



**5** Anger in Britain over Prince Andrew's '£12m' settlement



**8** Google to overhaul ad tracking system on Android devices



**13** India's 'Disco King' Bappi Lahiri dies at 69



**16** Giannis pours in 50 in Bucks win, Celtics win ninth straight



# Kuwait plunges into crisis after defense, interior ministers quit

## Foreign minister narrowly survives no-confidence vote



By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait yesterday appeared headed into yet another political crisis after two senior Cabinet members submitted their resignation immediately after a third minister narrowly survived a no-confidence vote following a grilling by an opposition lawmaker.

Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah and Interior Minister Sheikh Ahmad Mansour Al-Sabah said in a joint statement that reforms are impossible to achieve under the prevailing political circumstances. They said that the country is passing through a highly-charged atmosphere between the National Assembly and the government.

Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem meanwhile prevented leading opposition MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri from showing what he described as "indecent" footage about alleged immoral acts at Kuwaiti missions overseas. Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Sabah narrowly survived a no-confidence vote over alleged violations, with 21 MPs backing the motion and 23 opposing it. To pass, the motion needed 24 elected members to support it. Cabinet ministers are not allowed to vote on no-confidence motions.

The vote came after two MPs defended the minister and two others justified the grilling and the vote.

Continued on Page 2

**KUWAIT:** (Left) Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Mansour Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah and Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah walk together during a session at the National Assembly yesterday. (Right) Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmad gestures after surviving a no-confidence motion yesterday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat (See Page 3)

### News in brief

#### Hezb video sets social media on fire

**BEIRUT:** The near simultaneous release of propaganda videos in which Lebanon's army and the militant group Hezbollah flaunt their alpine skills triggered an avalanche of comments online yesterday, some jokingly referencing the Winter Olympics. The Jerusalem Post broadened the contest to include the Zionist alpine unit and asked whether Hezbollah's snow fighters were a match. — AFP

#### Remains found after shark attack

**SYDNEY:** Australian police said they had recovered human remains in the water after a horrific shark attack yesterday at a Sydney beach. It is the city's first fatal attack since 1963. A man fishing off nearby rocks told national broadcaster ABC he saw a man in a wetsuit being dragged underwater by a large shark off the eastern suburbs beach of Little Bay. — AFP

#### Wordle removes 'insensitive' words

**WASHINGTON:** Some four-letter words are taboo, but the New York Times has added a few five-lettered ones to the list - by removing them from the hit game Wordle. Users began to complain earlier this week, when the game said two different words were the correct answer. After the Times bought the simple but captivating game, Internet sleuths noticed it had begun removing words. — AFP

#### Watchdog warns of English infiltration

**PARIS:** The centuries-old French language watchdog Academie Francaise has warned that growing use of English by public and private bodies risks poor communication and could even undermine social cohesion. A report by six members of the body warns that "today's communication is characterized by a degradation that must not be seen as inevitable". A report by six members of the body warns that "today's communication is characterized by a degradation that must not be seen as inevitable". — AFP

## Law criminalizing 'imitation of opposite sex' overturned

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's constitutional court yesterday overturned a law that criminalizes "imitation of the opposite sex" in a move Amnesty International said was a breakthrough for transgender rights in the region. Kuwaiti lawyer Ali Al-Aryan, who filed a lawsuit to overturn Article 198 of the penal code

two years ago, confirmed that the law had been overturned, saying it violated personal freedoms, which are stipulated in the constitution.

"The law was overly vague and broad, and we based our defense on the existence of medical and constitutional foundations, as there are hormonal as well as psychological contributors," he told AFP. Amnesty welcomed the court's decision, saying it marked "a major breakthrough" for transgender rights in the region.

"Article 198 was deeply discriminatory, overly vague and never should have been accepted into law in the first place," its Middle East and North Africa deputy director Lynn Maalouf said in a

statement. "They must also immediately halt arbitrary arrests of transgender people and drop all charges and convictions brought against them under this transphobic law."

She also called for the release of those "unjustly imprisoned", including Maha Al-Mutairi who was sentenced last year to two years in prison for being transgender, among other charges. Maha Al-Mutairi, 40, had been arrested several times before on the same grounds, her lawyer, Ibtissam Al-Enezi, told AFP at the time, but added that the latest conviction - which included "misusing phone communication" - had been by far "the harshest". — AFP

## India schools reopen after hijab row

**UDUPI, India:** Schools reopened in southern India under tight security yesterday with public gatherings banned following protests over Muslim girls wearing the hijab in classrooms. Tensions have been high in Karnataka state since late last year when at least four schoolgirls were prevented from wearing the Muslim headscarf, sparking protests that have since spread across India.

In an attempt to calm tensions, Karnataka's state government temporarily closed schools last week. This came as the Karnataka High Court imposed a temporary ban on the wearing of all religious symbols in schools while it considers the headscarf ban. As classrooms reopened in the state on Tuesday and yesterday, police with batons were deployed outside several schools.

Authorities also imposed Section 144 - a law that prohibits gatherings of more than four people - in several districts. There were no reports of disturbances but local media on Monday said several Muslim girls chose not to attend classes or sit

Continued on Page 2

## Clock can transform physics

**WASHINGTON:** US scientists have measured Albert Einstein's theory of general relativity - which holds that gravity slows time down - at the smallest scale ever, demonstrating that clocks tick at different rates when separated by fractions of a millimeter.

