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MoE extends midyear school holiday over pandemic

Assembly to debate grilling of foreign minister

Protesters rally for women's rights, freedoms

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Over 150 people gathered in Irada Square in front of the National Assembly yesterday to protest against the violation of women's rights and freedoms. Participants held placards in English and Arabic with slogans including "Kuwait is a civil country ruled by the constitution", "Personal freedom is secured by article 30 of the constitution" and "No future for a nation without equity", among others.

Ibtihal Al-Khateeb, political activist and teacher at Kuwait University, said the attendees gathered to defend freedoms in general and women's freedoms in particular. "These include simple issues such as practicing sports by women to serious issues like joining the army. We should deliver a message that freedoms of all kinds are among basic human rights, and if we let go of small rights, our bigger rights will be abandoned," she said.

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KUWAIT: Activists rally in support of women's rights outside the National Assembly yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat (See Page 3)

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The education ministry yesterday decided to extend the midyear school break by two weeks, with public and private Arabic schools to reopen on March 6. The postponement came partly as part of efforts to combat the spread of the coronavirus. This will allow students and the teaching staff to enjoy the national holidays and the Israa and Meraj religious holiday before going back to school. The decision came despite a sharp drop in the number of coronavirus cases, which declined from a peak of over 6,900 cases on January 28 to just over 4,200 cases on Sunday.

Meanwhile, the National Assembly holds a regular session today and is expected to debate a grilling filed by MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri against Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Sabah over alleged failure to perform his duties. The minister has the right to demand a delay of the debate, but the Assembly should vote on such a request.

But Muwaizri said yesterday he is confident the minister will face the grilling today and answer a series of questions. The lawmaker alleged that the minister has failed to protect Kuwait's political and security interests abroad and failed to stop squandering of public funds at agencies under his supervision.

The Assembly is also scheduled to debate a draft law stipulating to grant tens of thousands of stateless people, known as bedoons, their basic humanitarian rights like free education, healthcare and jobs in both the private and public sectors. Such rights should continue to be offered until the issue of bedoons is resolved, according to the bill.

News in brief

Kuwait rewards frontliners

KUWAIT: The government has started to disburse incentives to frontliners including health workers as reward for the selfless services they rendered during the COVID-19 pandemic. Doctors, nurses and all paramedical staff working in the ministry of health began to receive their rewards from Sunday. The government has earmarked KD 660 million in rewards for front-line workers.

Australia to reopen borders

SYDNEY: Australia will reopen its borders to tourists from Feb 21. Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced yesterday, ending some of the world's strictest and longest-running pandemic travel restrictions "If you're double vaccinated, we look forward to welcoming you back to Australia," he said. In recent months, rules have been gradually relaxed for Australians, long-term residents and students. — AFP

Iraq presidential vote postponed

BAGHDAD: Iraq's parliament yesterday indefinitely postponed a scheduled vote for the republic's president after most major political blocs boycotted the session. The sweeping no-show deepens a political crisis in the war-scarred country which, almost four months after a general election, still hasn't chosen a new prime minister. — AFP

Antiquities returned to Iraq

BAGHDAD: More than 300 ancient cuneiform writing tablets were returned to Iraq yesterday from a private Lebanese museum, as part of Baghdad's widespread efforts to restore antiquities looted during years of war. Sealed wooden boxes transported the 331 tablets bearing ancient cuneiform script from the Nabu Museum in northern Lebanon to Baghdad. — AFP

Morocco lays Rayan to rest

IGHRANE, Morocco: Moroccans yesterday attended the funeral of Rayan, a five-year-old boy who spent five days trapped down a well, sparking a vast rescue operation that gripped the world but ended in tragedy. The boy had fallen down a narrow, 32-m dry well last Tuesday, sparking a complex earth-moving operation to try to reach him without triggering a landslide.

Well-wishers had flooded social media with messages of sympathy and

prayers that he would be brought out alive, but their hopes were dashed. On Saturday night, crowds had cheered as rescue workers cleared away the final handfuls of soil to reach him, after the marathon digging operation in the village of Ighrane in northern Morocco's impoverished Rif mountains.

But the joy turned to grief when the royal cabinet of the North African nation announced that the boy was dead. King Mohammed VI called the parents to voice his condolences. The child's body was taken to a military hospital in the capital Rabat, accompanied by his parents. Yesterday it was transported to the Douar Zaouia cemetery near his village, where

Continued on Page 2



BAB BERRED, Morocco: Moroccans bury five-year-old Rayan Oram in the village of Ighrane in Morocco's rural northern province of Chefchaouen yesterday. — AFP

Protests over classroom hijab ban in India

UDUPI, India: A ban on Islamic headscarves at schools has prompted an outcry among Muslims in southern India, with large crowds taking to the streets yesterday to protest against the restrictions. The standoff in Karnataka state has galvanized fears among the minority community about what they say is increasing persecution under the Hindu nationalist government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Students at a government-run high school were told not to wear hijabs last month, an edict that soon spread to at least two other educational institutions in the state. "It's discriminatory in nature and also it's against the rights that are provided under the constitution of India," Sumayya Roushan, president of the Girls Islamic Organization Karnataka, said at a press conference yesterday. Roushan said the ban violated "a personal choice that the students are entitled to, which doesn't... harm any other person".



KUNDAPUR, India: The principal talks with students of a pre-university college who arrived wearing hijabs in Karnataka's Udupi district yesterday. — AFP

Social media footage showed hundreds of people gathered on roads and waving Indian flags in at least two towns in Karnataka, the latest in several days of demonstrations held to condemn the bans. One of the schools has since partially yielded, allowing its female Muslim students to attend class with a hijab but instructing them to sit in separate classrooms, according to local media.

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Spinal cord implant helps paralyzed patients walk again

TOKYO: In 2017, Michel Roccati was in a motorbike accident that left his lower body completely paralyzed. In 2020, he walked again, thanks to a breakthrough new spinal cord implant. The implant sends electrical pulses to his muscles, mimicking the action of the brain, and could one day help people with severe spinal injuries stand, walk and exercise.

It builds on long-running research into using electrical pulses to improve quality of life for people with spinal cord injuries, including a 2018 study by the same team that helped people with partial lower-body paralysis walk again. "It was a very emotional experience," Roccati told journalists of the first time the electrical pulses were activated and he took a step.

He was one of three patients involved in the study, published yesterday in the journal Nature Medicine, all of them unable to move their lower bodies after accidents.

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Local

Parents weigh in on online education experience

Parenting for online students brings new challenges

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Since the last two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, parents have slowly accepted the reality that classes will continue to be held online. Students face several challenges, from Internet connectivity, speed, the devices they use, assignments to complete and workbooks to fill, to time spent on the computer, playing computer games and social media use. Also, teachers are reportedly giving more homework than they would if classes were held on campus.

Online school is more than just a huge change - it's an emotional burden on many students and parents. Raquel, a Filipino mother of three, has embraced the changes, but is hoping for normalcy and on-campus classes to return soon. "I stopped pushing my kids to their limits. I don't want to add more burden on them. This is an extraordinary time and requires understanding," said Raquel, who is a working mother.

Before the pandemic, Raquel said she used to challenge her children to do well in school in exchange of rewards. "I stopped being a pushy parent because I see their daily struggles with online classes. I hate seeing my kids getting exhausted on the computer. Once my eldest daughter, who is 16 years old, was crying and hiding in the room. She said was that she was very tired and experiencing difficulties in studying online. I never experienced

what they are going through, so after giving her a big hug, I went straight to the bathroom and cried too," she admitted.

"I understand her perfectly because I am a working mother. I have tasked her to watch over and help her two younger siblings (a 14-year-old sister and 8-years-old brother). When I come home from work, we review all their subjects and help them in their assignments," Raquel said. Her husband helps in performance-based assessments and projects.

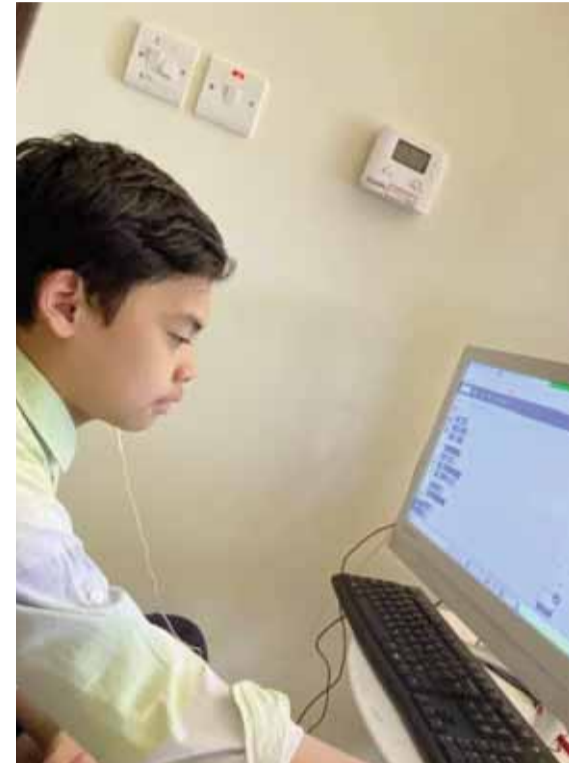
For a Syrian-Lebanese couple, studying online is tough. Mona said most of the time she looks after the needs of her two children. She is also a working mother, while her husband runs a small auto mechanic business. "After I come home from my job, I immediately cook dinner; if I'm too exhausted, I order from a restaurant. I do not bother my husband if he is relaxing or watching Netflix or football matches, as he would be angry," she said.

Mona's children are in grades 8 and grade 10 respectively. "Once I had a problem with my daughter, who said she doesn't want to attend online classes at all. I came to know that for two days, she only showed herself during attendance, but would switch off the camera and play games with friends on social media. When I confronted my daughter about it, she said she was fed up and doesn't understand anything. I didn't know what to do - I just cried," she recalled.

“ I stopped pushing my kids to their limits ”



KUWAIT: Students participate in online classes.



But there are some who see the advantages of online classes. Romeo, a father of two, said while there are many negative comments about remote learning, he sees more benefits for his children. "My kids no longer travel back and forth to school, so there is less hassle. I also save money on trans-

portation and no longer have to give them an extra allowance," he said. Romeo added because they are now studying at home, his children can concentrate more on their assignments. But he conceded that overexposure to the computer can have a negative impact.

Kuwait's social affairs minister discusses ties with several envoys



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Social Affairs Minister Mubarak Al-Aro meets Tajikistan's Ambassador Zabitullah Zabitov. — KUNA photos



Kuwait's Social Affairs Minister Mubarak Al-Aro meets India's Ambassador Sibi George.



Kuwait's Social Affairs Minister Mubarak Al-Aro meets Egypt's Ambassador Osama Shaltout.

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Social Affairs Minister Mubarak Al-Aro held separate talks with several ambassadors to the country, focusing on plans to improve bilateral relations and bolster cooperation across numerous fields. Tajikistan's and

India's ambassadors to Kuwait, Zabitullah Zabitov and Sibi George respectively, discussed bilateral ties with the Kuwaiti minister, with the latter thanking Kuwait for the aid it had given to New Delhi as it battled a recent surge of COVID-

19 cases. Egypt's envoy to Kuwait Osama Shaltout was also among the ambassadors to have had an encounter with the Kuwaiti minister, discussing efforts to improve his country's ties with Kuwait. The Kuwaiti minister held similar

talks with Canadian Ambassador Aliya Mawani, with issues ranging from women's empowerment to Canadian investments in Kuwait among the topics discussed, according to a social affairs ministry statement. — KUNA

Spinal cord implant helps paralyzed...

Continued from Page 1

But the three were able to take steps shortly after the six-centimeter implant was inserted and its pulses were fine-tuned. "These electrodes were longer and larger than the ones we had previously implanted, and we could access more muscles thanks to this new technology," said Jocelyne Bloch, a neurosurgeon at the Lausanne University Hospital who helped lead the trial.

Those initial steps, while breathtaking for the researchers and their patients, were difficult and required support bars and significant upper body strength. But the patients could start rehabilitation immediately, and within four months Roccati could walk with only a frame for balance. "It's not that it's a miracle right away, not by far," cautioned Gregoire Courtine, a neuroscientist at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology who led the research with Bloch.

Roccati is now "able to stand for two hours - he walks almost one kilometer without stopping". The Italian described being able to look clients in the eye, have a drink at a standing table and take a shower standing up thanks to the implant. He and others in the trial were also able to climb stairs, swim and canoe.

The improvements depend on the electrical stimulation, which is triggered via a computer carried by the patient that activates a pattern of pulses. Two of the patients can now activate their muscles slightly without

electrical pulses, but only minimally. The three men had all been injured at least a year before the study and Bloch said the team hopes to trial the technology with people sooner after an accident. "What we all think is that if you try earlier it will have more effect," she said.

There are challenges: In early recovery a patient's capacity is still in flux, making it hard to set a baseline from which to measure progress, and ongoing medical treatment and pain could hamper rehabilitation. So far, the implants are also only suitable for those with an injury above the lower thoracic spinal cord, the section running from the base of the neck to the abdomen, because six centimeters of healthy spinal cord is needed.

The idea of using electrical pulses to address paralysis stemmed from technology used to regulate pain, and the researchers said they see scope for further applications. They have also shown it can regulate low blood pressure in spinal cord injury patients and plan to soon release a study on its use for severe Parkinson's disease.

The team cautioned that significant work remains before the implant is available for treatment outside clinical studies, with Bloch saying she and Courtine receive around five messages a day from would-be patients seeking help.

They next plan to miniaturize the computer that activates the pulses so it too can be implanted in patients and controlled with a smartphone. They expect this to be possible this year, and have plans for large-scale trials involving 50-100 patients in the United States and then Europe. "We believe there is a bright future for neurological stimulation technology," said Courtine. "We'll do (it) as fast as we can." — AFP

have the right to speak. They suffer from repression and violence, and we want to deliver their voice," he told Kuwait Times.

The protest came after a women's yoga retreat that was denounced as "immoral" was postponed over the weekend after authorities said it needed a permit. The defense ministry last month imposed new rules on women in the military, saying they have to wear a hijab, need permission from a male guardian to join and are not allowed to carry weapons. Kuwaiti women, who earned the right to vote in 2005, have long been pushing the boundaries of their society, considered one of the most open in the region. Last year, they defied conservative norms and a culture of "shame" to speak out against harassment for the first time.

Protests over classroom hijab...

Continued from Page 1

Two other schools that had implemented a hijab ban declared a holiday and were closed yesterday.



BANGALORE, India: Muslim women hold placards during a demonstration after educational institutes in Karnataka denied entry to students for wearing hijabs yesterday. — AFP

Morocco lays Rayan to rest...

Continued from Page 1

hundreds of mourners attended his funeral, AFP journalists said. Rayan's father Khaled Aourram said he had been repairing the well when his son fell in, close to the family home. The shaft, just 45 cm across, was too narrow for Rayan to be reached directly, and widening it was deemed too risky - so earth movers dug a wide slope into the hill. Rescue crews, using bulldozers and front-end loaders, excavated the surrounding red earth down to the level where the boy was trapped, before drill teams carefully dug a horizontal tunnel to reach him from

the side to avoid causing a landslide.

Vast crowds came to offer their support, singing and praying to encourage the rescuers who worked around the clock. But the boy's death left Moroccans in shock. Mourad Fazoui in Rabat mourned what he said was a disaster. "May his soul rest in peace and may God open the gates of heaven to him," the salesman said.

The Arabic daily newspaper Assabah criticized the digging of unauthorized wells, saying many were used to irrigate cannabis widely grown in Morocco's north. Social media across the Arab world were flooded with messages of support, grief, and praise for rescue workers. "He has brought people together around him," one Twitter user said. But one deplored a "dystopian world" where "Arab nations are moved" by the Morocco rescue operation for the child while vast numbers of infants die in conflict or famine in Yemen and Syria. — AFP

Protesters rally for women's...

Continued from Page 1

Men too participated in the demonstration. Mishaan Al-Barrak, member of the Kuwait Progressive Movement, said people are participating to counter attacks on public and private freedoms. "Recently, we have noticed increasing violations of women's rights. We came to represent and speak on behalf of marginalized women such as bedoons, domestic workers and others who don't

Local

Kuwaitis gather to promote freedoms



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti citizens flocked to the Irada Square yesterday for a sit-in organized by women's groups in protest against limiting women's rights, and to reiterate that Kuwait is a civil state governed by the law and constitution. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Egyptian labor force largest in Kuwait: Report



KUWAIT: This file photo shows a worker at a construction site in Kuwait. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KUWAIT: Egypt has the largest expatriate group in Kuwait's labor force for the first time, according to recent statistics. A government report released recently shows that there were 456,600 Egyptian workers in Kuwait's labor market as of the end of September 2021; or 24 percent of the total workforce of 1.9 million workers (excluding domestic helpers). The Indian workforce of 451,300 (23.7 percent) came second followed by the Kuwaiti workforce of 424,100 (22.3 percent), according to the newest statistical report prepared by the State Audit Bureau. The statistics further show that the Kuwaiti labor force make up 22.3 percent of the total workforce, compared to 77.7 percent non-Kuwaitis. Furthermore, the Kuwaiti labor force increased by 2.7 percent during the period covered by the report, whereas the non-Kuwaiti labor force dropped from 80.3 percent, according to the report.

In fourth place comes the Bangladeshi workforce with 161,100 (8.5 percent), followed by the Pakistani workforce with 70,300 (3.7 percent), Filipino with 66,000 (3.5 percent) and Syrian with 63,200 (3.3 percent) respectively. Nepal came in eighth place with the number of workers in Kuwait with 40,000 (2.1 percent), followed by Jordan with 25,200 (1.3 percent) and Iran with 20,300 (1.1). The remaining 6.6 percent are workers of other nationalities (around 125,100), the statistics show.

According to the statistics, there were 351,600 Kuwaitis working in the public sector as of September 30, 2021, of whom 209,300 are women. Meanwhile, there were around 89,000 non-Kuwaitis in the public sector. On the other hand, Kuwaitis in the private sector reached only around 72,500 compared to around 1,390,000 expatriates. These figures do not include domestic helpers whose number has reached around 608,000 percent as of September 30, 2021, of whom around 307,000 are female and 301,000 are male.

Kuwait reports 4,294 new COVID cases, one death

KUWAIT: Kuwait reported 4,294 new COVID-19 cases yesterday in addition to one death and 5,022 recoveries. Meanwhile, the number of patients in ICU's reached 91, up from 87 on Sunday. The number of patients hospitalized dropped from 567 to 532, while total active cases dropped from 53,427 to 52,698. The percentage of daily new cases to new tests reached 13.6 percent while the percentage of recovery reached 90.5 percent, according to the health ministry's bulletin. The figures brought total cases to 583,113, deaths to 2,511 and recoveries to 527,904. Health authorities conducted 31,464 swab tests during the same period which takes to a total of 7,142,068.



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The Central Bank of Kuwait.

CBK holds workshop on money laundering, finance of terrorism

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) stressed yesterday the importance of boosting its efforts for meeting the international requirements and recommendations of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to combat money laundering and finance of terrorism.

This is implemented by inspecting the abidance of FATF criteria, and by following up on the ultimate possible manners of recommendations issued by financial institutions on that matter. CBK added in a statement issued yesterday as it held a workshop in coordination with the US Department of Justice (DOJ) on money laundering and financing terrorism via video call technology. Participants in the workshop also discussed latest challenges and dangers in this field, and tackled illegal financial practices, virtual assets, compliance requirements, as well as reviewing the best control practices applied globally in this regard.

