements to our transport infrastructure," he warned earlier this month.

The Labour party mayor, re-elected last year for a second term, is reluctantly proposing to raise the compulsory housing tax in the next budget, which he has said would "unfairly punish Londoners for the way the pandemic has hit our transport network". He wants the government to inject around £1.7 billion to fund TfL until April 2023.

'Devastated'

However, the Department for Transport has said

Khan is responsible for getting the system "back onto a sustainable financial footing in a way that is fair to taxpayers, rather than continuing to push for bailouts". "We will continue to discuss further funding requirements with TfL and the Mayor," a spokesperson told AFP.

The standoff reflects the inevitable rivalry between Khan, touted as a potential future Labor leader, and the government of Prime Minister Boris Johnson, himself a former London mayor. Both have accused each other of mismanaging the capital's extensive transport system. TfL notes the pandemic has "devastated" its accounts, with fares revenue falling by 95 percent at the height of the first coronavirus wave in 2020.

It has been forced to dip into its cash reserves to keep services running while going cap in hand to the government for support. Johnson's administration has already pledged £4 billion (4.8 billion euros, \$5.4 billion) in subsidies to keep the system running, as well as £600 million in loans.

The financial crisis has also affected the capital's new east-west Crossrail route, formally known as the Elizabeth Line, with the stretched budget adding to delays and costs.

Other global cities have faced similar struggles, including Ile-de-France Mobilités (IDFM) in the Paris area, which needed government support in its 2020 and 2021 budgets. Meanwhile in the United States, "strong" financial support packages passed by Congress and the White House helped replace ticket revenues lost from lockdowns, according to Paul Skoutelas, head of the American public transportation association, an industry organization.

'Delicate game'

But TfL, which gets nearly two-thirds of its operating income from fares—a much higher proportion



LONDON: Transport for London (TfL), which runs the British capital's underground "Tube" network and buses, has received billions of pounds from central government in the last two years to stay afloat. —AFP

compared to New York or Paris, where it is more like 40 percent—has been left especially exposed.

"Pre-COVID, TfL was largely self-sustained," explained Taku Fujiyama, who leads University College London's railway research group, noting it received no major central government grants. "Some cost-cutting measures are on the table now," he said, adding dramatic line closures were unlikely but minor service changes "might happen". "TfL needs to play a delicate game," Fujiyama said.

"The central government would not give blank cheques, and the TfL would need to demonstrate

their effort, whilst the mayor knows that dramatic service reduction would be politically costly."

With the threat from the Omicron variant now receding, passengers are returning to the system, aiding revenues but still leaving a large gap to plug. Weekday passenger numbers were at 50 percent of pre-pandemic levels on the Tube and 70 percent on buses in mid-January, with TfL expecting them both to reach 80 percent this year. The company has said it is exploring a number of ways to boost income, including through efficiency gains, commercial property projects and consultancy services. —AFP

Fed could raise rates by half a point if needed

WASHINGTON: The US Federal Reserve is not ruling out raising rates by half a percentage point if inflation remains high, Fed official Raphael Bostic said in an interview with the Financial Times.

The chair of the US central bank, Jerome Powell, signaled this week the Fed plans to hike interest rates in March, telling reporters the recovery in the world's largest economy is strong enough that it can handle higher borrowing costs.

Powell declined to give details on the size of the planned increase, saying only that the Fed would be flexible. It typically raises rates by a quarter of a percentage point; a half-point increase would be uncommon. In an interview with the Financial Times published Saturday night, Bostic, who heads the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, said that "every option is on the table for every meeting."

He still expects three quarter-percentage-point hikes by the end of the year. But "if the data say that things have evolved in a way that a 50 basis point move is required or (would) be appropriate, then I'm going to lean into that." Fifty basis points equal half a percentage point.

Bostic stressed that he would be "comfortable" with the idea of making a decision "in successive meetings," suggesting there could be a rate hike at each of the seven remaining meetings between now and the end of the year. The Fed's key rates were lowered to a range of 0 percent to 0.25 percent in March 2020 in an attempt to mitigate the shock to the economy from the COVID-19 pandemic. With growth back on track, the priority now for the Fed is to slow inflation, including by raising rates.

The world's largest economy staged a solid recovery last year as it grew at the fastest pace since 1984, but damage from the Omicron variant of COVID-19 is imminent. Surging prices continue to pose a challenge, as inflation picked up speed in the final three months of the pandemic's second year, according to official data. That threatens to dampen the consumer demand that has underpinned the recovery, while shortages and supply chain snarls continue to create headaches for businesses, and for President Joe Biden's efforts to return the country to normal. After the downturn in 2020, US GDP expanded by 5.7 percent last year, the Commerce Department said in its latest quarterly report.

In the October-November period when Omicron was spreading, GDP grew 6.9 percent, the data showed. While that topped expectations, economists warn the figure was inflated by businesses' attempts to rebuild depleted inventories. "The upside surprise came largely from a surge in inventories and the details aren't as strong as the headline would suggest," said Kathy Bostjancic of Oxford Economics.

"What's more, beneath the headline GDP print, the handoff to 2022 is weak, with consumer spending retrenching in December and Omicron dampening economic activity," she said in an analysis.

Ian Shepherdson of Pantheon Macroeconomics agreed, saying the start of the year looks grim: "Our tentative (first quarter) GDP forecast right now is zero." Biden, whose signature social spending bill is stalled in Congress, cheered the report, highlighting "the fastest economic growth in nearly four decades, along with the greatest year of job growth in American history." And, he said, "for the first time in 20 years, our economy grew faster than China's."

China's growth slowed to four percent in the fourth quarter, according to official data released last week. "This is no accident," Biden said. "My economic strategy is creating good jobs for Americans, rebuilding our manufacturing, and



President and Chief Executive Officer of the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta Raphael W Bostic speaks during European Financial Forum event in Dublin in this file photo.

strengthening our supply chains here at home to help make our companies more competitive."

Inflation on the rise

Ongoing supply bottlenecks and scarcity of key components combined with strong demand for goods fueled by generous government aid have created a perfect storm of inflationary pressures that have undercut Biden's approval among American voters. Prices accelerated during the year, peaking in the October-December period with a 6.5 percent surge in the personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index—the measure the Federal Reserve focuses on. That was the biggest increase in 40 years.

For the full year, inflation rose 3.9 percent, according to the data, still far above the Fed's two percent goal. Excluding volatile food and energy prices which have increased sharply in the year, the core PCE price index rose 3.3 percent in 2021, and 4.9 percent in the fourth quarter. The Federal Reserve on Wednesday issued a clear signal that it plans to begin raising interest rates in March to tamp down inflation, but that also could restrain growth next year. —AFP

that the Fed could lift interest rates more than four times this year.

PMI's lower amid Omicron

PMI manufacturing and services data results earlier last week came lower than expected from softer demand and interrupted supply during the recent omicron wave. However, the results being above 50 indicate economic expansion and the demand outlook is positive.

Market reactions

Worries of a tightening economy and company profits ahead of rate hikes sent US equities diving deep into the red. Leading year-to-date losses is the Nasdaq 100 with a 11.98 percent loss, followed by the S&P 500 with a 7.01 percent loss, and the Dow Jones with a 4.44 percent loss. Treasury yields, on the other hand, propelled back to their highs with the 10-year yield climbing into the 1.8 percent range and the 2-year yield back above 1 percent. A risk-averse environment faced with political tensions and market volatility kept demand for the greenback strong, surging to its highest level in 19 months with the dollar index closing the week at 97.217.

Data released on Friday showed the US economy capped off 2021 with another robust quarter of strong growth, fulfilling the fastest full year rebound since 1984 as the country began to move past the worst of the economic damage inflicted by the pandemic. US GDP expanded by 6.9 percent on an annualized basis in the fourth quarter, up from a 2.3 percent growth clocked in the third quarter. The data surpassed economists' expectations of a 5.5 percent advance.

Kuwait

Kuwaiti dinar
USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30270.

Eurozone economy rebounded in 2021 after COVID crash

BRUSSELS: The eurozone economy posted robust growth last year, official data showed yesterday, but fallout from the Omicron variant and an energy crunch have raised doubts about the bloc's ability to sustain the pace.

While historic, the 5.2 percent expansion failed to regain all the ground lost to the crash suffered in 2020, when the first shock of the coronavirus pandemic saw the eurozone contract by a cataclysmic 6.4 percent. The strength of the eurozone's recovery trailed the boom in the United States, which grew by 5.6 percent in 2021. China's leapt by 8.1 percent, according to government data. The Eurostat data office said the full 27-country EU economy, which includes several large economies that do not use the euro such as Poland and Sweden, grew by 5.9 percent.

Analysts said the rebound showed strong divergences especially late in the year, with export power-



house Germany seeing negative growth in the final quarter, and France, Spain and Italy expanding healthily. Jessica Hinds of Capital Economics warned that for the eurozone's core economies, where Germany is essential, "further gains will be much harder going, particularly against a backdrop of still acute supply shortages". The German government on Wednesday lowered its economic growth forecast for 2022 because of problems posed by Omicron and its effect on the global supply chain, a crucial concern for Europe's biggest economy.

'Soft start'

The crisis in Ukraine has also darkened the mood, as fears grow that Russia, a major source of fossil fuels, could curb the gas supply to Europe when heating needs are at a peak.

This would add to challenges posed by the highly contagious Omicron coronavirus variant that has brought a new wave of health restrictions and disrupted supply chains. "We expect a soft start to 2022 as high cases and the return of restrictions, especially on contact-intensive services, weigh on growth in the first quarter," Rory Fennessy of Oxford Economics said. But a strong rebound is expected over the second and third quarters "as supply bottlenecks unwind and consumer demand recovers," he added.

Analysts are also keeping a close eye on inflation, which is gaining ground in the eurozone and could bring a hit to consumer demand if it is not tamed in the coming months. Prices rose at an annual rate of five percent in December, the highest value on record for the currency bloc, and governors for the European Central Bank will meet on Thursday to discuss the next move.