Jun Ye, of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) and the University of Colorado

Boulder, told AFP it was "by far" the most precise clock ever built - and could pave the way for new discoveries in quantum mechanics, the rule-book for the subatomic world.

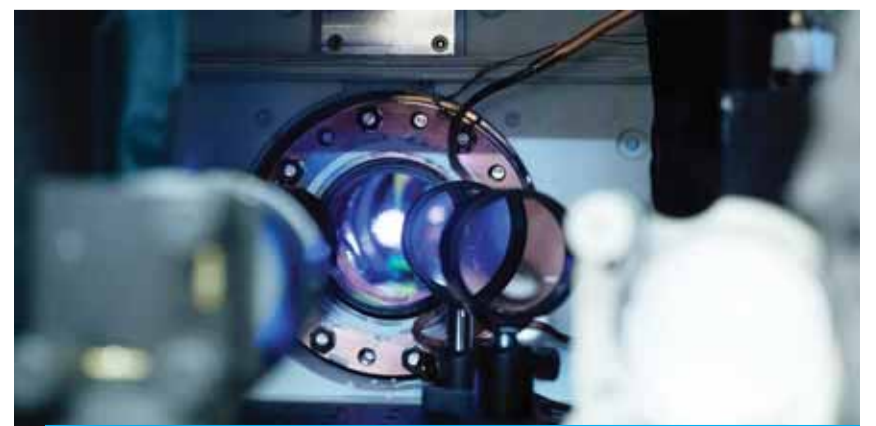
Ye and colleagues published their findings in the prestigious journal Nature yesterday, describing the engineering advances that enabled them to build a device 50 times more precise than their previous best clock, itself a record-breaker, built in 2010.

It was more than a century ago, in 1915, that Einstein put forward his theory of general relativity, which held that the gravitational field of a massive object distorts space-time.

Continued on Page 2



**KUWAIT:** Kuwaiti women protest near the Indian Embassy yesterday in support of Muslim women in India following a ban on hijab in schools in the southern Indian state of Karnataka. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat (See Page 2)



**BOULDER:** This handout photo shows a strontium atomic clock, one of the world's most accurate timekeeping pieces in the lab of Professor Jun Ye at the University of Colorado. — AFP

## Local

# Kuwaitis protest outside embassy in support of Muslim women in India



KUWAIT: The women's wing of the Islamic Constitutional Movement staged a protest at the Green Island's parking in front of the Indian embassy yesterday in support of Muslim women in India following a ban on hijab in school in the southern Indian state of Karnataka. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## India schools reopen after...

Continued from Page 1

exams when asked to remove their headscarves. "We have grown up wearing the hijab since our childhood and we cannot give it up. I will not write the exam, I will go home," the News Minute media outlet quoted a young girl as saying.

"Hindu students wear vermilion... Christian students wear a rosary, what is wrong if our children wear the hijab?" a parent told broadcaster NDTV. Nasir Sharif, 43, said his 15-year-old daughter was told to take off her hijab at the school gates yesterday in Chikmagalur district. He persuaded school authorities to allow her to remove it only in class. "My

daughter has been wearing the hijab since she was five years old. It is to protect her dignity. What they are asking us to do is humiliating," Sharif told AFP.

A video on social media that could not be independently verified showed around a dozen girls in burqas shouting, "We want justice! Allahu Akbar (God is greatest)", after being prevented from entering class. The row has heightened fears among Muslims in India, with many saying they feel under attack by the government of Hindu-nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Rashad Hussain, US ambassador at large for international religious freedom, tweeted last week that hijab bans in schools "violate religious freedom and stigmatize and marginalize women and girls". The Indian government said in a statement that people "who know India well would have a proper appreciation of these realities". "Motivated comments on our internal issues are not welcome," it added. — AFP

## Clock can transform...

Continued from Page 1

This causes time to move more slowly as one approaches closer to the object. But it wasn't until the invention of atomic clocks - which keep time by detecting the transition between two energy states inside an atom exposed to a particular frequency - that scientists could prove the theory.

Early experiments included the Gravity Probe A of 1976, which involved a spacecraft 10,000 km above Earth's surface and showed that an onboard clock was faster than an equivalent on Earth by one second every 73 years. Since then, clocks have become more and more precise, and thus better able to detect the effects of relativity. A decade ago, Ye's team set a record by observing time moving at different rates when their clock was moved 33 cm higher. Ye's key breakthrough was working with webs of light, known as optical lattices, to trap atoms in orderly arrangements. This is to stop the atoms from falling due to gravity or otherwise moving, resulting in a loss of accuracy. Inside Ye's new clock are 100,000

strontium atoms, layered on top of each other like a stack of pancakes, in total about a millimeter high.

The clock is so precise that when the scientists divided the stack into two, they could detect differences in time in the top and bottom halves. At this level of accuracy, clocks essentially act as sensors. "Space and time are connected," said Ye. "And with time measurement so precise, you can actually see how space is changing in real time - Earth is a lively, living body."

Such clocks spread out over a volcanically-active region could tell geologists the difference between solid rock and lava, helping predict eruptions. Or, for example, study how global warming is causing glaciers to melt and oceans to rise.

What excites Ye most, however, is how future clocks could usher in a completely new realm of physics. The current clock can detect time differences across 200 microns - but if that was brought down to 20 microns, it could start to probe the quantum world, helping bridge gaps in theory.

