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Prince William plants trees, builds bridges on UAE visit

Post-Brexit Britain seeks to strengthen ties with wealthy Gulf state

Zain Group net profit grows 2% to reach \$616 million

KUWAIT: Zain Group, a leading telecom innovator in seven markets across the Middle East and Africa, announces its consolidated financial results for the full-year 2021, and fourth quarter ended 31 December, 2021. The Group ended the year with a customer base of 48.9 million, an annual increase of 2.4%, reflecting an addition of 1.2 million customers.

For the full-year 2021, Zain Group generated consolidated revenue of KD 1.5 billion (\$5 billion), a year-on-year (Y-o-Y) decrease of 5%. Consolidated EBITDA for the period declined by 5% Y-o-Y, to reach KD 628 million (\$2.1 billion), reflecting an EBITDA margin of 41%. Consolidated net income reached KD 186 million (\$616 million), up 2% Y-o-Y and reflecting earnings per share of 43 Fils (\$0.14).

For the full-year 2021, currency devaluations in Sudan from 55 in January 2021 to 436 (SDG/\$) end of December 2021; in South Sudan from 175 in January 2021 to 426 (SSP/\$); and a 19% currency devaluation in Iraq from 1,190 to 1,470 (IQD/\$) resulted in a foreign currency translation impact of \$962 million in revenue and \$479 million in EBITDA.



Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO, Bader Al-Kharafi

Note, if the \$962 million currency translation impact on revenue was excluded, Y-o-Y revenue would have grown by 13% to reach \$6 billion, and EBITDA by 17% for 2021. The Board of Directors of Zain recommended a cash dividend of 23 fils per share for the second half of 2021, subject to Annual General Assembly and statutory approvals. (See Page 8)

DUBAI: Prince William made a climate-focused visit to the United Arab Emirates yesterday as post-Brexit Britain seeks to strengthen relations with the wealthy Gulf state. The duke of Cambridge, second in line to the British throne, visited an Abu Dhabi mangrove park before heading off to Dubai's Expo, where the UK pavilion was marking a "national day".

He was expected to discuss his Earthshot Prize, which rewards innovative solutions to environmental problems, and his United for Wildlife scheme with UAE officials. William's first official visit to the oil-rich former British protectorate bolsters ties after the UAE pledged billions of dollars in investment in UK industries in September.

The two countries also have strong defense links. The UAE was hit by a series of drone-and-missile attacks by Yemen rebels last month, while its relations with Gulf neighbor Iran are tense. However, the prince's visit concentrated largely on environmental issues as he planted saplings at Jubail Mangrove Park with Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, chairman of the Abu Dhabi executive office. They "discussed their work on globally impactful sustainability initiatives", the UAE's official WAM news agency said.

William tweeted: "The Mangrove Initiative will focus on sustainability and preserving the natural environment. These parks also play a role in their communities, especially for the next generation." He then headed to the neighboring emirate of Dubai, where he visited Jebel Ali Port, one of the world's busiest, to learn about efforts to fight the illegal wildlife trade. "The sheer scale of Jebel Ali Port is phenomenal," William tweeted.

He later arrived at Dubai's Expo site and was expected to meet with Crown Prince Sheikh Hamdan bin



ABU DHABI: Britain's Prince William, Duke of Cambridge, plants trees alongside two school children as he tours Abu Dhabi's wetlands at the Jubail Mangrove Park during an official visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) yesterday. —AFP

Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum. Expo, the \$7-billion world exhibition featuring 192 country pavilions, is being held as the UAE marks the 50th anniversary of its founding in 1971. In September, the UAE announced a five-year investment worth £10 billion (\$13.8 billion, 11.7 billion euros) in British companies focusing on technology, infrastructure and climate-focused energy transition.

It was announced following talks in London between Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed, the UAE's de facto ruler. The Johnson government had pledged to boost trade with the rest of the world, including the Middle East, after Britain left the European Union last year. William is touring the UAE after his 95-year-old grandmother, Queen Elizabeth II-Britain's longest-serving monarch—celebrated 70 years on the throne on Monday. —AFP

Saudi coffee legacy percolates through the generations

JIZAN: For Farah Al-Malki, growing coffee plants in Saudi Arabia's southwestern region of Jizan is more than just a profession. It is a family tradition passed down from generation to generation. The 90-year-old patriarch has a long history with coffee, which spread from Ethiopia to Yemen and then to the rest of the Middle East around the 15th century.

"My father inherited it from his grandfathers, and I took over and passed it down



JIZAN: Saudi farmer Ahmed Al-Malki, 42, harvests Khawlani coffee beans. —AFP

to my sons and then on to my grandchildren," Malki told AFP, as he watched his male relatives prune trees. Jizan is known

for its red Khawlani coffee beans, often blended with cardamom and saffron to give a yellowish hue of coffee—locally known as ghawa—and a taste markedly different from the bitter black liquid drunk elsewhere in the Middle East and in the West.

It remains an integral part of Saudi culture, so much so that the government has designated 2022 as "The Year of Saudi Coffee". Served with dates in homes and royal palaces across the kingdom, breaking barriers of societal hierarchy, ghawa is considered a symbol of hospitality and generosity. Donning the traditional dress of coffee farmers, a dark "chemise" shirt and ankle-length skirt known as a "wizrah", along with a belt holding a dagger, Malki is still tending to the fields despite his age. —AFP (See Page 13)

Science magazine on Wednesday. Up to now, archaeological discoveries had indicated that Neanderthals disappeared from the European continent about 40,000 years ago, shortly after the arrival of their "cousin" Homo sapiens, barely 5,000 years earlier and there was no evidence of an encounter between these two groups.

The new discovery, by a team of archaeologists and palaeoanthropologists led by Ludovic Slimak of Toulouse University, pushes back the arrival of

Homo sapiens in Western Europe to around 54,000 years ago. Another remarkable finding of the research is that the two types of humans alternated in inhabiting the Mandrin cave in what is now the Rhone region of southern France.

The Mandrin site, first excavated in 1990, includes layer upon layer of archaeological remains dating back over 80,000 years. "Mandrin is like a kind of neanderthal Pompeii, without catastrophic

Continued on Page 2



Saleh Al-Ojairi

Kuwaiti astronomer Al-Ojairi dies at 101

By Ahmad Jabr

KUWAIT: Saleh Al-Ojairi, Kuwait's most prolific, well-known and highly regarded astronomer passed away yesterday. He was 101 years old. Ojairi leaves behind a legacy in science unmatched in Kuwait and the region with contributions in astronomy, meteorology, mathematics and other fields that served as a main source of knowledge and reference to generations of professionals and amateurs alike.

Ojairi is credited for introducing

astronomy and meteorology to Kuwait, where he built the country's first observatory in the early 1970s. The Ojairi Calendar, first issued in 1952, is considered the most authentic and used calendar in Kuwait to follow dates and prayer times. He also has several publications, research papers and a library named after him. A beloved figure, Kuwait lost in Ojairi one of its pioneers and the man considered by many as the godfather of scientific research in Kuwait and the Gulf. (See Page 3)

Minister condemns headscarf ban for Muslim footballers

PARIS: France's gender equality minister threw her support yesterday behind Muslim women footballers who are seeking to overturn a ban on players wearing headscarves on the pitch. Rules set by the

French Football Federation currently prevent players taking part in competitive matches from wearing "ostentatious" religious symbols such as Muslim headscarves or the Jewish kippa.

A women's collective known as "les Hijabeuses" launched a legal challenge to the rules in November last year, claiming they were discriminatory and infringed their right to practice their religion. "The law says that these young women can wear a headscarf and play football. On football pitches today, headscarves are not

forbidden. I want the law to be respected," Equality Minister Elisabeth Moreno told LCI television.

Two months from French presidential elections, the issue has become a talking point in a country that maintains a strict form of secularism that is meant to separate the state and religion. The French Senate, which is dominated by the right-wing Republicans party, proposed a law in January that would have banned the wearing of obvious religious symbols in all

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Local

Panelists discuss suggestions for better distribution of constituencies in Kuwait

Law professors, activists mull ways to improve electoral system

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The Women's Cultural and Social Society (WCSS) in cooperation with the Kuwait Transparency Society held a discussion panel titled 'electoral system and fairness of constituencies' on Wednesday to discuss opinions and suggestions for a better electoral system in Kuwait.

Dr Mohammed Al-Faili, constitutional expert and teacher of law at Kuwait University's Faculty of Law, thinks that the constituencies should be set by law. "The legislator should decide the number of constituencies - between one and 50. The constituencies are subject to change by time, as population is growing. The number of voters



KUWAIT: The speakers are seen during the discussion panel. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

“ Discussing constituencies is part of political reforms ”

changes significantly in some constituencies. In some cases, some people may change their address to be able to vote for certain candidates in a certain constituency. This practice is unfair, but it cannot be officially proved," he noted.

Elections are the way to form the parliament, which is the tool for practicing the legislative and authority and monitoring the executive authority. "The parliament represents all people living in Kuwait," Faili said. "The parliament cannot practice its legislative work without institutional work. In that case, it is practiced according to individual skills rather than teamwork."

Real expression

Dr Mohammed Al-Mgatea, general law teacher at Kuwait University's Faculty of Law, spoke about

the real expression of the nation's will through ballot boxes and his suggestion for the distribution of constituencies and the voting system. "Discussing the constituencies is part of the political reforms. The electoral system is the main gate for any reforms. Unfortunately, the personal interest of the MPs and the personal interest of certain groups decide how constituencies are divided, which has spoiled the electoral system," he argued.

"We should change the traditional way of dividing the constituencies. What suites certain countries may not suit us. We should choose the non-geographical constituencies' system. We should also limit the migration of voters from one constituency to another which is a serious problem. Furthermore, the by-elections, which are illegal, are still practiced, unfortunately. Selling votes

is also popular. The reforms of the electoral system will actively eliminate all these negative aspects," stressed Mgatea.

He proposed a new electoral system based on the date of birth. "In this system, the voters will be chosen randomly by draw in five constituencies every six days for a period of 30 days. The constituencies will be balanced number wise, and also in terms of social variety including all groups, sects, and tribes of the Kuwaiti community. The difference in number of voters won't be more than 3.5 percent between all constituencies. At least nine countries around the world are applying this system," he concluded.

Mixed system

Salah Al-Ghazali, Head of the Kuwait

Transparency Society, said that the mixed electoral system is the best option in Kuwait as it has more positives than negatives. "Our present electoral system is unique and only half percent of countries around the world are applying it. The proportional electoral system is not successful. We should not leave this issue for a few MPs to decide, but rather we should seek the support of non-governmental organizations," he stated.

Abdullah Al-Ahmad, representing the Kuwait Democratic Forum, suggested having six constituencies according to the six governorates of Kuwait. "We aim to include all categories and minorities of the community in these constituencies, so all people will be represented in the parliament. This will be based on electoral roles," he pointed out.

Kuwait Airways career fair underway



KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways opened yesterday its annual career fair, held at its head office building on February 10-12, 2022.

Study places Homo sapiens in Europe...

Continued from Page 1

events, but with continuous filling of sands in the cave deposited progressively by a strong wind, the Mistral," Slimak told AFP. His team uncovered a layer, known as the "E layer", containing at least 1,500 cut flint points, more finely executed than the points and blades in the layers above and below.

Very small in size, some of them less than a centimetre in length, these points "are standardised, to the nearest millimetre, something we haven't seen at all with Neanderthals," said Slimak, a specialist in Neanderthal societies. These, he explained, were probably arrowheads, unknown in Europe at that time. He attributes this production to a culture called Neronian, linked to several sites in the Rhone area.

In 2016, Slimak and his team visited the Peabody Museum in Harvard to compare their discoveries with a collection of carved fossils from the Ksar Akil site at the foot of Mount Lebanon, one of the major sites of the expansion of Homo sapiens to the east of the Mediterranean. The similarity between the techniques used convinced Slimak that the findings at the Mandrin site were the first traces of Homo Sapiens found in Europe.

A milk tooth found in the "E layer" confirmed his suspicions. In all researchers found nine teeth at the Mandrin

cave site, belonging to six individuals. These ancient teeth were entrusted to Clement Zanolli, a palaeoanthropologist at the University of Bordeaux. Using microtomography, similar to medical scanning technology, the verdict was clear. The milk tooth from the "E" layer "was the only modern human tooth found at the site. That "fossil molar from a modern human child provides the earliest known evidence of modern humans in western Europe", the Natural History Museum in London said in a statement.

The archaeological team then used a pioneering technique, fuliginochronology, which analyses layers of soot impregnating the walls of a cave and the traces of ancient fires. The researchers demonstrated that "this Modern human population occupied this Rhone territory for some 40 years," said Slimak. At some point, the two populations either co-existed in the cave or on the same territory, the researcher concluded. He imagines that Neanderthals could have served as guides to Homo Sapiens to lead him to the best sources of flint available, some of which were located up to 90 kilometers (55 miles) away.

"Nothing new under the sun... This is precisely what happened when Europeans began the colonization of the Americas or Australia," he noted. "The findings from Mandrin are really exciting and are another piece in the puzzle of how and when modern humans arrived in Europe," concludes Professor Chris Stringer, co-author of the study and a specialist in human evolution at the Natural History Museum in London. "Understanding more about the overlap between modern humans and other hominins in Eurasia is vital to understanding more about their interactions, and how we became the last remaining human species," he added. — AFP

Minister condemns headscarf ban for...

Continued from Page 1

competitive sports. It was rejected in the lower house on Wednesday where President Emmanuel Macron's centrist Republic on the Move party and allies hold the majority.

Submission?

France's laws on secularism guarantee religious freedom to all citizens, and contain no provisions on banning the wearing of religious symbols in public spaces, with the exception of full-face coverings which were outlawed in 2010. Employees of state institutions are also forbidden from displaying their religion, as are school children. Many right-wing politicians in France want to widen restrictions on the headscarf, seeing it as a political statement in support of Islamism and an affront to French values.

In recent years, they have proposed banning mothers accompanying children on school trips from wearing headscarves, and have sought to proscribe the full-body swimsuit known as the burkini. Eric Ciotti, a hard-right MP from the conservative Republicans party, said Wednesday that the refusal

of Macron's party to support a ban on religious symbols in sport left "an awful aftertaste of submission."

"Everywhere Islamism wants to impose its rules," the ally of Republicans presidential candidate Valerie Pécresse said in parliament. "The veil is a prison for women, an object of submission and a negation of the individual," he added to boos from the ruling party. Moreno said Thursday that "in public space, women can dress as they like" before adding: "My fight is to protect those that are forced to wear the veil."

Demonstration

A planned demonstration by "les Hijabeuses" collective in front of the French parliament on Wednesday was banned by city authorities on security grounds. "We feel all of this is a great injustice," Foune Diawara, a co-founder, told AFP in an interview in January. "We just want to play football. We're not pro-Hijab activists, just football fans."

In 2014, the International Football Association Board (IFAB) authorized women to wear headscarves in games after deciding that the hijab was a cultural rather than a religious symbol. The French Football Federation argues that it is simply following French law, with the country's top constitutional court set to rule on the issue following the appeal from "les Hijabeuses". — AFP

Local

Ojairi, a pioneer with a passion for knowledge that inspired generations

Fear turned into curiosity that fueled lifelong drive to learn



Kuwait's late astronomer Saleh Al-Ojairi



Saleh Al-Ojairi with the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.



Saleh Al-Ojairi

By Ahmad Jabr

KUWAIT: Saleh Al-Ojairi, Kuwait's most prolific, well-known and highly regarded astronomer passed away yesterday. He was 101 years old. Ojairi leaves behind a legacy in science unmatched in Kuwait and the region with contributions in astronomy, meteorology, mathematics and other fields that served as a main source of knowledge and reference to generations of professionals and amateurs alike.

Ojairi is credited for introducing astronomy and meteorology to Kuwait, where he built the country's first observatory in the early 1970s. The Ojairi Calendar, first issued in 1952, is considered the most authentic and used calendar in Kuwait to follow dates and prayer times. He also has several publications, research papers and a library named after him. A beloved figure, Kuwait lost in Ojairi one of its pioneers and the man considered by many as the godfather of scientific research in Kuwait and the Gulf.



Saleh Al-Ojairi with one of his astrology equipment.

schools, and one of his most famous students was the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Ojairi's love for astronomy started at a very young age. As a child, he used to get afraid of natural phenomena such as thunder and lightning. But his fear soon turned into curiosity when his family would explain to him how those events happened. After noticing his enthusiasm to learn, his father decided to send him to the desert where he stayed with a Bedouin tribe for a short time to learn their lifestyle as well as skills such as shooting and horse riding. There under the starry skies of the desert is where Ojairi's curiosity turned into a lifelong passion for astronomy.

At age 18, Ojairi had already become an avid reader when he found a book that would change his life forever: 'Al-Manahag Al-Hamedia' by Egyptian writer and astronomer Ghaith Abdul Hamid Morsi. Enamored with the book, Ojairi decided to travel to Egypt and meet the author in person, and this was the first real step in his journey to knowledge. In Egypt, Ojairi also met famous astronomer Abdul Fattah Waheed who taught him the basics of astronomy. He then went to Cairo where he studied at the King Fuad University (modern day Cairo University) and earned a degree in astronomy. He later went to the Helwan Observatory, one of the oldest and most important in the Arab world, where he learned from renowned scholars including Abdul Hamid Samaha. Eventually, the Egyptian Association of Astronomy granted Ojairi a certificate in astronomy in appreciation for his publications and scientific research.

Passion for knowledge

Ojairi's journey did not come without adversity, which he overcame through passion, dedication, hard work and patience - his trademark drive that inspired generations. His travels had to wait until the end of World War II; and even then, transportation among countries was almost nonexistent. But he still chose to travel to Egypt fueled by an unending desire for knowledge.

In an interview with Kuwait Times published in 2015, Ojairi tells the story of how he made it to Cairo in order to meet his favorite writer. "I traveled to Egypt to meet the writer who made my brain explode with questions," he said. "At that time, we had no buses or planes, so I went to Egypt through land. I traveled from Kuwait to Basra, then to Beirut, Alexandria and finally to Cairo."

"I met the writer who welcomed me and taught me a lot, but he kept his valued books away from me and I was dying just to take them and read," Ojairi said, later explaining that he went back to his teacher's house after his death and his widow gave him the books as a gift.

Ojairi had several publications in astronomy throughout his illustrious career that remain of great value in libraries throughout the Arab world. In 1952, Ojairi released a calendar carrying his name, and Kuwait has since adopted it as the official calendar of



Saleh Al-Ojairi posing with his state award for scientific research.

The beginnings

Born on June 23, 1920 in the Qibla neighborhood of Kuwait City, Ojairi received his primary education in kuttabs before moving to his father's school which was established in the late 1920s. Ojairi then enrolled in Kuwait's first public school; the Mubarakiya School where his genius became evident to teachers who noticed his great skills in mathematics that were way above average for his age. After graduation, he worked as a teacher in the Sharqiya and Ahmediya



Saleh Al-Ojairi with one of his telescopes.



Astrology tools and equipment in Saleh Al-Ojairi's office.



Saleh Al-Ojairi with His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Amir expresses condolences over Ojairi's demise

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of condolences yesterday to the family of the late Dr Saleh Mohammad Al-Ojairi. In the cable, His Highness the Amir expressed sincere condolences to the deceased's family, praying to Almighty Allah to bestow mercy upon his soul. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables.

National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem also mourned the demise of Dr Ojairi, who he said has left "a rich legacy in science and astronomy that must be protected as a valuable reference." Ghanem expressed con-

dolences to the family of the late astronomer and to the Kuwaiti people in general.

Minister of Information Dr Hamad Rouh El-Din mourned Ojairi, saying in a press statement that the late astronomer was the founder of astronomy in Kuwait and the region with many contributions, scientific achievements, and books that have enriched scientific libraries. Furthermore, he expressed his sincere condolences to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and the Kuwaiti people.

Kuwait's National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) also mourned Ojairi yesterday. In a press release, NCCAL Spokesperson Dr Eissa Al-Ansari conveyed the condolences of the Minister of Information and all the council's staff over the demise of the late astronomer. Meanwhile, Al-Ojairi Scientific Center mourned its Chairman of the Board of Directors Dr Saleh Al-Ojairi, who passed away earlier yesterday at age of 101 years. — KUNA

of the state. Many of the astronomy equipment and tools in Ojairi's observatory were brought by Ojairi himself from the US and UK on his own expense. Ojairi earned an honorary PhD from Kuwait University in 1981, and the Gulf Cooperation Council granted him its top honors in scientific research in 1988.

Ojairi's never-ending passion for knowledge and endless drive to learn more earned him the love, respect and appreciation of all in Kuwait where he is considered a national hero and a role model. Ojairi's name is synonymous with science in a country that is home to one of the Gulf's first universities: Kuwait University that was established in 1966. While his journey has inspired many in Kuwait and the Arab world to follow in his footsteps, his legacy will undoubtedly continue to inspire science lovers for generations to come.