"This workshop is part of CBK's efforts in following up with the regional and international developments in a changeable financial environment and is a vital step towards bolstering cooperation with US in fighting the financial crimes," the statement quoted Executive Director of the supervision sector in CBK Waleed Al-Awadi as saying.

The workshop also discussed the international views regarding combating financial crimes and financing terrorism under new threats, especially the virtual ones, the US Deputy Chief of Mission James Holtsnider, said. (FATF) is the global money laundering and terrorist financing watchdog. The inter-governmental body sets international standards that aim to prevent these illegal activities and the harm they cause to society. —KUNA



Kuwait Airways launches 17 new summer destinations

KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways Company announced yesterday the launch of 17 new tourist destinations as part of its preparations for the summer season, which is expected witness a remarkable recovery in travel traffic with more options for travelers. In a press release, the company's CEO Maen Razouqi said that the total number of destinations offered by the company has become 57, pointing out that the new destinations will start from the beginning of next May.

The operation of the new destinations and flights will include Malacca, Moscow, Sarajevo, Nice, Salalah, Sharm El Sheikh, Sohag, Alexandria, Mykanos, Bodrum, Trabzon, Vienna, Madrid, Casablanca, Manchester, Kathmandu and Kuala Lumpur, Razouqi explained. "In choosing the new destinations, Kuwait Airways had put into consideration the most wanted and preferred destinations with high demands from all social segments, whether for business, tourism, or education", he noted.

Razouqi stressed the company's keenness to reach best levels of excellence through the services it provides to its passengers, in addition to improve all services to keep pace with the latest developments in the aviation sector. The launching of the new travel destinations comes as part of Kuwait Airways strategy and to meet the growing demand for these new markets, which are important for travelers. —KUNA

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A general photo showing the Palace of Justice in Kuwait City. —Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Several topics on National Assembly session's agenda



KUWAIT: A general view of a parliamentary session in progress last week. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KUWAIT: The National Assembly is scheduled to hold regular sessions today and tomorrow to discuss articles listed on its work agenda, mainly to consider interpellation of Foreign Minister and State Minister for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr. Ahmad Nasser Al-Sabah, as well as look into government work plan. The session will begin with rectifying session transcripts, queries and incoming letters, followed by the

four-axis grilling motion submitted by MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizeri. The interpellation will be in regards to "squandering of public funds", "breaching of laws and mismanagement", "failure of protecting country's political interests", and "non-adherence to international treaties and documents", according to the interrogating MP. Article 100 of the Kuwaiti Constitution grants members of parliament the ability to file an interrogation

request against the prime minister and cabinet ministers about affairs relating to their duties and responsibilities.

The assembly will then address government work plan for the years 2021/2022 - 2024-2025, in application of article 98 of the constitution. Further on the session's agenda is a host of parliamentary committees' reports of draft laws, amendments and proposals, amongst which, is the foreign affairs

parliamentary committee proposal on amending law boycotting the Zionist entity and suggesting law prohibiting dealing with and normalizing the Zionist entity and its organizations. The session will also be handling reports relating to domestic affairs including committee tasked with addressing conditions of stateless people report on civil, legal, social and employment rights of stateless people. —KUNA

Two dead, one injured in Wafra Road accident



KUWAIT: The car seen following the accident.

KUWAIT: Two people died, and another was critically wounded in an accident reported yesterday evening on Wafra Road. Firemen rushed to the scene in response to an emergency call reporting an accident involving a sports-utility-vehicle. They

freed the victims from the wreckage and handed them over to emergency medical technicians, Kuwait Fire Force said. An investigation was opened to reveal the cause of the accident.

Meanwhile, firemen freed a worker who became



A fireman helps a worker after he became trapped following a landslide.

trapped following a landslide reported near a house under construction in Rawdha yesterday. The man was in a stable condition at the time of his rescue, Kuwait Fire Force said in a statement, noting that an investigation was opened into the case.

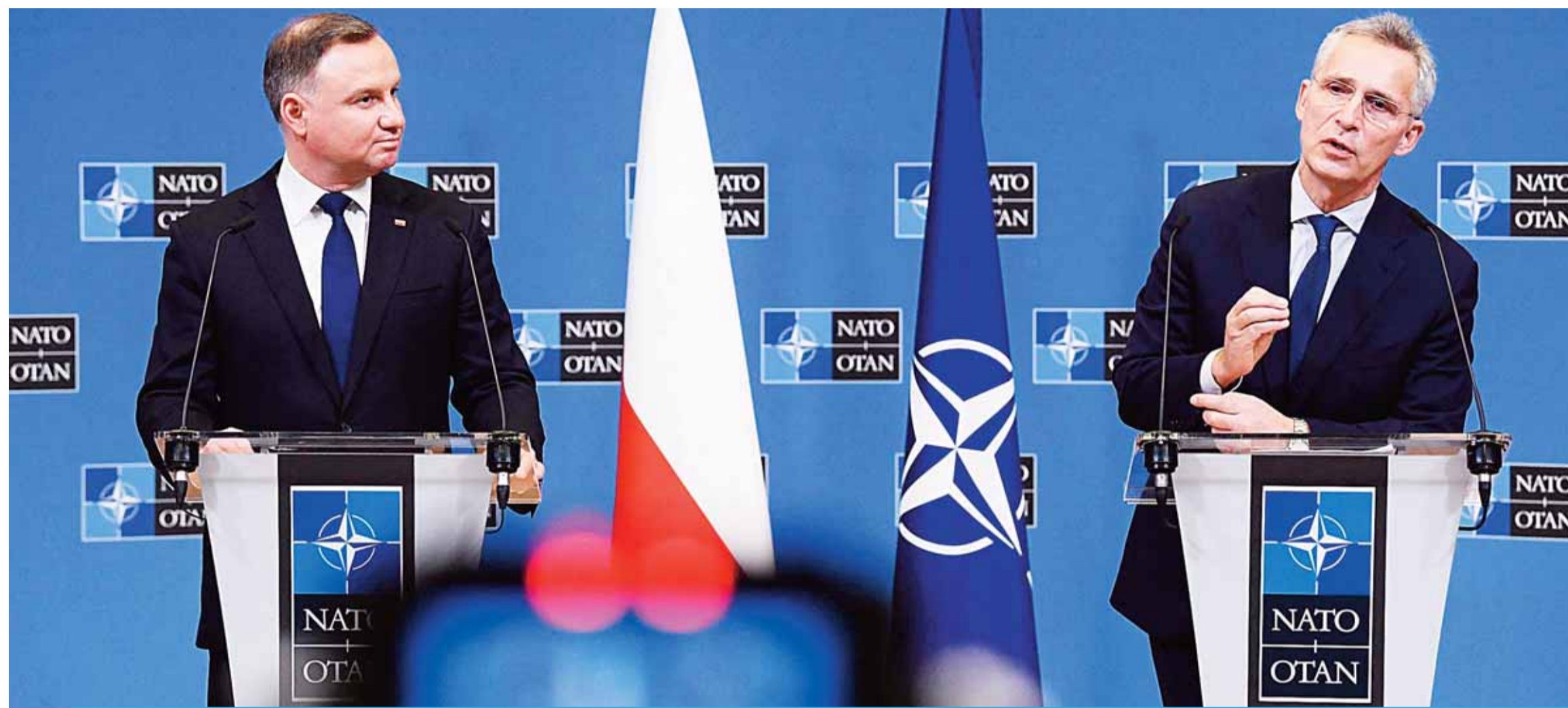


China locks down city of 3.5m near Vietnam border

Family denounces 'show trial' of German held in Iran

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BRUSSELS: NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg (R) and Polish President Andrzej Duda (L) give press conference after their meeting at NATO headquarters in Brussels yesterday. —AFP

Diplomatic flurry to avert Russia-NATO clash

German, Czech, Slovak and Austrian foreign ministers expected in Kyiv

MOSCOW: With war clouds gathering over Ukraine, international diplomacy goes into overdrive yesterday with the French and Russian presidents to talk in Moscow and the German chancellor heading to the White House to meet with US leader Joe Biden.

Also yesterday, the German, Czech, Slovak and Austrian foreign ministers were expected in Kyiv, which has played down dire US warnings that Moscow had stepped up preparations for a major incursion into Ukraine. US officials have said the Kremlin has assembled 110,000 troops along the border with its pro-Western neighbour but intelligence assessments have not determined whether President Vladimir Putin has actually decided to invade.

They said Russia is on track to amass a large enough force—some 150,000 soldiers—for a full-scale invasion by mid-February. Such a force would be capable of taking the capital Kyiv in a matter of 48 hours in an onslaught that would kill up to 50,000 civilians, 25,000 Ukrainian soldiers and 10,000 Russian troops and trigger a refugee flood of up to five million people, mainly into Poland, the officials added.

On top of the potential human cost, Ukraine fears further damage to its already struggling economy. And if Moscow attacks Ukraine it could face retaliation over the Nord Stream 2 pipeline—set to double natural gas supplies from Russia to Germany—with Berlin threatening to block it. Russia is seeking a guarantee from NATO that Ukraine will not enter the alliance and wants the bloc to withdraw forces from member states in eastern Europe.

'Apocalyptic predictions'

Moscow denies that it is planning to invade Ukraine, and Kyiv's presidency advisor said the chances of a diplomatic solution to the crisis remained "substantially higher than the threat of further escalation". On Twitter, Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba sought to

calm tensions, saying: "Do not believe the apocalyptic predictions. Different capitals have different scenarios, but Ukraine is ready for any development."

President Emmanuel Macron of France, which currently holds the rotating presidency of the EU, will be in Moscow yesterday and Kyiv today to spearhead efforts to de-escalate the crisis. He is expected to push forward a stalled peace plan for the festering conflict with Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine.

The trip will be a political gamble for Macron, who faces a re-election challenge in April. Also on Monday, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz will meet with Biden in Washington. "We worked hard to send a clear message to Russia that it will have a high price if they were to intervene into

Ukraine," Scholz told the Washington Post in an interview ahead of his meeting.

"I really appreciate what President Biden is doing in the bilateral talks between the United States and Russia. They are very difficult." Biden has reacted to the Russian troop buildup by offering 3,000 American forces to bolster NATO's eastern flank, with a batch of the troops promised arriving in Poland on Sunday.

But US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan told Fox News Sunday that Biden "is not sending forces to start a war or fight a war with Russia in Ukraine". "We have sent forces to Europe to defend NATO territory," he said.

Scholz said Sunday that Berlin was prepared to send extra troops to the Baltics in addition to 500 soldiers already stationed in Lithuania under a NATO operation. While he is in Washington, his foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock, will be in Kyiv along with her Czech, Slovak and Austrian counterparts for a two-day visit. Scholtz will be in Moscow and Kyiv next week for talks with Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. —AFP

Humanitarian crisis feared as cyclone kills 20 in Madagascar

ANTANANARIVO: Cyclone Batsirai swept out of Madagascar yesterday after killing 20 people, displacing 55,000 and devastating the drought-hit island's agricultural heartland, leading the UN to warn of a worsening humanitarian crisis.

Madagascar was already reeling from a tropical storm which killed 55 people weeks earlier, and the latest extreme weather event came as South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said the continent is "bearing both the brunt and the cost" of global warming.

Batsirai made landfall on the Indian Ocean island's east on Saturday evening bringing heavy rain and winds of 165 kilometres (102 miles) per hour, after drenching the French island of La Reunion. Jean Benoit Manhes, a representative of UN children's agency UNICEF in the country, told AFP yesterday that "Batsirai left Madagascar this morning at 7 am (0400 GMT) heading out into the Mozambique Channel."

Madagascar's disaster management agency said that Batsirai had left 20 people dead and forced 55,000 from their homes. UNICEF warned that many

of the victims were likely to be children, which make up more than 50 percent of the country's population.

The cyclone first hit a sparsely populated agricultural area in the country's east on Saturday, before later weakening. The eastern city of Mananjary was "completely destroyed," a resident named Faby said.

'Constant humanitarian crisis'

Batsirai then moved west inland, causing flooding that ravaged rice fields in the country's central "breadbasket," UNICEF said. "The impact of the cyclone does not end today, it will last for several months, particularly the impact on agriculture," Manhes said. "The roofs of several schools and health centres were blown off" in the affected areas, UNICEF said.

Batsirai spared the capital Antananarivo and the island's main port Tamatave, which led to a lower death toll than had been initially feared by the authorities and aid organisations, who had warned that nearly 600,000 people could be affected and 140,000 displaced. Some 77 percent of Madagascar's population live below the poverty line and the latest blow comes during a severe drought in the south which has plunged more than a million people into acute malnutrition, some facing famine.

The cyclone partly destroyed the main road linking the island's north and south, "which will make it difficult to provide access and reinforcements to villages, including in drought-hit areas," Manhes said.



Ukraine fears damage to its struggling economy

Ukraine fears damage to its struggling economy



RANOMAFANA, Madagascar: Residents look at the partially collapsed RN25 road in Ranomafana yesterday following the passage of cyclone Batsirai. Cyclone Batsirai swept out of Madagascar yesterday after killing 20 people. —AFP

"Madagascar is in a constant humanitarian crisis," he added. Some 10,000 people on La Reunion were left without electricity on Sunday, three days after Batsirai passed through the island, injuring 12 people on its path. Tropical Storm Ana affected at least 131,000 people across Madagascar in late January, with most of the 55 deaths coming in Antananarivo. Ana also hit Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, causing dozens of deaths. —AFP

In conservative Russia, liberal teachers are shown the door

SAINT PETERSBURG: Biology teacher Olga Shchegoleva had not even finished her first six months at a prestigious school in Saint Petersburg when she came under pressure to quit over a sex education blog. In Vladimir Putin's Russia, teachers are being increasingly caught up in the climate of social conservatism.

The 31-year-old Shchegoleva is one of hundreds of educators who recently have been fired or forced to quit over claims of misconduct, in a trend that reflects Russia's growing intolerance and conservatism.

Shchegoleva is the author of a sex education blog that addresses topics from sexual health and consent to birth control and toys. Even though she writes for adults, several concerned parents complained to the school, which is part of the respected Rimsky-Korsakov conservatory in Russia's former imperial capital.

Shchegoleva said she liked her job—and her students—but felt she had no choice but to quit. "There is

this belief that teachers have no life or hobbies outside of work, and that there are some ethical standards—not officially spelled out anywhere—that teachers are expected to follow," she told AFP.

The education ministry did not respond to an AFP request to provide any figures, but the chairwoman of a Russian teachers' union, Yury Varlamov, said courts had delivered more than 2,000 rulings linked to immoral conduct in the last five years. Most cases involved educators, Varlamov estimated.

"The dismissal of teachers for immoral behaviour is increasingly being used by employers against unwelcome workers," he said. The way the legislation is vaguely worded, experts say, leaves the door open for dismissal over a wide range of activities.

In one prominent case, a teacher from the Siberian city of Omsk who also worked as a plus-size model was pressured to quit in 2018 after pin-up-style pictures featuring her appeared online. In 2021, a teacher from the largest Siberian city of Novosibirsk was pushed out after she posted online a racy video in which she was seen stripping down to lingerie and dancing.

The same year, a teacher from Sevastopol in Russia-annexed Crimea publicly complained about her low salary. She was interrogated by members of law



SAINT PETERSBURG: Olga Shchegoleva, 31, a former biologist school teacher checks her computer during an interview with AFP in Saint Petersburg, on December 14, 2021. —AFP

enforcement and fired. Activists say teachers have been fired for their sexual orientation and others removed for their support of the opposition.

Putin, who enjoys unwavering support from the Orthodox Church, has been promoting increasingly conservative values to rally support from his core constituency. Amid raging tensions with the world's top democracies, he has sought to present Russia as the antithesis of Western liberal values. —AFP

Iran nuclear deal talks to resume in Vienna today

VIENNA: Iran nuclear deal talks will resume in Vienna today, diplomats said yesterday, after negotiators in recent weeks have cited progress in seeking to revive the 2015 landmark accord. Parties to the deal have been negotiating in Vienna since last year with indirect US participation. Talks were most recently halted at the end of last month, and the negotiators returned to their capitals for consultations.

"The 8th round of the Vienna Talks... attended by China, France, Germany, Russia, United Kingdom, Iran and the United States resume tomorrow in Vienna," tweeted Alain Matton, spokesman of the EU, which chairs the discussions. After months of stalemate, progress has been made in recent weeks to revive the 2015 agreement that was supposed to prevent Iran from acquiring an atomic bomb, a goal it has always denied pursuing.

Former US president Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from the pact in 2018 and reimposed tough economic sanctions on Iran, prompting the Islamic republic to begin pulling back from its commitments under the deal and step up its nuclear activities.

'Decisive moment'

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz told the Washington Post in an interview published online yesterday that a successful conclusion of the talks "depends on Iran". "We gave them a clear message that now this is the time for decisions and for progress, and not for prolonging the process," he was quoted as saying.

"This is the decisive moment, and we hope that they will use the chance. We have not too much time left," Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said the answers "the United States brings tomorrow to Vienna will determine when we can reach an agreement".

"We have made significant progress in various areas of the Vienna negotiations" including on guarantees that Iran seeks that a new US administration would not breach the deal once again, Khatibzadeh told reporters. —AFP

International

Family denounces 'show trial' of German held in Iran

'They are scapegoating my dad who is innocent'

PARIS: The trial of an Iran-born German national jailed in Iran since 2020 is a sham, his family said yesterday, accusing Tehran of illegally abducting him abroad while he travelled in the Gulf region. The family of Jamshid Sharmahd, 66, says that he was abducted by the Iranian security services in 2020 while in transit in Dubai and vehemently denies the accusations against him.

He is one of over a dozen Western nationals—including American, Austrian, British, French and German citizens—still held in Iran as talks to revive the 2015 deal over Tehran's nuclear drive reach an acute phase. Sharmahd, dressed in a striped Iranian prison uniform, appeared in court on Sunday charged with spreading "corruption on earth", which carries the death penalty.

"This was pure propaganda, a show trial, a kangaroo court. It is very disturbing," his daughter Gazelle Sharmahd, who is based in the US, told AFP. "All of the charges are fabricated charges. They are scapegoating my dad who is innocent," she added. Iran accuses Jamshid Sharmahd of being involved in the April 12, 2008, bombing of a mosque in Shiraz in southern Iran, which killed 14 people.

"My dad has never seen his lawyer. The lawyer did not have the right to look at his file," said Gazelle Sharmahd. "This is a great violation of rights. How can you try someone without them letting them review the evidence against them?" she asked, adding that German representatives were not allowed inside the hearing.

This was pure propaganda

'Great lengths'

Sharmahd and his family moved to Germany after Iran's Islamic Revolution, and then on to Los Angeles in the United States after their children grew up. A software designer, he became involved with an anti-regime group known as Kingdom Assembly of Iran and designed their website, the family says. They say a software glitch a decade ago exposed his work in the group. This meant he could no longer stay anonymous and became the subject of Iranian propaganda, including on state TV, and was the target of an assassination plot in 2009.

"They have been going to great lengths to get my dad," said Gazelle Sharmahd. He travelled to Mumbai in India in March 2020 to search for business opportunities, but got stuck by border closures as the pandemic erupted. In June, India's borders re-opened and he sought to return to the US via Amsterdam, but was not allowed to board the plane as he was not a US resident. He travelled on to Germany, accumulating more debt.

He then planned to head back to Mumbai, taking a flight from Frankfurt to Dubai. He then had a video call with his wife on July 28, 2020, from his hotel room in Dubai, their last such communication.

'Complete shock'

"After that video call my dad stopped responding for three days. Radio silence," said his daughter. A location tracker showed his



TEHRAN: Jamshid Sharmahd (L front), who is accused by the Iranian government of being a leader of the US-based "Tondar terrorist group" behind a deadly attack in Iran in 2008, attends the first hearing of his trial in the capital Tehran. —AFP

wife he was moving towards Oman. "That freaked her out," his daughter Gazelle said. "On July 31 she got a text message from him saying 'I am OK, I will contact you'. That was unusual for him."