While relativity beautifully explains how large objects like planets and galaxies behave, it is famously incompatible with quantum mechanics, which deals with the very small, and holds that everything can behave like a particle and a wave. The intersection of the two fields would bring physics a step closer to a unifying "theory of everything" that explains all physical phenomena of the cosmos. — AFP

proven by the grilling MP.

Before the vote, the Assembly held part of the session behind closed doors at the request of Muwaizri, who wanted to show classified material. But the speaker said he could not allow such indecent footage to be shown, adding that he was backed by a majority of lawmakers. Muwaizri however charged that Ghanem violated the constitution by preventing him from showing material linked to the grilling.

The foreign minister however received key support from a number of opposition lawmakers like Osama Al-Munawer, Bader Al-Humaidi, Saud Al-Mutairi and others. If these three had also voted against the minister, the no-confidence motion would have passed. In recent weeks, the opposition, which enjoyed the support of 31 MPs, saw some defections and three of its members were appointed as members of the Cabinet, thus reducing its strength to a minority.

## Russian army: Putin's favored foreign policy tool

MOSCOW: Whether they have been camped out on Ukraine's borders or moving tanks across the vast country, Russia's battle-hardened troops have made the world listen to Vladimir Putin, who wants to redefine European security. President Putin has made reviving the army one of the top priorities of his 20-year rule. After years of post-Soviet neglect, the armed forces received new aircraft, tanks and missiles, opened new bases in the Arctic and resumed Cold War-style strategic bomber patrols.

Today, experts say, the modernized Russian army has become a key tool of Putin's foreign policy. Dmitri Trenin, director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, says Putin thinks big. "The Ukraine crisis has demonstrated, for the first time since the end of the Cold War, Russia's readiness to use military force to prevent further expansion of the Western alliance into former Soviet territory," he said. "The geopolitical retreat that Russia began three decades ago has ended."

For months Russia has been moving troops towards the border with pro-Western Ukraine, prompting Western capitals to warn a Russian attack was imminent and start pulling personnel out of the country. Amid Russia's latest show of force the United States relocated its embassy in Kyiv to the western Ukrainian city of Lviv, citing a "dramatic acceleration" in the build-up of Russian troops. On Tuesday, Russia announced that some of the troops were returning home following the planned conclusion of exercises but other military drills were ongoing.

For months, social networks have been flooded with images of Russian tanks parked in the snow near the Ukrainian border or trains transporting multiple rocket launchers and other materiel. On the EU doorstep, Russia has flexed its muscles in Belarus, during joint drills that involved sophisticated weapons systems such as S-400 surface-to-air missiles and Pantsir air

defense systems.

Russia last month also announced a series of naval exercises in the Atlantic Ocean, the Arctic Ocean, the Pacific Ocean, the Mediterranean and elsewhere. With roughly one million active-duty military personnel and state-of-the-art weapons, the Russian army is one of the largest and most powerful in the world. Moscow has the world's second-largest arsenal of nuclear weapons and a huge cache of ballistic missiles.

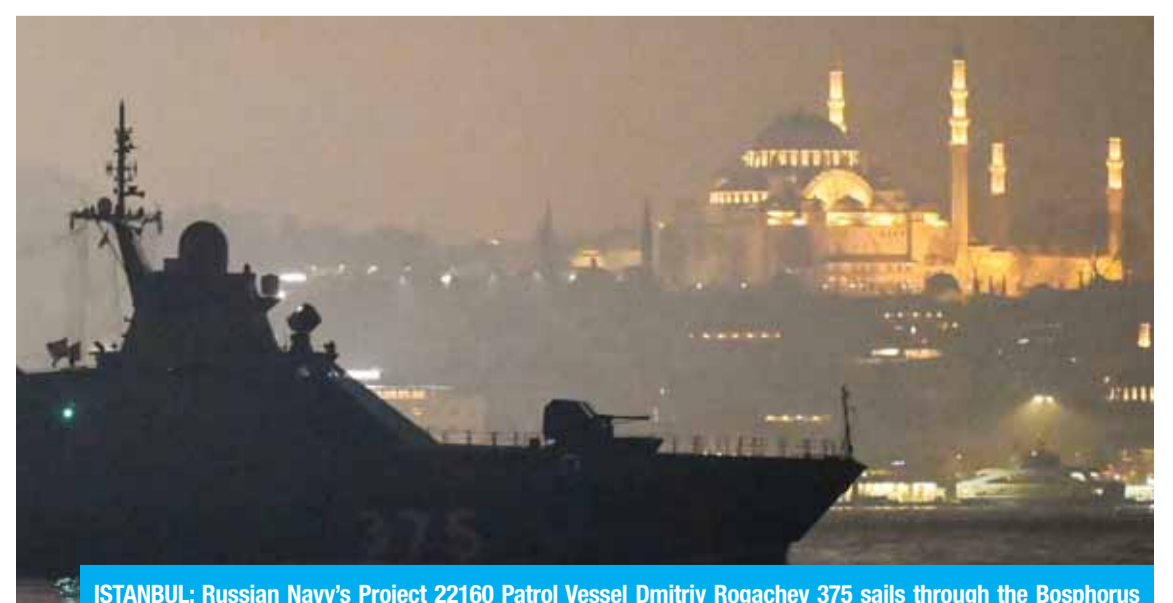
Putin has also boasted of developing a number of "invincible" weapons that can surpass existing systems, including the Sarmat intercontinental missiles and Burevestnik cruise missiles. In recent years the Kremlin strongman has scored a number of battlefield - and foreign policy - triumphs that helped boost his popularity despite economic malaise at home.