ECB chief Christine Lagarde holds strong to her position that the inflation is due to temporary factors such as supply bottlenecks and defends her existing policy of super low interest rates and major stimulus. The IMF last week cut its world GDP forecast for 2022 to 4.4 percent because of the surprise challenges posed by the Omicron variant. —AFP

Italian economy grew strongly in 2021: Data

ROME: Italy's economy grew by a better-than-expected 6.5 percent last year, despite a coronavirus-induced slowdown in the last quarter, national statistics agency Istat said in a provisional estimate yesterday. The eurozone's third largest economy was plunged into recession in 2020 following a long lockdown, with growth contracting by a staggering 8.9 percent.

But since then it has enjoyed what Renato Brunetta, minister for public administration, said this weekend was "a year of real economic boom". The 6.5-percent figure exceed expectations of around 6.0 percent. However, gross domestic product (GDP) increased only 0.6 percent in the last three months of 2021 compared to the previous quarter due to a fresh wave of COVID-19.

Italy's central bank earlier this month revised down its forecast for growth in 2022, predicting an increase in GDP of 3.8 percent, down from the 4.0 percent estimated in December. Italy is banking for its recovery on almost 200 billion euros (\$224 billion) in European Union post-pandemic funds which it expects to receive by 2026, in return for a series of structural reforms. —AFP

NBK Money Markets Report

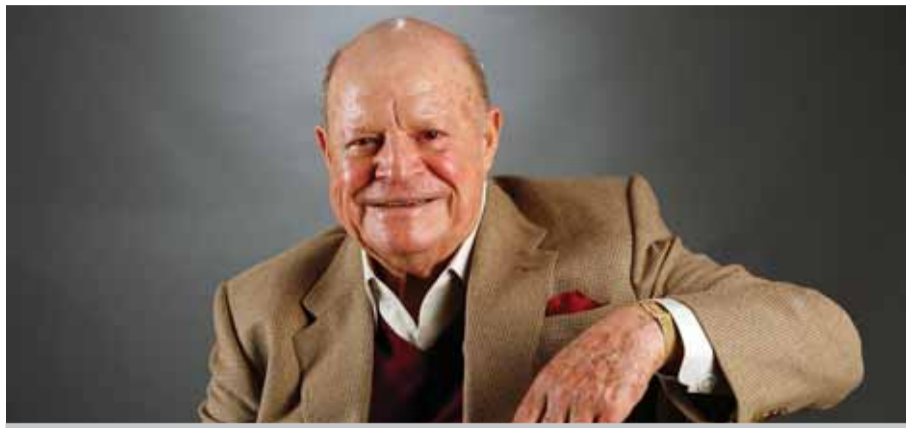
Volatility rises amid European tensions and a hawkish Fed

KUWAIT: The highly anticipated Federal Open Market Committee's statement released on Wednesday last week revealed strong support for a March rate hike and set a more hawkish tone as it hinted at potential consecutive rate hikes at each meeting. Governor Jerome Powell dodged a question on whether the Fed could raise rates at every subsequent meeting this year - which would amount to seven increases in 2022 - instead he said that the regulator would be "humble and nimble" and "guided by data." He said that the economy was much stronger now than in 2015, when the central bank last embarked on a rate raising cycle, noting soaring inflation that was "well above" the Fed's 2 percent target and a robust labor market. Powell also declined to say whether the Fed would consider raising rates by half a percentage point at some point this year, as opposed to the quarter point increases that have become the norm. The Fed also confirmed it will wind down its bond-buying program so that the purchases end in early March.

No time-frame was set for the reduction of the Fed's \$9 trillion balance sheet, but analysts are forecasting it to begin in July, with additional details about the speed of that effort to be unveiled in May. Following the statement, traders in overnight funding markets who were pricing in a quarter-point interest rate rise in March, began to dial up their expectations

Lifestyle | Gossip

DON RICKLES TOLD HIS DAUGHTER TO KEEP HIS NAME ALIVE



The legendary comedian's daughter Mindy Rickles revealed she uses her maiden name for her own stand-up career to honor a request from her late dad, who died from kidney failure at the age of 90 in 2017. She told Closer magazine in the US: "He always told me, 'Keep my name alive', and that's a big reason I use my maiden name, Rickles. "He wanted to be known as a nice guy, as he sang in his act, and that he really loved his family." Mindy, 55, admitted her father was "nervous" when she told him she wanted to go into stand-

up comedy. She explained: "He was nervous for me because he knows that the business is full of rejection and he didn't want me to get hurt." However, he was won over by the idea once he saw her performing and realized she knew how to handle a live crowd. She added: "He grew very proud of me. He lent an ear if I had a bad night and was always there for me." Humor was a big part of their family life, and Mindy revealed her mum always saw the funny side when their marriage made its way into his material. She said: "My father would imi-

tate her on stage or make fun of her jewelry obsession, but she laughed. "That's one of the reasons their marriage lasted so long. She had a wonderful sense of humor." While the whole family used to travel together, Mindy also recalled her mum sending photos from trips when she was exploring the local area. She said: "If my dad was busy working, my mom would explore the town they were in by herself. She'd send me pictures from the middle of nowhere."

Pete Smith dies aged 63

The 'Lord of the Rings' actor passed away after suffering from kidney disease and dementia in New Zealand on Saturday and is survived by his wife Mona Papali'i and his six children, who described losing him as "bittersweet" because his health had been so poor. His son Poumau Papali'i-Smith told Stuff magazine: "He was sick for a long time, so it's kind of bittersweet." He explained the treatment 'The Piano' star had been on for years "took its toll on him" and his health declined recently after he contracted an infection. He added: "For the last seven years he'd been on dialysis which took its toll on him over the years. Within the last two years he was also diagnosed with dementia. "We started doing dialysis at home but over the last few

weeks he suffered an infection which he fought for the last four weeks. "He passed on Saturday. We are happy that he didn't have to suffer any longer." Pete made his on-screen debut in the Kiwi 1985 sci-fi film 'The Quiet Earth', for which he won a GOFTA, and went on to feature in many other movies, such as the 'The Flight of the Albatross', 'What Becomes of the Broken Hearted' and 'The Boys.' He also forayed into television with his credits including 'Plainclothes', 'Shortland Street', 'Greenstone' and 'Mataku'. In 2006, Pete won an Air New Zealand Screen Award for his Best Supporting Actor role in the drama series 'The Market'. In addition to the dramatic, he was a keen gardener and used his love of it and his Maori culture to create documentaries on the subject, such as 'Maramataka' Poumau recalled: "He was always out in the community filming documentaries with the local talent up here with his gardening show. "He was but a man of the people, always putting other people before himself."



Springsteen guitarist joins Spotify boycott over COVID-19 misinformation

Bruce Springsteen's guitarist, Nils Lofgren, has joined the musicians boycotting Spotify. The 70-year-old rocker, who is also a member of Crazy Horse, the band that released a number of albums as Crazy Horse and Neil Young, is following in the footsteps of the latter and other well-known stars, who asked for their music to be removed from the streaming platform amid calls for Joe

for help you don't turn your back on them for money and power. You listen and stand with them." Music legend Neil had his music removed from Spotify earlier this week. In a request to the company, the 76-year-old singer said: "I want you to let Spotify know immediately TODAY that I want all my music off their platform. They can have [Joe] Rogan or Young. Not both. "I am doing this because Spotify is spreading fake information about vaccines - potentially causing death to those who believe the disinformation being spread by them. Please act on this immediately today and keep me informed of the time schedule." The streaming service later responded: "We want all the world's music and audio content to be available to Spotify users. With that comes great responsibility in balancing both safety for listeners and freedom for creators. We have detailed content policies in place and we've removed over 20,000 podcast episodes related to COVID since the start of the pandemic. We regret Neil's decision to remove his music from Spotify, but hope to welcome him back soon." In a note on her official website titled 'I Stand With Neil Young!', Joni Mitchell, 78, added: "I've decided to remove all my music from Spotify. Irresponsible people are spreading lies that are costing people their lives. I stand in solidarity with Neil Young and the global scientific and medical communities on this issue."



Rogan's controversial podcast to be dropped for giving false information regarding the coronavirus vaccine. According to TMZ, the E Street Band member said: "A few days ago, my wife Amy and I became aware of Neil and Daryl [Hannah] standing with hundreds of health care professionals, scientists, doctors and nurses in calling out Spotify for promoting lies and misinformation that are hurting and killing people. "When these heroic women and men, who've spent their lives healing and saving ours, cry out

Cannon reportedly set to become a father for the eighth time

Nick Cannon is reportedly set to become a father for the eighth time. In photographs from a baby shower, obtained by TMZ, the 41-year-old actor was seen cradling real estate agent Bre Tiesi's bump, as it was revealed she is expecting a baby boy. The pair also held hands and hugged as they walked along the beach in Malibu at the gathering on Sunday suggesting they were hosting the gender reveal party. Bre finalized her divorce from NFL star Johnny Manziel in November. The baby shower comes after Nick's five-month-old son Zen tragically died from a brain tumor last month. Nick

said telling his other children - also including four-year-old son Golden, 13-month-old daughter Powerful Queen, and seven-month-old twins Zion and Zillion - was "pretty intense", but his brood had helped him cope with the loss. He said: "Having to explain that to 10-year-olds [Moroccan and Monroe] and a four-year-old [Golden] is pretty intense. But their understanding and them being there for me probably helped me keep it together as well as really deal with it. Specifically, even, Roc and Roe. They were there for the entire journey." The 'Wild 'N Out' star - who had Zen with Alyssa Scott - was by his son's side



David Arquette has his own graffiti crew

The 'Scream' actor - who previously worked as a professional wrestler and has been training to be a clown - has revealed another string to his bow. peaking to Us Weekly magazine in the publication's '25 Things You Don't Know About Me' feature, he said: "I'm a graffiti artist named 'Someone'. My graffiti crew is called 'Kids Gone Bad.'" The 50-year-old star - who is a "Certified [Bob] Ross Instructor" - revealed his Hollywood skills extend behind the camera. He added: "I'm also a producer. I was an executive producer on 'Cougar Town' and 'Celebrity Name Game', among others." David has also done writing, and even turned his hand to directing for TV. He said: "I've directed episodes of 'Medium' and 'CSI:



Miami'. Despite his various projects, the actor has insisted supporting charities is the "most important" part of being famous. David backs organizations like Healthy Humor, Feeding America and the Violence Intervention Program, and he opened up on his work highlighting the efforts of charities helping people in need. He said: "I often work in the kitchen of the Downtown Women's Center, which focuses on helping women facing homelessness in LA. "I don't say this to toot my own horn - I think the most important aspect of celebrity is bringing attention to charities doing incredible work." Elsewhere in the piece, David noted he had finally "bought the rights to Bozo the Clown" after spending 15 years working on the deal. It comes as he continues his clown training, having previously said: "I'm a huge fan of Bozo the Clown. I personally am studying to be a clown myself. I have been taking lessons. It takes a lot of training. "You know I've never been able to juggle, but my father taught me a nose flute, and this is what I can do as my clown thing."

when he passed away on December 5, and said being with Zen at the time was a "blessing". He added: "I see it as a blessing that I got to be there. Alyssa says, 'I think he was just waiting for you.'" Nick - who also has 10-year-old twins Moroccan and Monroe with ex-wife Mariah Carey - previously claimed he will keep having kids if that's "God's plan" for him. The entertainer, who slammed the idea that any of his children were conceived by accident, was speaking after he became a dad for the seventh time in July 2021. Zen's arrival into the world marked Nick's fourth child in a matter of months. The star and Brittany Bell welcomed daughter Powerful Queen into the world in December 2020, and Abby De La Rosa gave birth to Zyon and Zillion in June. And the 'Masked Singer' host suggested he'll keep adding to his brood. He told said: "God willing, man. We'll see. If God sees it that way, then that's what I'm gonna keep doing." However, he later vowed to try and stop having any more - until 2022 "at least".