"The next day we were told by family members to watch YouTube. There was a clip-my dad was blindfolded and forced to confess to crimes that he did not commit." "This video was a complete shock. We found out he is in the hands of the Islamic regime."

There was then no news from him, and his family feared he could be dead but he then called for the first time from prison in September 2020. Iran announced his arrest in August 2020 in a "complex operation", without specifying how, where or when he was seized.

Activists accuse Iran of abducting regime opponents in a bid to put them on trial in Iran on charges that could see them sentenced to death, such as France-based Ruhollah Zam who was executed in December 2020. —AFP

Tunisian police blockade dissolved judicial watchdog

TUNIS: Tunisian police yesterday blocked access to the country's top judicial watchdog in a move its chief slammed as "illegal", two days after President Kais Saied dissolved the body. AFP journalists saw security forces blocking all roads to the Supreme Judicial Council (CSM) headquarters in Tunis.

"We don't know who issued these orders but we know that they have no legal basis," CSM president Youssef Bouzakher told AFP. Saied had dissolved the body on Sunday, months after sacking the government and seizing wide-reaching powers in Tunisia, often lauded as the only democracy to emerge from the 2011 Arab revolts. His supporters say his power grab on July 25 was necessary after a decade of misgovernance by corrupt political parties following revolt which sparked the Arab Spring uprisings. But critics say he has pushed the country down a dangerous route back towards autocracy.

Bouzakher said the closure of the CSM "proves that we have entered a phase where the executive is using force to seize control of all state institutions including the judiciary". Warning of threats to "rights and liberties", he said the CSM would continue to do its job.

Saied had said Sunday that the CSM was corrupt and had delayed politically sensitive investigations into the assassinations of left-wing opposition figures Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi. The CSM said he lacked the legal and constitutional authority to dissolve it. The body, created in 2016, consists of 45 magistrates with the power to appoint judges. Parliament appoints two thirds of its members who are then responsible for appointing the remainder. —AFP

Baby dies in Trinidad coast guard migrant interception

SCARBOROUGH: A baby died in her mother's arms after the Trinidad and Tobago coast guard fired on a boat carrying migrants from Venezuela, authorities said Sunday. The Caribbean nation's coast guard ship TTS Scarborough attempted to intercept a boat that illegally entered the country's territorial waters from Venezuela on Saturday a little before midnight, a coast guard statement said. The ship hailed the other vessel to make it stop and fired warning shots when it did not, the statement said, adding, "This measure also proved futile." The unknown vessel "continued with aggressive manoeuvres, first coming into contact with the ship's boat and then making attempts to ram it."

The statement said that coast guard personnel feared for their lives and fired on the engines of the boat to shut them down. When the boat did stop illegal migrants were discovered on board, the statement said, adding a woman on board holding a baby said she was bleeding. —AFP

Ex-leader ahead as Costa Ricans elect new president

SAN JOSE: Costa Ricans voted for a new president Sunday from a crowded field of candidates, with a center-left former leader ahead of the pack with about 60 percent of ballots counted in one of Latin America's stablest democracies.

Twelve hours of voting closed at 6 pm (midnight GMT) in what is frequently rated the region's "happiest" country, a tourist mecca and a leading green economy. However, polls show unemployment, corruption and creeping living costs topping the concerns of 3.5 million eligible voters in the country of five million people.

Jose Maria Figueres, 67, of the center-left National Liberation Party (PLN), had roughly 27 percent of the vote with 63 percent of ballots counted, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal said.

To win in the first round, one candidate must take 40 percent of the vote — otherwise the two leading contenders will face each other in an April 3 run-off. The eventual winner will be expected to tackle a worsening economy where unemployment has been steadily rising for more than a decade and reached 14.4 percent in 2021.

The poverty rate stood at 23 percent last year while the public debt was 70 percent of GDP. Costa Rica's problems have worsened with the coronavirus pandemic dealing a hard blow to its critical tourism sector.

On Sunday, Figueres, who led the country from 1994 to 1998, condemned the levels of poverty as well as housing shortages. "We have never experienced these things in this magnitude," he said. For Francisco Zeledon, the first voter in line at one polling station, "voting is the most important weapon we have to solve prob-

lems." "We have to solve poverty and create jobs for people," the 35-year-old said.

Polls have showed about a third of voters are undecided, faced with a choice of 25 presidential candidates. But one outcome looked likely: the ruling Citizens' Action Party (PAC) appeared set for a bruising defeat with anti-government sentiment sky-high.

Record unpopularity

"The ruling party is completely weakened and has no chance" after two successive terms in office, said political analyst Eugenia Aguirre.

"The presidential unpopularity figure of 72 percent is the highest since the number was first recorded in 2013," she added. This means the country's traditional political heavyweights — the PLN and the Social Christian Unity Party — could return to the fore after decades of a near political duopoly only recently broken by the PAC.

With results trickling in around 0600 GMT, second place remained closely contested between the economist Rodrigo Chaves (16 percent) and conservative evangelical preacher Fabricio Alvarado Munoz (15 percent). Munoz commands support from the evangelical community, which makes up about 20 percent of Costa Rica's population. Meanwhile, center-right Lineth Saborio of the PUSC garnered 12 percent. Presidents in Costa Rica cannot seek immediate re-election, leaving incumbent Carlos Alvarado Quesada out of the running.

Problems 'worsened'

Costa Rica is known for its eco-tourism and green policies, with its energy grid run entirely on renewable sources. Unlike many of its volatile Central American neighbors, Costa Rica has no army, has had no armed conflicts since 1948 and no dictator since 1919.

But the worsening economic situation has hit confidence in the political class. Voters under



SAN JOSE: Presidential candidate Jose Maria Figueres of the National Liberation Party (PLN) (C) and his wife Cinthia Berrocal Quiros (R) raise their hands with confidence as they leave his campaign headquarters where he gave a speech after the polls closed in San Jose, Costa Rica. —AFP

40 have only known "periods in which not only problems have not been resolved, but they have worsened," university student Edgardo Soto, an undecided voter, told AFP. Apathy and abstentionism are features of Costa Rican elections.

In 2018, 34 percent of voters stayed away, though participation is technically obligatory.

Eugenia Zamora, president of Costa Rica's electoral tribunal, said Sunday's vote kicked off with high turnout in the morning, and proceeded without incident. "This is a country with a robust democracy... It offers lessons for other countries," added Isabel de Saint Malo, head of the Organization of American States observer mission.

Outgoing president Alvarado said the vote was an affirmation of Costa Rica's place among "the world's strongest democracies." Costa Ricans also cast their vote Sunday for the 57-member Congress. "I hope that whoever wins really thinks of the people," said 77-year-old Mayra Sanchez after voting in Moravia, "and not of themselves." —AFP

Sudan security forces fire tear gas at protesters

KHARTOUM: Sudanese security forces fired tear gas yesterday at thousands of demonstrators calling for civilian rule and justice for protesters killed since last year's coup, witnesses and an AFP correspondent said. The tear gas was fired as demonstrators were heading toward the presidential palace in the capital Khartoum, in the latest rally against the October coup led by army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the correspondent said.

Mass protests have been regular in Sudan since the coup which derailed the country's rocky transition to civilian rule following the 2019 ouster of autocratic president Omar al-Bashir. At least 79 people have been killed and hundreds wounded in the crackdown on anti-coup demonstrations, according to an independent group of medics.

Yesterday's protests took place despite heavy security presence in Khartoum and its neighbouring cities of

Omdurman and Khartoum North. It came only two days after thousands of pro-military demonstrators rallied against recent UN talks that aimed to help Sudan resolve the political crisis since the coup.

Yesterday, anti-coup protesters in the city of Wad Madani, south of Khartoum, were seen waving the Sudanese flags and carrying posters of people killed in the crackdown. "No, no to military rule" and "blood for blood," they chanted, according to witnesses.

Hundreds also gathered in the Red Sea city of Port Sudan, residents there said. In Khartoum, some protesters also called for the dissolution of the powerful paramilitary Rapid Support Forces commanded by Burhan's deputy, Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, an AFP correspondent said.

"The Janjaweed should be dissolved," the protesters chanted, in reference to the RSF which grew out of the Janjaweed militias accused of atrocities in Darfur. Sudan, which was already in the grip of a dire economic crisis before the coup, has seen vital foreign aid cut as part of the international community's condemnation of the takeover. The United States, which suspended \$700 million in assistance to Sudan after the coup, has



KHARTOUM: Sudanese anti-coup protesters take part in a demonstration calling for civilian rule and justice for protesters killed since last year's coup, in al-Diyum neighbourhood of the capital Khartoum yesterday. —AFP

warned that a continued crackdown by the authorities would have "consequences". Sudanese authorities have repeatedly denied using live ammunition against demonstrators, reporting scores of security officers have been wounded and

a police general was stabbed to death. Yesterday, the Sudanese Professionals Association, which called for anti-coup protests, said the latest demonstrations were "a message to the dictatorship that authority lies with the people." —AFP

International

Almost 20 killed in avalanche on Afghan-Pakistan border

Firing from Afghanistan kills five Pakistan soldiers

JALALABAD: At least 20 people were killed by an avalanche yesterday while crossing a remote mountain pass from Afghanistan to Pakistan, a Taliban official said. Scores of Afghans cross illegally to Pakistan every day through the porous mountain border in search of jobs or to buy essential goods for trade.

Najibullah Hassan Abdal, head of information for eastern Kunar province, told AFP rescue workers were still searching at the scene of the avalanche. "Twenty bodies have been recovered already," he said. Illegal traffic across the Pakistan-Afghan border has soared since the Taliban returned to power in August, plunging the country into a severe crisis with tens of thousands of people made jobless.



Pakistan attempting to fence the entire 2,670-km frontier

Pakistan is attempting to fence the entire 2,670-kilometre (1,660 mile) frontier, known as the Durand line for the British colonial administrator who first drew it. Traders and smugglers have for centuries used well-trodden remote mountain passes to criss-cross the territories and avoid paying taxes.

But deadly avalanches are common in the area. In 2015 more than 250 people were killed across the country in a series of devastating avalanches.

Meanwhile, at least five Pakistan soldiers were killed

by firing from neighbouring Afghanistan, Islamabad said Sunday, in an attack claimed by the Pakistani Taliban. It comes just days after Baloch separatists in the southwest killed nine Pakistan troops in a series of brazen attacks that officials said involved planners from Afghanistan as well as India.

After seizing power in August, Afghanistan's Taliban pledged terror groups would not be allowed to operate from the country, but Pakistan militant groups have long taken sanctuary across the porous border. They include the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which on Sunday claimed responsibility for the attack in the Kurram district of rugged Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

The TTP has been emboldened by the return to power of the Taliban in Afghanistan and has stepped up attacks since a month-long truce with the Pakistan government ended last year. The Taliban are separate groups in both countries, but share a common ideology and draw from people who live on either side of the border.

The TTP said it killed six Pakistani troops in Saturday night's attack, but the Pakistan military's public relations wing (ISPR) said five Frontier Corps members had died. "Own troops responded in a befitting manner," it said, adding "terrorists suffered heavy casualties". Pakistan "strongly condemns the use of Afghan soil by terrorists", ISPR said. The army "is determined to defend Pakistan's borders against the menace of terrorism, and such sacrifices of our brave men further strengthen our resolve".

Premier in China

It took four days until Saturday for Pakistani troops to put an end to assaults by separatists in Balochistan province, with the army putting the final death toll at 20 militants and nine soldiers. The ISPR said intelligence



HERAT: People sit on the wreckage of a Soviet-era tank at the Darwaza-e-Kandahar area in Herat. — AFP

agents intercepted communications during those assaults on army posts that showed militants had links to Afghanistan and India.

Separatists have waged an insurgency in the vast southwestern province for years, fuelled by anger that its abundant reserves of natural resources are not relieving citizens from crushing poverty. The fighting came as Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan was making an official visit to China, which has invested significantly in

Balochistan, further stoking tensions.

Chinese investments in Balochistan are part of Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative. A Pakistani security official told AFP on Friday that the attacks were an attempt to derail Khan's visit to China. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project linking China's far-western Xinjiang region with the strategic port of Gwadar in Balochistan has sparked claims that the vast influx of investment does not benefit locals.—AFP

Sri Lanka frees rights lawyer after 2 years

COLOMBO: A Sri Lankan court yesterday ordered the release of a lawyer arrested over his alleged ties to the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings and held for nearly two years on charges rights groups say lacked evidence. Hejaz Hizbullah was arrested in April 2020 on suspicion of being linked to the devastating series of attacks on churches and hotels that left 279 people dead.

But after prosecutors failed to provide evidence of his involvement in the attacks, blamed on a local jihadist group, he was instead charged with inciting "racial hatred" under Sri Lanka's expansive Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA).

The Court of Appeal said "draconian elements" of the law had been misused to keep Hizbullah detained and noted that parliament had begun a process to reform the act. Yesterday's decision to grant bail comes just weeks before his case was due to be discussed at the UN Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva, according to diplomats.

Amnesty International had classified Hizbullah a prisoner of conscience and welcomed his release. "He was in prolonged detention... without a shred of credible evidence," the London-based rights group said.

Dozens of rights groups have campaigned for Hizbullah's freedom, and his detention has been highlighted by the European Parliament, which has also censured Sri Lanka over its rights record. Eran Wickramaratne of Sri Lanka's opposition SJB party called for the outright repeal of the "much abused" law that was used to detain him.

"We must ensure there will be no more Prisoners of Conscience like Hejaz," he wrote on Twitter. Hizbullah was a vocal advocate of Sri Lanka's minority Muslim community. He earned the ire of the island nation's ruling family after successfully challenging an effort to return former president Mahinda Rajapaksa to power during a constitutional crisis in 2018. The following year, Mahinda was appointed prime minister after his younger brother Gotabaya won presidential elections. UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet called for "renewed attention" to the intimidation of journalists, lawyers and activists in Sri Lanka after the Rajapaksa clan returned to power.—AFP

Rakhine rebels clash again with Myanmar junta troops

YANGON: A Myanmar rebel group said yesterday that junta troops attacked its fighters in breach of a ceasefire, accusing the military of trying to destabilise the only region of the country that has seen no post-coup crackdown. The Southeast Asian country has been in chaos since last February's putsch, with a brutal crackdown on dissent and increased fighting in borderlands involving ethnic armed organisations.

Days after the coup, the junta reaffirmed a commitment to a ceasefire with the Arakan Army (AA), which has for years fought a war for autonomy for Rakhine state's ethnic Rakhine population. On Friday junta troops entered an AA base in Maungdaw township, sparking three hours of clashes, a spokesperson for the group told AFP, adding one of its fighters had been killed.

"There is high tension militarily, which could break out any time," he said. "It seems as if the military wants to destabilise Rakhine's stability and calm." A junta spokesman said a number of border police had been killed in a mine attack on February 4, but blamed a local Rohingya insurgent group for the attack.

"We are still investigating the presence of the AA situation there," said spokesman Zaw Min Tun. Clashes



BEIJING: People queue for a swab test for the COVID-19 in Beijing. — AFP

China locks down city of 3.5m near Vietnam border

BEIJING: A Chinese city of 3.5 million near the border with Vietnam was on lockdown yesterday after more than 70 coronavirus cases were discovered there over the past three days. China, the only major world economy still sticking to a staunch zero-COVID policy, is on high alert for any outbreaks as it hosts the Beijing Winter Olympics.

Local officials in the city of Baise in the southern Guangxi region announced Sunday that no one would be allowed to leave the city, while residents of some districts would be confined to their homes. "Citywide traffic controls will be implemented," vice-mayor Gu Junyan told a briefing.

"In principle, vehicles and people cannot enter or leave the city... with personnel control strictly enforced and no unnecessary movement of people." Residents of some neighbourhoods in smaller rural cities and counties under Baise's jurisdiction have been placed under strict home confinement, while others cannot leave their district, Gu added.

Baise, located about 100 kilometres (62 miles) from the Vietnamese border, on Friday discovered its first local case—a traveller who had returned home for the week-long Lunar New Year holiday, according to offi-

cial. Since the pandemic, China has built a heavily enforced wire mesh fence along its southern border to keep out illegal migrants from Vietnam and Myanmar as well as potential Covid-19 infections.

Mass testing is already under way for residents, authorities said. Since the coronavirus pandemic first emerged two years ago in Hubei province's Wuhan, China has used strict local lockdowns, mass testing and contact-tracing apps to try and eliminate outbreaks as soon as cases are detected, sparing the country the mass deaths witnessed around the rest of the world.

Millions were confined to their homes in multiple Chinese cities in the run-up to the Olympics after cases involving both the Delta and Omicron coronavirus variants flared. The outbreaks were mostly stamped out. In December, 13 million residents of the northern megacity of Xi'an were placed under strict home confinement for over a month after an outbreak of more than 2,000 cases. Residents complained of grocery shortages and overly harsh enforcement of lockdown measures by local officials, which saw patients blocked from receiving critical medical treatment, leading to deaths in some cases.

China reported 79 new cases nationwide yesterday, of which 37 were in Guangxi. Meanwhile, Hong Kong's zero-Covid policy is on the ropes after a record number of new infections was announced over the weekend, sending officials scrambling to ramp up testing capacity and warning that a tightening of virus-control measures could be needed. China's borders with the rest of the world, including Hong Kong, are largely sealed.—AFP



RAKHINE STATE, Myanmar: A child looks on as Rohingya vendors sell vegetables at a market at Thet Kal Pyin camp in Rakhine State. — AFP

between the AA and the military in 2019 displaced more than 200,000 people across the state, one of Myanmar's poorest. After the coup, the junta ended a 19-month internet shutdown in the state of around one million.