In January, Russia swiftly sent troops to the Central Asian nation of Kazakhstan to back a Kremlin-friendly regime in what was touted as a peace-keeping operation amid deadly unrest. In 2015, Russia charged into Syria with an air campaign that turned the tide of a complex conflict in favor of the Damascus regime.

The intervention helped President Bashar Al-Assad reclaim swathes of territory his forces had lost to Islamists and Western-backed opposition groups. Syria has also proved a valuable training ground for the Russian military. A year earlier, Russian special forces helped the Kremlin seize Crimea from Ukraine in a largely bloodless military operation. In 2008, Russian troops routed the Georgian military in five days of fighting.

"The army is a good tool of influence," Vasily Kashin, a military analyst at Moscow's Higher School of Economics, told AFP. "From a military point of view, any concentration of troops requires a response," he added. But analysts also point out that apart from the show of force, the Kremlin has few other powerful levers to assert its influence on the international arena.

The West has repeatedly accused Moscow of using its vast energy resources as a geopolitical tool, but observers say Russia cannot afford to deprive itself of the major source of hard-currency income. Russia's military modernization has also come at the expense of key economic diversification efforts and major infrastructure and social projects. — AFP



ISTANBUL: Russian Navy's Project 22160 Patrol Vessel Dmitriy Rogachev 375 sails through the Bosphorus Strait on the way to the Black Sea as Suleymaniye Mosque is seen in the background yesterday. — AFP

## Kuwait plunges into crisis after...

Continued from Page 1

Sheikh Ahmad, the son of former prime minister and senior ruling family member HH Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, was charged by Muwaizri of squandering public funds, corruption and failure to perform his duties. The minister categorically denied the charges.

Speaking in defense of the minister, pro-government MP Abdullah Al-Turaiji said he found no evidence for any of the accusations. MP Hisham Al-Saleh insisted that the grilling was unconstitutional and that most of the alleged violations were not

Local

# Kuwaiti parliament renews confidence in foreign minister

MP says minister responsible for issues dating back to predecessor's tenure



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah congratulates Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah after winning the parliament's confidence. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem reacts during the session.



MP Dr Abdullah Al-Turajji speaks against the no-confidence motion.



MP Hassan Johar speaks in support of the vote.

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti National Assembly yesterday renewed confidence in the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah. In voting by acclamation in parliament, 23 MPs opposed the no-confidence vote against the minister and 21 approved — among the present total 44 legislators. According to constitutional provisions, a majority of the parliamentarians' vote is required to strip the concerned minister of the confidence.

Earlier during the session, MP Hassan Johar, who supported the bid to deprive the foreign minister of trust, charged that concern for public funds was not among Sheikh Ahmad's priorities. He complained about performance of the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) saying its role was not compatible with history of Kuwait's diplomacy. Another legislator, Dr Hisham Al-Saleh, who opposed the vote, indicated that the relevant motion was peppered with

false information and lacked evidences. "The interpellation should have been based on solid arguments and compelling proofs, rather than abusive terms against the minister," he said.

Shuaib Al-Muwaizri, the MP who had submitted the motion, argued that he was not seeking to settle personal scores with the minister, adding that problems dating back to the mandate of the former minister do not constitute an excuse for the current one to absolve himself of the responsibility. Another MP against the vote, Dr Abdullah Al-Turajji, argued that the interpellation lacked solid bases and evidence charging that some MPs sought to settle personal issues with the foreign minister.

National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem had earlier inaugurated the session for voting on stripping the minister of the confidence. Last week, after discussing the grilling motion filed by MP Muwaizri against the foreign minister, the parliament speaker



MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri makes his argument during the debate.

announced that 10 MPs submitted a no-confidence motion against the concerned minister. According to Article 101 of the Kuwaiti Constitution, "if the parliament decides to vote with the no-confidence motion against the minister, he is considered retired from duties immediately." The no-confidence motion requires approval of the majority of the parliament members, and the ministers are not included in the voting. The Kuwaiti government had renewed backing for the foreign minister. —KUNA

“Grilling lacked solid bases and evidence”



MP Dr Hisham Al-Saleh speaks during the session.

## Parliament Speaker heads to Egypt for Arab IPU Conference



KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem is seen off at the airport. —KUNA

KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem headed to Egyptian capital Cairo yesterday, to participate in 32nd conference of Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union (Arab IPU) and fourth Arabic Parliament conference for council speakers, between February 16 to 20. Ghanem, heading the Kuwaiti delegation, is scheduled to give speech during Arab IPU conference, titled Arab Solidarity, as per Al-Dustoor Network statement. The statement added that he is also giving a speech during joint

conference of Arabic Parliament and Arab council speakers, dubbed parliamentary vision to achieve security, stability and the development of current Arab reality. The delegation accompanying Ghanem consists of a number of parliament members, as they will be participating in sessions of Arab IPU conference, as well as committee meetings revolving around financial and economic affairs, affairs of women and childhood, political affairs and parliamentary relations. —KUNA