Miss USA 2019 Cheslie Kryst dies aged 30

The 30-year-old lawyer's family have confirmed she passed away over the weekend, though they did not confirm reports she took her own life after jumping from the 60-storey apartment building in New York where she lived on the ninth floor. Her family said in a statement on Sunday: "In devastation and great sorrow, we share the passing of our beloved Cheslie. Her great light was one that inspired others around the world with her beauty and strength. She cared, she loved, she laughed and she shined. "Cheslie embodied love and served others, whether through her work as an attorney fighting for social justice, as Miss USA and as a host on Extra. But most importantly,

as a daughter, sister, friend, mentor and colleague - we know her impact will live on." The beauty queen was also a reporter for 'Extra' and they have sent their condolences to her family. A statement read: "Our hearts are broken. Cheslie was not just a vital part of our show, she was a beloved part of our Extra family and touched the entire staff. "Our deepest condolences to all her family and friends." Cheslie - who was crowned Miss USA as Miss North Carolina - along with Nia Imani Franklin, Kaleigh Garris, and Zozibini Tunzi - who were Miss America, Miss Teen USA and Miss Universe respectively - became the first group of Black women to hold the titles in a single year. The attorney previously spoke of her pride in the group "breaking barriers" but admitted she was disappointed that some didn't see the significance of their collective success. She said at the time: "People will comment on our social media and be like, 'Why are we talking about your race? You guys are just four, amazing women'. And I'm like, 'Yes, we are four amazing women, but there was a time when we literally could not win!'



Prince Harry and Duchess Meghan expressed their misinformation 'concerns' to Spotify

Prince Harry and Meghan, Duchess of Sussex have expressed "their concerns" to Spotify over misinformation spreading on the platform. Musicians, including Neil Young and Joni Mitchell, asked for their music to be removed from the app amid calls for Joe Rogan's controversial podcast to be removed for giving false information regarding the coronavirus vaccine. And now, The Duke and Duchess of Sussex, who set up Archewell Audio, signing an exclusive mega-money multi-year deal with the streaming giant to release a number of podcasts, have revealed they urged Spotify to help stop the "global misinformation crisis". In a statement, an Archewell spokesperson said on behalf of the royal couple: "Since the inception of Archewell, we have worked to address the real-time global misinformation crisis. "Hundreds of millions of people are affected by the serious harms of mis- and disinformation every day. "Last April, our co-founders began expressing concerns to our partners at Spotify about the all too real consequences of COVID misinformation on its platform. "We have continued to express our concerns to Spotify to ensure changes to its platform are made to help address this public health crisis. "We look to Spotify to meet this moment and are committed to continuing our work together as it does." Spotify insisted it bans "false or dangerous deceptive content about COVID-19, which may cause offline harm

and/or pose a direct threat to public health." 'Heart of Gold' hitmaker Neil had his music removed from Spotify earlier this week. In a request to the company, the 76-year-old singer said: "I want you to let Spotify know immediately TODAY that I want all my music off their platform. They can have [Joe] Rogan or Young. Not both. "I am doing this because Spotify is spreading fake information about vaccines - potentially causing death to those who believe the disinformation being spread by them. Please act on this immediately today and keep me informed of the time schedule." The streaming service later responded: "We want all the world's music and audio content to be available to Spotify users. With that comes great responsibility in balancing both safety for listeners and freedom for creators. We have detailed content policies in place and we've removed over 20,000 podcast episodes related to COVID since the start of the pandemic. We regret Neil's decision to remove his music from Spotify, but hope to welcome him back soon." In a note on her official website titled 'I Stand With Neil Young!', Joni, 78, added: "I've decided to remove all my music from Spotify. Irresponsible people are spreading lies that are costing people their lives. I stand in solidarity with Neil Young and the global scientific and medical communities on this issue." - Bang Showbiz

Game of stones: Scottish island sweeps up Olympic curling

In a factory outside Ayr in southwest Scotland, James Wyllie carefully lifts and caresses a curling stone, as well-used drilling and polishing machines grind in the background. The 40-pound (18 kilogram) stone is made from unique granite rock harvested on Ailsa Craig, about 16 kilometers (10 miles) over a wild stretch of sea to the west of the mainland. Wyllie, 72, is the retired owner of Kays Curling, which has been making curling stones since 1851 and has the exclusive right to harvest granite from the remote volcanic island.

The stones from his factory will be used at the Beijing Winter Olympics, which start with a mixed doubles event between Great Britain and Sweden on Wednesday. "Ailsa Craig for probably almost 200 years now has been a unique source of granite for curling stones," Wyllie told AFP at the factory in Mauchline, 12 miles from Ayr. "There has been no equivalent type of granite found anywhere else in the world so far which is suitable for the purpose of a curling stone. "There have been one or two other sources tried with varying degrees of success but none of them has proved to be nearly as good as the Ailsa Craig stone."

'Paddy's Milestone'

Ailsa Craig is known to locals as "Paddy's Milestone" for being a resting



Jimmy Wyllie (72), a member of the family who have always owned the business and who started working at the factory when he was 15 years old, poses for a photograph in the workshop at Kays Curling in Mauchline. — AFP

spot across the sea between Glasgow and Belfast. It was a haven for Catholics fleeing persecution by Protestants during the Scottish Reformation in the 16th century. Today it is uninhabited, serving as a nature reserve for colonies of gannets, puffins and seals, which watch over the granite quarries. Kays Curling, which harvests the

rock intermittently, has been involved in providing curling stones for the Winter Olympics since the Chamonix Games in 1924.

The quarries hold two types of granite ideal for the sport, which is believed to have first been played on iced-over ponds and lochs in Scotland around 500 years

ago. Blue Hone non-porous micro-granite, formed by volcanic eruptions 60 million years ago, has low water absorption, which prevents repeatedly freezing water from eroding the stone. Ailsa Craig Common Green is more resistant to heat transfer, helping it to cope better with condensation and it does not splinter after contact with another stone in play. The Blue Hone insert—which is the part of the curling stone that makes contact with the ice—is fitted to the Ailsa Craig Common Green stone body, in a technique called "Ailsers". The bottom surface of the stone has to be extremely hard as ice can be very abrasive, says Wyllie.

Durability is vital in a sport in which players slide stones across sheets of ice about 150 feet (46 meters) long towards a target area of four concentric circles. Curlers sweep the ice in front of the travelling stones with brooms to help them reach the intended target.

Precision and harmony

Precision and the granite's harmony with the ice are everything. Even the slightest of bumps could mean the stone slipping off course and the difference between a gold medal and bitter disappointment. "The running surface of the stone can wear out, believe it or not," Wyllie says.

"And in addition to that it has to be impervious to absorbing moisture. "If moisture from the ice gets into the surface of the stone, then eventually that can freeze and expand and causes damage to the running surface." Kays Curling managing director Jim English says the curling stones are exported to 70 countries.

Demand for stones, which each take five hours to produce, is growing, he says. "Canada, America, certainly the Swiss, Austria and Europe itself," he says of the market. "But we sell as far as South America, all the way down to South Korea, Afghanistan and Nigeria." In the yard outside the factory, a short distance from the home once owned by Scotland's national poet Robert Burns, Wyllie inspects a row of rejected curling stones that are destined to be used as garden planters. "I have no doubt curling will grow in popularity after the Beijing Olympics," he says. "Demand for the stones is sure to be high in the months ahead." As always, Wyllie will be watching the curling events at the Winter Olympics closely. "Curling is simply too much fun to miss," he says with a smile. — AFP



This photograph shows junior veterinary doctor Rajkumar holding an injured bird whose feathers were burned by electric wires, at the Charity Birds Hospital in Gurugram. — AFP photos



Junior veterinary doctor Rajkumar holding an injured myna with plastered legs at the Charity Birds Hospital in Gurugram.

Birds of a feather: India's raptor-rescuing brothers

Nursed back from near death, a skittish vulture flaps its wings and returns to the grey skies above India's capital after weeks of tender care from two devoted brothers. New Delhi is home to a magnificent array of predatory birds, but untold numbers are maimed each week by kite strings, cars and other grave encounters with human activity. A fortunate few are found and cared for by Nadeem Shehzad and Mohammad Saud, siblings who run a rescue group devoted to injured creatures at the top of the avian food chain.

Both men are fighting an uphill battle: their patients are considered ill omens, and few donors are willing to shell out in support of Wildlife Rescue, their shoe-string operation on the city's outskirts. "There's a superstition in India that birds of prey are unlucky birds," Shehzad, 44, tells AFP. "They are not liked by many. Sometimes people hate them." When they were younger, the brothers found an injured predatory bird and carted it to a "vegetarian" veterinary hospital—one caring exclusively for herbivores—only to despair at the staff's refusal to treat it.