The AA previously reported its fighters had clashed with junta troops in November. Rakhine state, home to both the Rohingya and a largely Buddhist ethnic Rakhine majority, has been a tinderbox of conflict for decades. The military drove out more than 740,000 Rohingya Muslims from the state in a 2017 campaign that United

Nations investigators have called genocide. Rights groups have also accused soldiers of committing war crimes including extrajudicial killings in their later campaign against the AA. Meanwhile, Myanmar's junta has denied freeing an Australian academic detained for almost a year after Cambodia's leader yesterday took credit for arranging the release. Economist Sean Turnell was working as an advisor to Myanmar civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi when he was detained shortly after the coup in February last year.—AFP

News in brief

Indonesia bus crash kills 13

SOLO: At least 13 people were killed and dozens more injured after a tour bus carrying factory workers to a beach holiday crashed on Indonesia's Java island, according to police. The bus and its 47 passengers were headed from Sukoharjo in Central Java to a family gathering in neighbouring Yogyakarta province when the driver lost control going downhill, officers said late Sunday. "Witnesses we questioned said they saw the driver panicking as he tried to manage the gear stick, so there's an indication the brake was not functioning or faulty," Bantul district police chief Ihsan, who like many Indonesians uses only one name, told a media briefing. Deadly traffic accidents are common in the archipelago nation of 270 million, where vehicles are often old and poorly maintained and road rules are routinely ignored.—AFP

Philippine van crash kills 9

MANILA: Nine people including a baby were killed in the northern Philippines after a speeding van lost control on a corner and smashed into a row of houses on the edge of a highway, police said yesterday. The victims were gathered on the porch of a friend's house after attending a wake in Lal-Lo town in Cagayan province on Saturday night when the accident happened. "They were hanging out when the speeding van ploughed into them," Lal-Lo police chief Jefferson Mukay told AFP. A parked sports utility vehicle and motorised tricycle were also hit. The driver of the van, a military reservist, and his passenger were taken to hospital in a critical condition, Mukay said. He said the driver would face multiple homicide and other charges. Deadly road accidents are common in the Philippines, where drivers frequently flout the rules and vehicles are often poorly maintained or overloaded.—AFP

Nigeria oil vessel fire

LAGOS: Three crew members on board a Nigerian oil vessel that exploded and sank last week have been found alive while seven were still missing, the ship operator said. The Nigerian FPSO Trinity Spirit—a floating production, storage and offloading vessel—caught fire following an explosion on Wednesday, but the blaze was extinguished a day later. The vessel was located at the Ukpokiti Terminal, along the coast of the oil-rich Niger Delta region. Ten crew members were on board the vessel at the time of the accident. Ikemefuna Okafor, the executive officer of Shebah Exploration & Production Company Ltd (SEPCOL), the vessel owner, said late Sunday "three crew members have been found alive in the community". —AFP

Kenya forest blaze under control

ABERDARE: Dozens of forest rangers, firefighters and volunteers struggled yesterday to stem a blaze that broke out in Kenya's Aberdare national park at the weekend, as suspicions of arson emerged. The fire started on Saturday and was still ravaging the park some 36 hours later, as firefighters sought to bring it under control before it spread deeper into the forest. The park was etched in history when Britain's Elizabeth II, then a princess on a visit to Kenya, received news of her father's death while staying at the Treetops hotel, a remote game-watching lodge built high into a tree in the Aberdare forest. Rhino Ark, a conservation charity in Kenya, said it had sent in helicopters to conduct aerial surveys of the area to estimate the extent of damage to the forest cover. "Thirty-five trained firefighters have been deployed by chopper on the southern fireline," the group said on Twitter yesterday.—AFP

Business

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2022

Toshiba unveils new plan to split into two companies

Conglomerate revises proposal to divide into three

TOKYO: Japan's Toshiba yesterday announced plans to split into two companies, revising a controversial proposal to divide into three following a tumultuous period for the storied industrial conglomerate. The group said it plans to spin off its device segment, including its semiconductor business, in a bid to speed up decision-making and boost stock performance.

Shareholders, who have clashed with management on the best way forward for the troubled company, must still approve the proposal in a vote expected in March. The original spin-off plan faced stiff opposition from some key investors. The firm also said it will unload its stake in air-conditioning business Toshiba Carrier and seek to sell its elevator and lighting units.

"We believe a spin-off is optimal," president and CEO Satoshi Tsunakawa told investors, promising it would "enable more agile and flexible operations."

He said the sprawling business "struggled with the conglomerate discount and slowness in decision-making" in the past, and streamlining operations would allow investors to choose the portion of the business that interested them. Toshiba initially unveiled a plan to split into three last November, in what analysts called a test case for other Japanese giants.

But it said yesterday that "since this is the first large-scale spin-off transaction in Japan... it turned out there were obstacles which were not initially expected". Among those were higher-than-expected costs, and an extensive process

to list the two new entities.

A two-way split instead "can significantly reduce separation costs, secure financial soundness for each company, and significantly reduce spin-off uncertainty", the company said.

The spin-off is expected to cost 20 billion yen (\$173 million) over two years, with running costs also increasing by 13 billion yen a year. But Tsunakawa said that would be offset by plans to reduce operating costs by 30 billion yen annually.

Years of turmoil

The Japanese giant wants the split finalized by the second half of the 2022-23 financial year, but it could yet face shareholder opposition. General Electric and Johnson & Johnson have announced spin-offs in recent months—a move analysts say is in large part forced on them by financial markets.

Spin-offs can be a way for large corporations to create more value and rationalize operations, but they can also limit coordination between sectors, experts say. Toshiba dates back to 1875 and was once a symbol of Japan's advanced technological and economic power, but it has been mired in turmoil for several years. Last year, shareholders voted to oust the board's chairman after a series of scandals and losses, in a rare victory for activist investors in corporate Japan.

As part of the overhaul, the company yesterday declared Toshiba Tec and its air-conditioning, elevator and lighting units "non-core businesses". It has already agreed to the sale of Toshiba Carrier to the US-based Carrier



TOKYO: The logo of Japanese industrial group Toshiba is seen on top of a building at its headquarters in Tokyo yesterday. —AFP

Corporation in a deal reportedly worth some 100 billion yen.

The conglomerate currently owns 60 percent of the air-con company's shares and will retain only

five percent when the sale is completed later this year. It said it hoped to reach deals to offload the elevator and lighting units within the next two months. —AFP

Livelihoods lost as climate disaster woes mount in Kenya

MARSABIT, Kenya: Dabaso Galgalo is now used to the smell and grisly spectacle of rotting flesh festering in the scorching heat as Kenya reels from a spate of climate disasters. Surrounded by barren scrubland littered with withered carcasses of sheep and goats, the 56-year-old pastoralist is struggling to keep his beloved animals, and himself, alive.

What was left of his herd after a months-long dry spell was decimated by once-in-a-generation floods that hit northern Kenya, the latest in a series of unrelenting climate shocks lashing the region.

"We recently had heavy rains and strong winds that ended up killing livestock that had gathered at this water point," he told AFP, outside a settlement called 'kambiyanyoka' (snake camp) in Marsabit.

The semi-arid region has been the scene of a prolonged drought. Then, when the rains finally came, the deluge pushed communities, who rely exclusively on livestock for their survival, to the edge of disaster. "This is a very huge loss because we have lost lots of resources following this tragedy," said Galgalo.

"If one had 500 goats (earlier), they have between five and 20 goats left." Nomadic livestock herders in East Africa's drylands have learnt to cope with the vagaries of weather over decades, driving their relentless search for water and pasture in some of the world's most inhospitable terrain. But their resilience is being severely tested by climate change.

Fight for resources

Poor rainfall in the last quarter of 2021 — the third consecutive failed rainy season—followed a devastating locust invasion a year earlier, with animals now too weak to produce milk or too skinny to be sold. There are growing fears that as the situation worsens, tensions among communities could sharpen as they compete for access to meager resources. Marsabit is particularly vulnerable because of a perennial conflict between the Borana and Gabra pastoralist communities.

President Uhuru Kenyatta declared the drought a

Spirit to merge with Frontier, creating low-cost US airline

NEW YORK: Budget US carriers Spirit and Frontier announced yesterday they will merge to create a competitive low-cost airline, in an industry "shake up" they say aims to challenge the dominance of larger rivals. The cash and stock deal is valued at \$6.6 billion and expected to close in the second half of the year, pending approval from US antitrust regulators. "This transaction is centered around creating an aggressive ultra-low fare competitor to serve our guests even better, expand career opportunities for our team members and increase competitive pressure, resulting in more consumer-friendly fares," Spirit chief executive Ted Christie said in a statement.



MARSABIT, Kenya: Pastoralists from the local Gabra community walk among carcasses of some of their sheep and goats on the outskirts of a small settlement called 'Kambi ya Nyoka' (snake camp) suspected to have succumbed due to sudden change in climate in Marsabit county. —AFP

natural disaster last September, with 2.1 million people-four percent of Kenya's population—already grappling with hunger, according to government figures. The government said last week that 23 of the country's 47 counties faced "food and water stress" while the meteorological department has warned of a potential increase in "human-to-human and human-to-wildlife conflicts".

The authorities have invested 450 million shillings (\$3.9 million, 3.4 million euros) to buy 11,250 cattle and 3,200 goats from farmers in the worst-hit counties. The UN's Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) yesterday called for "aggressive" efforts to address the situation, warning it was concerned about "the realities on the ground." "We must stay committed to doing things differently," FAO Deputy General Beth Bechdol told a press conference in Nairobi before embarking on a trip to the drought-hit north.

"We have seen too many efforts that have taken too many years, that have been repeated and tried

over and over again with often times the same disappointing outcomes."

Africa hardest-hit

East Africa endured a harrowing drought in 2017 which also brought neighboring Somalia to the brink of famine. In 2011, two successive failed rainy seasons in 12 months led to the driest year since 1951 in arid regions of Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Uganda. With conflicts raging in Ethiopia and Somalia, aid agencies are struggling to assess the true extent of the current crisis.

Experts say extreme weather events are happening with increased frequency and intensity due to climate change—with Africa, which contributes the least to global warming, bearing the brunt.

For Galgalo, the race is on to save his remaining animals and protect his only source of income. But he is losing hope. "They are suffering from pneumonia and are still dying," he said. —AFP



NEW YORK: Budget US carriers Spirit and Frontier announced yesterday they will merge to create a competitive low-cost airline.

to \$24.33 in pre-market trade Monday, while those of Frontier Group, the parent company of Frontier Airlines, slid by 2.3 percent to \$12.10. The companies, which both fly exclusively Airbus aircraft, aim to create some 10,000 jobs by 2026. —AFP



EDF is building its first EPR, a technology that heats highly pressurized water to power a steam turbine, at Flamenville in northwestern France.

France's nuclear ambitions take shape with turbine deal

PARIS: French electricity giant EDF prepared yesterday to close a deal for the nuclear turbines business of General Electric, the latest step in President Emmanuel Macron's plans to revive his country's atomic power drive. Buying the turbines would give EDF a key component for the new EPR reactors it hopes to build in France while also wooing international clients looking to reduce reliance on fossil fuels for energy.

Talks with GE were announced last September, when Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire hailed a deal that "increases EDF's capacity to build our future energy system and fulfil our industrial ambitions for this strategic sector."

It would mark a return for the turbines business to France seven years after GE's purchase of the unit from Alstom—a controversial deal approved by Macron, who was finance minister at the time.

Details have not been released, though financial daily Les Echos said EDF would pay \$273 million (236 million euros), of which \$73 million is assumed debt, if approved by the board of the state-controlled firm later.

It would come ahead of a trip by Macron on Thursday to Belfort, in eastern France, an industrial basin that is home to GE's main production site for its steam turbine systems. He is expected to announce further details of a new nuclear push he insists is crucial for supplying zero-emission electricity as Europe moves to slow global warming and reduce its dependence on imported oil and natural gas. That could see next-generation EPR2 reactors built in France in coming years and the development of more affordable Small Modular Reactors (SMR), which could replace existing coal-fired plants.

EDF has said Scandinavian and Eastern European countries are interested in building SMR plants, but EU heavyweight Germany remains strongly opposed to nuclear power over safety and radioactive pollution risks. France generates 70 percent of its electricity from a network of over 50 reactors across the country, but many are nearing the end of their lifespan. —AFP

Business

Cuba marks six decades under stifling US economic sanctions

Blockade erodes communist nation's fortunes

HAVANA: Cuba yesterday marked 60 years under a US economic blockade that has deeply affected the communist nation's fortunes and shows no signs of being lifted.

Decreed by US president John F Kennedy on February 3, 1962, the embargo on all bilateral trade came into effect four days later. Its purpose, said Kennedy's executive order, was to reduce the threat posed by the island nation's "alignment with the communist powers."

Despite failing to force a change in tack from Havana since then, the sanctions remain in place six decades later, and are blamed by Cuban authorities for damage to the country's economy amounting to some \$150 billion. Cuba is experiencing its worst economic crisis in 30 years, with inflation at 70 percent and a severe shortage of food and medicines as the Covid-19 pandemic dealt a hefty blow to a key source of income: tourism. Long lines for essential goods are common, as food imports have been slashed due to dwindling government reserves. Havana blames the sanctions for all the island's woes.

The message that "the embargo is a virus too" has been hammered home by authorities for months, as they organize caravans of cars, bikes and motorcycles to criss-cross the country and denounce the sanctions. But detractors say inefficiencies and structural problems in



WASHINGTON: In this file photo taken on October 24, 1962, US President John Fitzgerald Kennedy signs the order of naval blockade of Cuba, in the White House, Washington DC, during the Cuban missiles crisis. — AFP

the economy controlled by the one-party state are also to blame.

'Counterproductive'

"The real blockade was imposed by the Cuban state," said activist Rosa Maria Paya of lobby group Cubadecide, which she directs from exile. The embargo would only be lifted, she believes, through "a transition to representative democracy."

Cuba has little productive capacity and relies on

imports for about 80 percent of its food needs.

A monetary reform launched a year ago to try and alleviate pressures on Cubans brought about a significant wage increase in a country where most workers are employed by the government, but further fueled price inflation. Since 2000, food has been excluded from the US blockade, and between 2015 and 2000, Cuba imported some \$1.5 billion worth of food from its neighbor.

But the purchases have to be paid in cash and upfront, onerous conditions for a country with limited reserves. According to Carlos Gutierrez, a Cuban-American and former US Secretary of Commerce, the embargo has proven to be "counterproductive."

"Absolutely nothing has been obtained from Havana" in response, he said.

Geopolitical interests

Instead, Cuba has looked to US rivals such as China and Russia for support. Two weeks ago, Cuba's President Miguel Diaz-Canel and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin discussed "strategic partnership" in a phone call. And Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Riabkov recently said Moscow would not rule out a military deployment to Cuba—a few hundred kilometers (miles) from Miami in the US state of Florida—if tensions with Washington over ex-Soviet

state Ukraine escalated.

For some, such posturing recalls the Cold War and the Cuban missile crisis between the United States and the former Soviet Union, which brought the world to the brink of nuclear warfare and was a major motivation for the blockade against Cuba. Conflict was averted when Moscow agreed to remove Soviet missiles from Cuban soil. The US blockade started out as a "strategic and military instrument" in the context of war, said political scientist Rafael Hernandez.

And although the Cold War is over, it is still the United States' "geopolitical interests" that determine its stance towards Cuba, he said. US domestic politics also play a role, with the vote of a large and vocal anti-Havana Cuban expat community holding the potential to swing battleground states such as Florida.

Somewhat relaxed under a brief period of detente under Barack Obama, sanctions were strengthened by his successor Donald Trump, who added 243 new measures. And despite campaign promises, current President Joe Biden has done nothing to relieve the blockade, instead announcing new measures against Cuban leaders in response to a clampdown on historic anti-government protests last July. For the US administration, said James Buckwalter-Arias of the Cuban-American Association for Engagement, "electoral considerations weigh heavier than humanitarian duty." — AFP



LONDON: A pedestrian walks past a pawnbroker's shop in Brixton, south London yesterday. The Bank of England said Britain's annual inflation rate would peak at 7.25 percent in April, compared with 5.4 percent last December, which was already near a 30-year high. — AFP

'Worst to come' on soaring UK food prices: Tesco boss

LONDON: The "worst is still to come" over soaring food prices, Britain's biggest retailer Tesco has warned as fears grow over a cost of living crisis caused by decades-high inflation. John Allan, chairman of the supermarket giant, warned Sunday that prices of Tesco products could spike by an average five percent in the coming months, further squeezing household budgets.

Britain is experiencing the highest rate of annual inflation in nearly 30 years, while the cost of living is set to soar further from April owing to a tax hike on UK workers and businesses plus increases in energy

bills. "The worst is still to come because... we are impacted by rising energy prices. Our suppliers are impacted by rising energy prices," Allan told the BBC.

"So the likelihood is that that inflation trigger will rise but we're doing all we can to offset it." The British government last week unveiled financial support for households after the UK energy regulator lifted prices to reflect the soaring natural gas and electricity markets. British trades union umbrella body the TUC on Monday said that one in eight workers would struggle to afford the basics in the coming months, citing its own survey. "Millions of low-paid workers face a perfect storm this April," said TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady.

"The government must do far more to help struggling families get through the tough times ahead." UK annual inflation stands at 5.4 percent, far above the Bank of England's 2.0-percent target. The BoE last week delivered a successive interest rate hike—and forecast Britain's annual inflation rate would peak at 7.25 percent in April. — AFP

law for the past fourteen years and still today". The Swedish tech startup filed its suit with the Patent and Market Court in Stockholm after the European Union General Court ruled that Google "breached EU antitrust laws by manipulating search results in favor of their own comparison shopping services."

In November, the EU court upheld a 2.4-billion-euro fine the European Commission had slapped on Google in 2017, saying results from Google's own comparison service were "displayed in a more eye-catching manner."

PriceRunner said it was seeking damages for profits it lost in Britain since 2008 as well as in Sweden and Denmark since 2013. PriceRunner said Google had a "monopoly-like position" within the European Economic Area (EU plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway), with over 90 percent of the market share for internet search engines. The price comparison site is based in Sweden but also operates in Denmark, Norway and the UK. It has previously said it plans to expand to more countries.

In November, Swedish fintech Klarna bought PriceRunner for an undisclosed sum, with media reports putting the price at over \$1 billion. — AFP

Sweden's PriceRunner sues Google for \$2.4bn

STOCKHOLM: Swedish price comparison site PriceRunner said yesterday it was suing tech giant Google for 2.1 billion euros (\$2.4 billion) for promoting its own shopping comparisons in search results.

Europe has cracked down on the business practices of Big Tech in recent years, while the EU is moving forward with legislation to tighten regulation. US behemoths are facing fines and legal challenges in many European nations. The Swedish tech startup said it expected the "final damages amount of the lawsuit to be significantly higher", given that "the violation is still ongoing."

Chief executive Mikael Lindahl said the lawsuit was also a fight "for consumers who have suffered tremendously from Google's infringement of the competition



LILLE, France: Google President, Global Affairs and Chief legal officer Kent Walker (left) and Markus Reinisch (center), VP Public Policy Europe, Middle East and Africa at Meta (Facebook), sit next to an empty chair of the Twitter representative, as they participate in an informal meeting of the EU Ministers responsible for Justice and Home Affairs (JHA). — AFP

Ottawa declares emergency over 'out of control' truckers' protest

OTTAWA: The ongoing truckers' protest in the Canadian capital is "out of control," the Ottawa mayor said Sunday, announcing a state of emergency as the city center remained blocked by opponents of anti-COVID measures.

The protesters, who first reached the capital on January 29, have parked their big rigs on city streets and put up tents and temporary shacks—paralyzing the capital to the consternation of officials and the mounting frustration of many residents. Mayor Jim Watson announced a state of emergency that "reflects the serious danger and threat to the safety and security of residents posed by the ongoing demonstrations and highlights the need for support from other jurisdictions and levels of government," a statement from the city said.

Earlier in the day, Watson had described the situation as "completely out of control," adding that the protesters "have far more people than we have police officers." "Clearly, we are outnumbered and we are losing this battle," he told CFRA radio. "This has to be reversed; we have to get our city back."

Watson called the truckers "insensitive," as they have continued "blaring horns and sirens and fireworks, and turning it into a party." The demonstrations began as protests by truckers angry with vaccine requirements when crossing the US-Canadian border, but have morphed into broader protests against COVID-19 health restrictions and the government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

Locals have complained of the ceaseless sound of air horns and of being harassed, insulted or blocked by

the protesters. The truckers and their supporters have dug in, however, saying the protests will continue until the COVID-related restrictions are lifted.

Police on Sunday announced new measures to stop people from helping the protesters keep up their sit-in. "Anyone attempting to bring material supports (gas, etc.) to the demonstrators could be subject to arrest," the force tweeted, adding Sunday night that several arrests had been made.

'Extremely disruptive'

Similar, if smaller, demonstrations hit the cities of Toronto, Quebec City and Winnipeg on Saturday. Police in Quebec City said some 30 big trucks were blocking a major artery and had been warned they would face fines if they did not move soon. Later Sunday police said on Twitter that all the trucks had left but protest organizers promised to return in two weeks, once the ongoing Quebec Winter Carnival was over. In an emergency meeting Saturday with Ottawa officials, police chief Peter Sloly complained that he lacked the resources to end what he called a "siege," and asked for reinforcements.