KUWAIT: A general view of the meeting. —KUNA

## Head of Saudi Red Crescent applauds KRCS' relief efforts

KUWAIT: President of the Saudi Red Crescent Dr Jalal Al-Uwaisi yesterday applauded the State of Kuwait's distinctive efforts for relieving stricken peoples throughout the world. Uwaisi, currently on a visit to Kuwait along with an accompanying dele-

gation, said after a meeting with Chairperson of the Kuwaiti Red Crescent Society Dr Hilal Al-Sayer that the KRCS noticeably contributed to portraying Kuwait's civic image abroad, adding that during the meeting he examined the society's relief activities in Yemen, Somalia, Indonesia and Sudan, in addition to the aid granted to the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan. Meanwhile, Dr Sayer lauded the KRCS cooperation with the Saudi Red Crescent and counterpart associations in other member states of the GCC. He further noted necessity of boosting coordination at this level to help the afflicted nations. —KUNA

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## Local

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## Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A bird flies before the rising waxing gibbous moon above Kuwait City on Monday. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## News in brief

## Kuwait oil price rises to \$95.01 pb: KPC

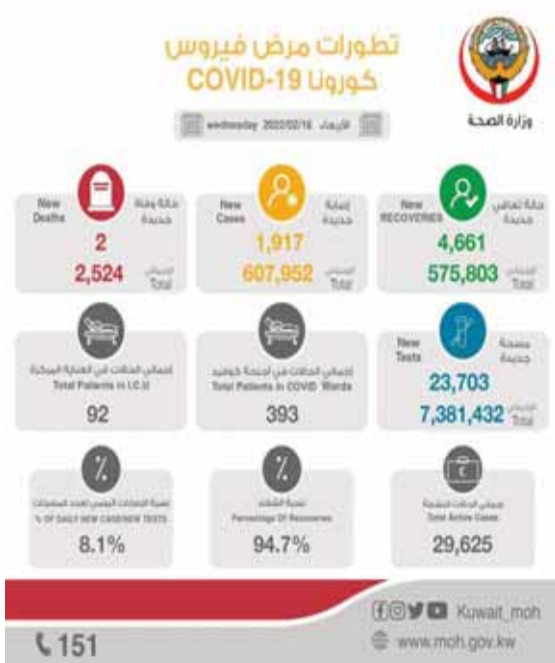
KUWAIT: Kuwaiti oil price rose by 37 cents to reach \$95.01 per barrel (pb) on Tuesday compared with \$94.64 pb on Monday, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. In the world market, the Brent crude went down by \$3.20 to \$93.28 pb and West Texas Intermediate moved down by \$3.39 to settle at \$92.07 pb.

## US Dollar stands at KD 0.302

KUWAIT: The exchange rate of the US Dollar against the Kuwaiti Dinar yesterday remained stable at KD 0.302, while the Euro's exchange rate went up to KD 0.343 compared to Tuesday, said the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK). The CBK added in its daily bulletin that the British Pound Sterling remained stable at KD 0.409, the Swiss Franc dropped to KD 0.326 and the Japanese Yen remained unchanged at KD 0.0026. The currency exchange rates as declared by CBK reflect average rates, not actual trade.

## Rajhi elected GCC Air Transport panel chief

KUWAIT: The GCC's Committee of Air Transport yesterday selected Kuwait's Abdullah Al-Rajhi as its chairman for the next three years. In a press statement on the sidelines of the conclusion of the committee's 16th meeting, Rajhi expressed his thanks for the members' confidence. Rajhi also added that the meeting discussed the establishment of a unified Gulf authority and training and raising the efficiency of civil aviation employees in the GCC countries.



## Kuwait's daily COVID-19 cases drop below 2,000

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Health Ministry recorded yesterday 1,917 new coronavirus (COVID-19) cases, taking confirmed cases tally up to 607,952. The number of recoveries also went up by 4,661 to 575,803, the ministry's Spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said in a statement to the press, adding that recovery-to-infection ratio reached 94.7 percent. Dr Sanad added that two deaths due to the virus were confirmed over the same period, taking the fatalities total to 2,524. In addition, 92 patients were receiving care in intensive care units (ICUs) as of yesterday, whereas 393 patients were receiving care in COVID-19 wards, while active cases were 29,625. Dr Sanad also noted that 23,703 swab tests were conducted over the same period, bringing the country's overall tests so far to 7,381,432, with an infection-to-swab ratio of 1.8 percent. —KUNA

## Online sales to the rescue during pandemic time

## Many turned to selling stuff online after losing their jobs

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: E-commerce thrived during the pandemic, and became a source of much-needed revenues for many individuals. Online seller Melito Alcantara's posts on Facebook generate a steady flow of income. "I started selling food on Facebook during the pandemic. People at that time were into online transactions, so I joined a group of Filipinos who are in this business," he said. Alcantara started by posting some of his dishes on his personal account, and eventually started posting on groups and community pages. "Whatever products are available, I post about them. Normally it starts with inquiries, then I get one or two orders, until it generates regular customers," he added. Since Alcantara doesn't have a car of his own, he only takes orders near his home in Salmiya. "I only entertain customers near my home. I started by delivering on foot, but now I have a

bicycle to deliver orders. This way I am reaching out to many customers," he said.

Another online seller Elite Salenga took advantage of free live posting on both TikTok and Facebook. During the pandemic, she lost her part-time job in a school and another side job selling houses and condominiums in the Philippines. "Before the pandemic, these jobs provided a very lucrative extra income and helped me and my children a lot. But I lost all those jobs because school canteens were closed and sales of houses and condominiums declined," she said. Salenga joined forces with another Filipina to sell stuff online - from food to items of everyday use for Filipinos such as clothes and home appliances. During the strict lockdowns and curfews during the pandemic, her company provided her with only 10 days of salary in a month, which was barely enough to survive. "I told myself I cannot help my kids who are all depending on me if I do not do



anything," she said. Salenga is a widow with five children. "I sell almost everything, even lightly-used items and secondhand products. This online business is giving me a better quality of life," she added.