Eventually, they began taking similarly hurt birds home to help them recover. "Some of the birds started flying back into the wild, and that gave us much-needed confidence," Shehzad said. Now, on the roof of their small office, a huge aviary



Junior veterinary doctor Rajkumar holding an injured heron at the Charity Birds Hospital.

hosts a colorful assortment of raptors in various states of convalescence. Among them are endangered Egyptian vultures, instantly recognizable by their bright yellow beaks and tousled cream crowns. A colony of the species lives at a waste dump in Delhi's east, drawn by the pungent refuse dumped there by surrounding slaughterhouses and fish markets.

One of their flock was recently returned to the wild by the brothers after being wounded by the taut string of a kite. Kites

are popular in the city, and Saud says the Wildlife Rescue clinic takes in half a dozen birds each day that are injured after colliding with them. In a treatment room, he carefully jostles with one flapping patient still ensnared by a wire, a bare wing bone peeking through a bloodied clump of feathers.

Successful treatment depends on how soon the injured birds are brought to their attention, Saud said, pointing to another bird in obvious pain, with discolored edges around an old wound. "He will die in a few days, his wound is already gangrenous," he tells AFP.

'We are the destroyers'

Delhi has grown at a remarkable pace in recent years, and the sprawling megacity is now home to about 20 million people. The loss of natural habitat and smog-Delhi is consistently ranked among cities with the world's worst air pollution—has strained the cornucopia of bird species nesting around the capital. As was the case for other ecosystems reeling from human encroachment, India's strict coronavirus lockdowns were a massive boon to the city's bird population, veterinarian Rajkumar Rajput tells AFP.

Rajput runs another charity clinic for injured birds in Delhi's south, largely caring for doves, pigeons and more gentle feathered friends than the carnivores nursed by Shehzad and Saud. He is an adherent of the Jain faith, which maintains a strict prohibition on animal slaughter, and the few raptors he does treat are kept on a vegetarian diet. Rajput warns the brief respite granted by the lockdowns is ending and the tide is beginning to turn back. "The distance between humans and birds has only been increasing. We are unable to bridge this distance because people are gradually losing their love for nature," the 38-year-old said. "These birds are the builders of natural environment, and us humans are the destroyers." — AFP



A rescued kite is seen inside a cage after being treated at the 'Wildlife Rescue', a non-governmental organization (NGO) which works for the welfare of birds of prey in New Delhi.



Attendant Shiv Kumar holding an injured pigeon at the Charity Birds Hospital.



Rescued kites are kept in a cage at the 'Wildlife Rescue', a non-governmental organization (NGO) which works for the welfare of birds of prey in New Delhi.

In food world, debate rages about recipe plagiarism

Pastry chef Nick Malgieri was scrolling through a food blog when he came upon a recipe for panettone, a puffy sweet bread that the author said conjured up fond memories of Christmases spent with his Italian grandmother. But it quickly became clear that the instructions were all too familiar. "I started reading the recipe and I said, 'This is my recipe!'" he recalled in an interview with AFP. Malgieri's unpleasant experience was unfortunately not a one-time thing. After decades of work and 12 published cookbooks, the American expert baker has seen his work all over the internet—reproduced without his consent on numerous sites.

Some of his recipes have even been claimed by other chefs and included in their cookbooks. In one, he says he found a copy of his "food processor puff pastry, practically word for word." Plagiarism has become widespread in the food world. It is difficult to curb, and even more difficult to prosecute. Given that the cookbook with Malgieri's puff pastry recipe had a small circulation and likely minimal profits, Malgieri's publishing house opted not to even file a complaint. When chefs do look to the US courts for relief, the chances of getting recognition of their copyright or a monetary settlement are seen as remote, because recipes are generally not protected under intellectual property laws.

"A recipe is just a listing of ingredients and simple instructions," New York-based attorney Lynn Oberlander, who specializes in the area, told AFP. "How can you copyright, for example, scrambled eggs?" Were that a possibility, she says, given there are not an infinite number of ways to prepare the dish, a chef could ultimately keep another from including the dish in a cookbook. The only hope for chefs wishing to protect their concoctions may rest in recipes that include "enough original literary expression," either in the instructions or in the historical narrative, to be considered unique, Oberlander says.

As recipe plagiarism has multiplied in recent years, cookbook authors have done just that, using "more descriptive stuff" in their written work, according to Jonathan Bailey, a consultant on plagiarism issues. The only risk? Readers sometimes find the extra verbiage "annoying," he says.

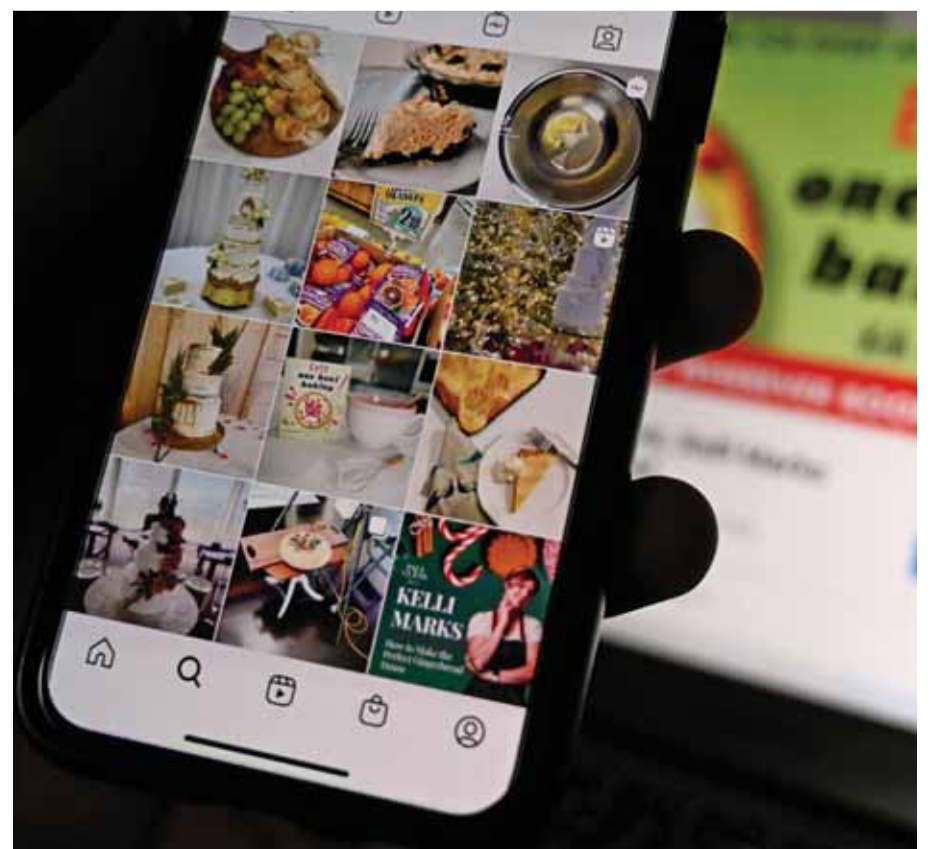
Inspiration or outright copying?

Last October, a recipe scandal rocked the culinary world. Singaporean chef and author Sharon Wee accused Elizabeth Haigh of having "copied or paraphrased" recipes and other passages from her 2012 book "Growing Up in a Nonya Kitchen," which recounted her experiences cooking with her mother. Wee said she was "distressed" by the incident, which resulted in Haigh's book "Makan" being withdrawn from circulation.

But in a business where the reinvention of classic dishes is commonplace, where does inspiration by another chef's work end and plagiarism begin? In France in the 1980s, chef Jacques Maximin wanted to launch a group that would protect chefs' creations, to fill the legal loopholes. His proposal prompted a firestorm of criticism from top chefs.

Paul Bocuse said he was "perplexed" by Maximin's idea, saying all chefs "take inspiration from others" and admitting he had "nicked" the idea for one of his signature dishes from "an old guy" in France's Lower Ardeche region. There is still significant disagreement on the issue. There have been calls on some food blogs to end plagiarism, with explicit instructions on how to correctly credit the work of another chef. "The internet has made plagiarism a sport," Malgieri says, with some recipes cropping up on "20 or 30" blogs at the same time.

For Kelli Marks, an Arkansas pastry chef who sells wedding cakes in the Little Rock area via her website, most food bloggers have no illusions about the idea that some of their content might eventually show up elsewhere. When she wrote her first book last year, she said she was careful to "go through and check my recipes" to make sure she was only sharing ideas that she herself had created from scratch—a process her publishers requested. Marks says she does not believe she has yet been the victim of plagiarism, but she is always on alert; she refuses to put some of her recipes online. "They're so important to me, and I would hate for someone else to take something I've created," she said. — AFP



In this photo illustration, the Instagram account of Pastry Chef Kelli Marks is displayed on a mobile phone with Marks' Facebook page shown in the background. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features



Stipe Pleic, also known by his Viking nickname of Ragnar Kavurson, holds an axe as he poses in the western-Bosnian town of Tomislavgrad. — AFP photos



Stipe Pleic, also known by his Viking nickname of Ragnar Kavurson, holds an axe as he poses on a replica of a drakkar.