Saleh Al-Ojairi with his telescope.



Saleh Al-Ojairi with some of his awards.

Local

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Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.netSlovak ambassador
congratulates
Kuwait on
national holidays

KUWAIT: Ambassador of the Slovak Republic to the State of Kuwait Igor Hajdusek released a statement congratulating Kuwait on its national holidays. "On behalf of the people, government and the Embassy of the Slovak Republic to the State of



Igor Hajdusek

Kuwait, I have the great honour to convey my warmest congratulations and best wishes to HH Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Amir of the State of Kuwait, HH Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Crown Prince, the government and the friendly people of the State of Kuwait on the

auspicious occasion of the 61st Anniversary of the National Day and 31st Anniversary of the Liberation Day of the State of Kuwait," the ambassador said.

"I am delighted to note that the friendly ties and good cooperation between the Slovak Republic and the State of Kuwait have continuously developed over the past decades," he wrote "I am convinced that our countries boast great potential on the way to developing mutually beneficial cooperation in the political, cultural, scientific, commercial and economic spheres. May I take this opportunity to wish His Highness robust health, every success and the friendly Kuwaiti people continued progress and prosperity."

Dishdashas losing their lure? More
Kuwaiti youth prefer to dress casual

Kuwait's national dress limited for official occasions only



KUWAIT: A vendor shows a dishdasha at a shop in Kuwait City.

— Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



A vendor surrounded by dishdashas in a shop in Kuwait City.

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti men, especially youths, are not wearing the traditional dishdasha daily anymore. Many bedouin still wear it, while many urbanites don't. But the dishdasha is still the official dress for formal occasions, such as weddings.

Khaled, 36, said he has been wearing Western outfits since he was a child. "I find pants much more comfortable. For me comfort is the most important thing, as I find the dishdasha uncomfortable. Yet I still wear it when attending weddings, as it is essential. After attending a wedding, if I want to go somewhere else, I will first pass by home to change my clothes," he told Kuwait Times.

Fahad, 31, echoed Khaled. "The dishdasha is only for weddings or funerals. Young Kuwaitis are not wearing it even for diwaniya gatherings. Casual outfits are much more comfortable for moving freely. I regularly go to the gym, so I always wear sports outfits. I can't go to the gym in a dishdasha," he pointed out.

"Some people like to wear a dishdasha as part of their traditions. But time has changed, and I definitely prefer casual outfits. I only wear a dishdasha for weddings and for Eid gatherings, but for the shortest time possible. Even at my workplace at the citizen service department, I wear casual outfits as they don't demand wearing a dishdasha," Fahad added.

Jazzaf, a 34-year-old teacher, also doesn't wear the dishdasha. "I wear pants because they are more comfortable and give me much freer movement than a dishdasha. Also, if I stain or burn my pants, no wor-

ries! But a dishdasha would look bad if you get a coffee or ketchup stain on it while dining out," he said.

Even some older Kuwaitis prefer to dress casually every day. Salem, 54, only wears a dishdasha for official occasions such as weddings, mourning gatherings and Eid visits. "I have got used to wearing casuals and rarely wear a dishdasha. When I was still working, I used to wear a dishdasha to work, but after I retired, I stopped doing so. In fact, I stopped wearing a dishdasha 15 years ago!" he told Kuwait Times.

"I used to wear dishdasha when visiting diwaniyas, but not anymore. Earlier, the diwaniyas I

“ Comfort is the most important thing ”

visited demanded wearing a dishdasha, but the dress code has been relaxed now. Most of my friends also wear casuals, even when going to the diwaniya. But for Eid, till today I have to get a new dishdasha. All my sons also wear it during Eid," Salem added.

Mohammed, 47, wore only dishdashas till the age of 14. "After that I started wearing casuals. I don't



Ghurras of different patterns on display.

even wear a dishdasha to work as I'm a mechanical engineer - I wear a uniform. I still wear a dishdasha for weddings and funerals. But I try to avoid weddings because of the dishdasha, especially since I only buy a new one once every few years. Even during Eid I don't wear a dishdasha, unless I have to visit people outside the family," he noted.

Among his friends, Mohammed is the only person who goes to diwaniyas not wearing a dishdasha. "For me, it's a habit to dress casually. At my age, I can't wear dishdasha without the ghutra and egal. This is the main reason why I don't wear a dishdasha, as I don't like to wear the ghutra and egal. If I have to wear the ghutra, it will take me over half an hour in front of the mirror to wear it properly," stressed Mohammed.

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Booster open for
16+ age group; no
appointments for 40+

KUWAIT: Children aged 16 and above can receive their booster dose of the COVID-19 vaccine six months after taking their second, the health ministry said yesterday. Meanwhile, it announced that people aged 40 and higher can now take their booster at any vaccination center

without prior appointment, while those aged under 40 still need an appointment. Kuwait had reported 3,324 new COVID-19 cases yesterday in addition to three deaths and 5,495 recoveries. Meanwhile, the number of patients in ICU's dropped to 91, while the number of patients hospitalized reached 473. Total active cases also dropped to 47,748. The percentage of daily new cases to new tests dropped to 11.8 percent while the percentage of recovery reached 91.5 percent, according to the health ministry's bulletin. Yesterday's figures brought total infections to 593,889, deaths to 2,517 and recoveries to 543,624.



KUWAIT: Officials attend the closing session of the Seventh GCC Cancer Awareness Week yesterday. —KUNA

Awareness of
cancer risk factors
rose to 65%: Official

KUWAIT: The social awareness of the dangers and risk factors of cancer reached 65 percent in Gulf countries, Secretary-General of the Gulf Union for Fighting Cancer Dr Khaled Al-Saleh said yesterday. In a speech he delivered at the closing session of the Seventh GCC Cancer Awareness Week, Saleh said that the new rates resulted from spreading social health awareness, which helped increase the cured cases from cancer in Kuwait and other GCC countries. He stressed the importance of cooperation between the public and private health sectors to succeed in raising levels of cancer awareness, noting that the late diagnosis rates have decreased, while cured cases from cancer have remarkably increased.

Upon the occasion, the Head of the coordinating committee Dr Hessah Al-Shaheen said that more than 35 activities were presented during the Seventh GCC Cancer Awareness Week, aiming to

send awareness messages to society and to help patients of all types of cancer. On her part, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Sidra Association for the Psychological Care of Cancer Patients, Sheikhha Azza Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah, stressed in her speech the role played by the Gulf Union the field of community awareness for cancer patients and the services provided by the association. It focuses on the psychological treatment of the people with cancer in all stages of the disease, by creating a positive environment surrounding the patients and their relatives that will enable them to adapt to their health condition and enhance their response to medical treatment, she said.

Meanwhile, the Honorary President of the Kuwait Association for Health Promotion and Health Media, Sheikhha Anisa Salem Al-Hamoud Al-Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah emphasized the important activities of the Gulf Week in the field of cancer awareness and its role in educating people about the importance of early detection. In her speech, she praised the important role played by the media in raising health awareness and health behaviors that would lead to a society with a high level of awareness with a healthy lifestyle that would help in achieving the goals of sustainable development. —KUNA



Hardline Hindu monk seeks re-election in key Indian state

Paris bans Canada-style COVID 'freedom convoys'

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CHUGUEV, Ukraine: Ukrainian Military Forces servicemen of the 92nd mechanized brigade use tanks, self-propelled guns and other armored vehicles to conduct live-fire exercises near the town of Chuguev, in the Kharkiv region, yesterday. —AFP

Russia, Belarus launch military drills

West fears Ukraine invasion amid tensions

MOSCOW: Russia and Belarus launched joint military drills yesterday that heightened tensions and added urgency to diplomatic efforts by NATO leaders to avert a feared invasion of Ukraine. The war games, set to run until February 20, are the latest point of contention between Russia and the West over Ukraine. Kyiv quickly denounced the manoeuvres as "psychological pressure".

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian called the exercises "a very violent gesture" while British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss used a visit to Moscow to accuse Russia of attempting "to undermine Ukrainian sovereignty". NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said the build up was "a dangerous moment for European security".

Western leaders have been warning for weeks that Russia could be preparing to escalate an eight-year separatist conflict in east Ukraine after building up of some 100,000 troops around the former Soviet state. The United States has said Russia is also dispatching some 30,000 troops to Ukraine's neighbor Belarus for the exercises that started yesterday. Columns of Russian missile systems rolled across snow-carpeted fields on the eve of the start of the drills in footage released by the defense ministry.

Russia has also sent six warship through the Bosphorus for naval drills on the Black Sea and the neighboring Sea of Azov. Kyiv denounced their presence as "unprecedented" attempt to cut off Ukraine for both seas. Moscow and Minsk have not disclosed how many troops are taking part in the military exercises in Belarus. "The objective of the exercises is to practice suppressing and repelling external aggression with a defensive operation," the Russian defense ministry said in a statement.

UK urges 'diplomatic route'

Answering Western concerns, the Kremlin has insisted the Russian troops in Belarus will go home after the exer-

cises. But Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky said "the accumulation of forces at the border is psychological pressure from our neighbors".

Kyiv has launched its own military drills expected to mirror Russia's games in Belarus, but officials have said little about them out apparent fear of escalating tensions. The diplomatic crisis has spurred weeks of talks between Russian, Western and Ukrainian officials. Those efforts have drawn cautious optimism for negotiated solution, with French President Emmanuel Macron saying he had secured a pledge from Russian leader Vladimir Putin that Moscow "would not be the source of an escalation".



The latest point of contention

Russia has put sweeping security demands to the United States and the Washington-led NATO military alliance with the aim of reducing their role in eastern Europe and former Soviet states. Britain's Truss was the latest Western diplomat to travel to Moscow to sound on Russia's latest stance. Truss told her counterpart Sergei Lavrov in opening remarks that Britain "cannot ignore" Russia's troop buildup or "attempts to undermine Ukrainian sovereignty". "There is an alternative route, a diplomatic route that avoids conflict and bloodshed," she

said. "I am here to urge Russia to take that path".

'Road to nowhere'

Lavrov replied that Western threats towards Moscow would do nothing to ease tensions over Ukraine. "Ideological approaches, ultimatums, threats-this is the road to nowhere," Lavrov said. Truss's trip comes just days after Macron conducted a round of shuttle diplomacy between Moscow and Kyiv, and then briefed German Chancellor Olaf Scholz about his progress in Berlin. The German chancellor will travel to Kyiv and Moscow next week for separate meetings with the Ukrainian and Russian leaders, including his first in-person meeting with Putin.

Scholz is due to meet Baltic leaders in Berlin. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson will meanwhile meet with NATO officials before travelling to Warsaw to hold talks with Polish President Andrzej Duda. Pentagon spokesman John Kirby warned Wednesday that Putin has continued sending troops to the border. The United States has been sending a steady supply of ammunition to Ukraine, delivering its tenth shipment by a military cargo jet on Wednesday night. Ukrainian officials have used more cautious language to describe the immediacy of the threat of the Russian build-up.

Deputy Defense Minister Ganna Malyar said Wednesday the Russian forces on the frontier were being used primarily "for political pressure and blackmail". Fighting between Kyiv's army and Russian-backed separatists who control parts of two breakaway regions has claimed more than 14,000 lives since breaking out in 2014. It began weeks after Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimea peninsula, sparking a wave of economic penalties from the West, which the United States and the European have said they will expand if Russia escalates again. —AFP

Madagascar cyclone toll rises to 92 amid calls for aid

ANTANANARIVO: The death toll from Tropical Cyclone Batsirai has risen to 92 in Madagascar, authorities said Wednesday, as humanitarian organizations ramped up aid efforts with more than 110,000 people in need of emergency assistance. The National Office for Risk and Disaster Management (BNGRC) released data from the hardest-hit regions revealing that 71 of the dead were in Ikongo district, near the east coast of the Indian Ocean island nation.

BNGRC director general Paolo Emilio Raholinarivo said that Batsirai, which made landfall on the weekend, had left 112,000 people needing emergency assistance and forced 61,000 from their homes. "It's devastation here," said Brunelle Razafintsindrofa, a lawmaker from Ikongo who spoke to AFP by phone. "Most of the victims died after their homes collapsed." Many NGOs and UN agencies have begun to deploy resources and teams to help the victims of the cyclone which brought heavy rain and winds of 165 kilometers per hour.

France sent 60 emergency workers to help set up facilities for purifying drinking water, and to fly drones to assess damage in areas that are difficult to reach even at the best of times. The tropical

cyclone hit Madagascar on Saturday night, on a 150-kilometre long, sparsely populated and agricultural eastern coastal area. As the cyclone moved inland, it caused flooding that ravaged rice fields in the country's central "breadbasket", raising fears of a humanitarian crisis.

Food security 'seriously affected'

German experts have arrived in the country, one of the poorest on the planet, to "support the humanitarian response in the Batsirai passage areas", the BNGRC said. Work is underway on the 20 roads and the 17 bridges that were cut and had isolated villages, it added. "We know for sure that rice fields, that rice crops will be damaged, will be lost," said Pasqualina DiSirio, director of the World Food Program in the country. "This is the main crop for Malagasy people and they will be seriously affected in food security in the next three to six months if we don't do something immediately." The UN agency distributed hot meals in Manakara, one of the most affected areas.

The French Red Cross launched an aid appeal, and deployed 87 tons of humanitarian aid from its facilities in Madagascar and the nearby French island of Reunion. Numerous aid organizations, including Action Against Hunger, Handicap International, Save the Children and Medecins du Monde, were mobilized ahead of the cyclone, organizing equipment and medicines. Alongside the aid provided by the government, they provided assistance to the victims: food, primary health care



IRONDRRO: Jocelyn Germain (56) cuts down a tree with an axe that fell on his son's house following the passage of cyclone Batsirai in Irondro. The death toll from Tropical Cyclone Batsirai has risen to 92 in Madagascar. —AFP

and the distribution of kitchen equipment, blankets, hygiene products.

Some 77 percent of Madagascar's 28 million people 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. Madagascar was still picking up the pieces after Tropical Storm Ana affected at least 131,000 people across the island late last month, with most of the 55 deaths occurring in the capital Antananarivo. Ana also hit Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, causing dozens of deaths. —AFP



BAMAKO: A market is pictured in Bamako. According to the UN, Mali imports 70% of its daily food. The effect of West African sanctions is less obvious for the moment on the daily lives of some 20 million Malians —AFP

Mali stands firm against economic sanctions

BAMAKO: Mali's ruling military junta has appeared unflinching so far in the face of economic sanctions imposed a month ago by the country's West African neighbors, despite indications the measures are beginning to bite. In response to the junta postponing promised elections following 2020's coup, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) imposed a trade embargo and closed borders with Mali, in a move backed by France, the United States and the European Union.

ECOWAS leaders also halted financial aid and froze Mali's assets at the Central Bank of West African States. The measures followed a proposal from Mali's junta to stay in power for up to five years before staging elections-despite an earlier commitment to hold a vote on February 27. Mali's military rulers have remained firm, and appear to enjoy popular support, despite the sanctions beginning to have an effect in one of the world's poorest countries.

In one of the first tangible consequences of the measures, Mali defaulted on debt repayments worth more than \$30 million in late January. Many ordinary Malians also told AFP that they have seen price rises since the imposition of sanctions, even though the measures do not apply to basic necessities. "I'm buying fewer onions and less oil, even though that's what we cook the most," said Mame Koita, a 46-year-old mother of four, in front of a market stall in the capital Bamako.

Swathes of Mali's territory lie outside of government control due to a brutal jihadist insurgency that first emerged in 2012, and has long hampered economic growth. Mariam Diakite, who launched a consumer association last year, said that the current situation for ordinary Malians is "really pitiful". "The sanctions add to an already existing situation," she told AFP. —AFP

International

Paris bans Canada-style
COVID 'freedom convoys'

France fears a repeat of 'yellow vests' protests

PARIS: Paris police said yesterday they would ban so-called "freedom convoys" inspired by a truckers' protest against coronavirus restrictions that has paralyzed the Canadian capital Ottawa. Convoys of vehicles from across France are expected to converge on the French capital today, risking a possible standoff with the police similar to the violent "yellow vest" protests that rocked the country in 2018.

A repeat of the "yellow vests"—a nationwide movement against social inequality—would be unwelcome for President Emmanuel Macron as he prepares for April 2022 elections he remains favorite to win. "There will be a special deployment... to prevent blockages of major roads, issue tickets and arrest those who infringe on this protest ban," the Paris police force said in a statement.

The city's ban order will remain in force from today to Monday, while police recalled that people blocking roads faced up to two years in prison, a fine of 4,500 euros (\$5,140) and a three-year exclusion from driving. Thousands of people opposed to France's vaccine pass, which restricts access to much of public life to those with the COVID-19 jab, have said on social media that they would rally in Paris. Some plan to continue on to European Union capital Brussels on Monday.



Thousands
oppose France
vaccine pass

'An aberration'

The movement is "far from having a solid structure" but "this especially media-friendly new form of action could give new momentum to different protest groups," a police report seen by broadcaster RTL and newspaper Le Parisien said earlier this week. A number of convoys of cars, vans and motorbikes set off from around France on Wednesday, inspired by the two-week blockade of central Ottawa by truckers angry at testing and vaccine requirements for crossing the border with the US.

Eyhande Abeberry, 52, a participant at the send-off in the southern French city of Bayonne, told AFP that the vaccine pass was "an aberration". But as in Canada, where the protest has broadened from the issues that first triggered it, others including purchasing power

and energy costs have motivated some French participants.

Those were also at the root of the "yellow vests" demonstrations. With an election first round coming on April 10, Macron's government has already mobilized billions of euros to limit the impact on households of surging gas and petrol prices. Far-right presidential candidate Marine Le Pen said that she "understood" the protesters' goals, saying that it was "another form of the yellow vests" demonstrations.



BAYONNE, France: A man holds a poster that reads "I support the Convoi de La Liberté" as it departs from Bayonne towards Paris in southwestern France. Thousands of opponents to the health pass have announced on social networks that they want to "drive on Paris" as part of a citizens' action called "freedom convoys". —AFP

Government spokesman Gabriel Attal said he recognized the public's "weariness" with infection control measures, but insisted that France had been among the European countries with "the fewest restrictions that infringe on citizens' freedom".

In a nod to public impatience ahead of the elections with France's tough COVID rules, Attal also indicated that the country may be in a position to drop its obligatory vaccine pass in late March or early April as cases fall. —AFP

A prominent Ugandan
author flees into exile

KAMPALA: A prominent Ugandan novelist who was charged with insulting President Yoweri Museveni and his son has fled the country out of fear for his life, his lawyer said Wednesday. "He has left Uganda," Eron Kiiza, the lawyer for Kakwenza Rukirabashaija, told AFP, adding that his client was seeking medical treatment abroad for injuries inflicted during his time in jail.

"He fears poisoning as a result of his injuries and the injections of unknown substances he was subjected to," Kiiza said. He said the 33-year-old, who last year won an international award given to persecuted writers, had told him he was in neighboring Rwanda and was aiming to reach Europe.

Rukirabashaija was detained shortly after Christmas and later charged with "offensive communication" in a case that has raised international concern, with the European Union among those calling for a "comprehensive investigation" into rights abuses in Uganda. He said he was tortured in custody and appeared on television at the weekend to reveal painful-looking welts criss-crossing his back and scars on other parts of his body.

"They beat me with batons, everywhere. You collapse, they beat you, you get up, you go into unconsciousness," he said in the interview with NTV Uganda broadcast on Saturday. The charges against him relate to unflattering comments on Twitter about Museveni, who has ruled Uganda since 1986, and his powerful son Muhoozi Kainerugaba. In one post, he described Kainerugaba, a general who many Ugandans believe is positioning himself to take over from his 77-year-old father, as "obese" and a "curmudgeon". He was released on bail last month, with his trial due to begin on March 23. Chief magistrate Douglas Singiza had refused to relax Rukirabashaija's bail conditions, which included a hold on his passport and an order not to speak to journalists.

'Plucked my flesh'

In Saturday's television interview—carried out despite the bail conditions—the author said he was forced to dance without rest for days alongside other prisoners. Describing a technique other Ugandan dissidents claim has been used against them, Rukirabashaija also said tools were used to torture him. "They were getting pliers and they plucked flesh from my thighs, everywhere," he said, also charging that he was injected several times with an unknown substance against his will. Kiiza said his client was aiming to go to Germany for treatment. "He told me he was in Rwanda and going to another country and heading to Europe," he added. "He hopes to get some travel documentation from a neighbouring country and use that to go to Germany." Uganda and Rwanda have recently moved to repair relations after years of hostility, with the land border reopened last month.

And Museveni's son Kainerugaba posted on Twitter that he had spoken to Rwandan President Paul Kagame who told him that the author was not in Rwanda. On Monday, the EU and several member nations released a statement expressing concern over "a significant increase of reports of torture, arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, harassment as well as attacks against human rights defenders, members of the opposition and environmental rights activists".