There are several advantages to selling online, including the ability to manage the business from anywhere, and ease of access for customers who can visit a website or social media account to find out about the available products and services.

## Amnesty International says law overturn breakthrough for transgender rights

KUWAIT: Responding to the Kuwaiti Constitutional Court's decision yesterday to overturn Article 198 of the Penal Code, which criminalized "imitation of the opposite sex", because it violated Article 30 of the constitution, Lynn Maalouf, Amnesty International's Middle East and North Africa Deputy Director, said: "The Kuwaiti Constitutional Court's decision to overturn Article 198 of the Penal Code is a welcome development and a major breakthrough for transgender rights in the region. Article 198 was deeply discriminatory, overly vague and never should have been accepted

into law in the first place.

"The Kuwaiti authorities must now ensure that Article 198 is repealed in its entirety. They must also immediately halt arbitrary arrests of transgender people and drop all charges and convictions brought against them under this transphobic law. All those unjustly imprisoned under Article 198 must now be released, including Maha Al-Mutairi who was arrested solely for being a transwoman. The authorities must also investigate all allegations of torture by security forces and install an independent mechanism for monitoring police behavior."

## Boeing's regional chief visits Kuwait's youth authority

KUWAIT: Boeing's Chief for the Middle East, Turkey and Africa Colgate Gata-Ora visited Kuwait, within the framework of the implementation of Kuwait Technical Entrepreneurship Complex project, which Boeing will build, implement and operate, said Director-General of the Public Authority for Youth, Dr Mishaal Al-Shaheen Al-Rubiae.

This project is one of the offset projects approved by the Cabinet. Rubiae said in a statement to the press yesterday after his meeting with Gata-Ora, as well as Director of International Strategic Partnerships at the company Justin O'Brien and Director of Boeing's office in Kuwait

Musaed Al-Holi.

He added that the project is the first stage of establishing a sustainable youth system for a knowledge-based economy based on innovation and technology. Furthermore, he stressed the authority's endeavor, through this project, is to transfer knowledge and technology from the international company Boeing by developing a sustainable business model to exploit state property for the benefit of Kuwaiti youth. He indicated that the project also includes spaces for business incubators and banks, investors in technology projects, and providers of administrative, legal, financial and logistical services. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Director-General of the Public Authority for Youth Dr Mishaal Al-Shaheen Al-Rubiae (left) meets Boeing's Chief for the Middle East, Turkey and Africa Colgate Gata-Ora. —KUNA



Xi orders Hong Kong to suppress outbreak 'above everything else'

## Shadow of Bulgaria's 'cocaine king' haunts Swiss trial

Page 6

Page 7



BRUSSELS: Britain's Secretary of State for Defence Ben Wallace (R) talks with Spanish Defence Minister Margarita Robles (C) and Turkish Defence Minister Hulusi Akar (L) at the start of the round table during the meeting of NATO defence ministers on the Russia-West tensions at the NATO Headquarter in Brussels yesterday. —AFP

# NATO warns on Russia pullback

## Defiant Ukraine stage military drills on 'Day of Unity'

KYIV: Ukraine staged military drills and defiant displays of flag-waving patriotism yesterday as NATO warned Russia is continuing to mass forces for a possible invasion. Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky watched troops training with some of their new Western-supplied anti-tank weapons on a range near Rivne, west of the capital.

The demonstration of Ukrainian firepower contrasted with images on Russian state media that were said to show Moscow's forces bringing an end to a major exercise in occupied Crimea. In Rivne, a row of vehicles was destroyed by simultaneous missile test strikes and armoured vehicles manoeuvred and fired on the yellowing moorland, while in Kyiv hundreds of civilians marched in a stadium with an enormous national banner.

The "Day of Unity" displays came as the Kremlin called for "serious negotiations" with Washington, and European leaders pushed hard for a diplomatic resolution to the crisis. NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg, hosting the alliance's defence ministers in Brussels, dismissed suggestions that the threat on the border had diminished. "It remains to be seen whether there is a Russian withdrawal," he said. "We are of course monitoring very closely what Russia does in and around Ukraine. What we see is that they have increased the number of troops and more troops are on their way."

### 'Signals give us hope'

Russia's huge build-up of troops, missiles and warships around Ukraine—which US intelligence warns could turn quickly into an invasion—has been called Europe's worst security crisis since the Cold War. Russian President Vladimir Putin has demanded Ukraine be forbidden from pursuing its ambition to join NATO and wants to redraw the security map of eastern Europe, rolling back Western influence.

But, backed by a threat of crippling US and EU economic sanctions, Western leaders have launched a drive to seek a negotiated settlement, and Moscow has signalled it will start to pull forces back. In the latest such move, on Wednesday the Russian defence ministry said military drills in Crimea—a Ukrainian region Moscow annexed in 2014 — had ended and that troops

were returning to their garrisons.

Washington has demanded more verifiable evidence of de-escalation, but US President Joe Biden on Tuesday nevertheless vowed to push for a diplomatic solution. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters: "It is positive that the US president is also noting his readiness to start serious negotiations."

German Defence Minister Christine Lambrecht, arriving at the NATO talks, said reports of a partial Russian pullback "are signals that at least give us hope. But it is important to observe closely whether these words are followed by deeds." Zelensky has downplayed threats of an immediate Russian invasion, but is attempting to rally his people with "Day of Unity" celebrations under Ukraine's blue and gold banner.