Bosnian embraces 'Viking' lifestyle after binge-watching TV series

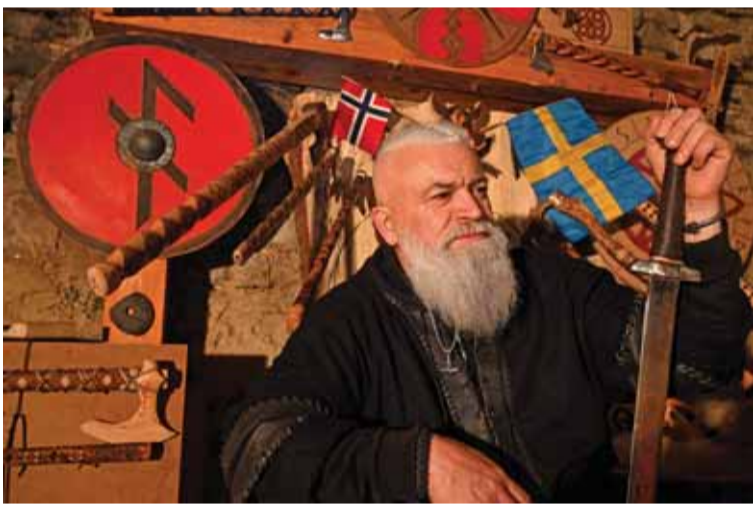
With his thick grey beard, plaited hair and an arsenal of medieval weapons, Bosnia's "first Viking" relaxes by hurling axes in the attic of his stone cottage. Over the past five years, Stipe Pleic has undergone a steady transformation from builder to Nordic warrior in homage to the popular television show "Vikings". The metamorphosis began after Pleic returned home to Tomislavgrad in southern Bosnia after years working on construction sites in Germany. What started as binge watching evolved into an obsession with the show's protagonist Ragnar

Lothbrok and the lives of the Nordic warriors, who launched raids across large swathes of Europe between the 8th and 11th centuries. "I had a lot of free time because I live alone here. And then when I was watching the series I saw Ragnar's axe, I liked it and wanted to do the same," says the 57-year-old, who also works as a driver for the regional government. Following in Ragnar's footsteps, he began making weapons by hand, decking the walls of his cottage with swords and shields, and dressing the part. Wearing a tunic and matching trousers, the towering Pleic

could easily pass for one of the show's main characters. His workshop now resembles a movie set, complete with an axe-studded throne and fox fur armrests. Blood-red shields coupled with Swedish and Norwegian flags hang alongside massive posters of series stars Travis Fimmel and Katheryn Winnick. And in his garden, he has built a replica of a drakkar—a flat-bottomed boat capable of crossing oceans—which he occasionally sails on a nearby lake. "My life has turned 180 degrees. My goals are different," Pleic says of his dramatic transformation, citing the harmony

that comes with the Viking lifestyle. He has even taken on a new persona—Ragnar Kavurson—a reference to both the name of his hometown during the Ottoman era and the word for "mis-creant". Over the years, he has made hundreds of axes, spears, bows, shields and pretty much anything else he spots on the TV show. Some projects take weeks of meticulous work to finish. Most of his hand-crafted axes have been offered to friends or sold, with some pieces fetching up to 300 euros (\$330). "I put a bit of myself into each of these," Pleic explains, adding he also

practices throwing axes every day, alone or with friends. "It is also a discipline that is recommended by psychiatrists. It's very relaxing," he says. In the future, he hopes to share his obsession with others by organizing the first Bosnian axe-throwing championship and building an entire Viking village for tourists. "I used to earn more money per day in Germany than I do now per month," he says. "But I wasn't happy. Now I am happy."—AFP



Stipe Pleic, also known by his Viking nickname of Ragnar Kavurson, poses in front of a display of the weapons he has created.



This image shows a display of axes and knives at workshop belonging to Stipe Pleic, also known by his Viking nickname of Ragnar Kavurson.



Stipe Pleic, also known by his Viking nickname of Ragnar Kavurson, poses in front of a display of the weapons he has created.

Japanese publishers to sue US firm over manga piracy

Four major Japanese manga publishers said Monday they will sue a US company accused of hosting servers for a piracy site, in the latest offensive against illegal copies of their graphic novels. Piracy is a long-running problem for Japan's internationally renowned manga industry, with publishers saying they lose millions in revenue as a result. The publishing giants will file the lawsuit with the Tokyo District Court this week, a spokesman for Kodansha, one of the publishers involved, told AFP. The four leading publishers—Kodansha, Shueisha, Shogakukan and Kadokawa—accuse web infrastructure company Cloudflare of copyright infringement for its role in hosting sites that distribute pirated copies of manga titles. They will seek a

combined 400 million yen (\$3.5 million) in damages, according to a source with knowledge of the suit. The site Cloudflare is accused of helping, by providing a server that can handle significant online traffic, has an estimated 300 million views a month and distributes about 4,000 manga

In 2019, the same four companies reached a settlement with the US firm after it agreed it would stop providing its services for a piracy site. Kodansha spokesman Tomoyuki Inui said publishers were determined to take legal action to protect the rights of artists.



titles, the source added. Piracy sites, where copies of graphic novels are distributed for free, have long tormented publishers of manga epics such as "One Piece" and "Attack on Titan," with losses estimated at millions of dollars in Japan alone. Cloudflare did not immediately respond to a request for comment, but it is not the first time it has come under fire from manga publishers.

Sutherland would need 24 return sooner rather than later

Kiefer Sutherland has warned he's getting too old to return to '24'. The 55-year-old actor portrayed Jack Bauer in the real time drama for nine seasons until 2014 and though he is "open" to returning to the program to complete his alter ego's journey, he admitted it would need to happen sooner or later because "time is catching up" and he's unsure he can maintain such a physical role. Asked about the possibility of returning, he told The Guardian newspaper: "I've learned to say: never say never. But if the writers are going come up with a good idea, they better do it quick, because I'm slowing down. "Time is catching up and the bones are getting brittle. "Maybe they should reboot it with new characters and Jack Bauer somehow gets out of China and that storyline's resolved. I'm open to all of it. "'24' was one of my great experiences in life and if there's a smart, intelligent way to finish it - or at least finish my involvement - I'm open to that." Despite his years in the spotlight, Kiefer admitted he's learned to answer to his '24' character's name when meeting fans. He said: "I've also had to learn how to respond to the name Jack, because people just go, 'Jack!' "I was just settling in my seat on a plane and this lady leaned over and said, 'I feel much safer now that you're sitting next to me.' I took a beat and said 'I don't know why. Everyone who sits next to me dies.' I was joking, but I'm not sure she knew how to take it."

Zac Efron secretly broke his hand filming 'Gold'

The 34-year-old actor threw himself into his role as a man trapped in a sandstorm in the thriller and though director Anthony Hayes admired the star's dedication during filming, he only realised the extent once it wrapped. He told the Sydney Morning Herald newspaper that, after the shoot ended, he received an email from Zac containing an X-ray of his hand, which had a metal pin in it after he broke a bone halfway through the shoot but decided not to mention it in case him having treatment got production shut down. Anthony noted: "Once Zac got out there,



he was just the hardest working dude you could get. His trailer was a couple of kilometers away, so we couldn't see it in the back of a shot when we were always shooting 360 degrees. "But Zac was never in his trailer, he was always on set, even when the ground temperature got up to 70 degrees. He didn't complain once." The filmmaker admitted Zac was drawn to the project because it gave him the chance to push himself to the limit, but he still couldn't be certain how his leading man would react with the tough conditions in Australia. He said: "What drew him to this was that it was a role that he'd never done before. It was a performance he'd never given before. It was extremes he'd never worked in before. "But with A-list actors who are used to a level of comfort, you never know what's going to happen once you get into the desert. It's easy when you're just on a Zoom call."



Nixon addresses Catrall's shade that And Just Like That is 'trashy'

Cynthia Nixon loves how Kim Catrall's absence from '...And Just Like That' was addressed "head-on". The 65-year-old actress opted not to reprise her role as Samantha Jones in the 'Sex and the City' reboot and her former co-star - who returned as Miranda Hobbes - is happy producers didn't brush her absence under the carpet and have made numerous references to the character throughout the series. Speaking on 'Watch What Happens Live', she told host Andy Cohen: "I thought it was great. I mean I have to say I love how we addressed it head-on in the first minute. "And then I loved how there began to be layers of it. There's the thing you tell Bitsy Von Muffling and then there's the way you talk about it amongst each other. "And I have to say, spoiler alert for any of you

who haven't seen it yet, but I felt like the flowers at the funeral were just. And I love how, you know, we keep checking in with her from time to time. I love that." The 55-year-old actress is also supportive of her character's alcoholism storyline and thinks it is reflective of real life. She said: "Well you notice I'm having a non-alcoholic beverage today. I love it. I have to say a lot of us were drinking more than we should have during the pandemic." But



Cynthia dismissed suggestions her alter ego has been turned into a version of herself, rather than the original Miranda, insisting there is a lot of crossover when playing a character for a long time, but acknowledged the writers have taken a lot of things "out of all of our own lives and put them in." She added: "Miranda's in the midst of a massive mid-life crisis at 55 and I am not." Cynthia's co-star Sarah Jessica Parker previously told Andy that the actress always has Tupperware pots of food with her, so the host asked her about what she packs for a day on set. She said: "It's a bowl that has kale, quinoa, avocado, sweet potatoes, carried chick peas, pickled onions, and I think I'm forgetting something."— Bang Showbiz

Sports

Holder finishes off England as West Indies win T20 series

Former West Indies captain named player of the match and series

BRIDGETOWN: Local hero Jason Holder took four wickets in successive balls during a dramatic last over as the West Indies beat England by 17 runs in the fifth and deciding Twenty20 international at the Kensington Oval on Sunday for a 3-2 series win. Akeal Hosein had already slowed England's progress with a format-best four for 30. James Vince, who holed out for an innings top-score of 55, was among those who fell to the left-arm spinner.

England, however, were still in the game, needing 20 runs to reach a target of 180 when all-rounder Holder began to bowl the final over of the match at his Barbados home ground. Despite starting the over with a no-ball, the towering paceman removed Chris Jordan and Sam Billings with his second and third legitimate deliveries via the aid of catches at deep midwicket by substitute fielder Hayden Walsh Jr.

Holder then had Adil Rashid taken at deep square leg before ending the match when he bowled Saqib Mahmood, with both batsmen out for golden ducks. Sri Lanka's Lasith Malinga, Afghanistan's Rashid Khan and Ireland's Curtis Campher are the only other men to take four wickets in four balls during a T20 international. Holder finished with a career-best return of five for 27 in 2.5 overs, having already removed England stand-in captain Moeen Ali.

"I pride myself on (not bowling) no-balls, pleased with how I came back, bowled a dot ball next up and then they had to come hard so I got the

four wickets," said Holder. The former West Indies captain was named both player of the match and series after taking 15 wickets across the five games—all at the Kensington Oval. "I'm pumped up for the moment, I love playing at Kensington Oval," he added. "It's the best place in the world to play cricket."

'Holder's town'

Billings kept England in the game before falling for 41 off 28 balls as the tourists were dismissed for 162 in 19.5 overs. West Indies captain Kieron Pollard led a late run-spree with a rapid 41 not out in a total of 179 for four. His bowlers then finished the job as West Indies, beaten by 34 runs in the fourth T20 on Saturday, enjoyed a much-needed success after a one-day international series loss at home to Ireland earlier this month. "This was a different game from last night and we capitalized with the bat in the last four overs," said Pollard, who shared an unbroken stand of 74 in five overs with midweek century-maker Rovman Powell (35 not out).