Uganda has witnessed a series of crackdowns aimed at stamping out dissent, with journalists attacked, lawyers jailed, election monitors prosecuted and opposition leaders violently muzzled. Rukirabashaija won acclaim for his 2020 satirical novel "The Greedy Barbarian", which describes high-level corruption in a fictional country. —AFP

Refugee camp in
Bogota park evokes
pain of conflict

BOGOTA: Far from their ancestral homes, more than 1,000 indigenous people displaced by conflict have been squatting in squalor since September in one of the Colombian capital's most emblematic parks. "We want rights and dignified conditions... food and security," said Luz Mary Querağama, one of the group's representatives.

There are around 550 children among about 1,300 people camping in the National Park that sits alongside one of the busiest avenues in Bogota. Some children are suffering from "malnutrition" and cold, said Querağama. The majority of the squatters come from the Embera indigenous community based in the southwest regions of Cauca and Choco. They say they fled violence by armed groups in their homelands and cannot return. After five months of fruitless negotiations, the humanitarian problem has become a "historic crisis" according to the Colombian press.

'Rats and tuberculosis'

With its shady paths, huge trees and playgrounds, the National Park is a rare island of greenery in the capital that attracts crowds at the weekend. But instead of walkers, the park is now filled with tarpaulin, camp fires and washing lines. Bare-footed children run around while mothers carrying

babies on their backs sweep the paths and tidy up their makeshift shelters.

The smell of cooked corn and plantains fill the air. There are just two public toilets in the park, while clothes are washed under a bridge using a sewer. Men carrying sticks provide security for the camp. "No-one should live in these conditions," said one volunteer delivering supplies to the camp. "There are rats, tuberculosis, all sorts of illnesses... the mayor's office is neglecting them, the government is doing nothing for them," she added, without giving her name.

The mayor's office insists it deployed "immediate humanitarian assistance" and is trying to find shelter for the refugees in Bogota ahead of helping them to "return in safety" to their homes. But the squatters accuse the government of failing them. In January, the interior ministry agreed to work with the mayor's office to coordinate the displaced people's return home. The mayor's office says close to 1,200 Embera people have already returned to their villages with another 400 rehoused elsewhere. Mayor Claudia Lopez has ruled out the "installation of an indigenous territory in the city."

Unprecedented

Indigenous people have been the most affected by Colombia's interminable conflict, after black Colombians. A series of bloody attacks and murders in Cauca, where armed groups are battling over control of the lucrative drug trade, has caught the national attention. During 60 years of conflict, Bogota—home to eight million people—welcomed hundreds of thousands of people displaced by the conflict. Since the 2016 peace deal signed by the

Global patent
filings 'surged'
to record high

GENEVA: A record number of international patents were filed last year, indicating that innovation had not been stymied by the pandemic, the United Nations said yesterday. Even as COVID-19 took a vast human and economic toll, international patent applications continued to grow, with

Asia, and China in particular, cementing their leading positions.

A record 277,500 international patents were filed in 2021, marking a 0.9-percent increase from 2020, the UN's World Intellectual Property Organization said in its annual overview. "These figures show that human ingenuity and entrepreneurial spirit remain strong despite the disruptions caused by the pandemic," WIPO Director-General Daren Tang said in a statement. Last year marked the 12th consecutive year of growth in international patent filings.

WIPO's chief economist Carsten Fink highlighted how remarkable it was that "international patent filings continued to grow in 2020 and 2021 as the global pandemic unfolded and upended economies around the world." "This experience is notably different compared to previous economic crises," he told reporters, pointing to how international patent filings fell during the global financial crisis in 2009. WIPO's complex system of registering international patents involves multiple categories, including global trademarks and design filing systems.

China on top

In the main category—the Patent Cooperation Treaty, or PCT—China remained at the top of the rankings with 69,540 filings. That marks a mere 0.9-percent increase over 2020. But a year earlier, China registered a 16-percent jump over 2019, when it for the first time overtook the United States as the world's top international patent filer. The United States remained in second place in 2021, with 59,570 filings, followed by Japan with 50,260, South Korea with 20,678 and Germany with 17,322. —AFP

Clashes, arrests as
New Zealand police
clear COVID protest

WELLINGTON: Police and anti-vaccine protesters clashed on the grounds of New Zealand's parliament yesterday, with more than 50 arrested after demonstrators who camped outside the legislature for three days were ordered to move on. Activists chanted the Maori haka and yelled "hold the line" as they scuffled with a line of police moving to clear a makeshift settlement from the lawns of parliament. Police moved in early yesterday after taking a hands-off approach to the first two days of days of protests, using loudhailers to warn a crowd of about 150 they faced arrest unless they left.

Officers were punched and kicked amid cries of "this is not democracy", "shame on you" and "drop the mandate". The protest began Tuesday as a copycat of a "Freedom Convoy" action by Canadian truckers, with hundreds of semi-trailers and campervans jamming streets in central Wellington. Many of the vehicles left after 24 hours but a hardcore of activists remained, vowing to stay "as long as it takes".

Wellington City Council, which also took a low-key approach in the protest's early stages, said its parking officers would begin issuing tickets to convoy vehicles

blocking city streets. Deputy Prime Minister Grant Robertson said patience had worn thin among Wellington residents at the disruption caused by the protests and called for police to act. "Roads are blocked in the city, businesses have had to shut, people felt threatened and intimidated by some of the protesters," he told Radio New Zealand prior to the police operation.

Police 'disappointed'

Wellington police commander Superintendent Corrie Parnell said more than 100 extra officers were brought in from outside the capital to clear the protest. "It is disappointing that despite the grounds being officially closed to the public earlier today, a number of protesters are refusing repeated requests to leave the precinct," he said. In a rare move, authorities closed the parliamentary precinct to the public to prevent reinforcements joining the protest. The police initially edged forward across the parliament grounds but halted when it met resistance as officers arrested the most prominent protesters. One woman, who refused to give her name, accused police of provoking the crowd. "This has been a peaceful protest, what they've done is a disgrace," she said. "I never thought I'd see this in New Zealand." But locals in the capital have complained about being abused for wearing masks and several businesses near parliament have closed after staff were harassed for enforcing vaccine mandates. Wellington City Council, which also took a low-key approach in the protest's



BOGOTA: Embera indigenous kids play in a makeshift camp at a national park in Bogota. Far from their ancestral homes, more than 1,000 indigenous people displaced by conflict have been squatting in squalor since September. —AFP

Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the government, the capital has been home to 380,000 of the conflict's victims, including more than 19,000 indigenous people.

Most of them live in poverty in the poor south of the capital, getting by selling their handicrafts and begging. But the gathering of more than 1,000 indigenous people in a single location of the capital is unprecedented. The coronavirus pandemic—which has left 40 percent of Colombians living in poverty—has made things worse, particularly since the end of a housing allowance that forced many to head to the National Park. The current priority for the mayor's office is to carry out a census of the occupants of the camp. —AFP



WELLINGTON: Protesters resist police after refusing to leave parliament grounds during the third day of demonstrations against COVID restrictions in Wellington yesterday. —AFP

early days, said its parking officers would begin issuing tickets to convoy vehicles blocking city streets.

New Zealand requires mandatory COVID vaccinations for people working in sectors such as health, law enforcement, education and defense, with those who refuse the jab facing the sack. Proof of vaccination must also be shown to enter restaurants, sports events and religious services. The "Freedom Convoy" of truckers in Canada has gridlocked the capital Ottawa since late last month, prompting city authorities to declare a state of emergency. —AFP

International

Hardline Hindu monk seeks re-election in key Indian state

State government's handling of COVID-19 pandemic widely criticized

GHAZIABAD: India's most populous state went to the polls yesterday in a key popularity test for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist government. Victory in the northern state of over 200 million people, and strong performances in four other state polls in the coming weeks, would boost Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) party ahead of 2024 national elections when he will likely seek a third term.

"We will win all five (states)... They (the people of Uttar Pradesh) will accept us in 2022 after seeing our work," Modi, 71, said in an interview with ANI news agency on the eve of the election. Uttar Pradesh, home to more people than Brazil, is run by Yogi Adityanath, a firebrand monk from the BJP who has implemented a string of policies seen by critics as anti-Muslim.

'Jobs lost'

The BJP's main rival is the Samajwadi (Socialist) Party, led by Akhilesh Yadav who has been seeking to tap into discontent over job losses and rising prices. The state government's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic has also been widely criticised, with hundreds of bodies floating in the Ganges or buried in its banks last year.

"The government should address what happened during COVID (in) the past two years. Many people have been affected and suffered losses no doubt," voter Amit Pratap Singh, 48, told AFP. "People's businesses have been impacted. Jobs have been lost. So the government should plan to address it."

Keen to make up lost ground, the BJP has promised a job for at least one member of each family and free electricity for farmers—a key voting bloc—if it retains power. Opinion polls have indicated that

the BJP will retain power—something no party has done since 1985 — with an increased vote share.

"I don't think the government should change if there's good governance. I have seen good governance in this regime. Yogi (Adityanath) has performed well. Because he's done well, he should stay," said Sandeep Sharma, 46, a voter from the state's Ghaziabad district.

'Love jihad'

Since winning power in 2017, Adityanath's government has tightened curbs on slaughterhouses killing cows—sacred in Hinduism—and on loudspeakers for the Muslim call to prayer. It also brought in a law against "love jihad", the alleged masterplan by the Muslim minority to hoodwink Hindu women into marriage in order to convert them to Islam.

The shaven-headed 49-year-old, who has been touted as a possible successor to Modi, has also given several cities new names in place of Islamic-sounding ones. More than 100 alleged criminals—mostly Muslims or low-caste Dalits—have been reportedly extra-judicially killed by police, a charge



Opinion polls indicate BJP will retain power

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NEW DELHI: Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) Member of Parliament Hema Malini talks to media on her arrival at Parliament for the ongoing budget session in New Delhi. — AFP

Adityanath denies.

The state was one of the worst affected when deadly violence erupted in late 2019 following protests against the federal government's amendments to India's citizenship law that was seen as anti-Muslim.

One of those to die was Aleem, who according to

his brother Shahbuddin was shot dead by police in the town of Meerut. Police have denied shooting anyone during the unrest. "Injustice is at its peak under Yogi's government. It can't get worse than this," Shahbuddin, 28, told AFP. Results from the election, as well from the four other polls, are due after counting begins on March 10. —AFP

Heaven can wait: How the super centenarians live

TOULON: Her 118th birthday wish is "to die soon". But in the meantime, Lucile Randon, better-known as "Sister Andre", always keeps her door open for any visitor who might want to say hello. Sister Andre is the oldest-known woman in France and Europe, and the second-oldest in the world after Kane Tanaka, a 119-year-old who lives in Japan.

She was born in Ales, southern France, on February 11, 1904, the year that New York opened its first subway, the Tour de France had only been run once and World War I was still a decade away. In her room in a retirement home in the southern city of Toulon, Sister Andre has a single bed, a Virgin Mary statue and a radio which she never turns on anymore. The outside world, she says, is too stressful.

Most of the time she sits in her wheelchair, her head tilted to one side, her blind eyes shut. Is she praying, thinking or napping? It's hard to say. But when she speaks, her voice is present and her recollections vivid. Her daily routine starts at 7 am when she is woken up and taken to breakfast, before being wheeled to morning mass which she, always dressed in her nun's habit, never misses.

'He's charming'

"It's awful that I depend on others for everything I do," said Sister Andre, who worked full-time until the

late 1970s and took care of other, often younger, home residents until she was 100. "I'm happy when I have company," she said—especially that of David Tavella, a staffer at the home that she has been living in for a decade, and her favorite companion. "He's charming," she said, grasping his hand.

Tavella also acts as her press agent, fielding interview requests from reporters, sifting through the many boxes of chocolates sent by admirers, and checking her post. Among her letters are handwritten New Year's wishes for 2022 sent by Emmanuel Macron—who is the 18th French president in Sister Andre's lifetime—which he signed off with "Yours very respectfully".

Most centenarians are found in the world's so-called blue zones where people live longer than average: They are in Okinawa in Japan, on the Italian island of Sardinia, the Greek island of Ikaria, the Nicoya peninsula in Costa Rica and in the Californian city of Loma Linda, France, although no blue zone, was still home to the world's oldest person with certified birth records, Jeanne Calment, who lived in Provence, dying in 1997 in Arles aged 122.

The man presumed to be the oldest in France also calls the south of the country home. Andre Boite is one of the very few male super-centenarians, a term defined as living beyond 110 years. At 111, Boite still lives in his own home, likes wearing three-piece suits and stays away from reporters. In 2015 there were half a million people over 100 in the world, with the UN saying this figure could grow to 25 million by the end of the century. France alone has 30,000 centenarians compared with only 200 in 1950, according to statistics institute Insee, with some 40 of them 110 or older.

and the French". In a furious reaction, LR leader Christian Jacob kicked him out of the party and expressed his "disappointment" over the move.

The gesture has also raised questions about the possible stance of Sarkozy in the election, who despite being a deeply polarising figure with criminal convictions, remains a major figure for many on the right. The latest poll by the Elabe institute for BFMTV Wednesday showed Pécresse slipping by one point to 15 percent, the latest indication that the Paris region chief has failed to capitalise the momentum from her nomination late last year.

Macron remains solid on 26 percent with far-right figures Marine Le Pen and Eric Zemmour competing with Pécresse to make the second-round run-off, it said. While far-left leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon is polling respectably on 10 percent of the vote, the Socialist mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, is seen on a disastrous 1.5 percent.

Hidalgo's ratings are beginning to raise questions about the future of the Socialists, the party of former president Francois Mitterrand who dominated

and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Liberal government, and put a spotlight on pandemic curbs around the world.

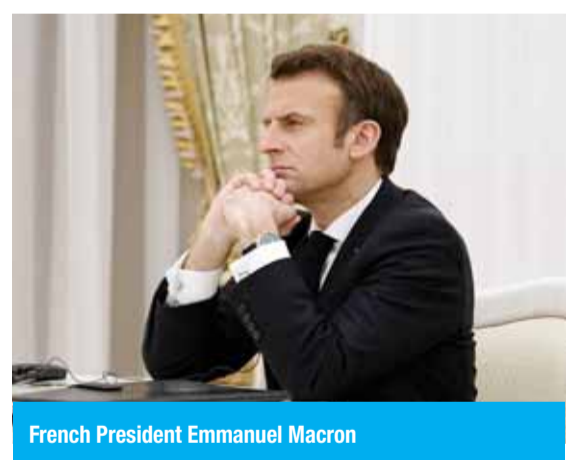
Hundreds of big-rig trucks are now paralyzing the streets of downtown Ottawa, with the mayor calling the situation out of control and declaring a state of emergency. "People told me, 'You will see, Ottawa is a dormitory town compared to Montreal or Toronto,'" said Cedric Boyer, a 48-year-old Frenchman who has lived in the capital for two years, smiling at how Ottawa has been turned upside down by the protests and drawn attention from around the world.

Copycat protests have popped up as far away as New Zealand. Calls have gone out on social media for similar rallies in Europe and the United States. In Ottawa, some people are using those media platforms to make a plea: "Make Ottawa boring again," playing on the Make America Great Again mantra of former US president Donald Trump, who has expressed support for the truckers. "In a democracy, everyone has the right to have a different opinion and the right to express it," Boyer said. "But where



TOULON, Var, France: File photo shows Sister Andre, Lucile Randon in the registry of birth and born on February 11, 1904, the oldest French and European citizen, praying in a wheelchair, on the eve of her 117th birthday. — AFP

Among them is Hermine Saubion who, when reminded of her age, says: "That's old, that's not young, I'm holding up." But when she wakes up from a nap in her wheelchair at the retirement home canteen in Banon, in the foothills of the Alps, her face lights up with a smile, and she looks attentively at her visitor. Saubion has no specific illness, but her body has gone immobile, and she is almost deaf, picking up only the occasional word, which isolates her from her surroundings. — AFP



French President Emmanuel Macron

France throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. Macron, who appears to be keeping his candidacy declaration to the last minute, is hot favourite to win the election, even if analysts caution that many voters have yet to make up their minds. — AFP

that starts poses a bit of a problem. It is when the freedom of some infringes on that of others."

Boyer said he felt badly in particular for people who cannot work because of the protests. In the downtown area, many stores and restaurants that had just been allowed to reopen after COVID-related closures are shut down again because of the truckers. Lisa Van Buren, 55, said there is a lot of frustration among Canadians these days. "I think there is a real anger, we shouldn't underestimate that anger," she told AFP.

In a letter to Trudeau, Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson complained about "an aggressive and hateful occupation of our neighborhoods." "People are living in fear and are terrified—they've now been subjected to the non-stop honking of large trucks for nine days which is tantamount to psychological warfare," he added. Since a court ordered that incessant honking to stop, the truckers have turned instead to revving the engines of their big-rigs. Local people are also suing the protest organizers for the chaos caused by the demonstration, and are seeking Can\$10 million (\$7.9 million) in damages. — AFP

As US schools lift mask mandates, parents cry foul

ARLINGTON: As more and more US states lift COVID-19 mask mandates in public schools due to declining infection rates, some parents are up in arms over this relaxation in health restrictions. School mask mandates are highly political in today's divided America. Wearing a face covering to fight the spread of the virus is mandatory in 16 states, most of them run by Democrats.

Much of the conservative right, egged on by former president Donald Trump, says this obligation infringes on people's individual freedom. And Republican-led states such as Texas and Florida have even banned mask mandates. But things are starting to change, now that new cases of infection have been falling for nearly a month. Four states run by Democrats—Connecticut, Delaware, New Jersey and Oregon—have announced they will soon stop ordering students, teachers and staff to wear masks. California says it is working with education officials to update its recommendations on masks.

In Virginia, Republican Governor Glenn Youngkin signed a decree late last month allowing parents to send their kids to school without masks. "This is about who is best positioned to make a decision with regards to their child's health," he said. But a court has issued a stay against that decree in response to a lawsuit filed by seven school districts. Some schools, mainly in Democratic strongholds near the US capital Washington, have threatened to send maskless children home or make them isolate at school.

'Calculated risk'

Virginia came under Republican rule during elections in November but has a strong Democratic minority. The state is a good illustration of the national divide on mask-wearing as the Omicron variant fades. Carrie Lukas, a mother of five children aged seven to 16 who go to school in Fairfax county near Washington, said school districts opposed to the governor's decree have not "prioritized kids," whom she said have suffered a lot in this pandemic. Lukas points to "evidence of tremendous learning loss" after a year of trying to learn online from home, and also believes wearing a mask is detrimental to social relations among adolescents.

"These are tough times for young teenagers when you're not able to see whether kids are smiling at you or frowning at you," Lukas said. Lukas, president of a conservative group called the Independent Women's Forum, said "there's been just an absolute avalanche of research showing that these masks don't work" at stopping the spread of COVID in schools. She also cited the fact children are less vulnerable to the coronavirus than other age groups.

A study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released in September 2021 concluded that risk of infection was 3.5 times higher in schools with no mask mandate than in those that did have them. But the results of this study have been challenged, among others by non-conservative media. Lukas advocates taking a calculated risk against COVID. "We take a lot of calculated risks as a parent all the time," she said. "We all know that there are some risks, but we allow free people to make their own decisions."

But other parents say collective responsibility should come first. "When an individual's choice impacts the health of somebody else, our individual freedoms stop when they impact the individual rights of another person," said Amber Bowmer, a 42-year-old substitute teacher. She and 12 other parents in Chesapeake, in eastern Virginia, filed suit in the state supreme court on grounds the governor had overstepped his legal authority in ordering schools to admit kids without masks. — AFP

Blow for rival as ex-minister backs Macron

PARIS: President Emmanuel Macron on Wednesday received a new boost in France's presidential election campaign after a heavyweight right-wing former minister said he would back the centrist incumbent rather than his main rival.

The announcement by Eric Woerth, labour and also budget minister in governments under president Nicolas Sarkozy, represented a new blow to the campaign of right-wing challenger Valerie Pécresse of the Republicans (LR) party who has already shown signs of flagging in the polls.

"I don't subscribe to what the LR says," said Woerth, adding that Macron was the best choice in the April elections to "defend the interests of France

Canadians are fed up with noisy protests

OTTAWA: Canada's capital is sometimes ribbed as being so quiet it's dull. But not these days, as truckers and others frustrated over COVID-19 restrictions clog the city center, revving engines in a non-stop blast of anger. Ottawa residents say they do not recognize their own city. And while some understand the protesters' gripes, they think that after nearly two weeks of chaos and gridlock, enough is enough.

The so-called Freedom Convoy began in January in western Canada—launched in anger at requirements that truckers either be vaccinated or test and isolate when crossing the US-Canadian border. But the movement has morphed into a broader protest against COVID-related restrictions

Business

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2022

Zain Group net profit grows 2% to reach \$616 million

Board recommends cash dividend of 23 fils per share for second half of 2021

Bader Al-Kharafi: • \$1.1 billion invested in network and digital infrastructure to drive growth
• Q4 2021 revenue KD 382 million (\$1.3bn), net income KD 50 million (\$167m)

KUWAIT: Zain Group, a leading telecom innovator in seven markets across the Middle East and Africa, announces its consolidated financial results for the full-year 2021, and fourth quarter ended 31 December, 2021. The Group ended the year with a customer base of 48.9 million, an annual increase of 2.4%, reflecting an addition of 1.2 million customers.