Ottawa police are due to soon be reinforced by some 250 Royal Canadian Mounted Police—a federal force. "This group is a threat to our democracy," city council member Diane Deans said of the protesters on Saturday. "What we're seeing is bigger than just a city of Ottawa problem, this is a nationwide insurrection. This is madness."

The police said Sunday that they had issued some 450 tickets since Saturday morning, for a variety of mostly minor infractions including excessive noise and use of fireworks, though one truck that turned out to be stolen was seized. They said "extremely disruptive" protesters had in some cases endangered public safety, causing "unacceptable distress" to local residents.

Police have opened 97 investigations into possible criminal offenses, the statement said. In addition, it said, the police are "actively working with Canadian, US and international security agencies/authorities to investigate email-based threats to public officials." —AFP



OTTAWA, Canada: In this file photo, supporters arrive at Parliament Hill for the Freedom Truck Convoy to protest against COVID-19 vaccine mandates and restrictions in Ottawa, Canada. — AFP

Stocks steady as traders mull rate outlooks

LONDON: Stock markets largely steadied yesterday with sentiment dominated by the outlook for interest rate rises as inflation soars. A forecast-busting US jobs report Friday reinforced optimism that the world's top economy was well on the recovery track, but also ramped up expectations of an interest rate hike by the Fed in March.

It comes as surging global inflation resulted in the Bank of England last week hiking its main interest rate for a second meeting in a row, while the European Central Bank signalled that it may raise borrowing costs this year. "There are plenty of reasons for investors to be cautious," said Russ Mould, investment

director at AJ Bell.

"Strong US jobs data last week might suggest the Fed pushes up rates faster and harder than currently expected. Ongoing tensions between Ukraine and Moscow also hang over markets." With US inflation data this week tipped to show prices rising at a pace not seen in 40 years, traders are becoming increasingly anguished that Federal Reserve rate hike plans could jeopardize the recovery.

There is mounting talk that the US central bank will have to hike borrowing costs at least four times this year—with some predicting as many as seven rises could occur. Elsewhere yesterday, oil prices retreated after European benchmark contract, Brent North Sea crude, hit \$94 — the highest level for more than seven years. Expectations that energy demand will continue to improve as the world economy reopens, as well as a cold snap in the United States and uncertainty over the Russia-Ukraine stand-off are expected to keep crude futures well supported according to analysts. Still, signs of a breakthrough in Iran nuclear talks could help staunch the surge, they added. —AFP

Business

Commodities drive Indonesia economic recovery in 2021

Outlook depends on how well the fast-spreading Omicron variant is managed

JAKARTA: Indonesia's economy returned to growth last year as surging commodity prices helped drive a recovery from a coronavirus-triggered recession, data showed yesterday, though officials warned the outlook depended on how well the fast-spreading Omicron variant is managed.

Southeast Asia's biggest economy expanded 3.69 percent on-year, the country's statistics agency said, having contracted in 2020 for the first time since 1998 during the region's financial crisis. The healthy rebound came largely on the back of declining coronavirus cases and robust exports, as prices for key commodities such as palm oil, coal and nickel rose significantly, Central Statistics Bureau head Margo Yuwono told a news conference.

And in an optimistic sign, the economy grew a forecast-beating 5.02 percent on-year in the final three months. "We hope the momentum of the economic recovery will be maintained in 2022 as long as we all agree that health protocols are critical so daily cases will decline and mobility will get better," Yuwono said. The coun-

try's trade surplus for 2021 reached \$35.34 billion, its highest in 15 years, the statistics agency reported earlier.

Indonesia was hit hard in July as the Delta variant swept the country, forcing the government to impose tighter social-distancing restrictions that hobbled businesses. A subsequent easing of those restrictions as cases declined in the fourth quarter allowed for a bounceback in some sectors, including transportation. But daily caseloads are once again surging owing to Omicron, with the country reporting 30,000 cases a day compared with fewer than 1,000 in December, forcing officials to reimpose containment measures in Jakarta, Bandung and Bali.

The government expects daily cases to peak by late February or early March. Despite worries over Omicron, the Central Bank of Indonesia has projected the economy to grow 4.7-5.5 percent this year, while the International Monetary Fund has projected a 5.6 percent expansion in 2022 and 6.0 percent in 2023. —AFP



JAKARTA: People trade at a traditional market in Jakarta yesterday. —AFP

Peugeot displays its latest models in 360 mall

KUWAIT: Kuwait Automotive Imports Company, the authorized distributor of Peugeot in Kuwait, is delighted to come even closer to its customers, with its most recent roadshow at 360 Mall. Until 9th February 2022, the customers will be able to experience the exciting Peugeot models up close and personal, come in contact with the ultimate technology, style and comfort and book a test-drive on their favorite model. Peugeot makes cars for those prepared to stand out and stand apart. Those who value style and live their lives with passion and conviction. Those who know who they are. Customers who enjoy the powerful lines that unite strength, elegance, dynamism, and smoothness in Peugeot vehicles. Stimulating and rewarding driving, a sleek design, and uncompromising quality are the brand's commitment to its customers and contribute to the emotion that each Peugeot provides. Peugeot combines Design, Style, and Emotion in all areas, aiming to be the world's high-end generalist brand.

Ashish Tandon, General Manager of KAICO (Kuwait Automotive Imports Co WLL) stated, "We are thrilled to have the opportunity to display our latest, technologically advanced, Peugeot



models in 360 Mall". Stefan Craita, Business Manager of Peugeot stated, "Numerous customers have praised and experienced Peugeot as smooth driving, premium comfort and overall design. We are thrilled to have the opportunity to display Peugeot in a very popular venue as 360 Mall, to be closer to our customer".

Issa Abdallah, Marketing Manager of KAICO stated, "Numerous customers have praised and experienced Peugeot as smooth driving, premium comfort and overall design. We are thrilled to have the opportunity to display Peugeot in a very popular venue as 360 Mall, to be closer to our customers".

Microsoft launches new Surface devices to empower hybrid workplace in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Microsoft announced yesterday the general availability of Microsoft Surface Laptop Studio and Surface Pro 8 for organizations across industries in Kuwait. Built to be modern and essential devices for today's hybrid workforce, the new Surface products protect productivity, promote innovation, and prioritize accessibility, while ensuring the safety and security of all users.

"Microsoft is committed to empowering the workforce in Kuwait by providing technology solutions that reduce complexity, facilitate workloads, drive productivity and ensure secure work from anywhere," says Finn Morris, Surface Business Group Director at Microsoft Middle East and Africa. "We realize that businesses across the country faced major challenges and changes over the past two years. To this end, Microsoft built new "Surface" devices that are in line with the evolving needs of the labor market in Kuwait. Integrated with Windows 11, these devices are designed to keep pace with the rapid digital transformation taking place across the country," Finn says.

Designed in concert with Windows 11, the new devices reflect Microsoft's commitment towards designing technology that fosters productivity and creativity, while also bringing inclusion and accessibility to the fore. Each new version of Windows unlocks the next generation of hardware innovation. And for the last decade, Surface has been at the forefront – challenging convention, pioneering new experiences and creating



entirely new categories of devices. "Windows 11 is built on the familiar Windows foundation but reimagined to boost employee productivity and enhance collaboration on the most secure version of Windows yet," added McDonald. In addition to ensuring productivity and innovation in the modern workplace, Microsoft is launching the Microsoft Ocean Plastic Mouse as a step forward in Microsoft's larger sustainability journey. In keeping with the organization's goal to have 100 percent recyclable devices and packages by 2030, the new mouse is made with 20 percent recycled ocean plastic and its packaging is 100 percent recyclable.

Surface laptop studio

The Surface Laptop Studio will transform the way users work with the most powerful and flexible laptop yet. It's built for performance with the highest graphics horsepower of any Surface Laptop. Seamlessly multitask and handle heavy workflows with quad-core powered 11th Gen Intel Core H Series processors, blazing enterprise-grade NVIDIA® RTX™ A2000 laptop GPUs, and Thunderbolt™ 4 ports. No matter the task, the Surface Laptop Studio provides unparalleled flexibility as it transitions from a best-in-class laptop to a natural angle for immersive Microsoft Teams calls and



presentations, to a full-performance canvas. Unleash creativity and enjoy the feeling of putting pen to paper with the vibrant and sharp 14.4" touchscreen and Surface Slim Pen 2.

Surface Pro 8

The all-new Surface Pro 8 is a powerful, ultra-light and slim device packed with processors to handle intensive workloads. Double-digit performance increases and 11th Gen Intel Core processors mean Surface Pro 8 will handle it all whether handwriting notes on screen, multitasking while on a video call, or crushing a spreadsheet – all in an ultra-versatile package. Enjoy the flexibility of writing in laptop mode, presenting multiple screens in desktop mode, or signing a contract on screen with Slim Pen 2 in tablet mode. Collaborate from anywhere with high-definition connections. From Wi-Fi 6 to LTE, teams can stay connected and productive with great cloud productivity tools that are instantly available.

Availability

Companies in Kuwait can order the Microsoft Surface Laptop Studio and Surface Pro 8 through authorized partners.

Bottlenecks squeeze German output in Dec

FRANKFURT: German production fell in December, pulled down by a suffering construction sector, official figures published yesterday showed, as Europe's largest economy struggled to shake off the drag caused by widespread supply bottlenecks. Output was down 0.3 percent in the last month of the year, cancelling out a revised 0.3 percent rise in November, according to figures from the federal statistics agency Destatis.

Over the whole of 2021, industrial production was three percent higher than in 2020, but still 5.5 percent lower than 2019, before the onset of the coronavirus crisis. Production of capital goods was up 2.5 percent in December, while intermediate goods were up 0.6 percent. The production of consumer goods fell by 0.5 percent, and construction fell by 7.3 percent.

The poor figures in construction masked a result that was "not as bad as it looks at first glance", as industrial output excluding energy and construction actually grew for the second month in a row, said Carsten Brzeski, head of macro at the ING bank. "Despite these first positive signs, German industry remains in the stranglehold of global supply chain frictions," said Brzeski.

Shortages of raw materials and components, which steadily increased over the course of 2021, meant that while order books for industry are full, production has struggled to keep pace.

Supply bottlenecks had cost industry "about 70 billion euros (\$80 billion) in lost added value" last year, according to the economic think tank IfW Kiel. The disruption caused by missing inputs was a "major reason why economic output in Germany was still behind its pre-crisis level" at the end of 2021, the think tank said. Germany's economy grew by 2.8 percent in 2021, according to figures published by Destatis in January. —AFP

NBK announces winner of KD 125,000 in Al-Jawhara draw

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) continues to reward its customers with an outstanding array of draws, prizes and offers all year round. In this context, the bank announced Abdulmajeed Mohamad Al-Anzias the winner of Al-Jawhara monthly prize worth KD 125,000 for January 2022.

Al-Jawhara Account gives customers the opportunity to enter draws and win prizes of KD 5,000 weekly, KD 125,000 monthly as well as the grand prize of KD 250,000 quarterly. Every KD 50 deposited into Al Jawhara Account gives the customer a chance to be one the next lucky winners, and

if no withdrawal or transfers occur on the account during the holding period, customers will receive an additional chance for every KD 50 held in the account, doubling their chance to win.

On this occasion, Hisham Al-Nusif, Deputy General Manager of Consumer Banking, National Bank of Kuwait, said: "We congratulate the winner of the first monthly draw for 2022 in which we promise our customers with exceptional events, prizes and rewards as part of our endeavorsto provide them with an all-inclusive banking experience."

Al-Jawhara Account is an outstanding means for customers to save and get a chance to win prizes at the same time. At NBK, we are committed to reward our customers through weekly, monthly and quarterly draws. We also continue to offer them more exceptional rewards and campaigns that give them more distinction and benefits from NBK's leadership and excellence. "We are constantly communicating with our customers to identify their needs, as well as

measure their satisfaction with the products offered. In this regard, we have seen customer satisfaction growing remarkably as to the services and benefits provided by the bank, which come in line with our commitment to offer customers a richer banking experience," he added. Al-Nusif affirmed that NBK ensures a quick and easy process for opening Al Jawhara Account by visiting the nearest NBK Branch, or simply through NBK Mobile Banking or NBK Online Banking for existing customers, in line with the bank's digital transformation strategy that provides its customers with integrated banking experience by enabling them to make all their banking transactions without visiting branches.

On the other hand, NBK announced the names of the winners of Al-Jawhara weekly draws worth KD 5,000 each for January including: Minor Hussain Mohammad Hajjijah, Mona MohdJoumeid and Shaikhah Ali Bouarki.

The draw was held live on NBK Instagram page in

the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, as well as representatives from NBK, noting that Al-Jawhara monthly and quarterly draws are conducted in the presence of a representative from Deloitte. Since 2012, National Bank of Kuwait has rewarded loyal customers with a total worth of annual prizes amounting KD 2,200,000 in Al-Jawhara weekly, monthly and quarterly draws.

In addition to providing top-notch, cutting-edge and highly secure banking services, NBK is keen to give customers a variety of offers, rewards and prizes matching their interests all year round.



Hisham Al-Nusif

Queen Elizabeth's diary is filling up'



The 95-year-old monarch hasn't attended a public engagement since October after being hospitalized for an undisclosed condition and then suffering a back sprain, with doctors advising her to rest, but after several months of light duties involving private meetings and virtual audiences, royal aides have now scheduled a series of public outings, beginning in March. However, "lessons have been learned" since the queen undertook 19 engagements in as many days last October and her schedule will be more lower paced than before. A source told The Sun newspaper: "There are no plans for her to withdraw from public life. "The Queen's diary is filling up again but it will be paced to what is appropriate. "They don't want to put extra strain on her and other royals will help her out where necessary." The queen - who turns 96 in April - held a reception at Sandringham this weekend, her first official engagement since meeting the Sultan of Oman at

Windsor Castle on December 15. The monarch marked 70 years on the throne on Sunday and to mark the occasion, she sent out a message in which she stressed her devotion to her country. She said: "It is a day that, even after 70 years, I still remember as much for the death of my father, King George VI, as for the start of my reign. "It gives me great pleasure to renew to you the pledge I gave in 1947 that my life will always be devoted to your service." The address also saw the queen express her "wish" that Prince Charles' wife, Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall, be titled Queen Consort when he takes the throne. She said: "And when, in the fullness of time, my son Charles becomes King, I know you will give him and his wife Camilla the same support that you have given me; and it is my sincere wish that, when that time comes, Camilla will be known as Queen Consort as she continues her own loyal service."

Eilish stops concert to help fan who had trouble breathing

Billie Eilish stopped her concert when she spotted a fan having trouble breathing. The 'bad guy' hit-maker was performing at the State Farm Arena in Atlanta, Georgia, on Saturday when she spotted an audience member struggling in front of the stage, so she cut off her song to find out what was going on before asking her crew for help. She said: "You need an inhaler? Do we have an inhaler? Can we just grab one?" When the crew confirmed they could help, she said: "It's OK, we got one. Give her some time. Don't crowd." Billie then further checked in on her fan and asked: "You need to come out or are you OK? Are you sure?" She then mouthed, "I love you." After the show resumed, the 20-year-old singer took an apparent swipe at Travis Scott, who continued performing at his Astroworld festival in November when people were being crushed in a crowd surge. She said: "I wait for people to be OK until I keep going." Travis was dropped from headlining the upcoming Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival following the tragedy and it was



recently revealed the 'ocean eyes' singer is one of the stars who will now be topping the bill, alongside Kanye West and Harry Styles. In December, Billie revealed she was still experiencing problems after contracting COVID-19 earlier in the year. She said: "I didn't die, and I wasn't gonna die, but that does not take away from how miserable it was. "It was terrible. I still have side effects. I was sick for, like, two months almost." She credited the vaccine with her being "fine" now, and admitted she felt "horrible" when she was battling coronavirus.

Amy Schumer constantly feels 'guilty' as a parent

The 40-year-old actress admitted it is "heaven on earth" being a mother to her two-year-old son Gene - who she has with husband Chris Fischer - but she is also left constantly feeling bad and she will never get used to the mixture of emotions. Sharing a photo of herself with her son, whose face was covered by a heart emoji, she wrote on Instagram: "Being his mom is heaven on earth and also means a constant feeling of guilt and vulnerability I will never get used to. "Your heart feels like it's outside your body and you're too old to drink the feelings away like you used to. When you were in love and scared. Send help!!!" Last month, the 'I Feel Pretty' star reflected on how she "finally" feels good after undergoing numerous surgical procedures over the last year. Amy had both her appendix and uterus removed due to endometriosis - a condition where tissue grows outside of the uterus - as well as undergoing liposuction treatment and she's now feeling stronger than ever. Sharing two photos of herself on a beach in a black swimsuit, Amy tagged gynecologist Dr Tamer Seckin, cosmetic surgeon Dr. Jordan Terner, and acupuncturist Vickie Lee in her Instagram post and wrote: "I feel good. Finally. It's been a journey thanks for helping me get my strength back @seckinmd (endo) @jordanternermd (lipo) never thought I would do anything but talk to me after your uterus doesn't contract for 2.5 years and you turn 40. "@paulvincent22 vickie Lee (acupuncture) my girl Nicole from the tox my friends and fam. Let's go!(sic) Amy also revealed on her Instagram Story that she's down to 170lbs since having surgery.



Murs was 'worried' about bringing girlfriend into the spotlight

Olly Murs was "very worried" about bringing his girlfriend into the public eye. The 37-year-old pop star started dating Amelia Tank - who is a part-time model and also works in a bank - in 2019 and he was nervous about making their relationship public because the 29-year-old beauty "hates" the idea of fame and she's content with her own life and career. He said: "I was very worried. But she doesn't want to be famous. She hates that side of it. She's a bikini model but that's not her full-time job. She works for a bank [as a communications manager] and has got her own career and her own life. She is not someone that wants to live off my name.

She's just really content being with me. We're happy. We're in love." The 'Troublemaker' singer then went on to explain the coronavirus lockdown was a "good thing" for the couple because they "loved being around each other" and spending so long with just each other for company has only strengthened their relationship. He told Fabulous magazine: "Lockdown was good for us. We were only together for a short time and then she moved in. We know quite a few couples that aren't together after lockdown, whereas we still love being around each other." But Olly acknowledged having a big house in his native Essex helped the couple as it was easy to give each other space when they needed it. He added: "It was lucky I have a house with space, as there were days that were a bit 'urgh' and we could get away from each other. I definitely sensed days when I walked into the lounge and I wasn't her favorite person. You have your ups and downs, but you also have love. We very rarely argue."



Jenner and Scott welcome their second child

Kylie Jenner has welcomed a baby boy with Travis Scott. The 24-year-old businesswoman - who already has four-year old daughter Stormi with the rapper - announced on Instagram on Sunday that she had given birth on 02.02.2022, one day after Stormi's birthday, confirmed by E! News to be a son. Alongside a black-and-white photo of the infant's hand, she wrote: "[blue heart emoji] 2/2/22." Travis was quick to comment on the post, sharing six brown heart emojis and a blue heart before members of her famous family sent their congratulatory messages. Kylie's older half-sister Kim Kardashian, 41, wrote: "Congratulations Travis, Kylie and Stormi" while their mother Kris Jenner, 66, simply wrote "Angel Pie." Kourtney Kardashian - who has Mason, 12, Penelope, nine, and Reign, seven, with ex Scott Disick - hinted that she could relate to her younger sister

as she wrote: "Mommy of two life" alongside a heart emoji and two prayer emojis. No name has been announced yet, but a source claimed when the billionaire businesswoman and reality star first announced her pregnancy that she wanted to give Stormi a sibling "for a while". The source told PEOPLE: "She has been wanting to give Stormi a sibling for a while. She loves being a mom. She is thrilled that she and Travis are pregnant again. She has been enjoying her pregnancy in private. She has only spent time with close friends and family." The Kylie Cosmetics founder - who kept her first pregnancy a secret from the media until after she had given birth - announced the news of her second pregnancy with a video in which saw her showing Travis Scott a positive pregnancy test and revealing the news to her mother Kris.