"This is Jason Holder's ground, his town, but it was total team effort from us." Moeen was again leading an England side missing injured captain Eoin Morgan, with the tourists deprived all series of T20 regulars Jos Buttler and Ben Stokes following their Ashes exertions. But Moeen was in no mood for excuses. "I thought West Indies were the better team," he said, adding: "They were smarter than us today with bat and ball." —AFP



BRIDGETOWN: Kyle Mayers (left) and Brandon King (right) of West Indies, walk onto the field during the 5th and final T20 between West Indies and England on January 30, 2022. —AFP

Despite 'serene' Kolbe's Top 14 debut Toulon fall to Stade Francais

PARIS: Toulon captain Baptiste Serin said South Africa's Cheslin Kolbe brings 'serenity to the team' even though he was unable to inspire them to victory on his Top 14 bow for the club on Sunday as Stade Francais won 26-24. Kolbe's league debut in his new colors was delayed by injury and Covid-19 postponements. The 28-year-old moved for a reported 1.8 million euros (\$2.12 million) from Toulouse in August.

The loss in Paris kept Toulon in 13th place, the relegation play-off spot, but they have three games in hand over Perpignan in 12th. Victory lifted the home side to 10th. Kolbe, 28, started behind a pack which included former Parisian Sergio Parisse as the 38-year-old seeks to prove his fitness over the next three weeks before a potential Test return with Italy in the upcoming Six Nations. Kolbe had played for Toulon in December 17's European Challenge Cup win over Zebre Parma.

"He's a guy who plays right, he brings a lot of serenity to the team. Cheslin's only played two matches, we have to be patient with Cheslin," Serin told reporters. "We know his ability with one-on-ones, he won all of them tonight. I found him serious," he added. By the time the Rugby World Cup winner got his first touch in the league his team already trailed after home fly-half Joris Segonds kicked a second-minute penalty. The visitors responded with two tries. After 11 minutes Kolbe's fellow back-three player and Tokyo 2020 gold medalist scored his first try for Toulon.

Segonds peppered Kolbe with kicks. The fullback responded by setting up Toulon's second try just after the quarter. His goose-step took him outside his defender before he fed Aymeric Luc who found Baptiste Serin with an inside pass for the scrum-half to cross. Louis Carbonel kicked the conversion to make it 14-3. Stade hit back as Samoan prop Moses Alo-Emile claimed his first try for the club. Segonds slotted the extras after half an hour. Carbonel kicked a penalty with five minutes left of the half and the away side led 17-10 at the break.

No 8 Parisse was replaced with 25 minutes remaining and was applauded off the field in the capital city, where he spent 14 seasons with Stade. He is expected to retire at the end of the campaign. Segonds closed the gap to four points with 18 minutes left with a penalty before being replaced by Argentina fly-half Nicolas Sanchez. With a quarter of an hour to play Stade Francais re-took the lead as club veteran Antoine Burban crashed over.

Sanchez succeeded with the conversion and then with two later penalties as the home side had a 26-17 advantage going into the final five minutes. Toulon pressed for a try to claim a bonus point and Serin turned the provider three minutes into added time to set-up Dorian Laborde. Earlier, Pau beat Clermont 28-20 and on Saturday Racing overcame Toulouse 20-15 at the champions' backyard as the likes of France's world player of the year Antoine Dupont and Les Bleus fly-half Romain Ntamack made their return from Covid-19 a week out from the start of the Six Nations. —AFP

Double Olympic winner Ledeska eyes a 'friendly'

PRAGUE: Ester Ledeska, a shock champion in two different sports in Pyeongchang four years ago, refuses to even utter the word "Olympics" as she heads to the Beijing Winter Games. Four years ago in Pyeongchang, the 26-year-old Czech won a surprise gold in the alpine skiing super-G event before adding another in her favored event, the snowboarding parallel giant slalom.

It made her the first athlete to win events in both alpine skiing and snowboarding at the same Olympics. In the super-G, Ledeska edged odds-on favorite Anna

Women Winter Tennis Tournament



Dalal Behbehani

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The Women Winter Tennis Tournament continues at Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah International Tennis Complex with the participation of 48 players.

Shooting tournament to kick off February 3

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Preparations are underway at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex for the Late Sheikh Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah Shooting Tournament which is organized by Kuwait Shooting Sport Club (February 3-5). President of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations Engr Duaj Khalaf Al-Otaibi said Kuwait Shooting will continue its efforts and participations in local and international

Lydia Ko holds off Kang for LPGA win at Boca Rio

MIAMI: World number three Lydia Ko held her nerve in the face of a strong challenge from Danielle Kang on Sunday, firing a three-under par 67 to win the LPGA at Boca Rio by one stroke. New Zealand's Ko started the day with a two-shot lead over America's Kang, who was trying to go back-to-back after winning the LPGA Tournament of champions

Veith of Austria by the narrowest of margins, with just one hundredth of a second separating the two. Genuinely stunned, Ledeska did not even celebrate, staring at the scoreboard in disbelief for several seconds before a TV cameraman assured her she had won.

A week later, as hot favorite, she won the parallel giant slalom to make history. She insists the Beijing Olympics are no more than "a little friendly match"—a term she and her team have adopted to ease the pre-event pressure. If they utter the word "Olympics", they must pay a ten-euro (\$11) fine. "I took this precaution mainly because everyone starts behaving like a complete lunatic before 'the friendly'," she said.

"The media hype about Olympic races—oops, there goes 10 euros—takes on massive proportions and everyone gets so crazy that they believe it might be something absolutely special even for me," she added. "But it's just another race!" While the tension is rising, Ledeska still loves what she does. "I'm still the same, I just race down



There are 32 players in the Open Category and 16 in the Juniors Under 16. The tournament is in cooperation with the Women's Committee at Kuwait Tennis Federation and Rafa Nadal Academy Kuwait. Deputy chairwoman of Women Committee Dalal Behbehani lauded the

events as it gets ready for the qualifying tournaments for the Paris 2024 Olympics.

He said Kuwait Shooters are being prepared at their best as they hope to qualify for the upcoming Olympics. Al-Otaibi appreciated the major support Kuwait Shooting is receiving from president of the Asian Shooting Confederation Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah who is keen on encouraging and motivating shooters, adding that the tournament is an opportunity to discover new talents.

Engr Otaibi thanked H.H. the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, H.H. the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and H.H. the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah for their support. Al-Otaibi thanked Minister of Public

in Orlando last week. Kang gained ground quickly with birdies at the first and third as Ko opened with a birdie at the first and a bogey at the second at the Boca Raton, Florida, resort.

After matching birdies at the 11th, Kang edged ahead with a birdie at the 12th, but she bogeyed 13 and when Ko birdied 15 she was alone in first again. Both birdied 16 from the same greenside bunker and arrived at 18 with Ko nursing a one-shot lead. She found both a fairway bunker and a greenside bunker, but blasted out to a foot to save par as Kang was unable to get her mid-range birdie attempt to fall.

Although the conditions were sunny and warm compared to the blustery chill of Saturday, Ko admitted the round was "a grind." But she got herself out of trouble when she had to,

the hill and I still like it," Ledeska said at a recent news conference. "But I hope I have learned something since 2018 and perhaps I am stronger and faster."

'Sense of speed'

Ledeska, the daughter of a popular Czech singer and composer, took up skiing aged two and snowboarding at five as her family left Prague each winter for the Czech mountain resort of Spindleruv Mlyn. She and her brother Jonas—an artist who has designed her ski suit—even went to school there. Snowboarding was Ledeska's first choice throughout her teenage years. "I made money for skiing as a snowboarder," she once said—but the balance has recently changed.

"I can take the sense of speed from skiing to snowboarding. When I switch, it feels like I have more flow for everything," Ledeska said. In Beijing, the women's snowboard parallel giant slalom takes place on February 8, three days before she has to switch to two skis for the



women's participation in the tournament as well as the major support they receive from their families. She thanked the president of Kuwait and Arab Tennis Federations Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Sabah for his continued support.

Works, State Minister for Youth Affairs Hussein Al-Mousa for his interest in the sport. He also thanked Public Authority for Sport (PAS) and its Director General Dr Humoud Fulaith and his deputies for providing all that is required to enable shooters continue their outstanding achievements. The tournament will be in Trap, Skeet, 10 Meter Rifle and Pistol, 50 Meter Rifle and 25 Rapid Pistol.



Engr Duaj Khalaf Al-Otaibi

going three-for-three on sand saves on the back nine to capture her 17th LPGA title against her long-time friend with a three-under par 69 for a 14-under total of 274. "She's obviously one of the players I've known for the longest time out here," Ko said of Kang. "She has kind of taken me under her wing."

"I just tried to focus on me and tried to play the best golf I can. At points it was a bit of a grind but I'm glad that I could get that done." Kang closed with a 68 for 275, while Japan's Yuka Saso carded a 67 to finish in solo third on 276. France's Celine Boutier, who played in the final group, carded a 69 for 277 and shared fourth place with England's Charley Hull, who signed for a 68. Ko, who won her first LPGA title at the age of 15, rose to number one in the world, then struggled through a near three-year title drought. —AFP

super-G. "The fast switch (between events) is pretty cruel. But I'm happy it's not on the same day, and in the end you just have to realize that you go headlong on two edges for a change," she said with a chuckle.

Ledeska has won two world championships titles and 20 World Cup events in snowboarding, earning an unrivalled four straight overall World Cup crowns in 2016-2019. She returned to the sport after a year off in December, finishing second in the parallel giant slalom at Carezza and winning another at Cortina d'Ampezzo two days later. On the ski slope, Ledeska has won two World Cup events since Pyeongchang and finished second in the overall downhill rankings in 2019/2020. She achieved her first podium of this season when she finished third in the Cortina downhill on January 22. Ledeska, who has disclosed a penchant for chocolate, ice-cream, shrimps and steak, said if she had any rest time in Beijing, she would watch the Harry Potter films with her coach. —AFP

Sports

Mane and Senegal cruise into Cup of Nations semis

Africa's top-ranked side on course to win elusive title

YAOUNDE: Sadio Mane's Senegal marched on to the semi-finals of the Africa Cup of Nations after seeing off a spirited Equatorial Guinea side with a 3-1 victory in Yaounde on Sunday. Mane set up the opener for Famara Diedhiou in the last-eight encounter but Equatorial Guinea fought back to equalize through Jannick Buyla early in the second half. Substitutes Cheikh Kouyate and Ismaila Sarr then both found the net to seal Senegal's place in the semis and a meeting with Burkina Faso on Wednesday at the same Ahmadou Ahidjo Stadium in the Cameroonian capital.