On Wednesday, after the Rivne drills, he was to visit Mariupol, a frontline port city near a break-away region held by Russian-backed separatists. In a video message, the 44-year-old former television actor turned leader said the flag would fly across the country and that the national anthem "Ukraine has not yet died" would be sung.

"Great people of great Ukraine! This day is ours," he declared. The European Union ambassador to Ukraine, Matti Maasikas, along with the German, Estonian, Polish and Spanish envoys were headed to Mariupol with the president in solidarity. Maasikas also said that he had raised the Ukrainian flag alongside the EU one at his embassy, adding: "Not sure it's fully according to the rules, but these are extraordinary times." In Kyiv, the capital's deputy mayor Valentyn Mondryvsky said headteachers have been given guidance on "emergency situations" and that bomb shelters would be available at all schools.

### Rich return

In another sign of Ukraine's most powerful figures coming together, some wealthy business leaders who had been urged to come back to the country announced their return. Ukraine's richest man, 55-year-old billionaire industrialist Rinat Akhmetov, who was born in Donetsk in an area now held by separatists, was in Mariupol.

"We continue to build, we continue to invest. This year, Metinvest will invest \$1 billion in new production," he said, referring to his company, promising to boost salaries and support a local university. On Tuesday, Ukraine said the websites of the country's defence ministry and armed forces as well as two banks had been hit by a cyberattack of the kind that US intelligence fears would precede a Russian attack. —AFP



Russia denies cyberattack, calls for serious dialogue

## Torrential rain kills 44 in Brazil tourist town

PETROPOLIS, Brazil: At least 44 people were killed in devastating flash floods and landslides that hit the picturesque Brazilian city of Petropolis, turning streets into torrential rivers and sweeping away houses, officials said yesterday.

Rescue workers raced to find survivors buried in the mud and wreckage after heavy storms Tuesday dumped a month's worth of rain in three hours on the scenic tourist town in the hills north of Rio de Janeiro. There were fears the death toll could rise as firefighters and volunteer rescue workers dug through the remains of houses washed away in torrents of mud, many of them in impoverished hillside slums.

At least 21 people have been so far rescued alive in the effort, according to the state government. Around 300 people were being housed in shelters, mostly in schools, officials said. Charities called for donations of mattresses, blankets, food, water, clothing and face masks

for victims.

Wendel Pio Lourenco, a 24-year-old resident, was walking through the streets with a television in his arms, heading to a local church in search of shelter. He said he was trying to save a few possessions, after spending a sleepless night helping search for victims.

"I found a girl who was buried alive," he said. "Everyone is saying it looks like a war zone." Governor Claudio Castro said much the same after visiting the scene. "It's almost a war situation. We've mobilized our entire team," he said. Videos posted on social media from Tuesday's rains showed streets in Petropolis, the 19th-century summer capital of the Brazilian empire, fill with gushing floods that swept away cars, trees and nearly everything else in their paths.

Many shops were completely inundated by the rising waters, which gushed down the streets of the historic city center. Officials said more than 180 firefighters and other rescue workers were responding to the emergency, aided by 400 soldiers sent in as reinforcements. City hall declared a "state of disaster" in the city of 300,000 people, which sits 68 kilometers (42 miles) north of Rio. The city council declared three days of mourning for victims.



PETROPOLIS, Brazil: People carry the corpse of a victim out of the rubble after a mudslide in Petropolis, Brazil yesterday. Large scale flooding destroyed hundreds of properties and claimed at least 44 lives in the area. —AFP

### 'Tragedy'

Petropolis is a popular destination for tourists fleeing the summer heat of Rio, known for its leafy streets, stately homes, imperial palace—today a museum—and the natural beauty of the surrounding mountains. Tuesday's storms dumped 258 millimeters (10 inches) of rain on the city in three hours, nearly equal to all the rainfall from the previous month, the mayor's office said.

The heaviest downpour had passed, but more moderate rain was

expected to continue on and off for several days, authorities said. President Jair Bolsonaro, on an official trip to Russia, said on Twitter he was keeping abreast of "the tragedy."

"Thank you for your words of solidarity with the people of Petropolis," he told President Vladimir Putin after meeting the Russian leader. "May God comfort (the victims) families." Brazil has been swept by heavy rains in the past several months that have caused a series of deadly floods and landslides. —AFP

## Anger in UK over Prince Andrew's '£12m' settlement

LONDON: Disgraced British royal Prince Andrew was urged yesterday to "live out his retirement in ignominy" after reportedly settling a sexual assault lawsuit for a whopping £12 million (£16.3 million, 14.3 million euros). The lawyer for US accuser Virginia Giuffre said on Tuesday that both parties had settled out of court, sparing Andrew the public humiliation of a trial. The details were not revealed. Giuffre, 38, has said she had sex with Andrew when she was 17 and a minor under US law, after meeting him through US financier Jeffrey Epstein. He took his own life in prison while awaiting trial for sex crimes.

The prince, 61, has not been criminally charged and has denied the allegations. Mark Stephens, a media specialist at law firm Howard Kennedy, told AFP that Andrew had "preserved some measure of dignity for the wider royal family" by agreeing to settle. But, Stephens added, "he's not going to see the light of day in public service ever again".