West and Fox 'still going strong' amid split speculation

Kanye West and Julia Fox are still together, amid speculation they split. The 'Uncut Gems' star recently took to her Instagram Stories to explain why she unfollowed fan accounts and deleted some photos with the 44-year-old rap legend on the social media app. On Sunday, she said in a clip from her bathroom: "Guys relax, I unfollowed the fan accounts because I was tired of seeing myself. "Suddenly Instagram was not a fun place anymore. "I took the photos down because I read the comments and everyone was like, 'Oh my god, you clearly only posted photos you looked good in.'" An insider has since told Page Six that the 32-year-old actress and Yeezy founder - who legally changed his name to Ye - are still going strong. They insisted: "She deleted the photos because commenters were being really mean and she didn't want to deal." The breakup rumors came as the 'Jesus Walks' rapper became locked in a vicious war of words with his estranged wife, Kim Kardashian, who filed for divorce from Kanye in 2021. The 'Stronger' hitmaker has been critical of his ex's decision to allow their daughter North, eight, to be on TikTok and has accused her security team of not letting him in their former marital home when he's with their children, but the Skims founder - who also has Saint, six, Chicago, four, and Psalm, two, with Kanye

- hit back and described herself as the "main provider and caregiver" for the kids. Kim responded on Instagram: "Kanye's constant attacks on me in interviews and on social media is actually more hurtful than any TikTok North might create." The former 'Keeping Up with the Kardashians' star continued: "I am doing my best to protect our daughter while also allowing her to express her creativity in the medium that she wishes with adult supervision - because it brings her happiness." Kim - who is dating comedian Pete Davidson - also accused Kanye of "trying to control and manipulate" the situation. She wrote: "Divorce is difficult enough on our children and Kanye's obsession with trying to control and manipulate our situation so negatively and publicly is only causing further pain for all. From the beginning I have wanted nothing but a healthy and supportive co-parenting relationship because it is what is best for our children and saddens me that Kanye continues to make it impossible every step of the way." The reality star insisted she wants to resolve their issues "privately". The TV star - who married Kanye in 2014 - explained: "Hopefully he can finally respond to the third attorney he has had in the last year to resolve any issues amicably."

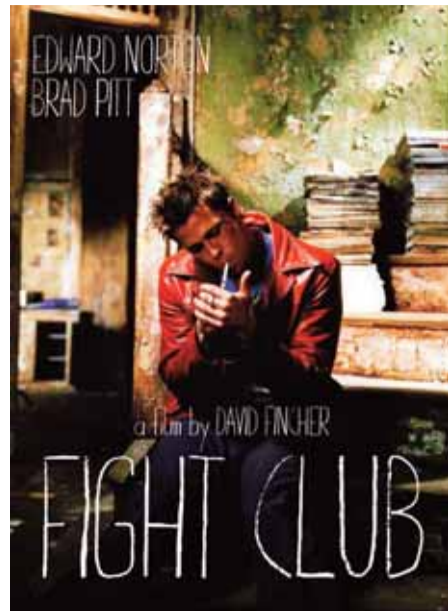
Sofia Vergara urges followers to get checked for cancer

Sofia Vergara's surgery scar reminds her "how blessed" she is to have survived cancer. The 49-year-old actress was diagnosed with thyroid cancer at the age of 28, and on World Cancer Day, Sofia reflected on how "lucky and grateful" she is to share her story and urged everyone to get checked for signs of the disease. Alongside a photo from her first acting lesson with her scar on display, she shared on Instagram: "At 28, 'Cancer' was not a word I expected to hear. It was just a routine checkup. But the doctors found a lump in my throat, and that word became part of my story. I spent countless hours in radiation treatments, and, eventually, in surgery. Today, I get to call myself a

cancer survivor. "This was my first acting class after diagnosis and treatment, and seeing the scar on my throat reminds me of how blessed I felt that day—and every day since. I'm lucky and grateful to be in a position to share my story and say: early prevention is so important!! Schedule your annual check up for this year if you haven't already." The 'Modern Family' star recently shared how she responded to the shock diagnosis by educating herself about the condition. She shared: "At 28 years old during a routine doctor's visit, my doctor

felt a lump in my neck. "They did a lot of tests and told finally me I had thyroid cancer. When you're young and you hear that word 'Cancer,' your mind goes to so many places but I tried not to panic and I decided to get educated. "I read every book and found out everything I could about it. I was fortunate to have caught it early and to have the support of my doctors and most importantly, my family. "I learned a lot during that time, not just about thyroid cancer but I also learned that in times of crisis, we're better together." Sofia previously admitted she was "lucky" to have survived her cancer scare. The Hollywood star - who has a 30-year-old son called Manolo with her ex-husband Joe Gonzalez - was relieved the problem was discovered before the cancer had been allowed to spread. She said: "I was lucky that's all I needed. That kind of cancer is very quiet, and usually you only realise you have it after it's already spread and it's much harder to treat." And even though she's now cancer-free, Sofia remains conscious of the threat. She explained: "I get my blood levels checked every three to six months to make sure my thyroid levels are good. And of course after cancer, every time I cough or feel something I'm a little paranoid."





Original 'Fight Club' ending restored in China after online backlash

The original, iconic ending of cult US film *Fight Club* has been restored to screens in China after a censored version that brought all criminals to book sparked outrage online. Beijing has some of the world's most restrictive censorship rules with authorities only approving a handful of foreign films for release each year—sometimes with major cuts. But reversing endings is rare, and there was widespread anger after censors replaced

the original finale of *Fight Club* on a version streaming on platform Tencent Video.

In the original closing scenes, star Edward Norton's narrator kills his imaginary alter-ego Tyler Durden, played by Brad Pitt, before watching multiple buildings explode, suggesting his character's plan to bring down modern civilization. But the version on Tencent instead closed with a line of text on a black screen to say the police "rapidly figured out the whole plan

and arrested all criminals".

In a rare censorship reversal, however, Tencent this week began to air the original conclusion of David Fincher's film, including the iconic explosive ending that was trimmed last month. The ending in which the state triumphs had sparked head scratching and outrage among some Chinese viewers—many of whom would likely have seen pirated versions of the unadulterated film. Human Rights Watch

described the cuts as "dystopian". Author Chuck Palahniuk, who wrote the 1996 novel that *Fight Club* was adapted from, tweeted that China had "done the right thing".

Tencent did not reply to questions on what led to the censorship, nor its abrupt reversal, which prompted more debate online. "Now, I'm speechless!" wrote one Chinese film fan, with the sentiment echoed across social media.—AFP

End of the road in Colombia for Escobar's 'cocaine' hippos?

More than 100 African hippos descended from fewer than a handful imported as exotic pets by drug lord Pablo Escobar, face an uncertain future in Colombia. After the government added Escobar's so-called "cocaine" hippos Friday to a list of "introduced, invasive species," experts say killing them may be the only viable option. From the few individuals once housed at Escobar's Hacienda Napoles estate, the hippos' numbers have ballooned, with 130 now roaming free north of Bogota around the Magdalena River.

Officials say the grazing giants, endemic to sub-Saharan Africa, threaten local wildlife and humans living along the river, whom they have already come into conflict with. Attempts have been made to sterilize the animals, which can weigh as much as 1.8 tons, but doing so is expensive and difficult. "Sacrifice (culling) remains on the table," said David Echeverri, head of the Cornare state environmental agency in charge of the sterilization effort. "It is a necessary option... it could be the only way to stop the problem from getting worse," he told AFP.

Escobar, once head of the deadly Medellin Cartel, became one of the richest men on the planet, according to Forbes,

thanks to the drug trafficking empire he built. With his wealth he built a menagerie, acquiring hippos, flamingos, giraffes, zebras and kangaroos for his ranch. After he was shot dead by police in 1993, all but the hippopotamuses were sold to zoos. The semi-aquatic ungulates were left to roam Escobar's estate and continued breeding. They are now believed to be the largest so-called "bloat" of hippopotamuses outside of Africa.

'Complex, expensive and dangerous'

The creatures have long been a headache for authorities faced with a vocal anti-culling campaign. Last Friday, the government officially declared the hippos an invasive species and announced it had a plan to "manage" their population, which studies have suggested could quadruple in 10 years. Although the details of the plan have not been revealed, former environment minister Manuel Rodriguez has urged the government to use any means, including opening a hunt on the animals. "Obviously there are animal activists opposed to this, but what is the alternative?" he said.

To date, Cornare has managed to surgically sterilize 11 hippos and dart another 40 with contraceptives. The effort has cost more than \$100,000, but has failed to stop hippo numbers from swelling. "Everything with hippos is complex, expensive and dangerous," Echeverri told AFP.

For Rodriguez, the animals pose a major threat to fishermen and other river-side inhabitants. Last year, Cornare recorded two hippo attacks on people, neither fatal. In Africa, hippos kill hundreds of people every year.—AFP



Hit Aussie show 'Neighbors' faces the axe

The Australian soap opera that helped launch the careers of Kylie Minogue, Margot Robbie and Russell Crowe faced an uncertain future yesterday, with 'Neighbors' finding few friends in the television industry. After almost 9,000 episodes, the Melbourne-based show is struggling to find a broadcaster in Britain — where it has enjoyed a cult following for the past 36 years. Current UK broadcaster Channel 5 will not carry the program after June 2022, forcing producers to pull the plug unless a replacement is found. "As you know the future of the show has been uncertain for some time," a top producer told cast and crew Sunday, in a memo obtained by AFP.

Australia's "Channel 10 would love the show to continue if we could find another broadcast partner to replace C5", the message said. "These discussions are ongoing however there is no new broadcaster at the moment and production must end, effectively resting the show."

"We are so proud of the show, you all and everything that you've achieved. But for now, this chapter is closing and we want to work together to give Neighbors

the amazing send off it deserves," it added. The note also included a helpline number for distraught cast and crew to contact for support. A whole generation of Brits grew up watching characters such as Charlene Robinson (Minogue) and her on-screen beau Scott Robinson, as well as an ensemble cast that over the years included actors Guy Pearce, Natalie Imbruglia and Liam Hemsworth.

Such was the show's one-time popularity that it was once blamed for Brits adopting an Australian-style upwards intonation at the end of sentences. Britain's Channel 5 said that while 'Neighbours' was "iconic", it wanted to focus on homegrown shows. "We recognise that there will be disappointment about this decision, however our current focus is on increasing our investment in original UK drama, which has strong appeal for our viewers," it said. Australia's Network 10 said in a statement that its intention was to "continue our association with Neighbors if another broadcast partner comes forward".—AFP



In this file photo taken on May 18, 1982 Italian film directors, brothers Paolo (second left), and Vittorio Taviani (second right) are accompanied by the actors, Sabina Vannucchi (left), Omero Antinutti (center), Margarita Lozano (right), and Claudio Bigagli for the presentation of their film 'La Notte di San Lorenzo' during the Cannes International Film Festival. — AFP

Spanish actress Margarita Lozano dies at 90

Spanish actress Margarita Lozano, who worked with top European directors such as Pier Paolo Pasolini and Sergio Leone, died yesterday aged 90, local officials said. The southeastern city of Lorca, where Lozano spent her childhood, declared three days of mourning, referring to her as an "adoptive daughter." "Margarita Lozano left a deep mark on both the cinema and theatre and acted under the orders of the best directors of the time," Lorca mayor Diego Jose Mateos said in a statement. Born in 1931 in Tetuan in northern Morocco which was then a Spanish protectorate to a father who was a

soldier stationed there, Lozano initially studied design and fashion.

But she abandoned her studies to pursue acting, her true passion, in Madrid, initially in the theatre. She starred in acclaimed Spanish director Luis Bunuel's 1961 drama "Viridiana" about a young nun about to take her final vows. The movie won the top Palme d'Or prize at the Cannes Film Festival that year. In the late 1960s she went to Italy, appearing in Pasolini's 1969 drama "Pigsty" as well as Sergio Leone's 1964 western "A Fistful of Dollars" alongside Clint Eastwood.

She retired for a decade to raise her

family but returned to Italian cinema in the 80s, appearing in several films by Paolo Taviani and his brother Vittorio Taviani. Her friend, Spanish architect Simon Angel Ros who designed her home in the coastal town of Puntas de Calnegre near Lorca where she was living, said Lozano passed away "peaceful". "Her heart has been weakening slowly, she did not suffer," he told local media. Lozano's only son Paco flew from Italy where he lives on Saturday to be by her side in her final hours, he added.—AFP

NY's Queens borough offers a world of flavors, even amid pandemic

Across ethnically rich New York, you can easily dine on food from 100-plus countries. Or you can just go to the borough of Queens, where an incredibly diverse food scene is thriving even in these pandemic days. Located across the East River from Manhattan, Queens has benefited from steady immigration that has built up a fabulously varied culinary stage. "Of the five boroughs, Queens is the one with the most diverse population... with over 100 ethnicities, by my count," said Robert Sietsema, a food writer for Eater.com.

He said nobody knows the exact number of communities, as immigrants keep coming in. "Tibetans and Nepalese have recently arrived in Jackson Heights, for example," he said, referring to one of the most vibrant neighborhoods of this borough of nearly 2.5 million people. Indeed, a journey through Queens is an exotic feast of flavors, aromas and textures, its offerings expanding even as the pandemic has hit New York hard. This month alone four new restaurants opened in Queens, serving food from Turkey, Hong Kong, Singapore and Italy, according to Eater.com.

And the situation is fluid in this most dynamic of cities as neighborhoods and their culinary offerings constantly evolve. The visitor to Queens will find everything from Colombian arepas to Greek moussaka, hummus from Lebanon, and Brazilian feijoada, a hearty stew of black beans, beef and pork.

Keeping track

In 2015, Instagram influencer Andy Doro set himself the goal of touring the world—culinarily speaking—by eating his way through as many ethnic restaurants in New York as he could. He got stuck at 145 countries. "It's very easy to get to 100," he told AFP, but "now, you know, I've been stuck in the 140s. I'm at 145." And a good number of them are in Queens. Doro showed off some favorite spots on a tour through the borough's snowy streets, start-



A cook prepares arepas in the kitchen of the Arepa Lady restaurant in the Queens borough of New York City.

ing in the heart of Jackson Heights.

The area once attracted many people of Colombian origin, and now has become "a big center for a lot of South Asian and Himalayan countries—so Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh," Doro said. At tiny Yun Cafe, 25-year-old Yun Naing, a recent arrival from Myanmar, said she keeps her cuisine authentic by importing ingredients—tea leaves, chili powder and more—from back home. "Burmese cuisine is special," she said, "because we

have a lot of strong flavors."

Other Queens neighborhoods have their own rich offerings, such as the Chinatown in the Flushing area farther east—known to the world as the home of the US Tennis Open. Locals say it rivals that of the better known one in Manhattan, boasting myriad eateries representing many regions of China as well as the increasingly popular cuisine of South Korea.—AFP



Cook Alfredo Lopez prepares arepas in the kitchen of the 'Arepa Lady' restaurant in the Queens borough of New York City.—AFP photos

Sports

Jokic triple double lifts Denver over Nets as 76ers thump Bulls

Antetokounmpo's Bucks rout Clippers

LOS ANGELES: Reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Nikola Jokic delivered his season-best 14th triple double with 27 points, 12 rebounds and 10 assists on Sunday to lead Denver over Brooklyn 124-104. The 26-year-old center also sparked a defensive effort from the Nuggets that kept the Nets to a season-low 29 second-half points as Brooklyn's road losing streak reached eight games.

"In the second half, we knew we had to step up on defense because that is how we would win the game," Jokic said. The Nuggets led 76-75 at halftime then dominated from there, with the Serbian hitting 12-of-15 from the floor while adding two steals and a blocked shot. "We took it upon ourselves to go out there and get the job done," Denver's Will Barton said.

"We know if we want to make a deep playoff run, it starts on the defensive end," Jokic said the triple doubles come naturally in the flow of the games. "I'm just trying to play a game," Jokic said. "When I pass, I pass to the right guy to make a basketball play. It doesn't matter if I get 15, 20 shots. I share the ball and when bodies are moving we're hard to guard and tonight was a night like that." Barton contributed 21 points, six rebounds and four assists as the Nuggets, sixth in the Western Conference at 29-24, snapped a three-game losing skid. "Any time you can get a win on your home court, especially after a losing streak, it's a big deal," Barton said. "For us to be where we're at, we'll take it, but we're not satisfied. We just have to stay consistent and we'll be fine." The Nuggets have struggled with injuries to standouts Michael Porter and Jamal Murray, but Barton said Jokic has helped pick up the slack.

"With two of our main guys down, he's keeping us afloat and still doing great numbers," Barton said of Jokic. "He's the best player in the league right now. He can do it all, pass it, score it in the post, shoot threes. And I think he has stepped it up defensively this year



DENVER: Kyrie Irving #11 of the Brooklyn Nets drives against the Denver Nuggets at Ball Arena on February 6, 2022 in Denver, Colorado. — AFP

and also being a vocal leader for us." The Nets, who fell to 29-24, were led by 27 points from Kyrie Irving, who cannot play in home games under New York's coronavirus rules because he is unvaccinated.

Brooklyn has also been hampered by injuries to stars Kevin Durant and James Harden. Nets coach Steve Nash said the team is not intending to trade Harden as

rumors swirled - ahead of Thursday's NBA deadline - that Brooklyn might send him to Philadelphia in exchange for unhappy Australian guard Ben Simmons, who has not played all season. "I've talked to James," Nash said. "James wants to be here. He wants to be here long-term as well... we think we have the best chance to win with James." — AFP

Beijing Olympic hockey players wear COVID face masks during match

BEIJING: Russian and Canadian women ice hockey players wore medical masks yesterday for their Beijing Winter Games match after COVID results failed to arrive in time, in a bizarre pandemic-inspired chapter to the Games. Canada ran out 6-1 winners, but only after a delay of one hour when the Russians found they had no opponents to play. "We were just waiting for (Russia's PCR) results to come back and once they came back we were comfortable," said Natalie Spooner.

"Our coaches and medical staff were not going to put us in a situation where we would not feel safe. "This is probably a cool story in the long run. We can say we were at the COVID Olympics and we even wore a mask in a game." The Olympics in the Chinese capital are taking place in a COVID-secure "closed loop" bubble where everyone must wear a mask at all times-except, usually, when they are competing.

Everyone in the bubble must also have a COVID test each day. "Pursuant to discussions between the two teams, they both agreed that the match would start with both sides wearing masks," the International Olympic Committee said in a statement to AFP. The Russian players took their masks off in the third period. "The results came in and they were negative and they said they were going to take their masks off," said Spooner.

"We figured we had them (the masks) on for two periods so why not keep being extra safe for one period." The Russian players said they had done nothing wrong and that they had their daily COVID test at their normal time of 8:00am. "It is out of our control. The Chinese at the laboratory, they were not ready to give our PCR test results," said Anna Shibanova, adding that all the Russian players tested negative for COVID.

Her team-mate Daria Gredzen said that "we did everything right". "We were preparing for the game as usual. We came out, did the warm-up and were about to go on the ice," she said. "And when we already came out on the ice, we found out that the other team was not there." Shibanova said she hoped she'd never have to play in a mask again. "It is not a nice feeling," she said. "There's not enough air." There have been 387 positive cases since January 23 in the bubble, according to official figures, among them an unknown number of players. — AFP



BEIJING: Finland's Noora Tulus (right) lies on the ice after a shot on goal during the women's preliminary round group A match of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games ice hockey competition between Switzerland and Finland yesterday. — AFP

Hoge captures first US PGA Tour title

SAN FRANCISCO: Tom Hoge out-dued former world number one Jordan Spieth down the stretch to win the Pebble Beach Pro-Am on Sunday, capturing his first US PGA Tour title with a final-round 68. Hoge trailed Spieth by one stroke through 15 holes. He hit his second shot from the fairway at 16 within inches and tapped in for birdie as Spieth made bogey from a greenside bunker at the 17th, leaving Hoge one shot up.