Africa's top-ranked side remain on course to win their elusive first Cup of Nations title, three years after losing to Algeria in the final in Egypt. Mane was given the all-clear to play after suffering suspected concussion in a nasty collision during Senegal's 2-0 win over Cape Verde in the last round. The 29-year-old crossed paths with his Liverpool team-mate Mohamed Salah as he entered the stadium, where Egypt had beaten Morocco in their quarter-final a little earlier.

Now Mane joins Salah in staying on until the last weekend of the tournament. They could meet in the final, with the Egyptians facing Cameroon in the other last-four tie on Thursday. Backed by the majority of the crowd, the Lions of Teranga went in front just before the half-hour mark when Mane set up Diedhiou to score. Equatorial Guinea, who had ousted Mali on penalties in the last round, thought they had a penalty shortly after half-time for a Kalidou Koulibaly handball, but the South African referee overturned the decision after reviewing the images.

They did equalize in the 57th minute when Buyla, one of a host of Spanish-born and based players in the squad, toe-poked into the corner. Senegal coach Aliou Cisse turned to his bench and Crystal Palace midfielder Kouyate made a quick impact, pouncing for an easy finish after a horrible mix-up between Saul Coco and Carlos Akapo when Equatorial Guinea failed to clear a corner. Also on from the bench, Sarr then made sure of the victory following superb play down the left by Saliou Ciss. — AFP



YAOUNDE: Senegal's midfielder Cheikh Kouyate (center) jumps for the ball during the Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) 2021 quarter-final football match between Senegal and Equatorial Guinea at Stade Ahmadou Ahidjo on January 30, 2022. — AFP

Canada stun US to close in on World Cup berth

HAMILTON: Canada took a giant step towards their first World Cup qualification in 36 years on Sunday after scoring an upset 2-0 victory over arch-rivals the United States in CONCACAF qualifiers. A Cyle Larin goal after just seven minutes and an injury time effort from Sam Adekugbe secured all three points for the Canadians at a frigid Tim Hortons Field in Hamilton to extend the home side's lead at the top of the CONCACAF standings. The unbeaten Canadians now have 22 points from four games with four fixtures remaining, pulling four points clear of the USA who are second with 18 points.

Canada have emerged as the surprise package from the Central America, North America and the Caribbean qualifying region, and are now firmly on course for only their second trip to the World Cup after reaching the Mexico finals in 1986. "We're turning into a football country," Canada's jubilant English coach John Herdman said afterwards. "(The USA) are a great team, a very good team, they had great quality today. But we matched their spirit.

"And that's what I said to our lads - we've got our own quality, and it came through." Goalscorer Larin admitted a World Cup berth was within reach. "We're almost there," he said. "But we never settle for anything. We'll keep pushing." Mexico are third in the standings level with the USA on 18 points after drawing 0-0 with Costa Rica in Mexico City on Sunday. The top three sides in the eight-team round-robin table qualify automatically for this year's finals in Qatar.

'Result hurts'

But the defeat piles pressure on USA coach Gregg Berhalter, whose team face Honduras at home on Wednesday before a tricky final three games in March which includes away trips to Mexico and Costa Rica and a home game against Panama. "It's hard for me to remember a performance away from home this dominant without getting a result," Berhalter said afterwards. "The result hurts, the performance doesn't hurt." The United States, aiming to atone for their shock failure to qualify for the 2018 World Cup, dominated possession and territory on Sunday but fell behind after a defensive lapse that allowed Turkey-based striker Larin to fire the hosts into the lead.

A Matt Turner goal kick was won by Kamal David who headed forward. Larin gathered all too easily just outside the US penalty area and played a neat one-two with Lille forward Jonathan David



HAMILTON: The United States' Weston McKennie goes for a header against Canada's Ike Ugbo during the second half of their World Cup qualifying match against Canada on January 30, 2022. — AFP

before brushing off US defender Miles Robinson and rifling a finish past Turner. It would be Canada's only meaningful chance on goal for the rest of the half with the USA enjoying the lion's share of possession thereafter.

But for all the US territorial dominance the Americans were unable to make it count, failing to find the incisiveness in attack to trouble the Canadian defense. Chelsea forward Christian Pulisic looked the likeliest source of invention for the USA, but was often isolated and on the receiving end of a some rugged Canadian tackling. The Americans finally got a shot on goal two minutes before half-time. A Pulisic corner was met with a firm glancing header from Weston McKennie but Canada keeper Milan Borjan reacted superbly to tip the effort onto the underside of the bar.

The similar half followed a similar pattern, with the US having plenty of the ball without really testing the Canadian defense. As the game wore on, the US became more ragged and deep into injury time the hosts broke clear, with defender Adekugbe skipping clear and racing towards goal before blasting past Turner for 2-0. In other games on Sunday, 2018 World Cup qualifiers Panama moved into the qualification reckoning with a 3-2 home win over Jamaica. Panama are fourth in the standings with 17 points, one behind the USA and Mexico. — AFP

Salah-led Egypt face Cameroon in 'third final before final'

YAOUNDE: Mohamed Salah-captained Egypt face a "third final before the final" this week when they confront hosts Cameroon in an Africa Cup of Nations semi-final in Yaounde. "We overcame the Ivory Coast and Morocco in what amounted to finals before the final and now we face another one against Cameroon," said Mozambique-born Egypt coach Carlos Queiroz.

While Liverpool star Salah and his Pharaoh teammates have been battling fellow top-10 ranked teams in the knockout stages of the marquee African tournament, Cameroon had a gentler passage. They defeated the Comoros, who had to use an outfield player between the posts after Covid-19 and injury sidelined their three goalkeepers, then Gambia, the lowest ranked of the 24 teams at the finals.

The clash on Thursday comes a day after Senegal, whose star-packed side includes another Liverpool star in Sadio Mane, face Burkina Faso in the first semi-final, also in Yaounde. It will be an emotional occasion for the Burkinabe, whose coach Kamou Malo says they will be "playing for our people who are being tested by current events", referring to a recent military coup. Here, AFP Sport looks ahead to the last-four clashes with Senegal favoured to qualify for a second successive final, while Cameroon and Egypt meet in a repeat of the 2017 title decider.

Fourth-tier Bergerac, Monaco into French Cup quarter-finals

PARIS: Fourth-tier Bergerac Perigord shocked Ligue 1 strugglers Saint-Etienne 1-0 to book a spot in the French Cup quarter-finals on Sunday and Monaco eliminated top-flight rivals Lens 4-2 in another last-16 clash. Late substitute Romain Escarpit scored a 76th minute winner for the side from Dordogne in south-western France who also claimed the scalp of Ligue 1 side Metz with a 5-4 win on penalties in the round of 64 last month. "Frankly, it's magnificent," said Escarpit. "We didn't give up, we fought. We'll all enjoy this together because it doesn't happen often in a career."

Bergerac reached the last eight for the first time

Cameroon v Egypt

Cameroon sharpshooters Vincent Aboubakar (six) and Karl Toko-Ekambi (five) are the leading scorers in this Cup of Nations, having bagged between them all 11 goals scored by the Indomitable Lions. Egypt have particularly painful memories of Aboubakar, whose late goal gave Cameroon a come-from-behind 2-1 triumph in the 2017 final in Libreville.

The Saudi Arabia-based goalmouth predator drew a blank against Gambia, but was denied a hat-trick by two close shaves and a header striking the chest of Gambian goalkeeper Baboucar Gaye. Lyon forward Toko-Ekambi, one of many Cup of Nations stars with African roots born in Europe, came to the rescue by netting twice in seven minutes. Now they face the Ahmed Hegazy-marshalled defense of record seven-time champions Egypt, a country renowned for rearguard strength both at national team and club levels.

A major concern for Egypt, though, is that they may have to field third-choice goalkeeper Mohamed Sobhy as Mohamed Elshenawy and Mohamed Abougabal had to retire injured against the Ivorians and Moroccans. At the other end of the pitch, there is the menace posed by two-time African Footballer of the Year Salah, who debuted for his country in 2011, a year after they last conquered Africa by beating Ghana. After a slow start in Cameroon, Salah led by example against Morocco, equalizing and then setting up the extra-time winner for fellow Premier League forward Mahmoud Trezeguet. Senegal share with west African neighbors Mali the unwanted distinction of never having lifted the Cup of Nations - the symbol of national team supremacy in the continent. — AFP

in the club's history, and joined fellow fourth-tier side Versailles, who shocked Ligue 2 leaders Toulouse 1-0 on Saturday. "We lacked the killer instinct," said Saint-Etienne captain Timothee Kolodziejczak, whose side dominated but drew a blank on front of goal. In Lens, last year's runners-up Monaco earned their quarter-final berth with Wissam Ben Yedder scoring twice. The Principality side were three goals up after half an hour. Ben Yedder headed in after 18 minutes and Jean Lucas and Sofiane Diop, quickly added two more.

Wesley Saïd pulled a goal back for the hosts before the break with Arnaud Kalimuendo reviving their hopes of a fightback after 53 minutes. The striker came close to equalizing in the 84th minute, but sent wide. Ben Yedder cemented a win for the five-time winners with two minutes to go. It is the fourth straight season a team from the fourth division has made the last eight and Bergerac and Versailles will be hoping to emulate Rumilly-Vallieres' effort from last term by reaching the semis. — AFP

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Rams outmuscle 49ers 20-17

Bengals stun Chiefs to reach first Super Bowl since 1989



CALIFORNIA: Cooper Kupp #10 of the Los Angeles Rams is tackled by Jimmie Ward #1 and Talanoa Hufanga #29 of the San Francisco 49ers in the fourth quarter during the NFC Championship Game on January 30, 2022. —AFP

LOS ANGELES: Quarterback Joe Burrow led the Cincinnati Bengals into their first Super Bowl since 1989 with a stunning upset of the Kansas City Chiefs on Sunday as the Los Angeles Rams outmuscled the San Francisco 49ers to advance to the NFL showpiece. After the nerve-shredding drama of the divisional round, Sunday's conference championship games delivered more nail biting action as the battle for Super Bowl berths reached its climax.