For the full-year 2021, Zain Group generated consolidated revenue of KD 1.5 billion (\$5 billion), a year-on-year (Y-o-Y) decrease of 5%. Consolidated EBITDA for the period declined by 5% Y-o-Y, to reach KD 628 million (\$2.1 billion), reflecting an EBITDA margin of 41%. Consolidated net income reached KD 186 million (\$616 million), up 2% Y-o-Y and reflecting earnings per share of 43 Fils (\$0.14).

For the full-year 2021, currency devaluations in Sudan from 55 in January 2021 to 436 (SDG/\$) end of December 2021; in South Sudan from 175 in January 2021 to 426 (SSP/\$); and a 19% currency devaluation in Iraq from 1,190 to 1,470 (IQD/\$) resulted in a foreign currency translation impact of \$962 million in revenue and \$479 million in EBITDA.

Cash dividend of 23 fils

Note, if the \$962 million currency translation impact on revenue was excluded, Y-o-Y revenue would have grown by 13% to reach \$6 billion, and EBITDA by 17% for 2021. The Board of Directors of Zain recommended a cash dividend of 23 fils per share for the second half of 2021, subject to Annual General Assembly and statutory approvals. This dividend follows the semi-annual dividend of 10 fils distributed earlier in 2021, totaling 33 fils per share for the year.

Key Operational Notes for 12 months ended 31 December, 2021

1. The year highlighted by the notable customer growth from 5G in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, and 4G uptake in Iraq, Jordan and Sudan, resulting in the Group's consolidated data revenue reaching \$2.1 billion, representing 42% of the Group's revenue for 2021

2. Throughout 2021, Zain Group invested \$1.1 billion in CAPEX (21% of revenue), predominantly in 5G rollouts in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain; 4G upgrades across Iraq, Jordan, South Sudan and Sudan; expansion of Fiber-to-the-Home infrastructure; and spectrum license fees

3. Zain's operation in Jordan completed the sale and leaseback of 2,607 towers for \$88 million

4. Zain KSA fintech, 'Tamam'; ZainCash in Iraq and Jordan; M-Gurush in South Sudan attract 1.5 million customers recording over 25 million transactions with a value of \$2.3 billion in 2021

5. Launch of ZainTech, unifying the Group's ICT assets under one roof to provide comprehensive digital solutions and transformation services to enterprises and governments across the region

6. Zain Ventures invests in ZoodPay, 'Buy Now Pay Later' super app's series B round, following earlier investments in PIPE and Swvl

7. The growth of Zain Esports saw it hold 16 tournaments in 2021, with 18,000 gaming participants, 43 million social media impressions and 5.7 million engagements on social media channels

8. The Zain Group API platform grows, partnering 16 global OTT and solutions providers offering 36 different digital innovations and processing 130 million payment transactions since launch in 2018

9. Zain upgraded to A- in the latest 'CDP Score Report-Climate Change 2021', ranking it first in the region and among leaders globally

10. Zain named Best Telecom Brand for 2021 by Telecom Review

Commenting on the results, the Chairman of the Board of Directors of Zain Group, Ahmed Al Tahous said, "The board and management's focus on operational efficiency, significant investment in network upgrades, and meticulous execution of key elements of our sustainability-conscious 4Sight strategy continues to drive shareholder value. I would like to thank all the government bodies and regulatory authorities across our markets for their support and wisdom in creating an environment to raise the telecom sector to new heights and empower Zain to enhance the meaningful connectivity we provide the



Chairman of the Board of Directors of Zain Group, Ahmed Al Tahous

2021 was a successful year in driving shareholder value through solid operational performance and meticulous execution of the 4Sight strategy

communities, businesses and governments we serve." Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO, Bader Al-Kharafi commented, "The Group's solid performance for 2021 reflects the success of the many operational and monetization initiatives implemented by the management across all markets. The board's recommendation of 23 fils per share dividend for H2 in addition to the semi-annual 10 fils dividend, totaling 33 fils for the year, reflects a 77% payout ratio, one of the highest in the region.

This provides a clear indication of the strength of our financial solvency, and the company's ability to execute on its strategic profitable growth plans, despite the continuing challenges of the pandemic and impact of unavoidable currency devaluations on the business." "We continue to manage significant currency devaluations in Iraq and Sudan, which impacted key financial indicators during 2021, costing the company \$962 million in revenue and \$479 million in EBITDA.

To mitigate this impact, we have revamped prices and focused on monetizing new digital services while seeking lucrative opportunities in the enterprise space to capitalize on 4G rollouts in these countries." "Despite the Sudan currency impact, we are very pleased that for the first time since 2007, the Zain Sudan board decided to distribute SDG15 billion (\$30m) of dividends to Zain Group, representing 45% of the operators 2021 net income. We



Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO, Bader Al-Kharafi

New lucrative business verticals including Fintech and API platform witness healthy growth

thank the Central Bank of Sudan and regulatory authorities for their support on this milestone."

\$1.1 billion invested in network upgrades

"In Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain we are focused on monetizing our significant investments in 5G networks and international connectivity across all operations through our revamped wholesale business, seeking lucrative opportunities in the enterprise and government space. Across all operations, we invested \$1.1 billion during 2021 in network upgrades and digital infrastructure to enhance the mobile experience and drive growth."

"Similar to the deal in Kuwait, the sale of our passive tower infrastructure in Jordan for \$88 million creates significant value for shareholders. It gives Zain Jordan greater flexibility to invest in network upgrades and ICT technologies to meet the ever-increasing demand for reliable broadband access. It also enhances operational efficiencies and enables a laser focus on customers, allowing us to offer them the best mobile and data experience in the Kingdom."

"It is extremely pleasing to record impressive growth in all key indicators in various digital entities we have launched in recent years. Our fintech aspirations of creating the first telco-led challenger bank in the region are energized by the customer uptake and transaction growth we have experienced with

'Tamam' in Saudi Arabia, 'ZainCash' platforms in Jordan and Iraq, and 'M-Gurush' in South Sudan."

"The API platform continues its positive trajectory of profitable growth on multiple levels, and Zain Esports is proving itself as a leading regional gaming powerhouse. Zain Saudi Arabia's digital operator 'Yaqoot' continues to deliver healthy growth in the digital telco space, as does Zain Iraq's digital operator, 'oodi', and together the operations offer a simple, all-digital mobile experience that frees customers from the traditional retail buying experience."

"The A- ranking that Zain achieved in the latest 'CDP Score Report-Climate Change 2021', positioned us first in the region and among leaders globally, highlighting our mission to foster sustainable systemic change and provide meaningful connectivity by integrating technologies to generate safe energy to help reduce global warming. Zain is committed to implementing programs that make us a more efficient and environmentally friendly organization."

Al-Kharafi concluded, "I would like to recognize and thank over 7,200 dedicated and talented Zain colleagues across our operations who despite the pandemic, continue to provide exemplary services to our customers. We enter 2022 with confidence, as well continue to deliver on the 4Sight growth strategy and take advantage of evolving opportunities within the core telecom business while diversifying into new lucrative business verticals in the ICT, digital infrastructure, fintech and digital services arena."

Financial KPIs of key markets for the 12 months ended December 31, 2021

Kuwait

Maintaining its market leadership, the flagship operation saw its customer base serve 2.5 million. The Group's most profitable operation saw its 2021 revenue grow by 1% Y-o-Y to reach \$1.06 billion (KD 318 million), with EBITDA increasing by 13% to \$416 million (KD 125 million), reflecting an EBITDA margin of 39%. The operator recorded a net income of \$266 million (KD 80 million) reflecting a 7% increase. Data revenue grew by 6% Y-o-Y and represented 40% of total revenue. The operator continues to grow its 5G mobile and broadband customers and resulting revenue, capturing the largest 5G customer and revenue market share in the country.

Jordan

For 2021, Zain Jordan revenue increased by 3% to \$500 million, EBITDA grew by 6% to reach \$230 million, reflecting an EBITDA margin of 46%, with net income growing 66% Y-o-Y and reaching \$132 million, mainly from the gain on tower sale. With the expansion of 4G services across the country, data revenue grew 11% representing 50% of total revenue. Zain Jordan served 3.6 million customers maintaining its market leading position.

Saudi Arabia

For 2021, the operator generated Revenue of SAR 7.9 billion (\$2.1 billion), with EBITDA amounting to SAR 3.1 billion (\$836 million), reflecting an EBITDA margin of 40%. Net income for the period reached SAR 214 million (\$57 million). Having the Kingdom's largest 5G network covering 50 cities, data revenue represented 48% of total revenue and customers served stood at 8 million, a 14% increase.

Iraq

Zain Iraq's 2021 revenue reached \$769 million, and EBITDA amounted to \$312 million, reflecting an EBITDA margin of 41%. Net profit reached \$42 million for the period. The operator's customer base increased by 2% to reach 16.4 million customers. It should be noted that the Iraqi dinar devaluation also impacted Zain Iraq's revenue by \$172 million for the year.

Sudan

For 2021, Zain Sudan generated revenue of \$330 million, with EBITDA amounting to \$164 million, reflecting an EBITDA margin of 50%. Net income for the period reached \$103 million (SDG 33 billion), compared to \$61 million last year, a growth of 70%. Data revenue represents 27% of total revenue, while the operator's customer base stood at 16.3 million, maintaining its market leadership.

Bahrain

For 2021, Zain Bahrain generated revenue of \$172 million, up 5% Y-o-Y. EBITDA increased by 2% to \$58 million, reflecting an EBITDA margin of 34%. Net income increased 3% amounting to \$15 million, with data revenue growing 4% to represent 46% of total revenue.



- Chairman Ahmed Al Tahous: "2021 was a successful year in driving shareholder value through solid operational performance and meticulous execution of the 4Sight strategy"
- Vice-Chairman & Group CEO, Bader Al-Kharafi: "\$1.1 billion invested in network and digital infrastructure to drive growth"
- Q4 2021 revenue KD 382 million (\$1.3 billion), net income KD 50 million (\$167 million)
- \$962 million foreign currency translation impact on Group's revenue

Business

Siemens overcomes supply snags to post higher profit

Siemens sells mail business for 1bn euros

FRANKFURT: German industrial giant Siemens ploughed ahead in the first quarter, booking an increased net profit despite the supply chain disruptions which have troubled many businesses, it said yesterday.

The group, which makes products ranging from trains to factory equipment, made a profit of 1.8 billion euros (\$2.1 billion) between September and December last year, up 20 percent on the same period in 2020. The company's revenues over the same period increased by 17 percent to 16.5 billion euros, while its orders jumped 52 percent to a value of 24.2 billion euros.

Siemens achieved the result "despite a continuing complex macroeconomic environment influenced by the coronavirus pandemic", the group said in a statement. Siemens had also avoided "major disruptions from increased supply chain risks", it said.

Widespread bottlenecks-affecting everything from raw materials like wood to key components like semiconductors-have created a drag on industry and limited production. "We had a very successful start

into fiscal 2022," Siemens CEO Roland Busch said in a statement.

The Munich-based group's results "impressively demonstrate that we are a leader in accelerating digitalisation and sustainability," Busch said. Siemens, long a producer of heavy industrial equipment, has shifted its focus towards in recent year towards digital industries and the automation of factories.

The new strategy led Siemens to part ways with its energy subsidiary, which was introduced onto the stock market in 2020. The group announced on Wednesday it was selling its mail and parcels business to fellow German group Koeber for 1.15 billion euros, as well as exiting its electric motors joint-venture with Valeo. In January the group also sold its road signalling subsidiary for 950 million euros. "Closing is expected in the course of the current calendar year, subject to regulatory approvals." The unit — which makes equipment to sort parcels — has around 1,200 employees and generates annual revenue of about EUR500 million, Siemens said. The firm added it would retain its airport logistics solutions business. — AFP



MUNICH, Bavaria: The CEO of German industrial giant Siemens Roland Busch speaks during the virtual annual shareholders' meeting in Munich, southern Germany, yesterday. — AFP

Delivery Hero shares plunge

FRANKFURT: The food-ordering group Delivery Hero dropped sharply on the Frankfurt Stock Exchange after publishing results and forecasts yesterday that disappointed investors. Delivery Hero's share price fell by up to 30 percent in trading and sat at around minus 26 percent at 12:45 pm local time (1145 GMT), the biggest drop on record for the company.

While sales on the group's platforms exceeded expectations, the operating profit margin on those sales was below Delivery Hero's minus-two-percent target, finishing the year at minus 2.2 percent. The Berlin-based company sees the same measure falling between minus one and minus 1.2 percent in 2022, putting off the prospect of reaching profitability this year.

Food-delivery services, which benefited from people staying home more in the early stages of the coronavirus pandemic, have struggled as health restrictions have fallen away and diners return to restaurants. The company, which joined Germany's blue-chip DAX index in August 2020, has struggled to convince investors, with the group's share price dropping by around 50 percent over the past year.

For the coming year the company has set itself the aim of increasing sales on its platforms to between 44 billion euros and 45 billion euros (\$51 billion). The target is up on the firm's 2021 result of 35 billion euros, but below the figure of 48 billion euros expected by analysts.

"With steady growth rates and an increasing contribution margin of own-delivery, it is clear that our business model works," Delivery Hero's chief financial officer Emmanuel Thomassin said in a statement. — AFP

AstraZeneca says 2021 profit dives

LONDON: British COVID vaccine maker AstraZeneca said yesterday that net profit collapsed last year, hit by the vast takeover of US biotech firm Alexion and other charges, despite surging revenues. Profit after tax slumped to just \$112 million (98 million euros) compared with \$3.2 billion in 2020, the pharmaceutical company said in a statement.

However, revenues including COVID-19 vaccine sales rebounded 41 percent to \$37.4 billion. The COVID jab, Vaxzevria, achieved full-year sales of almost \$4 billion. However, the group warned yesterday of declining coronavirus product sales this year as the deadly pandemic recedes.

Strong growth
"AstraZeneca continued on its strong

growth trajectory in 2021," said chief executive Pascal Soriot, noting strong progress on new medicines alongside the purchase and integration of Alexion. "We also delivered on our promise of broad and equitable access to our COVID-19 vaccine with 2.5 billion doses released for supply around the world, and we made good progress on reducing our greenhouse gas emissions."

The UK group faced vast costs last year following its \$39-billion takeover of US biotech company Alexion, while it also took large impairment and restructuring charges. AstraZeneca, which developed its COVID jab with Oxford University, initially offered the vaccine at cost during the pandemic in contrast to rivals including Pfizer, but indicated in November that it would start selling it at a profit.

Soriot added that the group was increasing its shareholder dividend after what he described as a "landmark year". The annual dividend was upped to \$2.90 per share.

AstraZeneca added that it anticipates that COVID product sales will sink by "a low-to-mid twenties percentage" this year. That is expected to be partially offset by sales of Evusheld, its preventative monoclonal anti-

body treatment for immunocompromised people. Yet AstraZeneca warned that the gross profit margin from its COVID-19 medicines was expected to be "lower than the company average". The group also revealed yesterday that it had swung into a pre-tax annual loss of \$265 million, after a \$3.9-billion profit last time around. In reaction to the results, AstraZeneca's share price rallied 3.5 percent to 8,655 pence in early morning trade on London's rising stock market.

Jab 'raised profile'

"The COVID vaccine has raised Astra's global profile significantly, with its previous not-for-profit status now being removed," said Hargreaves Lansdown analyst Keith Bowman. "For now, and with further innovation and new drug successes ongoing, analyst consensus opinion continues to point to a strong buy."

Rival drugmaker GlaxoSmithKline had reported Wednesday that 2021 profits had slumped by a quarter, after the prior year was boosted by asset sales. GSK has thus far failed to produce a successful COVID vaccine unlike AstraZeneca, but is developing a jab alongside French peer Sanofi. — AFP



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 10 FEBRUARY 2022

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No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance										Valuation Multiples *				
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	1041	1034	1043	1033	10	11,255,896	-6	-0.58%	3.71%	1030	1040	22.4	2.16	2.9%	1.26
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	302	301	305	299	6	10,403,941	-3	-0.99%	7.89%	294	303	24.2	1.40	1.6%	1.13
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	224	224	225	221	4	11,669,768	-1	-0.44%	2.75%	224	227	78.7	0.98	0.0%	1.01
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	272	274	275	267	8	14,202,388	-1	-0.36%	9.16%	271	275	20.7	1.25	1.8%	1.05
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	909	904	910	901	9	23,751,546	-4	-0.44%	8.65%	899	908	35.4	3.96	1.3%	1.40
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	809	808	810	804	6	3,265,060	1	0.12%	2.28%	803	813	59.6	4.66	0.6%	1.05
204	National Investments	Financial Services	283	294	296	277	19	12,948,366	14	5.00%	34.25%	289	296	9.3	1.24	3.4%	1.25
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	163	162	164	158	6	18,365,261	0	0.00%	14.08%	161	168	36.9	2.00	2.3%	0.59
252	Al Imtiaz Investment	Financial Services	126	134	136	125	11	100,963,230	8	6.35%	13.56%	134	137	NM	0.82	6.4%	1.00
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	182	176	183	175	8	22,318,454	-6	-3.30%	-1.68%	174	178	27.1	1.28	0.0%	0.97
413	Mabaneer	Real Estate	817	811	818	800	18	7,620,485	-2	-0.25%	2.27%	807	814	17.9	1.85	1.7%	1.10
501	National Industries	Financial Services	292	294	294	288	6	7,669,126	2	0.68%	3.89%	292	301	5.8	1.06	0.0%	1.44
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	984	1003	1019	964	55	3,252,078	21	2.14%	15.15%	1000	1019	35.4	1.02	5.0%	0.93
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	912	949	959	908	51	2,937,079	38	4.17%	11.38%	949	960	27.0	2.23	5.6%	0.74
526	Al Qurain	Basic Materials	385	394	395	385	10	8,295,181	9	2.34%	13.54%	393	407	NM	1.07	3.8%	0.75
603	Agility	Industrials	1,005	1018	1,035	1000	35	8,968,292	18	1.80%	7.72%	1016	1033	2.3	1.10	0.9%	1.48
605	Zain	Telecommunications	602	615	621	602	19	30,787,280	14	2.33%	3.36%	613	617	14.1	2.24	3.3%	1.34
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,148	3,479	3,563	3,148	415	6,295,442	331	10.51%	7.91%	3461	3585	7.6	3.80	11.4%	0.50
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	220	218	222	216	6	8,294,080	0	0.00%	0.00%	217	222	NM	0.70	0.0%	0.88
818	Ahli United Bank	Banking	283	289	291	280	11	77,539,555	6	2.12%	3.96%	287	290	19.8	2.23	1.3%	1.15
821	Warba Bank	Banking	281	277	282	274	8	8,884,385	-4	-1.42%	1.09%	273	278	21.1	2.74	0.0%	1.00
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	600	598	604	590	14	3,694,527	-1	-0.17%	1.53%	596	600	18.6	1.69	2.9%	0.43
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	394	401	709	390	319	3,650,696	9	9.00%	2.30%	400	408	NM	1.68	0.0%	0.47
826	Shamal Az-Zour	Utilities	223	223	225	222	3	5,221,319	0	0.00%	-2.19%	222	227	18.9	3.95	4.0%	0.62
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	2,130	2,280	2,335	2,115	220	1,500,233	156	7.34%	12.87%	2180	2300	29.2	8.11	1.8%	0.64

* As of end of week closing

Mixed performance at Boursa Kuwait, foreign investment drops

KUWAIT: The Central Statistical Bureau (CSB) issued a report on foreign investment flows, both direct and indirect, although the report's title carried the "Direct Investment in the State of Kuwait for 2021", and the year 2021 is the date of publication of the report and not relevant to the published figures. There is confusion between the two dates (years) at the beginning and after. The report contained a complaint about the weak response to the third survey questions that included 63.6% of recipients, i.e. weak. We believe in the need to support the administration by legalizing the response and making it obligatory. According to the report, foreign investments balance - except for the government- in 2020, reached KD 14 billion increasing from KD 13 billion at the end of 2019. However, the increase was in the indirect component within it, which is of little benefit, and the drop in the direct investment, the target of development. Investment in the financial portfolio rose in 2020 to KD 5.6 billion from KD 4.8 billion in 2019, and similarly it rose in other financial instruments to KD 3.3 billion from KD 3.2 billion, also in financial derivatives to KD 1.6 billion up from KD 1.4 billion.

On the other hand, the balance of foreign direct investment dropped from KD 3.67 billion in 2019 to KD 3.55 billion, meaning that there were outflows of up to KD 119 million in 2020. About 53.4% of these investments are concentrated in three sectors: Telecommunications companies, investment companies and banks, which Kuwait does not need foreign expertise or benefit therein because it has advanced local expertise in them. Statistics are not available for the most important indicators of benefit in foreign direct investment in terms of the number of sustainable national job opportunities that have been created in all of these projects.