The 32-year-old pushed his lead to two strokes with a 22-foot birdie putt at the 17th and closed with a par for a 19-under total of 268. Spieth, a three-time major winner whose 12 tour titles include the 2017 Pebble Beach crown, finished with a three-under 69 for 270. American Beau Hossler was alone in third after a 71 for 271. "Feels pretty good," the 68th-ranked Hoge said of the victory in his 203rd career start.

Hoge, runner-up at La Quinta two weeks ago, said that in the past he's found himself uncomfortable after playing himself into contention, but not on Sunday. "It's awesome," he said. "You work through so many hard

times, to finally pull one off feels incredible." Hoge had held the first-round lead and shared the overnight lead with Hossler and Andrew Putnam. But it took most of 18 holes to separate himself on a day when five players shared the lead as the final group approached the turn.

After a birdie at the third, Hoge had a double-bogey at the fifth, rebounding with birdies at the sixth and seventh before a bogey at the eighth. He regained some momentum with a birdie at 11, then rolled in a 17-foot birdie at the 14th. "It was a weird day because I felt like I made a few too many mistakes early on, so I was kind of out of it," he said. "And I looked up and I was still in the game making the turn." "Luckily I made a few putts finally on the back nine."

Spieth had three birdies and a bogey on the front nine, but moved into the lead with back-to-back birdies at 12 and 13. His 15-foot birdie effort at 14 burned the edge and at 15 his shot out of the rough clipped a tree and finished short of the green and he settled for par. Down by one after missing a five-footer to save par at 17, he was in the long fairway bunker at the 18. "Solid week," Spieth said. "Obviously anytime I'm tied for the lead or in the lead the back nine on Sunday it's very disappointing if you don't win." "Today I felt a little off with my driver, but I felt like I hit a lot of shots exactly where I wanted to." — AFP

AFC stars stretch NFL Pro Bowl win streak to 5 games

LAS VEGAS: Justin Herbert threw two touchdown passes and Mac Jones tossed another as the American Conference (AFC) defeated the National Conference (NFC) 41-35 in Sunday's NFL Pro Bowl all-star game. It was the AFC's fifth consecutive victory over the NFC, the longest run by either side in the rivalry. The contest did not feature players from the Los Angeles Rams and Cincinnati Bengals, who will meet for the NFL crown in next Sunday's Super Bowl at Los Angeles.

Herbert, a second-year standout for the Los Angeles Chargers in his first Pro Bowl, was named the Offensive Most Valuable Player. He completed 7-of-11 passes for 98 yards on a day when there were seven interceptions, at least one from each quarterback. "It's an awesome opportunity to come out here and line up with the greatest players in the game," Herbert said. AFC defensive end Maxx Crosby of the host Las Vegas Raiders was named the Defensive MVP with five tackles, two sacks and three deflected passes.

"I've been working," Crosby said. "I had to come out here and put on a show for the fans." The game had some experimental rules, including no kickoffs, to increase scoring chances. A team that scored could try and keep possession by converting a fourth down and 15 play from its own 25-yard line. Teams making the attempt went 0-for-8. There was a relaxed attitude about hard hits and tackles with few kicks of any type attempted.

AFC defender Darius Leonard returned an interception 45 yards to open the scoring while NFC defender Antoine Winfield returned an interception 63 yards for a touchdown on the final play of the first quarter to pull the NFC within 14-13. AFC lineman Myles Garrett picked off a deflected pass attempt that was ruled a fumble and returned it 22 yards for a touchdown on the first play of the second quarter. Herbert threw touchdown passes of 7 and 15 yards to Mark Andrews in the first half to give the AFC a 28-21 halftime lead while Jones tossed a 6-yard touchdown pass to Hunter Renfrow in the third quarter. AFC receiver Stefon Diggs ran four yards for a touchdown, evading his brother Trevon, an NFC defender, to reach the end zone as the AFC took a 41-21 lead after three quarters. Kyler Murray, who hit Mike Evans on a 19-yard touchdown pass in the second quarter, connected on a 5-yard touchdown pass to Kyle Pitts to lift the NFC within 41-28 with 10:18 to go. — AFP



CALIFORNIA: Tom Hoge of the United States celebrates with the trophy after winning the final round of the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am at Pebble Beach Golf Links on February 06, 2022. — AFP

Chinese tennis star Peng Shuai repeats sexual assault denial

BEIJING: Chinese tennis star Peng Shuai said she never accused anyone of sexual assault, in an interview published yesterday, again walking back an allegation that sparked what she described as a "huge misunderstanding". The former doubles world number one alleged in a social media post in November that former Chinese vice-premier Zhang Gaoli forced her into sex during a years-long relationship. The post was swiftly deleted and Peng was not heard from for nearly three weeks, prompting concern around the world about her safety. She has since appeared at some public events, and denied ever making the accusation.

"I never said anyone had sexually assaulted me in any way," Peng told the French sports daily L'Equipe on Sunday, reiterating a similar comment she gave to a Singaporean newspaper in December. The 36-year-old said she was the one who deleted her allegation from Weibo, China's Twitter-like platform. It was widely suspected that China's strict internet censors, sensitive about any criticism of the ruling Communist Party, had removed it.

When L'Equipe asked why she deleted it, Peng said: "Because I wanted to." "There was a huge misunderstanding in the outside world following this post," she said during the interview in the Beijing Winter Olympics bubble. "I don't want the meaning of this post to be twisted anymore. And I don't want any further media hype around it." Peng also told L'Equipe that she was retiring from professional tennis, citing a major injury and disruptions to travel and treatment during the pandemic.

'Never disappeared'

Some of the world's biggest tennis stars, including Serena Williams, Naomi Osaka and Novak Djokovic, spoke out about the Peng case. The United Nations and the White House also expressed concern. The Women's Tennis Association (WTA) suspended its tournaments in China over the matter. When asked about the worries her absence sparked, Peng said she had "never disappeared". "It's just that many people, like my friends or people from the IOC messaged me, and it was simply impossible to answer so many messages."



China's Peng Shuai

Peng was accompanied by Chinese Olympic Committee chief of staff Wang Kan during the interview. Concerns have swirled about Peng's safety despite her appearances following the three-week absence, which showed her attending sporting events. After she denied making any sexual assault allegations in December, the WTA said it was still not convinced of her well-being. At the Australian Open last month, activists handed out 1,000 "Where is Peng Shuai?" T-shirts to spectators ahead women's final to highlight the case.

Bach meeting

International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Thomas Bach held a video conference with Peng on November 21, but that led to accusations that he was trying to protect the hosts of the 2022 Winter Games. Bach said ahead of the Games that the IOC would back an inquiry into her allegations if she wanted one, saying he would hold a meeting with Peng to "know better about her physical integrity and her mental state".

Bach, along with IOC member Kirsty Coventry, met Peng over dinner at the Olympic Club in Beijing on Saturday, the body said in a statement. "We had dinner together on Saturday and we had a nice discussion and exchange," Peng told L'Equipe. "He asked me whether I am considering competing again, what my projects are, what I'm planning to do, and so on."

The IOC said Peng shared with Bach and Coventry "her intention to travel to Europe when the COVID-19 pandemic is over". "All three agreed that any further communication about the content of the meeting would be left to her discretion," the IOC statement added. There was no mention in it of Peng's wellbeing, if she could move freely inside China or travel abroad. "I don't think it is for us to judge one way or another," IOC spokesman Mark Adams said at a daily briefing in Beijing, when asked if he believed Peng spoke freely during the L'Equipe interview. — AFP

Sports

Forest stun holders Leicester as Liverpool see off Cardiff 3-1

'Incredible' non-league Boreham Wood stun Bournemouth in FA Cup

LIVERPOOL: Nottingham Forest knocked holders Leicester out of the FA Cup as the Championship side powered to a shock 4-1 win, while Liverpool eased into the fifth round with a 3-1 victory against Cardiff on Sunday. Leicester's disappointing season hit a new low with the dismal fourth round loss against their midlands rivals at the City Ground.

Last season's Wembley triumph against Chelsea was Leicester's first ever FA Cup final victory, but that seemed a distant memory as their trophy defense ended with a whimper. Bottom of the second tier when Steve Cooper took charge in September, Forest have been revitalized by the former Swansea boss and they destroyed Leicester with three goals in nine first half minutes. Forest will face fellow Championship side Huddersfield in only their second appearance in the FA Cup fifth round in 17 years.

Having climbed to eighth place in the Championship, Forest are also chasing a return to the Premier League for the first time since 1999. It is still some way from the glory days of Brian Clough, who led Forest to the English title in 1978 and two European Cups in 1979 and 1980. But Cooper's men have provided their long-suffering fanbase with hope that a return to relevance could be on the cards in the near future for one of English football's sleeping giants.

In the first derby between the clubs for eight years, Forest took the lead in the 23rd minute when Brennan Johnson's cross was nodded down by Keinan Davis and poked home by Philip Zinckernagel. Just 24 seconds later, the sell-out crowd erupted again as Leicester shot themselves in the foot. Daniel Amartey's woeful backpass towards Leicester keeper Kasper Schmeichel was intercepted by Johnson, who took a touch before clipping his shot through the Dane's legs.

The goal prompted one angry Leicester supporter to invade the pitch and confront several Forest players in an ugly incident that saw punches thrown before he was led away. All the problems that have bedevilled Leicester this season were being exposed by Forest and it was their set-pieces woes that the hosts punished next. In the 32nd minute, James Garner swung over a corner and Joe Worrall took advantage of Leicester's slack marking to head past Schmeichel.



MILAN: AC Milan's French forward Olivier Giroud (center) and Spezia's Italian goalkeeper Ivan Provedel (right) go for the ball during the Italian Serie A football match between AC Milan and Spezia on January 17, 2022.—AFP

Elliott 'fairytale'

Forest keeper Brice Samba gifted Leicester a goal in the 40th minute, needlessly rushing out of his area as Kelechi Iheanacho danced past him and shot into the empty net from an acute angle. But Djed Spence quashed any hopes of an unlikely Leicester revival when he exchanged passes with Zinckernagel before delivering a clinical finish in the 61st minute.

Jürgen Klopp labelled Harvey Elliott's goalscoring return in Liverpool's win over Cardiff as a "fairytale" after five months out with a serious ankle injury. Elliott was introduced off the bench alongside new signing Luis Diaz after Diogo Jota's header had opened the scoring early in the second half. Diaz made an instant impact by teeing up Takumi Minamoto to double Liverpool's lead. But the biggest cheer was reserved for Elliott when he fired home on the volley 14 minutes from time.

There were fears Elliott could be out for at least the rest of the season when he suffered a dislocated ankle against Leeds. "Coming on was a great step back but

scoring this goal was a proper fairytale," said Klopp. "Harvey was unlucky with the injury but lucky with the whole process afterwards. Everything went really well. He did an incredible job, the medical department did an incredible job. He is a fearless boy and a great footballer." Rubin Colwill pulled a goal back for the Bluebirds, but it is Liverpool who will meet Norwich at Anfield in the last 16.

Boreham Wood boss Luke Garrard hailed his "incredible" non-league minnows after they shocked Championship side Bournemouth with a 1-0 win in the FA Cup fourth round on Sunday. Mark Ricketts' first half goal at Dean Court sent Boreham Wood into the fifth round for the first time as they demonstrated the FA Cup's renowned knack for producing stunning upsets. Boreham Wood, currently in fifth place in the fifth tier National League, are the lowest ranked team left in the competition. But Bournemouth, third in the Championship, paid the price for a lethargic display that suggested they were prioritising their push for promotion back to the Premier League.—AFP



VENICE: Napoli's Nigerian forward Victor Osimhen (left) fights for the ball with Unione Venezia's Italian defender Mattia Caldara during the Italian Serie A football match between Venezia and Napoli on February 06, 2022.—AFP

Osimhen fires Napoli into heart of 3-way Serie A title tussle

MILAN: Victor Osimhen scored on his first Napoli start since November to help his team to a 2-0 win at Venezia on Sunday which moves them one point behind Serie A leaders Inter Milan. Nigeria striker Osimhen had made two brief substitute appearances since fracturing bones in his face in a sickening head clash at Inter, and rewarded coach Luciano Spalletti's decision to pick him by leaping to head Napoli ahead just before the hour mark at the Stadio Pier Luigi Penzo.

Andrea Petagna sealed the points in the 100th minute of a match extended due a clash of heads between the referee and Venezia's Tyrone Ebuehi, as well as that same player's late red card for a dreadful foul on Dries Mertens. "I prepared well for this game, had a good week and was ready to kick on from the first minute," Osimhen told DAZN. "And of course to start with a goal, I'm really happy about this performance from the whole squad."

Wearing a special face mask he described as a "good look for me", Osimhen's sixth Serie A goal of the season—his first since mid-October-fired Napoli right back into a three-way league title tussle. Napoli are second, level on 52 points with AC Milan who broke open the race for the Scudetto as Olivier Giroud's derby double saw off Inter on Saturday.

Like Milan, Napoli have played a game more than Inter but they host the champions next weekend before travelling to Barcelona for the first leg of their Europa League play-off with the Catalan giants. "We have a lot of objectives this season and the Scudetto is one of them, so step by step and with determination I think we'll get there," added Osimhen. Osimhen could have had another as he

struck the post in the first half but Napoli had to battle their way past Venezia, who are in the relegation zone following defeat and Cagliari's 2-1 win at 10-man Atalanta earlier on Sunday.

Pereiro lifts Cagliari

Gaston Pereiro earned Walter Mazzarri's Cagliari their third win in five league matches to move them up to 17th, two points ahead of Venezia. The 26-year-old gave Cagliari a surprise lead four minutes after half-time in Bergamo, and was crucial to Atalanta going a man down when he was brought down by onrushing goalkeeper Juan Musso just moments later.

Fourth-placed Atalanta, who will drop out of the Champions League positions if Juventus beat Verona on Sunday night, pulled level through Jose Luis Palomino in the 64th minute. However the hopeful home fans were silenced again four minutes later when Pereiro rolled home the winner from Raoul Bellanova's low cross. "We played badly, and never really troubled Cagliari," said Atalanta coach Gian Piero Gasperini.

"We need to get our heads back and focus on being a team, because that performance was not good enough." Atalanta have a game in hand but also have a fight on their hands to keep Champions League football after previously looking like title contenders. They host Juve next weekend and will have to do without Duvan Zapata for that match and their Italian Cup tie with Fiorentina, with the Colombia forward pulling up just 14 minutes after coming off the bench for his first appearance of 2022.

Sampdoria took advantage of 18th-placed Venezia's defeat by thumping Sassuolo 4-0 and going five points clear of the bottom three. Marco Giampaolo's Samp won thanks to two stunning volleys from Francesco Caputo and Andrea Conti, a goal from Stefano Sensi on his debut after arriving on loan from Inter and Antonio Candreva's late penalty. Bologna and Empoli played out a goalless draw in the afternoon's other match.—AFP

Messi, Mbappe on target as PSG thrash sorry Lille

PARIS: Lionel Messi and Kylian Mbappe both scored as Paris Saint-Germain stretched their mammoth lead at the top of Ligue 1 to 13 points with a 5-1 thrashing of defending champions Lille on Sunday. Mauricio Pochettino's men were given a helping hand by a nightmarish display from Lille goalkeeper Ivo Grbic at the Stade Pierre-Mauroy. Portuguese midfielder Danilo Pereira netted twice, while Presnel Kimpembe also got on the scoresheet.

All eyes in the capital remain on Paris' Champions League last-16 first leg against Real Madrid on February 15. Mbappe, who has long been linked with Real, said that match has been the reason he is yet to make a decision about his future, despite having been free to sign a pre-contract agreement with another club since the start of last month. "Playing against Real Madrid changes a lot of things," the World Cup winner told Amazon Prime.

"Even if I'm free to do what I want, I'm not going to talk to the opponents. I'm focused on winning against Real Madrid and we'll see what happens afterwards." This game, though, was the perfect response for PSG after their French Cup exit on penalties at the hands of Nice in midweek. Lille are languishing down in 11th place after a seventh defeat of their title defense. The hosts needed to get something from the game to move into the top half of the table, but they made a calamitous start.

Grbic somehow failed to gather in Nuno Mendes' low cross despite being under no pressure, and Danilo duly stabbed into an empty net to give PSG a 10th-minute lead. Hatem Ben Arfa, making his first start since last April after his surprise move to Lille, set up Sven Botman to equalise before the half-hour mark. But PSG were back in front in the 32nd minute as Grbic totally missed Messi's corner and Kimpembe bundled home from close range.

Messi grabbed his first goal of 2022 in slightly fortuitous circumstances, as a clearance ricocheted off his shins and played him in on goal. Grbic rushed out to close the angle, but the seven-time Ballon d'Or winner coolly dinked the ball into the net to score his second Ligue 1 goal. "I have never had any doubts about Messi," said PSG coach Pochettino. "He's the best player in the world.—AFP



NORD: Lille's defender Zeki Celik jumps over Paris Saint-Germain's Italian midfielder Marco Verratti after scoring a goal during the French L1 football match between Lille and Paris Saint-Germain on February 6, 2022.—AFP

News in brief

Vlasov wins Tour of Valencia

VALENCIA: Russian climb specialist Aleksandr Vlasov won the Tour of Valencia five-day stage race on Sunday as Dutch sprinter Fabio Jakobsen edged the dash to the line in downtown Valencia. The 25-year-old Vlasov took the lead with a solo break on stage three's gravelly summit finish, and held on over the two final flat stages at the weekend. Vlasov won by 32 seconds from the great Belgian hope Remco Evenepoel of Quick-Step, while 21-year-old Spaniard Carlos Rodriguez of Ineos was another four seconds back in third. In only his second race for German outfit Bora since leaving Astana, this was Vlasov's first ever multi-day race win. "We've had a perfect five days here. We've worked very well together as a team," Vlasov said.—AFP

Chelsea face Al Hilal in semis

ABU DHABI: Chelsea will face Al Hilal of Saudi Arabia in the Club World Cup semi-finals after the Asian Champions League winners came from behind to rout Al Jazira 6-1 on Sunday. Abdoulay Diaby struck first for UAE Pro League champions Al Jazira, but Al Hilal responded with two goals before half-time from former Manchester United striker Odion Ighalo and Matheus Pereira. Mohamed Kanno headed in a corner to increase Al Hilal's lead on 57 minutes and Salem Al Dawsari added a fourth with a composed finish at Mohammed Bin Zayed Stadium. Moussa Marega and Andre Carrillo completed a thumping win with late goals for Leonardo Jardim's side, the record four-time Asian champions and 17-time Saudi league winners.—AFP

Bublik captures maiden ATP title

PARIS: Alexander Bublik stunned top seed and Olympic champion Alexander Zverev to win his maiden ATP title in Montpellier on Sunday. The 24-year-old Russian-born Kazakh triumphed over the world number three from Germany, 6-4, 6-3. Bublik's win will also assure him a new career-high ranking on Monday from his current 35. Before Sunday, the eccentric Bublik had lost all four of his previous ATP finals in Newport and Chengdu in 2019, and Singapore and Antalya last year. He now heads for the Rotterdam tournament next week where he has a first-round clash against former world number one and three-time major champion Andy Murray. "I had four finals and the fifth final I have won against a great player like 'Sascha'," said Bublik who had also defeated Zverev in Rotterdam last year. "It's great. All my game together.—AFP



MONTPELLIER: Kazakhstan's Alexander Bublik poses with his trophy after winning the final over German's Alexander Zverev on February 6, 2022.—AFP

Real sneak past Granada

MADRID: Jordi Alba scored an extraordinary volley and Dani Alves was sent off as Barcelona delivered a major boost to their hopes of finishing in La Liga's top four on Sunday by winning a six-goal thriller against Atletico Madrid 4-2. Real Madrid then capitalized on Sevilla's goalless draw with Osasuna on Saturday by edging past Granada 1-0 to extend their lead at the top of the table to a daunting six points. In the absence of the injured Karim Benzema, Marco Asensio finally broke Granada's resistance in the 74th minute at the Santiago Bernabeu. Barcelona were more emphatic as they scored four in 40 minutes at Camp Nou before surviving a late fightback from Atletico after Luis Suarez headed in and Alves saw red with 20 minutes left. A statement victory returns Xavi Hernandez's side into the top four for the first time since September, with Atletico now two points behind in fifth. "The team, the fans and the club in general needed a win like this," said Xavi.—AFP

Villiere hat-trick lifts France

PARIS: France team manager Raphael Ibanez said Gabin Villiere was a "warrior" after the winger scored three times as the Six Nations contenders beat Italy 37-10 in Paris on Sunday to move top of the table. Player of the match Villiere, who featured in the French third-tier just four years ago, took his tally to six tries in nine matches for France, who go above Ireland on points difference after the opening weekend. "Gabin's performance was exceptional. He's a finisher, he showed that," Ibanez told reporters. "What is quite characteristic in him is his warrior state of mind which is an example to his team-mates," he added. Italy lost for a record-extending 33rd consecutive time in the tournament despite leading early in the first half thanks to debutant Tommaso Menoncello's effort. "I'm not satisfied with the end result," said Italy head coach Kieran Crowley.—AFP

Sports

'Catastrophic' Dortmund thrashed by Leverkusen in Haaland's absence

Wolfsburg haul themselves away from the relegation zone

BERLIN: Borussia Dortmund's Bundesliga title hopes were left in tatters on Sunday as they crashed to a 5-2 defeat at home to Bayer Leverkusen, with injured star striker Erling Haaland forced to watch from the sidelines. In a game they had to win to keep pace in the title race, Dortmund's calamitous defending saw them slump to a sixth defeat of the season and fall further behind league leaders Bayern Munich.