In Kansas City, Burrow and the Bengals overturned a 21-3 first half deficit against the rampant Chiefs offense led by Patrick Mahomes to snatch a 27-24 win in overtime. Rookie Evan McPherson kicked the winning points for the Bengals after Burrow had hauled his team back into contention with a performance that included two touchdowns and 250 yards with 23 of 38 passes completed. "Big win for us," said Burrow. "This is something I always wanted, to play in a Super Bowl and I couldn't be with a better group of guys."

"We're not done yet," added Bengals coach Zac Taylor. "We've got a special team. Everyone stepped up, man. We knew it would come down to

one team making the plays to win, and our guys did that." Victory was sweet for Burrow, whose rookie season last year was cut short by a horrific knee injury. It was a stunning AFC Championship defeat for the host Chiefs, who were seeking a third consecutive Super Bowl trip after winning in 2020 and losing to Tampa Bay last year.

Cincinnati will try to win the Super Bowl for the first time since the club began play in 1968, having lost to San Francisco in 1982 and 1989 in its only prior appearances in the NFL spectacle. Chiefs star Mahomes threw for 275 yards and three touchdowns but surrendered his first two interceptions in four AFC finals. Mahomes could only look on in disbelief as the Bengals celebrated. "When you're up 21-3 in a game, you can't lose it, and I put that on myself," Mahomes told reporters later.

Rams win thriller

As well as Burrow, the Bengals had the trusty boot of rookie kicker McPherson to thank for the win. McPherson had booted the Bengals into the AFC title game with a 52-yard effort to seal a 19-16

upset of Tennessee last week. McPherson said the Bengals had stayed calm despite trailing by 18 points early in Sunday's game. "Nobody blinked an eye," McPherson said. "I think we all thought we were definitely going to come back and find a way to win. That's what we've done all throughout the whole year."

In Los Angeles, the Rams ensured they will play a Super Bowl on home turf after staging a comeback of their own to beat the 49ers and end a six-game losing streak against their Californian rivals. The 49ers edged the Rams 27-24 on the final game of the regular season earlier this month to squeeze into the playoffs. History looked to be repeating itself on Sunday as the 49ers took a 17-7 third quarter lead thanks to touchdowns from Deebo Samuel and George Kittle either side of a Robbie Gould field goal.

But with the game on the line, Rams quarterback Matthew Stafford led scoring drives which yielded a Cooper Kupp touchdown and two Matt Gay field goals to give Los Angeles a 20-17 lead. San Francisco quarterback Jimmy Garoppolo had one last chance to find a game-winning score, but gave up an

interception to Travin Howard in an attempt to avoid a sack which effectively ended the game. "That was an unbelievable performance by our team," Stafford said afterwards.

"It didn't start the way we wanted it to, guys battled. I said in the locker room there's no way we're not going to win this damn game. Our guys put our minds to it and came out here and did it." It is the second time in three years the Rams have reached the Super Bowl after advancing to the 2019 edition, where they were beaten by Tom Brady's New England Patriots. Stafford, who joined Los Angeles last year in a blockbuster trade from the Detroit Lions, will be playing in his first Super Bowl at the age of 33.

"I'm at a loss for words," he said. "I'm just having a blast playing ball with these guys and, shoot, we've got one more to go home stadium-let's get it done." Stafford's dream night almost turned to disaster late in the game but what should have been a straightforward interception was fumbled by 49ers safety Jaquiski Tartt. "I deserve all the criticism my way," Tartt wrote on Twitter later Sunday. "Let my brothers down!! It still won't define me as a person/player." —AFP

Suns, Hawks keep NBA winning streaks alive

LOS ANGELES: The Phoenix Suns erased a 12-point third-quarter deficit to beat San Antonio 115-110 and push their NBA winning streak to 10 games on a Sunday that saw Atlanta rally for a seventh straight win. The lead changed hands nine times in the fourth quarter and the Suns trailed by two with 2:19 remaining when Devin Booker drained back-to-back three-pointers to put Phoenix ahead for good.

The Suns became the first team in the league to reach 40 wins, pushing their NBA-best record to 40-9. Booker led the way with 28 points. Mikal Bridges added 26 and veteran point guard Chris Paul had 20 points and 19 assists. Doug McDermott led the Spurs with 24 points and Lonnie Walker IV added 22 off the bench.

In Atlanta, Trae Young scored 36 points and handed out 12 assists as the high-flying Hawks won their seventh straight with a 129-121 come-from-behind win over the Los Angeles Lakers. Young scored 13 points in the fourth quarter and reserve Onyeka Okongwu, the US son of Nigerian immigrants, added 12 of his 16 points in the fourth to spark a rally from a 101-91 deficit after three quarters.

The Lakers were without four-time NBA champion LeBron James, who missed a third consecutive game with a sore left knee. Malik Monk, who led the Lakers with 33 points and 10 rebounds, noted that the superstar playmaker is "missed tremendously" but, he added: "It's our job to figure out how to play without him." Anthony Davis had 27 points and Russell Westbrook chipped in 20 and 12 assists for Los Angeles.

The Hawks opened the fourth with a 16-5 run to seize the lead. The Lakers pulled level on



PHOENIX: Mikal Bridges #25 of the Phoenix Suns drives to the basket during the game against the San Antonio Spurs on January 30, 2022. —AFP

a Monk three-pointer with 1:52 left, but Young answered with a 30-foot three-pointer and two free throws as the Hawks pulled away. "We have what it takes to win games," Okongwu said. "No matter if we're up or down, no matter how the game's going, as long as we lock in." In Detroit, the Pistons played a dismal first half but rallied to beat the red-hot Cleveland Cavaliers 115-105.

Detroit rookie guard Cade Cunningham's game was emblematic of the Pistons' night. Scoreless in the first half, Cunningham finished with a triple-double of 19 points 10 rebounds and 10 assists as the hosts seized the lead for the first time in the fourth quarter and held on for the win. Saddiq Bey scored 31 points for the Pistons, who snapped a four-game skid and ended Cleveland's four game winning streak. The Chicago Bulls also shook off a slow start on the way to a 130-116 victory over the Portland Trail Blazers.

Portland made seven of their first nine three-point attempts, but Chicago clamped

down on defense and clawed back for the win. Coming off a big defeat in San Antonio, the Bulls rebounded with at least 20 points from all three of their All-Stars. Nikola Vucevic scored 24 points and grabbed 14 rebounds in his 26th double-double of the season. DeMar DeRozan added 23 points and 10 assists and Zach LaVine chipped in 20 points for the Bulls, who are a half-game behind the Miami Heat atop the Eastern Conference.

In Orlando, the Magic's Franz Wagner drove for a go-ahead layup with less than a minute to play in a 110-108 victory over the Dallas Mavericks. Orlando, who own the worst record in the league, withstood a triple-double by Mavs guard Luka Doncic of 34 points, 12 rebounds and 11 assists—the 43rd of the Slovenian star's career tying him for 10th on the all-time list. There was little suspense in Milwaukee, where NBA Most Valuable Player Nikola Jokic scored 18 points with nine rebounds and 15 assists to lead the Denver Nuggets' 136-100 rout of the reigning champion Bucks. —AFP

Hovland nets Dubai Desert Classic

DUBAI: Norway's Viktor Hovland made a remarkable final round charge to defeat Richard Bland in the first play-off hole and win the Dubai Desert Classic on Sunday. The 24-year-old, six shots off overnight leader Justin Harding, produced a storming finish, sandwiching a terrific eagle two on the par-4 17th hole with birdies on the 16th and 18th to close with a sensational six-under par 66.

That took the man from Oslo to 12-under par and set the clubhouse mark, which was later matched by England's Bland, double the age of Hovland, after a stunning 22-foot birdie on the 18th hole. Bland, who turns 49 in three days, chipped in for a birdie on the difficult ninth hole, and then holed his tough bunker shot on the par-3 11th. However, the most crucial shot was the 22-foot birdie putt on the 18th, as the winner of last year's British Masters closed with a 68.

Rory McIlroy reached the 17th tee at 12-under par, but slightly blocked his tee shot into the right bushes on the reachable par-4. The four-time major champion proceeded to make a remarkable par, but sliced his 3-wood second shot on the par-5 18th into the water. He finished with a bogey and was third at 11-under par. On the first play-off hole, Hovland found the green in two and two-putted for a birdie. Bland missed his second shot and then failed to make an up and down from the greenside rough.

Hovland never looked in contention

after making a three-putt bogey from 33 feet on the 15th. But he then drained a 35-footer for birdie on the 16th, a 33-footer for eagle on the 17th and missed a 40-footer for eagle on the 18th. Hovland seems to be making it a tradition of mounting a late Sunday charge. His last win on the PGA Tour, the Tiger Woods-hosted Hero World Challenge in December last year, also saw him come up from a similar position.

"I wouldn't say it's become a habit just yet. Obviously, you have to get things going your way and I would certainly say that I had things going my way in Bahamas last time, and obviously this time, finishing birdie, eagle, birdie, that's something that rarely happens," said Hovland. "And even then, some other guys had a chance to take me out of it. So, I just try to do the best I can. I knew that I could post a good score today. I played some good golf this week. But I didn't quite get the same momentum that I did today. I posted a good number and made it interesting for the guys behind me."

Hovland is expected to rise two places to number 3 in the world rankings next week behind Jon Rahm and Collin Morikawa. "I have quite a lot to prove to be able to beat those guys, but this is a good start and we will see what happens," said Hovland. "It's pretty wild to become the world number three...it's very rewarding to see all the hard work paying off." Five players were tied for fourth place at eight-under par, a group that included the overnight leader Harding (76) and Poland's Adrian Meronk (72). Australian Adam Scott (69) and Europe's 2021 Ryder Cup captain, Pdraig Harrington (72) were in a tie for ninth at seven-under par 281. —AFP