The report's figures suggest that the CSB needs a lot of legal and knowledge support to promote the quality of its statistics. The published figures contain about KD 1.132 billion or 32% of the total balance of direct investment, which is not known or classified as other. Although the report's figures mention that there are KD 19.6 million investments in money exchange companies, KD 12 million investments in service companies, and KD 100 thousand investments in oil and gas companies which are small amounts, while there are more than one billion KD are undefined, which is statistically unacceptable.

UNCTAD figures indicate that the year 2020 was the best year for foreign direct investment inflows to the six GCC countries since 2011. The net balance of the inflows for the six countries reached \$27.7 billion distributed as follows: \$19.9 billion for the UAE, \$5.5 billion for Saudi Arabia, \$4.1 billion for Oman and about \$1 billion for Bahrain. It was negative for both Qatar by \$2.4 billion and Kuwait by \$319 million. Since 2011, when foreign direct investment inflows to Kuwait reached their highest levels of \$3.3 billion, these inflows suffered a continuous decline over 8 of the following 9 years, until reaching negative figures in 2020 according to the CSB and UNCTAD.

In conclusion, in this article we do not direct any blame on a particular party whether for the decline of these flows or the quality of their statistics as this is a natural outcome of the deterioration of the general environment engulfing development. One of the recent indicators of the deterioration of this environment is the downgrading of all Kuwaiti banks by Fitch last week. There are some reasons for that including loss of priorities, making plans, and moving against them is another reason, lack of awareness of the importance of the quality and modernity of information as a third reason. A fourth reason is the cancerous spread of authorities and agencies without verifying the need and quality of performance. So, it is natural that the reluctance or even the escape of direct investments, local or foreign, is the outcome of the repellent environment.

Trading features at Boursa Kuwait - January 2022

Kuwait Clearing Company issued its report regarding "Trading Volume according to Nationality and Category" for January 2022 which is published on the official website of Boursa Kuwait. The report indicated that individual

traders still form the largest trading group and their contribution is increasing. They acquired 46.5% of total value of sold shares (43.8% January 2021) and 45.5% of total value of purchased shares (41.5% January 2021). Individual investors sold shares in the amount of KD 599.903 million and purchased shares in the amount of KD 586.159 million, with a net trading of selling by KD 13.744 million.

The second largest contributor to market liquidity is the institutions and companies sector with declining contribution. It acquired 26.6% of total value of purchased shares (30.5% January 2021) and 23.6% of total value of sold shares (28.1% January 2021). This sector purchased shares worth KD 343.421 million and sold shares worth KD 304.361 million, becoming the only sector with a net purchase by KD 39.060 million.

The third contributor is the clients' accounts (portfolios) and its contribution is rising. This sector captured 24.5% of total value of sold shares (23.7% January 2021) and 23.9% of total value of purchased shares (23.1% January 2021). This sector sold shares worth KD 316.123 million and purchased shares worth KD 308.283 million, with a net trading balance of sold shares by KD 7.840 million.

The last contributor to liquidity is the investment funds sector and its contribution is rising in terms of selling and declining in terms purchasing. This sector acquired 5.4% of total value of sold shares (5.1% January 2021) and 4% of total value of purchased shares (5.1% for the same period 2021). This sector sold shares worth KD 69.065 million and purchased shares worth KD 51.590 million, with a net trading of most selling by KD 17.476 million.

Boursa Kuwait still continues to be a local Boursa with Kuwaiti traders forming the largest trading group. They sold shares worth KD 1.143 billion capturing 88.6% of total sold shares (82.9% January 2021), and purchased shares worth KD 1.110 billion acquiring 86.1% of total value of purchased shares (80.4% January 2021). As such, their net trading balance was the most sector selling by KD 32.282 million.

Percentage share of other foreign investors, out of the total purchased shares value reached 10.9% (16.8% January 2021) that is worth KD 140.481 million and sold shares worth KD 87.231 million, 6.8% of total sold shares (12.4% January 2021); thus their net trading value was -the only purchasing - by KD 53.250 million.

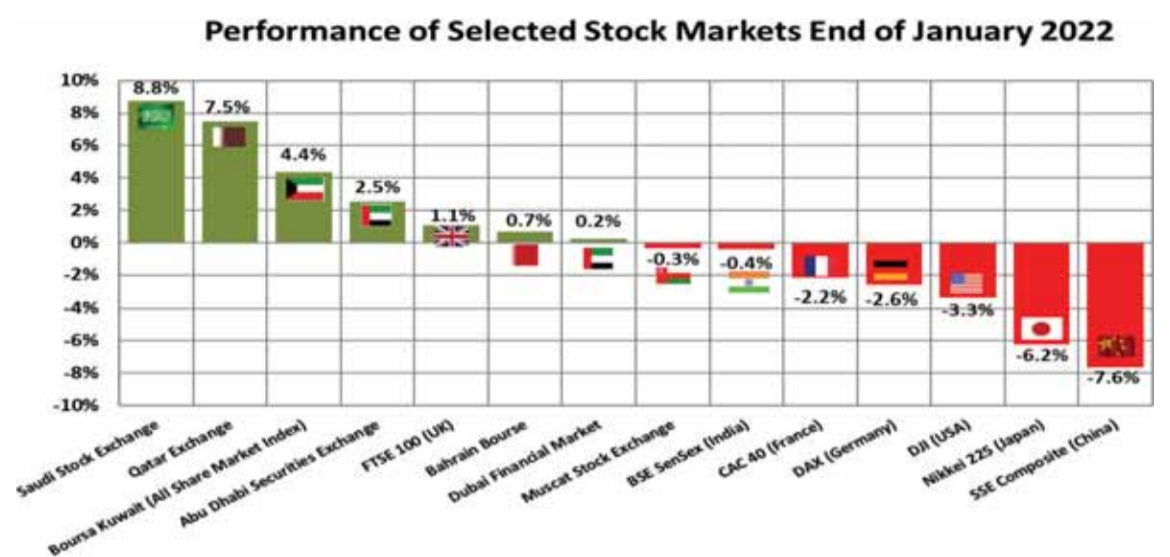
GCC Investors' share out of total value of sold shares scored 4.6% (4.7% January 2021) and worth KD 59.602 million, while their contribution out of purchased shares was at 3% (2.8% January 2021), worth KD 38.633 million. Their net trading was selling by KD 20.969 million.

Relative distribution among nationalities changed from its predecessor and became at 87.4% for Kuwaitis, 8.8% for foreign traders and 3.8% for GCC traders, compared with 81.6%, 14.6% and 3.8% for Kuwaitis, foreign and GCC traders respectively, for the same period in 2021. This means Boursa Kuwait remained local with the major share for the local investors and their share is increasing. Still, turnout from traders from outside the GCC region than their GCC counterparts, and the majority of the trading is still for individuals.

Number of active accounts between the end of December 2021 and the end of January 2022 rose by 1.1%, compared with a greater increase by 5.1% between the end of December 2020 and the end of January 2021. Number of active accounts in the end of January 2022 scored 20,524 accounts or 5% of total accounts versus 20,306 accounts in the end of December 2021, 4.9% of total accounts.

Comparative performance of selected stock markets - January 2022

After the positive performance of the sample markets during 2021, where all selected stock markets achieved gains, some of which are significant, January 2022 performance was divided equally between 7 profitable markets and 7 other losing markets versus December 2021 performance. The positive performance affected 6 Gulf markets out of 7 profitable markets in January, albeit with small gains for some of them, while the majority of the



damage was directed to emerging and mature markets.

The biggest gainer in January was the Saudi market, whose index gained 8.8% after it was the second-largest gainer in 2021 with gains of 29.8%. The second-largest gainer was the Qatar Stock Exchange, whose index added in one month 7.5%, after gains by 11.4% during the past year. The All-Share Market index of Boursa Kuwait came next with 4.4% gains, after gains by 27% in 2021. The Abu Dhabi market (the largest gaining market in 2021 at 68.2%) achieved 2.5% gains followed by the British market, the only winner outside the framework of the GCC region and increased by 1.1%, then Bahrain Bourse and the Dubai market by 0.7% and 0.2%, respectively.

The biggest loser in January was the Chinese market whose index lost -7.6%, after achieving the lowest gains over the past year by 4.2%. The Chinese market suffers from inflationary problems in its real estate market, which was reflected into concerns that affected its companies. It was followed by the Japanese market which lost -6.2%, then the American market for the Dow Jones index by -3.3%. The German market came next with a -2.6% loss, followed by the French market by -2.2% and the Indian market by -0.4%. Muscat Stock Exchange was the achieved the least losses during January 2022, with its index losing -0.3%.

While the financial markets are awaiting an early start to the rise in interest rates next March, the crisis of Russia and Ukraine and the free fall of share prices for some large technology companies contributed to the decrease in the risk appetite, which led to a limited setback for emerging and mature markets. All the previous factors will remain an influence those markets in February, although in a limited way and conditional having no breakthrough or setbacks in the Ukrainian crisis, and the occurrence of either of them might change the course of those markets in either direction. While the markets of the GCC remain operating in a positive environment supported by the significant rise in oil prices that is expected to continue in February, it is expected that it will continue in the short term on its opposite positive path for other markets until the end of February.

Ahli United Bank (AUB) financial results 2021

AUB announced results of its operations for the year ending in December 31st 2021, which indicate that the bank achieved profits (after deducting taxes) by KD 31.2 million, a rise by KD 1.5 million or by 5% versus KD 29.7 million in 2020. This rise is attributed to the decrease in total provisions by a greater decrease in the operating profit, in which the operating profit declined by KD 1.8 million while total provisions dropped by KD 3 million. The following graph displays the profits level attributed to the bank's shareholders during the period 2008-2021.

In details, total operating income increased by KD 719 thousand or by 0.8%, reaching KD 91.43 million compared with KD 90.71 million. This resulted from the rise in net financing income by KD 2.3 million, to reach KD 77.6 mil-

business did particularly well.

TotalEnergies' adjusted net profit, which excludes certain one-time expenses, increased more than fourfold to \$18.1 billion — even as its oil production fell two percent last year.

With a presidential election looming in April, French left-wing politicians criticised the soaring profits at TotalEnergies even before the annual earnings statement was released. Green presidential election candidate Yannick Jadot railed against profits made "on the back of French men and women" while "gas and petrol bills rise for the benefit of shareholders".

"We should just take it from them," said left-wing leader Jean-Luc Melenchon. Stellar results at oil majors BP and Shell prompted calls for a wind-fall tax on the British energy giants.

Pouyanne said TotalEnergies already makes sizeable contributions to governments. "If more were taken, it would be at the expense of investments, workers or shareholders," he said.

Renewables investment

As lockdowns spread in 2020, oil prices dropped off a cliff, even briefly turning negative. But they soared back above \$70 per barrel in 2021 and reached multi-year highs this year, exceeding \$90.

are subjected to racial slurs and discriminated against in job assignments, discipline, pay, and promotion," said Kevin Kish, the agency's director, in a statement.

Black workers at the factory were regularly subjected to deeply offensive racial slurs and jokes by co-workers and managers, the complaint said. Kish said the agency received hundreds of complaints from workers at the plant.

"The facts on this case speak for themselves," he said. Ahead of the filing, Tesla had released a statement Wednesday saying it "opposes all forms of discrimination and harassment" and that it is committed to providing "a workplace that is safe, respectful, fair and inclusive."

But excerpts of the complaint, released by the

lion compared with KD 75.3 million. Moreover, all operating income items increased, except for net gain from investment securities that declined by KD 4 million, reaching KD 1.6 million versus KD 5.6 million in 2020.

On the other hand, the bank's total operating expenses rose by KD 2.5 million or by 7.7%, reaching KD 35.7 million versus KD 33.2 million in the end of 2020, due to the rise of all operating expenses items. Percentage of total operating expenses to total operating income rose to 39.1% compared with 36.6% in 2020. Total provisions decreased by KD 3 million or by 11.5% as mentioned previously, reaching KD 23.1 million versus KD 26.1 million. Accordingly, the net profit margin rose to 34.1% compared with 32.8% in the end of 2020.

Total bank assets scored KD 4.573 billion, increasing by KD 203.4 million or by 4.7%, versus KD 4.370 billion in the end of 2020. Financing receivables increased by KD 228.5 million or by 7.3%, reaching KD 3.342 billion (73.1% of total assets) versus KD 3.114 billion (71.3% of total assets) in the end of 2020. Percentage of financing receivables to total depositors scored 86.9% compared with 82.4%. Moreover, deposits with the Central Bank of Kuwait declined by KD 90.2 million or by 32.9%, reaching KD 184.3 million (4% of total assets) versus KD 274.5 million (6.3% of total assets).

Figures indicate that the bank's liabilities (excluding total equity) increased by KD 58.3 million or by 1.5%, reaching KD 3.925 billion compared with KD 3.867 billion in the end of 2020. Percentage of total liabilities to total assets scored 85.8% versus 88.5% in 2020.

Results of analyzing the bank's financial statements indicate that profitability ratios showed mixed performances compared with the end of 2020. Return on average assets (ROA) rose slightly to 0.70% versus 0.68%. Also, return on average equities (ROE) increased to 6.9% versus 6.6% in 2020. While return on average capital (ROC) dropped to 13.7% compared with 14.1% in 2020. Likewise, earnings per share (EPS) declined to 11.5 Fils versus 12.3 Fils in 2020. (P/E) scored 26.9 times compared with 23.5 times in 2020, due to the decline in the EPS by 6.5% against a rise in the share market price by 6.9%. (P/B) scored 1.6 times compared with 1.4 times in the end of 2020. The bank announced that it would distribute cash dividends by 5% of the nominal share value, i.e. 5 Fils per share, and distribute 5% as bonus shares. This means the share achieved cash yield by 1.6% on the closing price in the end of December 2021 in the amount of 309 Fils.

The weekly performance of Boursa Kuwait

The performance of Boursa Kuwait for last week was mixed, where the traded value, traded volume and number of transactions decreased, while the general index (AllShare Index) increased. AllShare Index (value weighted) closed at 659.7 points as of last Thursday, showing a rise by 1.0 points or by 0.2% compared with its level last week. It remained higher by 36.9 points or by 5.9% compared with the end of 2021.



HAUTS-DE-SEINE: File photo shows the new TotalEnergies logo during its unveiling ceremony, at a charging station in La Defense on the outskirts of Paris. —AFP

Natural gas prices, meanwhile, increase fivefold on strong winter demand and geopolitical tensions between key supplier Russia and Western nations over Ukraine. Oil prices could "remain at high levels" this year, TotalEnergies said.

After gas prices reached all-time highs in the final months of 2021, they have remained "very high" in Europe and Asia this year due to the geopolitical uncertainties, the company said. —AFP

agency and filed in a California court late Wednesday, paint a very different picture.

The agency said non-Black workers would regularly refer to areas where many Black or African-American workers were stationed with racist historical names, including "the plantation".

Black slaves were frequently set to work on agricultural plantations in North America before the mid-19th century producing crops including sugar and cotton.

Workers at the Tesla factory would commonly be "taunted by racial slurs and then baited into verbal and physical confrontations" by non-Black workers and would subsequently face disciplinary action, the complaint said. —AFP

Microsoft vows app store fairness with Activision merger

SAN FRANCISCO: Microsoft on Wednesday courted the favor of antitrust regulators scrutinizing its plan to buy video game maker Activision Blizzard, promising that any app store it builds will treat developers fairly.

Microsoft president Brad Smith laid out a set of "Open App Store Principles" that will apply to the store it runs for Windows-powered computers and "the next-generation marketplaces we will build for games." "We have developed these principles in part to address Microsoft's growing role and responsibility as we start the process of seeking regulatory approval in capitals around the world for our acquisition of Activision Blizzard," Smith said in a statement.

Microsoft's \$69 billion deal to buy video game powerhouse Activision Blizzard needs to pass muster with regulators in Europe and the United States intent on reining in tech titans. After the merger plans were announced last month, analysts told AFP the deal would certainly be scrutinized, but likely less intensely than would an acquisition by Amazon, Google, or Facebook-parent Meta.

Microsoft appeared to be trying to differentiate itself from Apple and Google, who have been accused of tightly controlling their respective app stores and taking too big a bite out of revenue brought in by developers.

Principles outlined by Microsoft included allowing all developers access to its app store and not requiring them to use the technology firm's payment system for in-app transactions. All apps in a Microsoft shop will be treated equally, according to Smith. —AFP

TotalEnergies returns to profit after COVID crisis

PARIS: French energy giant TotalEnergies yesterday rebounded from the COVID crisis with a huge 2021 profit as oil and gas prices soared — a performance that raised political hackles in an election year in France.

The company reported net profit of \$16 billion (14 billion euros) — the highest in at least 15 years — following a historic \$7.2-billion loss in 2020, when oil prices crashed. Oil and gas firms slumped into the red in 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic slashed energy demand and prices.

But the market rebounded last year as the global economy and demand recovered. "We entered the year 2021 cautiously, we didn't know we were headed at the start of the year and we saw the environment completely turn around," chief executive Patrick Pouyanne said at a news conference. "We took full advantage of this favourable environment, particularly in the second half of the year," he said, noting that the company's liquefied natural gas

California agency accuses Tesla of racial segregation

SAN FRANCISCO: A California agency filed a racial discrimination complaint against Tesla on Wednesday, accusing the electric carmaker of segregating Black employees at its factory in the US state. The California Department of Fair Employment and Housing (DFEH) "found evidence that Tesla's Fremont factory is a racially segregated workplace where Black workers

Business

Ooredoo reports 18% increase in EBITDA to KD 61.1 million in 2021

Ooredoo Kuwait continues to provide its customers world-class services

KUWAIT: National Mobile Telecommunications Company K.S.C.P "Ooredoo" announced yesterday its financial results for year 2021:

Financial Highlights

- Net profit attributable to NMTC increased to KD 19 million in 2021, representing a strong growth of 468% compared to KD 3 million in 2020. Net Profit growth was supported by solid operational and financial earnings from Ooredoo Kuwait, Ooredoo Tunisia, Ooredoo Algeria, Ooredoo Palestine and Ooredoo Maldives.
- EBITDA increased by 5% in 2021 to KD 208 million, compared to KD 197 million in 2020.
- Consolidated revenue increased to KD 602 million in 2021, compared to KD 593 million in 2020. Revenues in KD were positively impacted by the gradual easing of restrictions in Kuwait, healthy Tunisian market growth, record revenue in Palestine, and strong numbers in Algeria in local currency terms.
- The consolidated earnings per share was 38 fils for 2021, compared to 7 fils per share earned in 2020. The Board of Directors recommends a dividend payment of 35 fils per share, subject to shareholder approval at the General Assembly scheduled for March 2022.

Sheikh Mohammad Bin Abdullah Al Thani, Chairman of the Board of Directors commented: "NMTC reported a solid set of results for the year ended 31 December 2021, as market activity improved due to the easing and lifting of COVID-19 restrictions in some of our core markets. Furthermore, we saw an increase in customer confidence in the business due to our ongoing commitment to provide innovative products, which further supported our strong performance for the year.

Consolidated revenue for NMTC increased slightly to KD 602 million for 2021, compared to KD 593 million in 2020, with an EBITDA margin of 34%. In Kuwait, the focus remained on cost optimisation and digital transformation, resulting in an increase in EBITDA of 18% and an improved EBITDA margin of 29%. In Tunisia, revenue increased by 5%. In Algeria, the business reported strong numbers as revenues were up by 8% in local currency terms. Palestine reported a 9% increase in revenue to KD 33.8 million, with an increase in EBITDA of 17%, primarily driven by operational efficiencies. With the uptick in tourism, Maldives reported a 2% increase in revenues. Furthermore, the business now serves over 368 thousand customers.

We remain optimistic about 2022, as we continue to focus on enhancing our product portfolio, driving cost optimisation initiatives, and further broadening our cus-



Sheikh Mohammad Bin Abdullah Al Thani



Abdulaziz Yaqoub Al-Babtain

tomers base across all markets in which we operate."

Review of Operations

The Group's operational performance can be summarised as follows:

Ooredoo - Kuwait

Abdulaziz Yaqoub Al-Babtain, Ooredoo Kuwait's Chief Executive Officer, said: "The COVID-19 pandemic and a decline in Kuwait's population continued to put pressure on Ooredoo Kuwait's performance during 2021. However, with the gradual ease of travel restrictions, supported by the stabilisation of oil prices, Kuwait's population has witnessed a slight uptick. With this, the company reported 18% increase in EBITDA to KD 61.1 million in 2021 compared to KD 52.0 million in 2020 supporting an improved EBITDA margin of 29%, up from 25% compared to 2020. Revenue also increased to KD 210.5 million in 2021, compared to KD 209.8 million in 2020.

"It goes without saying that Ooredoo has made quantum leaps in the world of telecommunication, technology, cybersecurity and security services, making it a well-reputed company with a leading position in the world of innovative digital services, information technology, Internet and communications." Al-Babtain added.