"It was a catastrophic day for us. It's not the time to talk about Bayern, we have other issues at the moment," captain Marco Reus told DAZN. They are now nine points adrift of the top, with their lead over third-placed Leverkusen slashed to just five points. "It's a bitter defeat. Talking is one thing, but we have to put things into practice," said coach Marco Rose, who had promised a more solid defensive performance before the game.

Much had been made of Haaland's absence, but it was fellow convalescent Mats Hummels who was more sorely missed, as Dortmund's back line self-immolated in the first half. Hummels' replacement, Dan-Axel Zagadou, handed Leverkusen the opener on a plate after just 10 minutes in a comedy of defensive errors. Too hesitant on the ball after a short goal-kick, Zagadou gave the ball away cheaply in his own box, allowing Patrik Schick to shoot unchallenged from point-blank range.

As goalkeeper Gregor Kobel dived full-length to parry the shot, Manuel Akanji hurried back to help, only to end up bundling the ball into his own net. Another own goal at the opposite end brought

Dortmund level a few minutes later, Jeremie Frimpong flicking a Julian Brandt free-kick past his own goalkeeper. But Leverkusen had smelt blood, and took the lead again with a devastating counter-attack, the entire front line linking up to provide Florian Wirtz with a tap-in. Leverkusen midfielder Robert Andrich crowned a disastrous first half-hour for Dortmund when he curled a direct free-kick into the top corner from the edge of the area.

Half-time boos

Booed off at half-time by their own fans, Dortmund briefly rallied at the start of the second half, before going 4-1 down on 53 minutes. Having failed to properly clear a Leverkusen corner, the home side watched helplessly as Jonathan Tah sent a fantastic volley fizzing under the crossbar. The return of US international Giovanni Reyna after six months out with injury provided some brief cheer on the hour mark, and both he and Jude Bellingham came close to scoring in the last quarter of an hour. Leverkusen twisted the knife when Diaby netted a fifth on the counter-attack a few minutes from time, before Steffen Tigges grabbed a consolation tap-in.

In Sunday's other game, Wolfsburg hauled themselves away from the relegation zone with a 3-1 win over bottom club Greuther Fuerth. Branimir Hrgota gave Fuerth hope on the penalty spot after Aster Vranckx had put Wolfsburg in front with an early tap-in. Vranckx then restored the lead after a mistake from Fuerth goalkeeper Sascha Burchert,



DORTMUND: Leverkusen's French forward Moussa Diaby scores during the German first division Bundesliga football match between Borussia Dortmund and Bayer Leverkusen in Dortmund on February 6, 2022. —AFP

before Maximilian Arnold made it 3-1 with a curling free-kick. Maximilian Philipp added a fourth with a

deflected volley a few minutes later to seal a first league win in 10 games for Wolfsburg. —AFP

Mane vs Salah: Rematch looms with World Cup place at stake

YAOUNDE: Sadio Mane trumped Liverpool teammate Mohamed Salah in the Africa Cup of Nations final, but the Egyptian will soon have a chance to even the score in a World Cup play-off. Egypt confront Mane-inspired Senegal home and away in March with a ticket to the 2022 World Cup in Qatar at stake. Ghana meet Nigeria, Cameroon play Algeria, Mali face Tunisia and the Democratic Republic of Congo tackle Morocco in the other play-offs.

But it is the showdown between the Egyptian Pharaohs and the Senegalese Teranga Lions that will capture the imagination with Premier League sharpshooters Salah and Mane dominating the headlines. Mane not only helped Senegal conquer Africa for the first time after a penalty shootout triumph in Cameroon on Sunday, he was also voted the player of the tournament.

The 29-year-old scored three of the nine Senegalese goals in seven matches and recovered swiftly from being injured in a last-16 win over

Cape Verde to inspire his team. In the final, he had an early penalty saved by Mohamed Abou Gabal, but atoned by slotting the spot-kick that won the shootout after 120 goalless minutes dominated by the west Africans. After a slow start to the 29-day flagship African tournament, Salah led his team through a far harder knockout-phase path than Senegal to the title decider.

Effectively facing three finals before the final, Egypt pipped the Ivory Coast on penalties, came from behind to beat Morocco in extra time, then overcame Cameroon in another shootout. Abou Gabal, who surprisingly lost out to final rival Edouard Mendy for the goalkeeper of the tournament award, kept Senegal at bay in regular and extra time. But he may not face Mane in the World Cup if first choice keeper Mohamed Elshenawy recovers from an injury sustained against the Ivorians.

Queiroz conundrum

It is a conundrum for coach Carlos Queiroz, who must watch the first leg



YAOUNDE: Egypt's forward Mohamed Salah reacts during the Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) 2021 final football match between Senegal and Egypt on February 6, 2022. —AFP

of the play-off from a stand unless an appeal against a red card in the Cup of Nations clash with Cameroon succeeds. His assistant, South African Roger de Sa, was banned for four matches after an undisclosed incident following the victory over Morocco, ruling him out of both legs.

Seeking a fourth straight World Cup appearance, after guiding Portugal in 2010 and Iran in 2014 and

2018, the former Real Madrid manager and twice Manchester United assistant manager has his work cut out. But for Abou Gabal, Senegal would have won the final by several goals in 90 minutes, while Egypt created few scoring opportunities. After suffering a first shootout loss at a Cup of Nations, Egypt have also lost the aura of invincibility when it comes to penalty taking. —AFP

New boys fire Juve into top 4

MILAN: Dusan Vlahovic and Denis Zakaria enjoyed dream Juventus debuts on Sunday with a goal each in a 2-0 win over Verona which puts their new team in Serie A's Champions League places, while Napoli are hot on leaders Inter Milan's heels after seeing off Venezia. The duo made sure that Juve took advantage of Atalanta falling to a shock 2-1 home defeat to lowly Cagliari by beating spirited Verona in Turin to take their place in the top four for the first time this season.

Serbia forward Vlahovic took just 12 minutes at a foggy Allianz Stadium to show why Juve shelled out

an initial 70 million euros (\$80.2 million) to snatch him from Fiorentina, racing onto Paulo Dybala's chipped through ball before sending a delicate lofted finish over Verona goalkeeper Lorenzo Montipò.

Zakaria, who arrived for 4.5 million euros from Borussia Moenchengladbach on transfer deadline day, sealed the points in the 61st minute when he was sent clean through on goal by Alvaro Morata and lashed home a precise finish which put Juve two points ahead of fifth-placed Atalanta. "It's important to score goals but I want to improve in every aspect of the game, general play, passing, mentality, everything that can help the team," Vlahovic told DAZN.

Juve have played a game more than Atalanta, and travel to Bergamo next weekend to face a team who were blasted by coach Gian Piero Gasperini as "not good enough" following their loss to Cagliari.

Coach Massimiliano Allegri poured cold water on Vlahovic's suggestion that Juve were aiming for the league title, even though only eight points separate his side from Inter. "The Scudetto is between Inter, Milan and Napoli, we are out of it right now. It's still wide open for the Champions League and we have to take it one step at a time," he said.

Vlahovic's 18th league strike of the season puts him level with Lazio's Ciro Immobile in the hunt for Italy's 'Capocannoniere' scoring award. The 22-year-old had a great chance to go it alone at the top shortly before half-time after superb interplay between Dybala and Morata led to the latter whipping over a perfect cross to his new strike partner. However Vlahovic could only glance wide, leaving the door open for Verona-missing key players Giovanni Simeone and Gianluca Caprari—that was only closed once Zakaria struck. —AFP

Rangers respond to thrash Hearts, Celtic hit Motherwell for 4

GLASGOW: Rangers bounced back from a crushing Old Firm derby defeat to Celtic to remain just one point behind their Glasgow rivals at the top of the Scottish Premiership with a 5-0 thrashing of third-placed Hearts on Sunday. Earlier, Celtic were 4-0 winners away to Motherwell. Rangers were without top scorer Alfredo Morelos for their 3-0 defeat at Celtic Park in midweek and the Colombian's return made a huge difference to Giovanni Van Bronckhorst's men as he scored twice at Ibrox.

Glen Kamara and Fashion Sakala came off the bench to score late on either side of Scott Arfield's strike as Rangers ran riot with four goals in the final 26 minutes. Aaron Ramsey also made his debut off the bench to round off a fine afternoon for the Scottish champions after questions were asked about their attitude over the past week. Celtic had briefly pulled four points clear as Tom Rogic scored twice with Liel Abada and Daizen Maeda also on target for the visitors at Fir Park. Reo Hatate and Abada did the damage in midweek and combined once more for the opener with the Israeli slotting home his 14th goal of the season from Hatate's cross. Rogic was one of those recalled after his return from international duty with Australia. January signing Matt O'Riley's bright start to his Celtic career has put Rogic's place in the team under threat, but he responded in style with a stunning strike into the top corner from outside the box.

Abada turned provider for the third as his low cross was swept in by Rogic. Celtic could have scored many more in the second half as a combination of poor finishing, the woodwork and Motherwell goalkeeper Liam Kelly kept the score down. "We like to play a certain way," said coach Ange Postecoglou. "We don't want to be a team that grinds out results, we want to get the fans off their seats. "We didn't come here to shut up shop after three goals. We want to get four, five, six. We will be doing that until the end of the season." There was some fortune over the one goal that did come after the break as Maeda's shot was blocked by Bevis Mugabi, but looped up over Kelly and under the bar. —AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

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

Old Name: Shah Mohammed Jumman Sheikh, New Name: Shah Mohammed Jumman Choudhary, Passport No.: K8490308 (Indian). (C 1420) 7-2-20221

I, Linguntla Babu S/O Linguntla Venkataiah (Old Name), D.No. 17/2-2, Mudrapalli, Pondalur, Penagalur Mandal, YSR Kadapa District, A.P., India, have changed My Passport (K9653001) name correction as MULAKALA NADIPI RED-DALIAH S/o Mulakala Venkataiah & Malakala Chinnamma (New Name). 6-2-2022

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Senegal crowned African champions

Mane scores winning kick as Senegal overpower Egypt in shoot-out



YAOUNDE: Senegal's players celebrate with the trophy after winning the Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) 2021 final football match between Senegal and Egypt at Stade d'Olembé in Yaounde on February 6, 2022. — AFP

YAOUNDE: Sadio Mane made up for missing from the spot in normal time to score the decisive penalty as Senegal overcame Mohamed Salah's Egypt 4-2 in a shoot-out to win their first Africa Cup of Nations title after Sunday's final finished goalless at the end of extra time. Mane had seen Mohamed Abou Gabal save his seventh-minute penalty at the Olembe Stadium in Yaounde but Egypt could not capitalise as they went to extra time for the fourth consecutive game at this Cup of Nations.

Salah was due to step up to take Egypt's fifth penalty but with Mohamed Abdelmonem hitting the post and Mohamad Lasheen having his kick saved by Edouard Mendy, the Liverpool star did not get his chance and was already on the verge of tears as his club team-mate Mane prepared to strike the decisive blow.

After two previous final defeats, Senegal are Cup of Nations winners at last, while Egypt missed out on a record-extending eighth continental crown that would also have been a first for Salah. "It just

shows that if you work hard, if you persevere, you will get what you want," Senegal coach Aliou Cisse told broadcaster beIN Sports. "I am very emotional because the people of Senegal have wanted this trophy for 60 years."

Abou Gabal, who was named man of the match, summed up the Egyptian mood, saying: "We are really disappointed but that's football, either you win or you lose." Senegal's celebrations followed a disappointing final, the fifth in the last 11 editions of the tournament to be decided in a shoot-out after a goalless draw. Egypt had already twice won finals that had been settled on penalties after finishing 0-0, and they had already won in the same manner twice in the last fortnight, against the Ivory Coast and Cameroon.

Not Salah's night

This time their luck ran out as the tournament ended at the venue where eight people died and 38 were injured in a crush on January 24. The country's

88-year-old President, Paul Biya, attended the closing ceremony where he was paraded in an open-top car to hysterical crowds along with his wife, First Lady Chantal Biya. FIFA president Gianni Infantino and CAF chief Patrice Motsepe were also present although the biggest cheers were reserved for Cameroon great Samuel Eto'o, now the head of the country's football federation, when his face appeared on the big screens. Eto'o is one of the continent's all-time great footballers, but this final brought together Africa's current superstar duo in Salah and Mane.

Desperate to make up for losing the 2019 final to Algeria, Senegal had a golden early chance to take the lead when outstanding left-back Saliou Ciss was chopped down by Abdelmonem in the box. Mane stepped up, but his kick was too close to the middle of the goal and Abou Gabal was able to save. Salah needed nearly half an hour to make an impact with a jinking run in from the right and a shot easily saved by Mendy, and the Chelsea goalkeeper then pro-

duced an excellent stop to tip a Salah effort over just before half-time.

Carlos Queiroz's Egypt team are masters of the dark arts, regularly looking to waste time, and the Portuguese coach himself was suspended here after losing his temper in the semi-final and being sent off. Their coaching staff pulled the strings on the touchline, moving Salah into a central role after an hour, and substitute centre-forward Marwan Hamdy missed a glorious chance soon after as he headed wide from point-blank range.

By then it was clear that Egypt were willing to go to extra time again, sure that they could rely on more heroics from their goalkeeper. Abou Gabal, nicknamed Gabaski, clawed away Boulaye Dia's 100th-minute header after a fine cross by Ciss, and he also kept out a Bamba Dieng piledriver in the second period of extra time. With Mendy saving from Hamdy at the other end, penalties were inevitable, and it proved to be Senegal's night with Bouna Sarr their only player to miss his kick. — AFP

Shiffrin slides out at Olympics

BEIJING: Double gold medalist Mikaela Shiffrin slid out in her bitterly disappointing opening race at the Beijing Olympics yesterday as two teenagers made their mark on their Games debuts. Kamila Valieva, a 15-year-old Russian, created figure skating history by becoming the first woman to land a quadruple jump in Olympic competition—and not content with doing it once she did it again.

And Californian-born Chinese freestyle skier Eileen Gu, 18, held her nerve to seal a place in the final of the Big Air event on her Games bow. Defending champion Shiffrin was among the favourites to retain the women's giant slalom title and win a third Olympic gold medal of her career, but in bright morning sunshine she made an error near the top of her first run and her race was over.

"There's a huge disappointment, not even counting medals," the 26-year-old said. "The day was finished basically before it even started." Shiffrin vowed to move on and quickly concentrate tomorrow's shorter slalom, a more technical event in which she is a four-time world champion. With Shiffrin out, Sara Hector of Sweden won the giant slalom for her first individual victory at a major championship.

Shiffrin's Norwegian boyfriend Aleksander Aamodt Kilde completed a miserable day for skiing's golden couple when he could only finish fifth in the men's downhill despite starting as favourite. Switzerland's Beat Feuz mastered a treacherous course to win the most prestigious

race in Olympic skiing, improving on his bronze from Pyeongchang four years ago.

Experience counted as the 34-year-old clocked 1min 42.69sec to finish 0.10sec ahead of 41-year-old Frenchman Johan Clarey, who became the oldest man or woman in history to win an Olympic alpine skiing medal. Austria's Matthias Mayer finished third while Kilde was more than half a second adrift of the winner. "The Olympics are a big thing and today it worked for me... It means the world to me," Feuz said. "I can't think of anything more beautiful than flying home with a gold medal around my neck."

At the Big Air Shougang venue, where enormous industrial cooling towers provide a gritty backdrop to the skiers' gravity-defying mid-air moves, Gu took her Olympic bow. The teenager, who has captivated China since switching allegiance from the United States three years ago, misjudged her second attempt, coming down in a tangle on her second run. She responded with a shrug and a smile and, with the pressure on, produced an assured third run to reach Tuesday's final—and give herself a chance of gold. "Oh my god!" she exclaimed to the cameras.

At the Capital Indoor Stadium, Valieva landed the quadruple jumps—when a skater rotates four times in the air—as she helped the Russians win gold in the figure skating team event. All eyes will now be on the teenager in the women's singles event next week to see if she can maintain the Russians' stranglehold on a title they have won at the last two Olympics. — AFP

Dakar explodes with joy



DAKAR: Supporters crowd the roads around the Dakar airport where the Senegalese football is scheduled to arrive after winning, for the first time, the Africa Cup of Nations (CAN). Senegal's President Macky Sall declared yesterday a public holiday to celebrate the national football team's first ever African Cup of Nations crown. — AFP

DAKAR: Dakar exploded with joy at the final whistle as Sadio Mane's Senegal beat Mohamed Salah's Egypt for their first ever Africa Cup of Nations crown. "African champions. What a game! What a team! You did it. Beautiful moment of football, beautiful moment of communion and national pride. Congratulations to our heroes," Senegalese President Macky Sall

tweeted after the Lions' win Sunday night. Sall declared Monday a national holiday to celebrate the "brilliant victory", public television announced. The president, who had been due to visit Comoros at the end of a trip that took in Egypt and Ethiopia, also cancelled the last leg in order to welcome the triumphant Lions on their return to Dakar at 1300 GMT

Monday, RTS television said. Dakar erupted when Liverpool star Mane scored the decisive penalty to give Senegal the win in a shoot-out (4-2) after the final finished goalless at the end of extra time.

Hundreds of supporters in Senegal jerseys flocked to Independence Square, near the presidential palace in the heart of Dakar, to celebrate. — AFP