Ooredoo Kuwait's 5G rollout increased further during 2021. Ooredoo Kuwait's continued commitment to its customers through providing world-class services was recognised by the Stevie International Business Awards where the Company was awarded a Gold Stevie in the 'Mobile On-Demand Application' category for the My Ooredoo App, as well as a Bronze Stevie for Ooredoo Kuwait's volunteer program in the 'Corporate Social Responsibility Program of the Year' category.

Al-Babtain concluded: "With the diversity of customer segments, we have diversified our campaigns and

marketing strategies to satisfy every segment. This led to an increase in the number of our customers, which mirrors their great trust in us which we take pride of."

It is worth noting that Ooredoo Kuwait continued achieving excellence and outstanding successes during 2021, through developing strategic partnerships that helped it to better understand the factors of change in consumer behavior.

Strategic Partnerships

Among this year's remarkable partnerships are: Ooredoo's collaboration with the National Bank of Kuwait (NBK), the leading provider of digital banking services in Kuwait and the region, to develop digital services, products and solutions that contribute to enriching customer experience in both institutions. The signing of the MoU came as part of the strategic partnership and well-established relationships between Ooredoo and NBK, and their keenness to provide cutting-edge digital services and solutions that contribute to meeting the needs of all customers to get an exceptional experience from leading institutions in both the financial services and telecommunications sectors.

Ooredoo has also entered a reseller agreement with BT, a leading provider of global communications services and solutions. The scope of services includes managed connectivity and voice services, collaboration and contact centre solutions, as well as cloud-based security services and consultancy.

Digital Transformation & Sustainable Growth

In continuation of its ongoing efforts to accelerate the digital transformation in the country, and in line with its business strategy to constantly provide the latest digital services to its customers and the public, Ooredoo has announced the adaptation and utilization of "Kuwait Mobile ID". It is a mobile application provided by the Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) that provides users with a digital civil ID accredited for identification and digital signature for both government and private sector, for secure authentication of identities at any of its branches, sales channels, online at <https://shop.ooredoo.com.kw>, or through the MyOoredoo application.

Ooredoo first operator in Kuwait and the region to roll out eSim online purchases in Kuwait

Ooredoo is the first telecom operator in the State of Kuwait and region to offer customers the ability to conduct a complete purchasing process of a new eSIM online, and without any physical interaction or signature utilizing "Kuwait Mobile ID", a mobile application provided by the Public Authority for Civil Information

(PACI). PACI provides users with a digital civil ID accredited for identification and digital signature for both government and private sector.

Ooredoo Kuwait announced that it won the title "Speedtest Awards Winner 2021" by Ookla, the company that operates the famous website Speedtest.net, a tool that measures network speed on users' devices. The award is based on speed test results conducted by hundreds of thousands of actual smartphone users in Kuwait.

Ooredoo - Tunisia

Revenues increased by 5% to reach KD 134.0 million in 2021 compared to KD 127.7 million in 2020. EBITDA decreased to KD 51.8 million in 2021 compared to KD 54.7 million in 2020. Ooredoo's customer base in Tunisia decreased to 6.9 million customers, due to a change in Ooredoo Tunisia's reporting methodology of its prepaid customer's base from the original life-cycle definition to the 90 days network activity definition to align with a common methodology across mobile operators within the country. This change translates into a drop in the reported customer base of approximately 1.2 million with no impact on the reported financials.

Ooredoo - Algeria

Ooredoo Algeria reported strong numbers despite the continued devaluation of the Algerian Dinar, which depreciated by 8% year-on-year. Revenues stood at KD 188.5 million in 2021. In local currency terms, revenues were up by 8%. EBITDA increased by 4% to KD 65.1 million in 2021 compared to KD 62.6 million in 2020. Ooredoo Algeria's customer base increased by 2% to 12.8 million in 2021 compared to 12.5 million in 2020.

Ooredoo - Palestine

Revenue increased by 9% to KD 33.8 million in 2021, compared to KD 31.2 million in 2020. The business reported a strong EBITDA with an increase of 17% to KD 12.3 million in 2021 compared to KD 10.5 million in 2020, driven by operational efficiencies across the business. Customer base in Palestine increased by 5% to reach 1.4 million customers in 2021 compared to 1.3 million in 2020.

Ooredoo - Maldives

Ooredoo Maldives reported a 2% increase in revenues to KD 35.0 million in 2021, compared to KD 34.3 million in 2020. EBITDA was KD 17.2 million in 2021 compared to KD 17.0 million in 2020. Ooredoo Maldives now serves a total of 368 thousand customers.



TOKYO: A pedestrian walks past an electronic chart displaying today's movement of share price (top, left) of the Tokyo Stock Exchange and movement of the past 12 months. — AFP

Asian, European markets rise as crucial US inflation data looms

HONG KONG: Asian and European stocks enjoyed further gains yesterday as traders jostled for position ahead of the release of US inflation data later in the day that could have a huge bearing on the Federal Reserve's rate hike plans.

A broadly positive week for global equities continued on Wednesday thanks to some healthy earnings results, the further reopening of economies and signs of an easing in Russia-Ukraine tensions. While the mood for now is positive, nerves are on edge as the US consumer price index figures come up for release.

Commentators warn that a reading above the forecast 7.2 percent — which would be a new four-decade high — would pressure the Fed to act more aggressively to rein in prices. Some Fed officials on Wednesday said policymakers would make their decisions based on data coming across their desks, with a 50-basis-point hike — as opposed to the usual 25 basis points — was not off the table just yet.

Surging inflation and bets that the US central bank will end its pandemic-era cheap cash policies have weighed on world markets in recent months, stalling a two-year rally that saw them hit record or multi-year highs.

But there is a feeling in some quarters that investors may be getting used to the prospect of higher borrowing costs, while still-strong economic data and the easing of containment measures will continue to support company earnings.

"While uncertainty remains as to the course of inflation, particularly wages, and interest rates in the months ahead given the planned tightening by the Fed is essentially new ground... historically economies have grown in much higher interest rate environments," said markets strategist Louis Navellier.

"Why is the market rallying when we're about to get hit with that horrible inflation news tomorrow? In a word: earnings. They're much better than anyone anticipated. So the surprises are huge and the guidance, by and large, is great." All three main indexes on Wall Street chalked up strong gains Wednesday, while London, Paris and Frankfurt piled on more than one percent apiece.

Asia battled to maintain the momentum and fluctuated through the day but gainers came out on top. Tokyo, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Seoul, Taipei, Mumbai and Bangkok were solidly higher and Singapore eked out small gains. Wellington, Jakarta and Manila edged down.

London, Paris and Frankfurt all rose at the open of trade. There is a general consensus that the outlook for the global economy is positive and markets will recover as inflation is brought under control thanks to easing supply snarls, but some observers remain cautious.

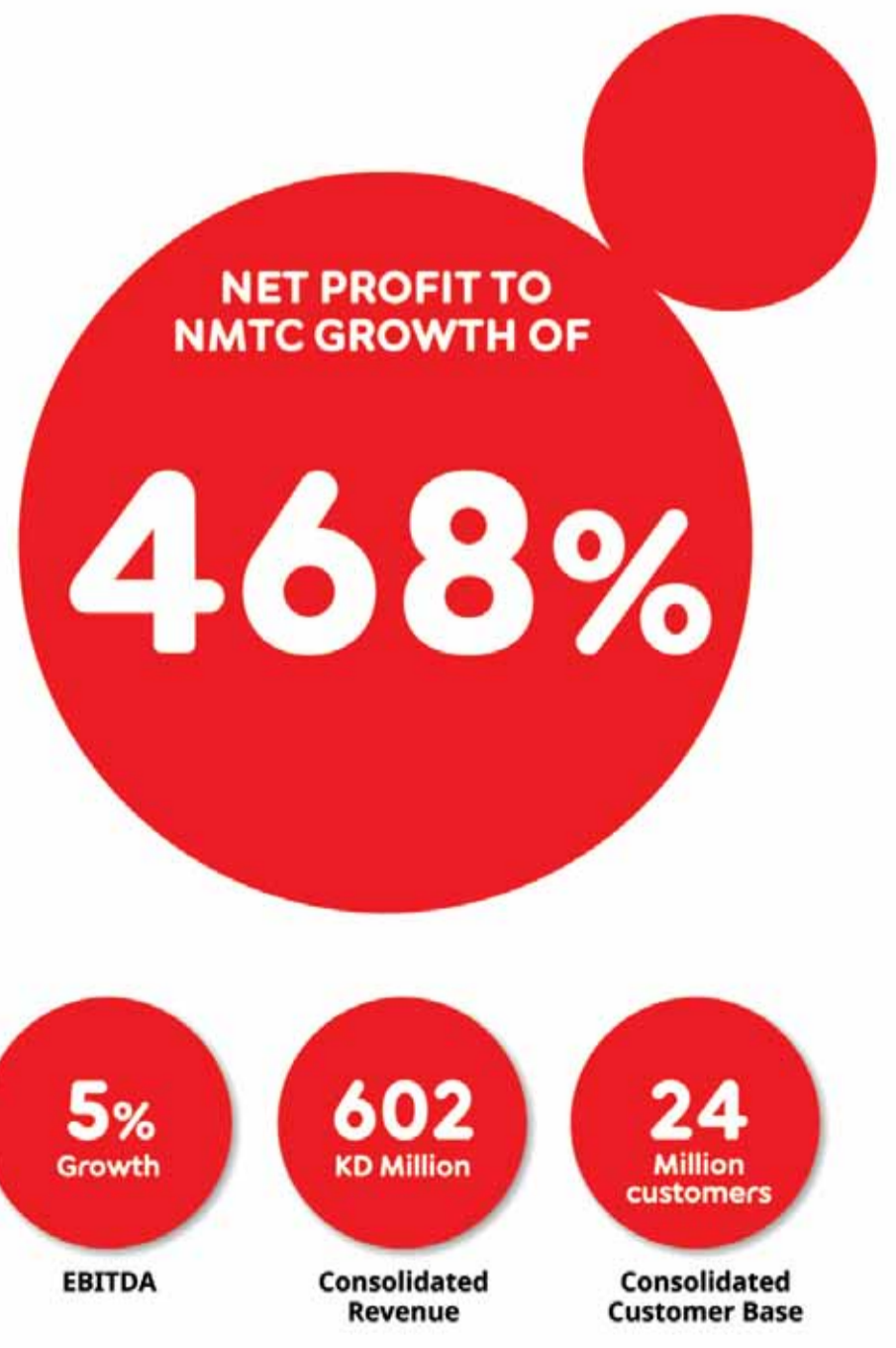
"The market is being somewhat sanguine about what will happen in the second half of 2022," Sonal Desai, of Franklin Templeton Fixed Income, said. "There is an expectation that inflation will decline sharply. I think that might be optimistic because a lot of the factors driving inflation will still be with us. The Fed is already behind the curve."

Still, concerns over the stand-off between Russia and Ukraine appeared to be easing after French President Emmanuel Macron said Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin had told him that Moscow "would not be the source of an escalation".

While the West accuses Russia of having massed 100,000 soldiers near Ukraine's borders, Kyiv's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said "diplomacy is continuing to lower tensions". Meanwhile, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said "there were positive signals that a solution to Ukraine could be based only on fulfilling the Minsk agreements", which ended the worst of the fighting in 2014 between Ukraine and Russian-backed separatists.

Signs of progress on the diplomatic front in Eastern Europe have kept a cap on oil prices in recent days, as has the possibility of a revived Iran nuclear deal, which could see Tehran resume worldwide exports and ease supply problems. Both main contracts were slightly higher Thursday, having rallied this year to their highest levels since 2014. — AFP

Financial Results for 2021



Lifestyle | Features



(From left to right) Berlinale 2022 International Jury Member and Japanese director and screenwriter Ryusuke Hamaguchi, Berlinale 2022 International Jury Member and Zimbabwean filmmaker and writer Tsitsi Dangaremba, Berlinale 2022 International Jury President and US filmmaker M Night Shyamalan, Berlinale 2022 International Jury Member and French producer Said Ben Said, Berlinale 2022 International Jury Member and German director and screenwriter Anne Zohra Berrached, Berlinale 2022 International Jury Member and Danish actress Connie Nielsen and Berlinale 2022 International Jury Member and Brazilian director Karim Ainouz pose during a photo call for the jury's presentation on the day of the festival's opening in Berlin yesterday. — AFP photos



French actor Denis Menochet (left), French director Francois Ozon (center) and French actor Khalil Gharbia are given instructions by a steward for their positions to pose for photographers during a photo call for the film 'Peter von Kant'.

Berlin filmfest goes live as virus wave peaks

The Berlinale, Europe's first major international film festival of the year, kicked off as a live event yesterday with Germany facing record daily coronavirus infections. Organizers of the event, which started in 1951 as a Cold War culture showcase for the divided German capital, say a raft of precautions will keep audiences safe as they take in the latest movies from around the globe. Artistic director Carlo Chatrian defended the decision against accusations it was irresponsible at this stage of the pandemic, saying the communal movie experience was crucial for the battered industry, as well as for society at large.

"Seeing a film in a theatre, being able to hear breathing, laughter or whispers next to you—even with correct social distancing—contributes in a vital way not only to the viewing pleasure, but also to strengthening the social function that cinema has," he

said. Indian-born American director M Night Shyamalan ("The Sixth Sense"), who is leading the jury, told a press conference yesterday morning he was "just so excited to watch these movies". "I'm feeling like a kid here and these guys are the perfect partners in crime," he said.

The jury also includes Japan's Ryusuke Hamaguchi, whose "Drive My Car" is now nominated for four Oscars, and Tunisian-French producer Said Ben Said, who praised the decision to go ahead with the festival. "Cinema for me has always been like a religion, and as a cinephile I have always been a very religious man... For a religious man, the church is the most important place," he said.

Huppert honors

The Berlinale will open with "Peter von Kant", a gender-flipped adaptation of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's classic "The

Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant". The film by acclaimed French director Francois Ozon stars Denis Menochet, Isabelle Adjani and Hanna Schygulla, now 78, who played the cruel young seductress in the original. It is among 18 contenders for the festival's Golden and Silver Bear top prizes, to be handed out on February 16.

Seven of the filmmakers in competition are women. The festival will also award an honorary Golden Bear for lifetime achievement to French screen legend Isabelle Huppert. Berlin ranks with Cannes and Venice among Europe's biggest film festivals and prides itself on being most welcoming to the general public, selling thousands of tickets to red-carpet premieres and screenings across the city.

Last year, the Berlinale competition was staged strictly online, just as the first vaccines were rolling out across Europe. This time the event will screen around 250

films, a quarter fewer than in previous years, with limited cinema capacity as well as vaccine, testing and mask requirements and a shorter competition run.

The Berliner Morgenpost warned of a "catastrophe" if the festival turned into a "superspreader event", while weekly Die Zeit called it "irresponsible" and "backward" not to have an online program. Scott Roxborough, Europe bureau chief for The Hollywood Reporter, also questioned the festival's choice, saying it arose from deep anxiety about the future of movie-going.

Bounce back?

"People are still very uncertain what the industry will look like after corona," he told AFP. "Most theatres will have reopened or partially reopened but we still haven't seen a real bounce back of arthouse movies, of independent movies in the way that a lot of people had hoped." Big-name filmmakers

and stars are awaited in the German capital, with France's Claire Denis premiering "Both Sides of the Blade" with Juliette Binoche and Vincent Lindon of last year's Cannes winner, the feminist shocker "Titane".

"Carol" screenwriter Phyllis Nagy will present her abortion rights drama "Call Jane" starring Elizabeth Banks and Sigourney Weaver. Paolo Taviani, 90, who won the Golden Bear a decade ago with his late brother Vittorio with "Caesar Must Die", will unveil "Leonora Addio" about the murder of a Sicilian immigrant boy in Brooklyn. And Indonesia's Kamila Andini will be the first Southeast Asian woman in competition, with "Before, Now and Then" about a war refugee who befriends her husband's mistress. — AFP



The Ambassador of Pakistan to Kuwait Syed Sajjad Haider



IWG enchants members, guests with Pakistan Cultural Day 'Zoom event'

The International Women's Group (IWG) in cooperation with the Embassy of Pakistan and in line with social distancing guidelines held an elaborate and informative 'Pakistan Cultural Day' Zoom event for members and guests; affectionately titled 'Pyara (beloved) Pakistan'. This very special event meticulously planned by IWG's past president, Ambreen Mustafa, wife of Syed Sajjad Haider, Pakistan's Ambassador to Kuwait, covered many aspects of Pakistan's natu-

ral beauty and rich cultural heritage.

The meeting commenced with an informative slideshow of some prominent trailblazing women of Pakistan in a variety of fields such as government, education, literature, science, economics, philanthropy, social activism and fine arts. IWG's current president, Cristiana Balducci, wife of the Ambassador of Italy, formally opened the event by welcoming participants and members. Two short documentaries covering the many historical sites and breathtaking scenic beauty of Pakistan's varied landscapes were shown, followed by a lively and entertaining quiz.

Aziza Khan, IWG board member, acting as MC introduced Syed Sajjad Haider, Pakistan's Ambassador to Kuwait. In a pre-taped speech in front of a few socially distanced staff members, organizers and performers the ambassador spoke of the warmth and welcoming nature of the Pakistani people; its splendid historical sites; superb handicrafts and textiles; its natural beauty comprising of oceans; deserts; magnificent mountain ranges and

home to K2, the second tallest mountain in the world.

In closing, HE Syed Sajjad Haider, who will shortly be completing his tour of duty and returning to Pakistan, thanked the IWG board and all attendees for participating in the event. Expressing his gratitude at having been able to serve Pakistan in this wonderfully hospitable country of Kuwait, he reminded everyone of the direct flights to Pakistan and said that he and his wife look forward to reciprocating by welcoming them to Pakistan to enjoy its many offerings.

As a gesture of respect and gratitude, Syed Sajjad Haider and Mrs Mustafa were then presented with shields of appreciation. To the delight of the attendees, the meeting then continued with two musical segments; the first was a mesmerizing piece played on the Rubab, an instrument from the 17th century, followed by a dance presentation performed by the talented amateur 'Hunza Troupe' comprised of medical professionals working in Kuwait.

The graceful folk dance called Alghani or Ajolis from the beautiful Northern region of Gilgit-Balistan (GB); Hunza a part of the GB region has a 100% literacy rate with a life expectancy rate of approximately 100 years, due to its clean mountain air and organic produce.

In closing, Ambreen Mustafa, wife of the Ambassador of Pakistan, explained that the original event had been planned as a physical meeting and was meant to create a lively street food scene representing delicacies from Pakistan's four provinces. The idea was to take members and guests on a culinary and visual journey of the senses; she said: "however, the present COVID considerations did not allow us to welcome you with open arms and with warmth the way we intended, but we have tried to transfer as much of the program as possible on this zoom format, and hope that we have succeeded in bringing you some of the color, flavor and enchanting beauty of our beloved Pakistan."



Panda 'phenomenon' surprises Beijing Olympics mascot designer

The man behind the Beijing Winter Olympics mascot jokes that he wished he had kept a few more of his cuddly panda creations after they became highly sought after collectables in China. Bing Dwen Dwen, the official mascot of the Games, has become the latest must-have item for keen fans with long queues at Olympic souvenir shops, and many willing to pay well over the official price to get their hands on one. Cao Xue, who led the design team, said he was surprised by the craze. "I thought... that some people might begin to purchase some after the opening of Olympics, but I didn't expect it to be so hot overnight," he told AFP. "Bing Dwen Dwen has become a phenomenon."

"Each of us kept only one Bing Dwen Dwen as a souvenir, which we deeply regret now," he added. While the name officially means "ice child" in Mandarin, the popular rotund mascot is more colloquially translated as "ice chubster". However a supply shortage-attributed to production issues around Chinese Lunar New Year, which coincided with the start of the Olympics—has seen scalpers selling the toy for ten times its original price of 200 yuan (\$30), according to reports. Police have also warned of scams surrounding Bing Dwen Dwen with online fraudsters pocketing the money and disappearing. But with spectators largely banned due to COVID-19 restrictions, owning an "ice chubster" may be the closest most people get to the Beijing Games.

'The best and only choice'

In the months designing the Games mascot, there were at least 16 versions and floor-to-ceiling drawings pasted around his office, said Cao, a professor at the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts. "We drew tens of thousands of sketches, spent seven months in the process of designing and modification, and once gave up the

idea of panda as there had been so many panda images designed before. "But in the end for both our design team and the Beijing Olympic Organizing Committee—a panda is our best and only choice."



The final blueprint placed the animal inside a transparent ice-like bubble, inspired by the outer shell of a "tanghulu", a hawthorn snack glazed with syrup popular in Beijing. It has also spurred creative interpretations including Bing Dwen Dwen themed dumplings, rice cakes and homemade versions, according to videos by enthusiastic users online. One fan outside the iconic Bird's Nest stadium even claimed to have recreated the mascot using human hair.

Organizers have insisted they are now ramping up supply, and state media has published videos showing workers putting in overtime at factories. "When I saw Beijing citizens queuing in [shopping district] Wangfujing for hours in the severe cold, I was thinking: they don't want to buy a lifeless toy," said Cao. "They waited for hours in the cold in the hope that they could hold something which give them a sense of warmth. "Through Bing Dwen Dwen, I want to express warmth and love." — AFP



Lifestyle | Features



Saudi Farah Al-Malki, 90 (left), his son Ahmed, 42, and his grandson Mansour, 11, harvest Khawlani coffee beans at a coffee farm in Saudi Arabia's southwestern region of Jizan. — AFP photos



Saudi farmer Farah Al-Malki, 90, checks his Khawlani coffee beans.

Sotheby's sale of 200 pairs of Virgil Abloh shoe fetches \$25 million

Sotheby's announced Wednesday that an auction of 200 pairs of the Louis Vuitton and Nike "Air Force 1" sneaker created by late US designer Virgil Abloh had fetched a total of \$25 million. A spokesman for the auction house told AFP that the most paid for one of the pairs was more than \$350,000 during the online sale that ran from January 26 to February 8. The sums greatly exceed the initial estimates of Sotheby's, which had started the bidding at \$2,000 and had predicted they would sell for between \$5,000 and \$15,000 a pair.

In the end, the sneakers, which ranged in size from five to 18, averaged more than \$100,000 per shoe. The cheapest sold for just over \$75,000. The special edition sneaker, made of calf leather, was originally created for Louis Vuitton's spring-summer men's collection for 2022, of which Abloh was artistic director. Abloh, a multi-talented DJ, architect and designer died in November at the age of 41 following a private battle with cancer.

A close associate of Kanye West, Abloh was the first Black American to be named creative director of a top French fashion house and brought streetwear and a less elitist approach to the world of luxury. The brown, white and cream-colored sneakers boast Nike's famous swoosh logo plus Louis Vuitton's recognizable monogram and damier motifs. They were created to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Nike Air Force 1, which was designed in 1982.

'Broke the record'

The auction, held exclusively online, began just six days after the presentation of Abloh's last Vuitton collection in Paris in front of an emotional audience that included stars Rihanna, Kanye West and Pharrell Williams. "From the moment our



In this file photo US fashion designer for Off-White Virgil Abloh acknowledges the audience at the end of the Off-White Women's Fall-Winter 2019/2020 Ready-to-Wear collection fashion show in Paris. — AFP photos

Saudi coffee legacy percolates through the generations

For Farah Al-Malki, growing coffee plants in Saudi Arabia's southwestern region of Jizan is more than just a profession. It is a family tradition passed down from generation to generation. The 90-year-old patriarch has a long history with coffee, which spread from Ethiopia to Yemen and then to the rest of the Middle East around the 15th century. "My father inherited it from his grandfathers, and I took over and passed it down to my sons and then on to my grandchildren," Malki told AFP, as he watched his male relatives prune trees.

Jizan is known for its red Khawlani coffee beans, often blended with cardamom and saffron to give a yellowish hue of coffee-locally known as ghawa-and a taste markedly different from the bitter black liquid drunk elsewhere in the Middle East and in the West. It remains an integral part of Saudi culture, so much so that the government has designated 2022 as "The Year of Saudi Coffee". Served with dates in homes and royal palaces across the kingdom, breaking barriers of societal hierarchy, ghawa is considered a symbol of hospitality and generosity.



Saudi Farah Al-Malki, 90, and his son Ahmed, 42, sort Khawlani coffee beans.



Saudi farmer Ahmed Al-Malki, 42, harvests Khawlani coffee beans at a coffee farm.

Donning the traditional dress of coffee farmers, a dark "chemise" shirt and ankle-length skirt known as a "wizrah", along with a belt holding a dagger, Malki is still tending to the fields despite his age. "The biggest issues we used to have were the lack of water and support," said Malki. But with the kingdom's desire to diversify its economy away from oil, alongside a social shift to transform the country's ultra-conservative image and open up to visitors and investors, the government last month

began a campaign to promote its coffee. It instructed all restaurants and cafes to use the term "Saudi coffee" instead of Arabic coffee. Saudi Aramco, the largely state-owned oil company, announced plans to establish a coffee centre in Jizan using "advanced irrigation techniques to improve agricultural capacity".

UNESCO dream

By the end of 2021, the kingdom had 400,000 coffee trees in 600 farms across the country, producing about 800 tons of coffee a year. That is a fraction of what Ethiopia produces but, according to domestic reports, Saudi Arabia plans to plant 1.2 million Khawlani trees by 2025.

Malki has nine sons, all of whom take part in the coffee industry, ranging from agriculture and packaging to transportation and marketing. On the field every day is his 42-year-old son, Ahmed, who like his father is dressed in traditional farmer's clothing, complete with a headdress made of flowers. He said he has an intimate

knowledge of Khawlani coffee beans, explaining: "All farms are organic and free of chemicals." They produce about 2.5 tons of coffee beans a year, selling for between \$27-\$40 a kilogram (\$12-\$18 a pound).

Historian Yahya Al-Malki, who is not related to the farm family, told AFP that the "secret" to the Khawlani beans lies in their cultivation in the Jizan region, where it is warm, humid and rainy. Saudi Arabia has sought to include its cultivation of Khawlani coffee on the list of "intangible cultural heritage of humanity" maintained by the United Nations cultural agency UNESCO. This, Ahmed said, would be a dream come true. "It will help in supporting farmers and preserving coffee trees as well as attracting foreign investors to the region," he told AFP. "I hope to pass this on to my sons and their sons, and pray it be a source of livelihood for them." — AFP



Saudi farmer Ahmed Al-Malki, 42, displays Khawlani coffee.



Saudi Farah Al-Malki, 90, his son Ahmed, 42, and his grandson Mansour, 11, harvest Khawlani coffee beans at a coffee farm.



Saudi farmer Farah Al-Malki, 90, and his grandson Mansour, 11, harvest Khawlani coffee beans.

auction launched, the energy has been electric," said Brahm Wachter, Sotheby's head of streetwear and modern collectables, adding that the event "broke the record for the most bids in the opening day of any online sale."

The market for rare sports shoes is soaring, with sneakers having transformed into major collector's items that have recently been snatched up for tens of thousands of dollars. In search of a facelift and new clientele, big names in luxury such as Dior and LVMH have partnered with sports and streetwear brands to create athletic footwear.

According to Sotheby's, more than 1,200 potential buyers from more than 50 countries participated in the auction. More than half of those who successfully purchased a pair of shoes were under age 40 and collectors in Asia represented 40 percent of final buyers. In the history of sneaker sales, however, the most expensive pairs have been worn by sports and hip-hop legends. Last April, a pair of Nike Air Yeezy 1s worn by Kanye West sold for \$1.8 million at Sotheby's. In October, a pair of sneakers worn by NBA superstar Michael Jordan early in his career sold for nearly \$1.5 million. Proceeds from the Abloh shoe auction will benefit a scholarship fund he set up that supports aspiring designers of Black, African American or African descent. — AFP



In this file photo a pair of Louis Vuitton-Nike sneakers is displayed at Sotheby's in New York.

Angelina Jolie, at US Capitol, presses for domestic violence law

Film star Angelina Jolie was back on Capitol Hill Wednesday pleading with US lawmakers to immediately pass measures to combat domestic violence. At a press briefing in the US Capitol, Jolie expressed support for renewing legislation that would provide victims of such abuse with medical and legal assistance, as well as support to children who have been exposed to violence in the home.

"The ugly truth is that violence in homes is normalized in our country," said the filmmaker and Academy Award-winning actress. "I want to acknowledge the children who are terrified and suffering at this moment, and the many people for

whom this legislation comes too late," said Jolie, who teared up as she called on Congress to make reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) a priority.

The 46-year-old "Eternals" star has

accused her ex-husband Brad Pitt of intentionally hitting their son Maddox, then 15 — although Pitt has been cleared of the allegations. President Joe Biden, then a US senator, was primary author of the original version of the bill first signed into

law in 1994. Subsequent versions of VAWA have passed with strong support from both Democrats and Republicans.

But in 2019, a version that had cleared the House of Representatives stalled in the Senate, which was then controlled by Republicans who prevented the bill from coming to a final vote. The legislation unveiled Wednesday also has bipartisan support, and Biden applauded the group of lawmakers from both parties who came together to introduce the VAWA reauthorization.

"Combating domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking should not be a Democratic issue or Republican issue. It's a matter of justice and compassion," Biden said, adding he looks forward to the bill reaching his desk "without delay." Republican Senator Joni Ernst, herself a survivor of domestic violence and sexual assault, was elated that a deal had been reached to get VAWA over the finish line. "We can almost let out a sigh of relief," she said. — AFP



Actress Angelina Jolie (center), speaks alongside US Senator Joni Ernst (R-IA) (right), US Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) (left), US Senator Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV) (second left), and US Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) (third left), as they announce a bipartisan modernized Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), during a press conference on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC. — AFP

Sports

Vhova, Ledecka put Shiffrin under pressure in super-G

Shiffrin vows to 'try to re-set better this time'

YANQING: Reigning champion Ester Ledecka and slalom gold medalist Petra Vhova will ensure misfiring Mikaela Shiffrin goes into the Beijing Olympics super-G today under massive pressure. Shiffrin produced two unusual mistakes in both the slalom and giant slalom, skiing out early in both races. It was the first time the American had done that in consecutive technical races since 2011, when she was 16 and in her inaugural World Cup season. Czech snowboard gold medalist Ledecka and Vhova, from Slovakia, along with Switzerland's world champion Lara Gut-Behrami, will be waiting to pounce in Yanqing.

Shiffrin redemption?

Mikaela Shiffrin saw her medal hopes in both the slalom and giant slalom drain away after barely making five gates in either race before uncharacteristically sliding out. As disappointing as those results were, the American vowed to "try to re-set better this time". She added: "I also don't know how to do better because I just don't. I have never been in this position before and I don't know how to handle it. "We are not done yet but GS and slalom, those were my biggest focuses. It really feels like a lot of work for nothing. "They will try to say, 'This happens and it's OK, and don't be too hard on yourself'. But it is a lot of work for a grand total of five gates in the GS and five gates in the slalom," Shiffrin said. "That's not lost on me."

Vhova hunts second gold

Vhova kept her nerve to win the slalom at these Games, improving from eighth fastest in the first leg to register an impressive victory in Shiffrin's absence. Her Swiss coach Mauro Pini said there

was a clear plan for the 26-year-old Slovak. "We have of course another big goal in the alpine combined. For us it's there, and we will try, I'm sure."

Snowboard crossover Ledecka

The reigning champion is the unlikely figure of cross-code star Ledecka, the Czech who successfully defended her snowboard parallel giant slalom title on Tuesday. Ledecka became the first woman to win a gold medal in two different sports at a Winter Olympics when she took skiing and snowboarding titles in Pyeongchang four years ago. After her snowboard success in Beijing, the 26-year-old is now strapping on two skis to target the super-G before going for gold in downhill and alpine combined. "For me it's natural and I've been doing this since I was a child," she said of competing in both snowboarding and skiing.

Italian duo, Gut-Behrami lurk

The Italian trio of Federica Brignone, the silver medalist in the giant slalom who skied out of the slalom, Elena Curtoni and Sofia Goggia top World Cup standings in the super-G. Reigning Olympic downhill champion Goggia, however, will sit out the race after failing to recover from a knee injury she sustained in a crash in Cortina last month. The current world champion is Gut-Behrami, who won in Cortina in 2021 ahead of Swiss teammate Corinne Suter, and has already bagged giant slalom bronze in Beijing.

Second speed event

The super giant slalom, or the super-G as it is more commonly known, combines elements of the downhill and the giant slalom, and is decided over



YANQING: Slovakia's Petra Vhova competes in the second run of the women's slalom during the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games at the Yanqing National Alpine Skiing Centre. —AFP

one race. Skiers must negotiate widely-spaced gates, as in giant slalom, over a long course with speeds approaching those in downhill over a course that drops between 400 and 600 meters for women. The minimum number of gates for women is 30. Unlike the downhill, skiers do not have the

chance of a pre-race training run, only a one-hour visual inspection on the morning of the race. It will be a first outing for the women on the "Rock" piste as two World Cup races, in 2020 and 2021, on the hill were cancelled because of Covid-19 restrictions in China. — AFP

NFL to review minority hiring after race storm

LOS ANGELES: The NFL will seek advice from independent experts as part of a wide-ranging review aimed at boosting the numbers of minority head coaches, league chief Roger Goodell said Wednesday. NFL commissioner Goodell said nothing would be "off the table" as the league looked to improve its record of hiring minorities following allegations of institutional racism.

"I think we've made a tremendous amount of progress in a lot of areas, but with the head coaches we've got a lot of work to do and we've got to figure that out," Goodell told reporters at his annual state-of-the-league press conference ahead of this weekend's Super Bowl. "To me, this is an opportunity for us to step back, look at what we're doing, and see how what we're doing can lead to better results." The NFL was rocked last week after former Miami Dolphins head coach Brian Flores filed a lawsuit accusing the league and club owners of racist hiring practices.

The explosive allegations refocused attention on the NFL's dearth of African-American or minority head coaches in a league where around 70% of players are Black. Since Flores' lawsuit, both the Dolphins and the Houston Texans have hired minority head coaches, taking the 32-team league total to five. However, Goodell acknowledged on Wednesday that even allowing for those appointments the NFL had fallen short "by a long shot." "I think we've made a lot of progress in a lot of areas," Goodell said.

'Falling short'

"But not at the head coach. And that is something we really have focused on-trying to get the results that we expect. We have fallen short of that by a long shot." Goodell said the NFL's affirmative action policy, the "Rooney Rule", which requires teams to interview at least one minority candidate for head coaching jobs, had been successful in getting Black coaches "into the interview room." "But what we want to see is the outcomes," Goodell said.

"So what we are going to do is step back and look at everything we are doing today and re-evaluate that." That could even include revising the Rooney rule or eliminating it altogether, Goodell said. "We're going to have independent people come in and look and help us evaluate it," Goodell said. "Because it's sometimes hard to evaluate your own policies and procedures. We want to make sure we're doing everything we possibly can to create that opportunity for everybody to make sure we are an inclusive league and we get the outcomes we want."

Goodell said the league would be ready to overhaul league policies if necessary. "If it requires an overhaul you do it," he said. "If it requires changes in other areas you do it. "Obviously we haven't been successful to date so you have to look at every one of the alternatives. "We're going to have people look at it independently with us and bring those ideas to us. "We believe in diversity, we believe in it as a value, we believe it makes us stronger-we just have to do a better job."

"Is there another thing we can do to making sure we're attracting the best talent and making our league inclusive? If I had the answer I would give it to you. "We have to continue to look at it and say "We're not doing a good enough job here". We need to find better solutions and better outcomes. So let's find more effective policies." —AFP

Rohit lauds Krishna's 4-12 as India clinch ODI series

AHMEDABAD: Skipper Rohit Sharma on Wednesday hailed Prasad Krishna's spell of 4-12 as one of the best in India after the hosts outplayed West Indies by 44 runs to clinch the one-day series. West Indies faltered in their chase of 238 to be bowled out for 193 in 46 overs in the second ODI as India took an unbeatable 2-0 lead in the three-match series in Ahmedabad. Krishna's career-best figures involved three maiden overs in his spell of nine to make India extend their successive ODI series win record over West Indies to 11.

"I have not seen that kind of spell in a long time in India," Rohit, who took over as the full-time ODI skipper in the previous match, said of Krishna's bowling. "He bowled with skill, he bowled with pace. The others complimented him. All in all a great bowling effort." Krishna, who played his sixth ODI for India since his debut in March last year against England, said it was "flattering" to hear such high praise from Rohit - a veteran of 229 ODIs.

Pace bowler Shardul Thakur took two wickets while the rest of the bowlers got one each. Suryakumar Yadav's 64 remained key as India

posted 237 for nine, a total that looked below par but proved enough for the tourists who came into the match without injured skipper Kieron Pollard. In reply, West Indies lost opener Brandon King for 18 and Darren Bravo for one with Krishna taking down both the batsmen in his first two overs.

Krishna struck again in his second spell to send back stand-in-skipper Nicholas Pooran, for nine, as West Indies slipped to 66-4. "I have been striving to get more consistency. I remember when I started, I was excited and had so many emotions running through me," player of the match Prasad told reporters. "But over a period of time we have had our plans very clear and glad it paid off." Shamarh Brooks raised hopes of a fightback with a 41-run partnership with Akeel Hosen who attempted to keep up the chase after his partners' departure in another gritty stand with Fabien Allen.

'Special' Odean

All rounder Odean Smith, who took two wickets with his pace bowling, gave India a scare with 20-ball 24 but



AHMEDABAD: India's Rohit Sharma plays a shot during the second one day international (ODI) cricket match between India and West Indies in Motera on February 9, 2022. —AFP

Washington Sundar got him out and Krishna took the final wicket. Earlier Yadav and KL Rahul, who made 49, put on 90 runs for the fourth wicket after West Indies fast bowlers struck early to reduce India to 43-3.

Pace spearhead Kumar Roach drew first blood after getting Rohit caught behind for five in the third over of the innings. Pollard's replacement Smith rattled the hosts with his

double strike in one over to send back Rishabh Pant, who opened the batting, out for 18 and Kohli also walked back on 18. "Odean is special. He is a strong guy," Pooran said of the 25-year-old Smith who played his fourth ODI since his debut in January. "He is still young. With experience, sky is the limit for him. The final match is on Friday at the same venue. — AFP



NICE: Nice's Polish goalkeeper Marcin Bulka stops a shoot during the French Cup quarter-final football match between OGC Nice and Olympique de Marseille at the 'Allianz Riviera' stadium in Nice on February 9, 2022. —AFP

Kluivert shines; Nice thump Marseille 4-1

PARIS: Justin Kluivert scored twice as Nice came from behind to beat south coast rivals Marseille 4-1 in a pulsating French Cup quarter-final on Wednesday. Nice join Monaco and fourth division Versailles in the draw for the semis with Nantes taking on Bastia. Nice and Marseille was the pick of the quarter-finals with the sides placed second and third in the French top flight.

Kluivert was man-of-the-match rising to head home the go-ahead goal on 29 minutes before his sublime strike from distance four minutes into the second half put the hosts on their way to a deserved win.

"It's really important for a striker to score goals and I'm very happy with those two. I came here to score goals and that shows a bit about what I can do," said the 22-year-old son of former Dutch international striker Patrick Kluivert. Nice conceded an own-goal in the third minute before Amine Gouiri levelled on 10 minutes, while Andy Delort put the game beyond doubt just after the hour. Fourth division Versailles also reached the semi-finals after squeezing past Bergerac 5-4 on penalties following a 1-1 draw. — AFP

Cricketer tried in a rare adultery case

DHAKA: Bangladeshi national cricketer Nasir Hossain has gone on trial charged with adultery after a man claimed the batsman illegally married his wife, lawyers said yesterday. Bangladeshi men, but not women, can be tried for adultery in socially conservative Bangladesh although cases are extremely rare, with people usually keen to avoid a public scandal.

Nasir, 30, who has represented Bangladesh more than 100 times-although not since 2018 — tied the knot with flight attendant Tamima Sultana on Valentine's Day 2021. But her first husband Rakib Hasan has filed charges of adultery against Nasir, claiming that he was-and still is-married to Tamima. If found guilty, Nasir could face a maximum punishment of seven years in jail. Tamima has been charged with forgery. "Tamima has forged divorce documents and postal receipts to show that she was no longer married with Rakib," Rakib's lawyer Ishrat Hasan said.

Farid Uddin Khan, who represents the cricketer and Tamima, said the court would record the testimony of witnesses from March 10. "Adultery cases are rare. Usually, it's tough to prove. We are confident these charges cannot be proved," he said. Both Nasir and Tamima are currently out on bail. Nasir played 19 Tests, 65 one-day internationals and 31 Twenty20 internationals for Bangladesh. His last international match, an ODI, was against Sri Lanka in 2018 in Dhaka. — AFP

Sports

Man City go 12 points clear; Southampton stun Spurs 3-2

Leeds snatch a thrilling 3-3 draw at Aston Villa

LONDON: Manchester City surged 12 points clear at the top of the Premier League with a 2-0 win against Brentford, while Tottenham's top four bid suffered a blow in a dramatic 3-2 defeat against Southampton on Wednesday. Pep Guardiola's side extended their unbeaten run in the league to 14 matches thanks to Riyad Mahrez's first half penalty and Kevin De Bruyne's strike after the interval at the Etihad Stadium.

City were held to a 1-1 draw at Southampton in their previous league game, but they got back on track to pile the pressure on second placed Liverpool, who host Leicester on Thursday in one of their two games in hand on the champions. City made six changes to the team that beat Fulham in the FA Cup last weekend, with Jack Grealish and Kyle Walker dropped just days after Guardiola was forced to defend the pair for a night out in Manchester. Footage on social media showing Grealish, Walker and Mahrez outside a venue in Manchester.

But Guardiola did not have an issue with his players, joking that they would be fined for failing to invite him. City were unaffected by the fuss as they dominated from start to finish, finally making the breakthrough after 40 minutes. Raheem Sterling's run drew a rash sliding tackle from Mads Roerslav, conceding a penalty that Algeria winger Mahrez converted emphatically. City scored the killer second goal in the 69th minute when Brentford keeper David Raya passed straight to Sterling.

Although Raya saved Sterling's shot, Kevin De Bruyne pounced on the rebound and stroked a cool finish into the empty net. "I'm very satisfied with the performance. It's difficult when they defend deep with 10 players," Guardiola said. "Liverpool have two games to play, then we see the gap.

Everyone is tough competition, but it is impressive at this stage to have 60 points. We have done incredibly well." At the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium, Jan Bednarek's own goal in the 18th minute put the hosts in front.

Southampton were level five minutes later when Armando Broja side-footed past Hugo Lloris. Son Heung-min struck for Tottenham in controversial fashion after 70 minutes. Southampton felt Broja was fouled by Emerson Royal in the build-up, but David Coote allowed play to continue and Lucas Moura picked out Son to slide home from eight yards. The visitors, perhaps provoked by Tottenham manager Antonio Conte's complaints about their protests, responded impressively.

Leeds fightback

Mohamed Elyounoussi equalised with an 80th minute header from James Ward-Prowse's cross, sending Saints boss Ralph Hasenhuttl running on the pitch to celebrate. Che Adams nodded home two minutes later from another pin-point Ward-Prowse delivery. Steven Bergwijn thought he had saved Conte from a first home league defeat with Tottenham, but his stoppage-time effort was disallowed for offside. "We have to be better to manage the game in different situations. We can improve in this aspect. I knew there was a lot of the job to do," Conte said.

Tottenham remain seventh, four points adrift of fourth placed West Ham with three games in hand. Leeds came from 3-1 down to snatch a thrilling 3-3 draw at Aston Villa. Daniel James fired Leeds ahead in the ninth minute, but Philippe Coutinho equalized in the 30th minute with his second Villa goal since his January loan move from Barcelona. Villa were in front eight minutes later as Coutinho pro-



MANCHESTER: Manchester City and Brentford's players fight for the ball during the English Premier League football match between Manchester City and Brentford on February 9, 2022. —AFP

vided a perfectly weighted pass for Jacob Ramsey to finish. Ramsey lashed in his second in the 44th minute and once more Coutinho was the catalyst.

But James reducing the deficit with a close-range header and Diego Llorente completed Leeds' fightback after 63 minutes. Villa's Ezri Konsa was sent off in the 87th minute for two bookings.

Wilfried Zaha went from hero to zero as the Ivory Coast forward missed a penalty after scoring Crystal Palace's equalizer in their 1-1 draw at Norwich. Third bottom Norwich took the lead after just 39 seconds when Teemu Pukki's miscued effort squirmed in for the quickest goal in the Premier League this season. —AFP

Kuwait National Disabled Basketball team in Turkey



By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait National Disabled Basketball team played their first friendly match against Besiktas, during its training camp in Istanbul, Turkey. The camp will continue until Feb 18, after which the team will travel to Bahrain to defend their

title during the third West Asia Paralympic games which is scheduled on Feb 18 - 26. The team is scheduled to play 6 friendlies in Turkey. The Kuwait Disabled Sports Club Technical Director and head of the delegation Mohsen Al-Ajmi said the training camp is proceeding as scheduled. The team has morning and evening sessions.

He said the Kuwait players will face the best players in Turkey so that they will be at their best physically and technically. Al-Ajmi lauded the support athletes receive from the Public Authority for Sport and its Director General Dr Humoud Fulaiteh and his deputy Dr Saqer Al-Mulla and their communications with Chairman of the Paralympic committee.

Carvalho puts Betis in sight of Spanish Cup final

VALLECAS: William Carvalho's brilliant goal edged Real Betis one step closer to the Copa del Rey final on Wednesday as they beat Rayo Vallecano 2-1 in the first leg at Vallecas. Rayo, who have never reached the final, took an early lead through Alvaro Garcia but Betis came storming back. Borja Iglesias driving in before Carvalho nutmegged Alejandro Catena and sidefooted into the corner. Betis will now look to finish the job at the Benito Villamarin on March 3, with the winner of the tie to face either Valencia or Athletic Bilbao, who play the first leg of their semi-final at San Mames on Thursday.

Betis are the highest placed La Liga team left in the Copa del Rey this season after they knocked out Sevilla and Real Madrid were beaten by Athletic in the quarter-finals. Manuel Pellegrini's side are sit-

ting third in the league and pose a major threat to Atletico Madrid and Barcelona securing qualification for the Champions League. But winning the cup for the first time since 2005 would perhaps be an even greater achievement.

Rayo, with Radamel Falcao, are the underdogs of the last four and their fans made it a carnival atmosphere at Vallecas, where supporters even watched from the balconies of flats close enough to the stadium to look over the pitch. The players fed off the support in the opening 10 minutes and grabbed an early lead when Ivan Balliu chipped a cross to the back post, where Alvaro did well to tuck a controlled finish into the corner. But the game settled and so did Betis, with Nabil Fekir increasingly influential and Rayo struggling to regain a foothold. The equalizer came in the 26th minute when Fekir played into Borja on the edge of the area and he arrowed a shot, low and into the corner. Betis might have taken the lead before half-time when Fekir spurned an excellent chance on the break but they did in the second. Carvalho poking the ball through the legs of Catena, collecting it the other side and sidefooting in to give his team the advantage. —AFP



MADRID: Real Betis' French midfielder Nabil Fekir (left) fights for the ball with Rayo Vallecano's Spanish midfielder Oscar Valentin during the Spanish Copa del Rey (King's Cup) semi-final football match between Rayo Vallecano de Madrid and Real Betis on February 9, 2022. —AFP

Bournemouth leapfrog Blackburn in Championship promotion race

LONDON: Bournemouth climbed back into second place in the Championship with a 3-1 win against Birmingham, while their promotion rivals Blackburn crashed to a 2-0 defeat against Nottingham Forest on Wednesday. Scott Parker's side are two points clear of Blackburn with two games in hand as they chase automatic promotion to the Premier League via a top two finish. Ryan Christie opened the scoring and Dominic Solanke's 20th goal of the season doubled Bournemouth's lead at Dean Court.

Bournemouth had Colombian midfielder Jefferson Lerma sent off in the second half two minutes before Onel Hernandez got one back for Birmingham. Jaidon Anthony sealed the victory as the Cherries made amends for Sunday's shock FA Cup fourth round defeat at home to non-league Boreham Wood. James Garner and Brennan Johnson lifted Nottingham Forest into the play-off places as they defeated 10-man Blackburn at Ewood Park.

Garner, on loan from Manchester United, grabbed the first goal when he slotted past Thomas Kaminski. Blackburn's Darragh Lenihan was sent off early in the second half and Johnson's penalty in the final minutes made sure Forest maintained the momentum from their FA Cup fourth round rout of Leicester on Sunday. Billy Sharp bagged a brace to give Sheffield United a 2-0 win over West Bromwich Albion in a disappointing start to Steve Bruce's reign as Baggies boss. —AFP

Celtic survive Aberdeen scare to remain on top

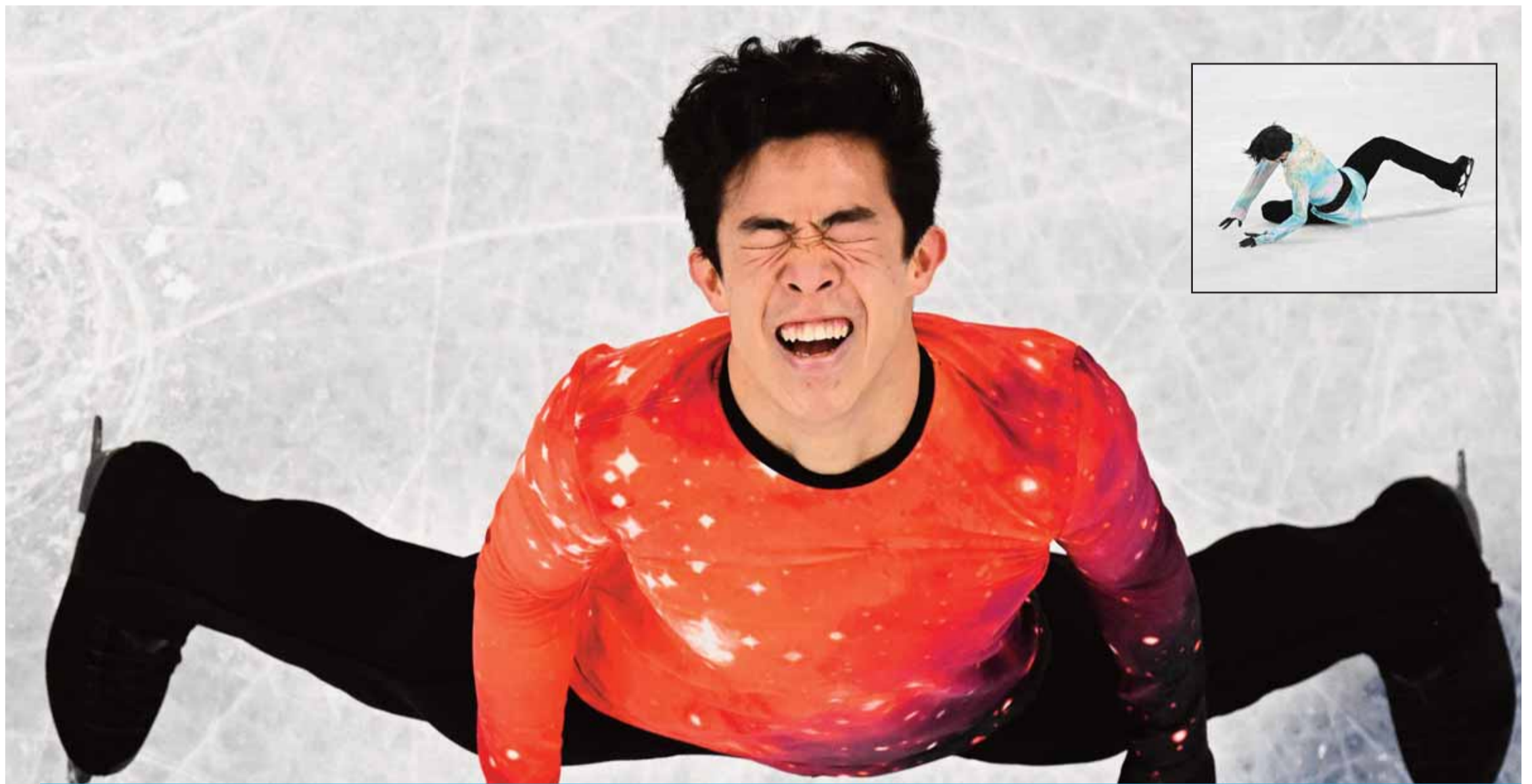
GLASGOW: Celtic hit back after a two-goal lead to beat Aberdeen 3-2 on Wednesday and maintain a slender one-point advantage over Rangers at the top of the Scottish Premiership. Jota and Matt O'Riley's deflected effort had Ange Postecoglou's men cruising towards an eighth consecutive victory. But the visitors were stunned as Aberdeen came out a different side after the break and struck twice in five minutes through Christian Ramirez and Lewis Ferguson.

Barely 60 seconds after the Dons had levelled, Celtic retook the lead when a loose ball broke to Jota in the box and he fired home his fourth goal in three appearances against Aberdeen. Celtic still needed to see out a nervy final 30 minutes, but got over the line to stay just in front of Rangers in the title race. "This is not an easy place to come and win, so great character and a good reaction to get the third goal," said Postecoglou.

"As you saw in the second half there are still areas where we can improve and that's what we need to do. "We could have maintained our composure better. I thought we were rushing." Rangers had a much more comfortable evening as they struck early in each half to beat Hibernian 2-0 at Ibrox. Captain James Tavernier's penalty opened the scoring after Paul McGinn's needless challenge brought down Ryan Kent on five minutes. —AFP

Chen wins skating gold; Hanyu falls

Russian Olympic skater Valieva tests positive for banned drug



BEIJING: USA's Nathan Chen competes in the men's single free skating of the figure skating event during the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games yesterday. (Inset) Japan's Yuzuru Hanyu falls in the men's single free skating of the figure skating event yesterday. — AFP

BEIJING: Nathan Chen won a dominant figure skating gold for his first Olympic title as reigning champion Yuzuru Hanyu fell twice on the ice and failed to win a medal in Beijing yesterday. One of the most eagerly anticipated events of the Games came as the IOC refused to comment on a reported doping case involving another figure skater, 15-year-old Russian sensation Kamila Valieva.

Eight golds were up for grabs on the sixth day of competition in the Chinese capital, with the Americans Chen and Chloe Kim, in the snowboard halfpipe, blitzing the opposition to win two of them in style. An Olympic title had been the only major prize eluding three-time world champion Chen, but he finally won the gold with an overall score of 332.60, while the Japanese duo of Yuma Kagiyama, on 310.05, and Uno Shoma took silver and bronze. Hanyu was fourth.

An elated Chen said: "I'd always of course dreamed about making the Olympics and winning the Olympics but I was like... I don't know if I can make that happen. "I haven't really had time to process fully but it's amazing so far." Hanyu was chasing a third

Olympic gold but having started the day eighth after a disappointing short program, the Japanese icon went for broke with a free skate that included an attempt at a quadruple axel—something no skater has ever landed in competition.

That remains the case after the "Ice Prince" tumbled twice, once trying to nail the notoriously difficult jump. "Honestly, it feels like everything has gone wrong this time around, but I did my best," said the 27-year-old, who only arrived in Beijing on Sunday. Skating to "Rocket Man" by Elton John, Chen lived up to his nickname "Quad King" in a routine in which the 22-year-old landed five quadruple jumps, to rapturous cheers from the crowd.

Sensational Kim

After the US won their first gold in Beijing with snowboarder Lindsey Jacobellis on Wednesday, they now have two more in quick succession. The 21-year-old snowboard sensation Kim had the halfpipe title in the bag after only the first of three runs, scoring a whopping 94.00 points to take a virtually unassailable lead. Kim became the youngest woman

to win an Olympic snowboarding medal when she won halfpipe gold as a 17-year-old at the 2018 Pyeongchang Games.

She took a two-year break from competition after her Olympic success as she struggled to cope with the pressures of fame. "What you guys need to understand is that this isn't an easy sport," she told reporters yesterday. "It's all about being smart with it, prioritizing my health and just taking it step by step. We'll go from there."

On the ski slopes, Johannes Strolz won alpine combined gold—emulating his father's triumph at the 1988 Calgary Olympics. Strolz was dropped by the Austrian team not long ago and had to fund himself, even working as a traffic policeman for a time. "I think I'm a good example of never giving up," said the 29-year-old. Norway and Germany top the medals table on five golds each, with Austria and Sweden both on four.

Overshadowed

But the action on the snow and ice was overshadowed after Russian media reported that 15-year-old

figure skating star Valieva, who led Russia to team gold at the Games this week, tested positive for a banned heart medication before the Olympics. The positive test could cost Russia the team gold and also threatens Valieva's participation in the individual event that starts on Tuesday.

Russian athletes are competing in the Beijing Games as the Russian Olympic Committee (ROC) after the country was banned because of a massive state-sponsored doping scheme at the 2014 Sochi Olympics. The sample in question was obtained before Valieva won the European championship last month, the RBC newspaper reported late Wednesday.

The drug detected is trimetazidine, a metabolic agent that is prescribed for the treatment of angina and vertigo, according to Kommersant newspaper. It is banned by the World Anti-Doping Agency because it can increase blood flow efficiency and help endurance. Separately, Iranian alpine skier Hossein Saveh Shemshaki was suspended from the Olympics after testing positive for an anabolic steroid, the International Testing Agency (ITA) said, the first publicly announced doping case at the Games. — AFP

Jazz end Warriors winning streak as Blazers stun Lakers

LOS ANGELES: Donovan Mitchell scored 14 points and grabbed 10 rebounds as the Utah Jazz halted Golden State's nine-game NBA winning streak on Wednesday with a 111-85 victory. Bojan Bogdanovic scored 23 points to lead six players in double figures for the Jazz, who out-scored the Warriors 48-20 in the paint and out-rebounded them 52-35. "We took care of business as a group," Mitchell said after Utah's fourth straight victory. "That's all that matters."

Mitchell was playing his third game after missing eight with concussion symptoms. He handed out eight assists and said he didn't mind departing late in the fourth quarter to a standing ovation—shy of a triple-double. "I'm coming back from a concussion, I'm trying to get into shape," he said. "They're a good team, they make you work." Jordan Poole paced the Warriors with 18 points and Stephen Curry added 16, but Golden State lost by their biggest margin this season.

In Portland, the Anfernee Simons scored 29 points and Jusuf Nurkic added 19 with 12 rebounds as the Trail Blazers snapped a six-game losing streak with a 107-105 victory over the Los Angeles Lakers. The Lakers, seeking to bounce back from an embarrassing 131-116 loss to the Milwaukee Bucks on Tuesday, had 30 points from superstar LeBron James. But despite shooting 55.4% from the field the Lakers couldn't hold off the undermanned Blazers.

Six-time All-Star Damian Lillard remained sidelined by an abdominal injury. His longtime backcourt partner CJ



SALT LAKE CITY: Jordan Clarkson #00 of the Utah Jazz shoots over Juan Toscano-Anderson #95 of the Golden State Warriors during the first half of a game at Vivint Smart Home Arena on February 09, 2022. — AFP

McCullum was traded on Tuesday as the Blazers embark on a rebuilding phase. "Disappointed, angry," coach Frank Vogel after watching the Lakers let go of a nine-point third-quarter lead. "This was a game we had to get." Anthony Davis scored 17 points for the Lakers. Point guard Russell Westbrook sat out with lower back tightness, missing a game for the first time this season amid trade speculation that has intensified amid his recent struggles.

DeMar DeRozan scored 36 points to power Chicago to a 121-109 victory over the Charlotte Hornets that kept the Bulls in third place in the Eastern Conference. The Bulls snapped a two-game skid to stay a hair in front of the Cleveland Cavaliers, who beat

the San Antonio Spurs 105-92. "We need it," DeRozan said of the victory. "We can't afford to drop any games." With that in mind, DeRozan was an efficient 13 of 19 from the field, including draining three of his four attempts from three-point range.

"Just taking what they gave me, not forcing anything," said DeRozan, who also pulled down five rebounds and handed out four assists." Zach LaVine added 27 points with seven rebounds and Nikola Vucevic scored 18 points with 15 rebounds for Chicago. LaMelo Ball, newly named to his first All-Star Game, led Charlotte with 33 points, nine rebounds and five assists, but the Hornets—ninth in the East—dropped their sixth straight. — AFP

New skating champion Chen the 'Quad King' and 'Rocket Man'

BEIJING: Three-time figure skating world champion and now Olympic gold medalist Nathan Chen strapped on his first pair of skates aged three after watching his two older brothers play ice hockey. His parents, Chinese immigrants Hetty Wang and Chen Zhidong, got him figure skates instead—and changed the course of the sport in the process. The 22-year-old Chen yesterday upstaged reigning champion Yuzuru Hanyu at the Beijing Games to claim the only major prize that had eluded him, an Olympic gold medal.

Chen's route to China, where he still has relatives, was a story of determination and learning from disappointment. "Even if a great skate happens or a bad skate happens, I don't think wholesale changes should occur," Chen said before winning Olympic gold. "Stick to your strengths, stick to what you know how to do, keep pushing forward." Chen became the first skater to hit five different quadruple-spin jumps in competition, landing a quad toe loop, Salchow, flip, loop and Lutz.

The number and variety of quad jumps Chen can work into a routine brings a dynamic that few rivals can match, provided Chen performs them with his typical near-flawless preci-

sion. High above the rink, Chen soars with a power equal to his flamboyant style and showmanship when his skates dig into the ice. Together, they have drawn applause from fans and high marks from judges. At the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics, Chen helped the US take a team bronze medal, but struggled in his short program and was 17th before delivering an unprecedented six quad jumps in his free skate which helped him finish fifth overall.

After that experience, Chen won his next 13 competitions over more than three years, including three consecutive world championships in 2018, 2019 and 2021, after COVID-19 wiped out the 2020 event. That win streak was snapped last October at Skate America, when Chen settled for third behind countryman Vincent Zhou and Japan's Shoma Uno. Chen responded with victories at Skate Canada and the 2022 US championships, claiming his sixth national crown—the longest run since Dick Button won his seventh straight title in 1952. After starting the season with a free skate to Mozart, Chen said the program felt "a little off" and noted, "There are other programs I feel a little bit more connected to." — AFP