The Daily Telegraph newspaper reported that Andrew was to pay £10 million to Giuffre and £2 million to a charity for victims of sex trafficking. His team told AFP they would not comment on the contents of the deal. The deal raised questions of who is footing the bill for the perennially cash-strapped prince, who is said to be selling a Swiss ski chalet at a knockdown price to help meet his US legal bills. The Telegraph said the settlement money would come from one of the private estates belonging to his mother Queen Elizabeth II. Commentators demanded transparency on the source, in case the British taxpayer ends up on the hook.

### 'Swept under the carpet'

"I just think it's awful that it's all been swept under the carpet, as if it never even happened," Yasmine Ollive, a 34-year-old account manager, said in London. After other controversies over Prince Harry and his wife Meghan Markle, she said that if the royals "keep on carrying on with the things that they're doing, then it could be the end of them". Separately yesterday, police in London confirmed they were investigating allegations that an aide to Prince Charles, the queen's heir, had offered UK honours to a Saudi businessman in return for donations to the prince's charitable foundation.

The scandal hanging over Andrew has threatened to overshadow the queen's Platinum Jubilee this year, marking her 70 years on the throne. Any jury trial could have coincided with nationwide jubilee celebrations due to take place in the summer. But Andrew will now no longer be questioned under oath by Giuffre's lawyers, who had been due to travel to London next month. The court filing said Andrew "regrets his association with Epstein, and commends the bravery of Ms. Giuffre and other survivors in standing up for themselves and others". "He pledges to demonstrate his regret for his association with Epstein by supporting the fight against the evils of sex trafficking, and by supporting its victims," it added. —AFP

## International

# At new fraud trial, Navalny vows to fight on against Kremlin

## Navalny also faces up to six months in prison

**POKROV:** Imprisoned Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny said he would keep challenging Russia's leadership during the opening of a new fraud trial that could extend his jail term by more than a decade. Navalny appeared at the beginning of the hearing Tuesday via video link wearing a prison uniform and flanked by guards at the makeshift court inside his penal colony, smiling and embracing his wife. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he was "troubled by dubious new charges" against Navalny and called for his release.

"Navalny and his associates are targeted for their work to shine a light on official corruption," Blinken tweeted. "This time, he goes to trial in a penal colony, out of public view. Russian authorities should release Alexei Navalny and end their harassment and prosecution of his supporters."

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz earlier said the new case was "incompatible" with the rule of law, speaking during a press conference with Russian leader Vladimir Putin in Moscow. The 45-year-old opposition leader has already been behind bars for a year, after surviving a poison attack he and Washington blame on the Kremlin.

He is serving out a two-and-a-half year sentence on old embezzlement charges, but the fresh charges could see his time behind bars significantly extended. "You're going to increase my term indefinitely."

“You're going to increase my term indefinitely”

What can we do about it?" Navalny said during the court hearing.

"The activities of people are more important than the fate of one individual. I'm not afraid." The new case was launched in December 2020, when Navalny was recovering in Germany after he was attacked with Soviet-designed poison. The Russian authorities have repeatedly denied any involvement.

### 'Illegal persecution'

Rights groups have criticised authorities for holding the closed-door hearing inside the maximum-security prison in Pokrov, 100 kilometres (60 miles) east of Moscow. Investigators accuse Navalny of stealing for personal use more than \$4.7 million in donations that were given to his political organisations. The charges carry a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison.

A prosecutor during the trial accused Navalny and his allies of "misleading citizens" with the "deliberate" aim of stealing funds. Navalny grew a wide following among liberal-leaning Russians with videos exposing the corruption among the elite. Many of the investigations gained millions of views online.

Navalny's allies decried the trial as a sham and his lawyer said it came as part of Kremlin efforts to remove him from political life. "We believe the persecution of Navalny is illegal, is distinctly political in



POKROV, VLADIMIR OBLAST, Russia: Journalists wait in front of the entrance to the penal colony N2, where Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny has been transferred to serve a two-and-a-half year prison term for violating parole, in the town of Pokrov. — AFP

nature, and aimed at discrediting and removing him from political activity," lawyer Olga Mikhailova said.

### 'Incompatible' with rule of law

The start of the trial comes during a week of intensive talks between Russia and the West over Ukraine, with Scholz the latest leader in Moscow for talks with Putin. The German chancellor condemned legal proceedings against Navalny, following appeals

earlier from the opposition leader's allies to raise his case with Putin. "My position on the Navalny case is very clear: His judgement is incompatible with the principles of the rule of law and I have expressed this view on many occasions," Scholz said. Navalny was treated by doctors in Berlin and Germany blamed his near-fatal poisoning on the Kremlin. Former chancellor Angela Merkel used her final visit to Moscow last year to ask Putin to free Navalny. — AFP

## Macron hosts African leaders ahead of Mali withdrawal

**PARIS:** President Emmanuel Macron hosts African leaders yesterday ahead of an expected announcement that France is withdrawing its troops from Mali after an almost decade-long deployment to battle a jihadist insurgency. Multiple sources have told AFP that Macron will announce that French forces will leave Mali and redeploy elsewhere in the Sahel region, following a breakdown in relations with the ruling junta. It remains unclear when, and how, Macron will make the announcement, which could come as part of yesterday's meeting or when he travels to Brussels today for a two-day EU-Africa summit. The deployment in Mali of a European force known as Takuba—a project driven by Macron to spread the security burden in the troubled region—will also come to an end, the sources said.

The Mali deployment has been fraught with problems for France, with 48 of the 53 soldiers killed during its Barkhane mission in West Africa losing their lives in the country. France initially deployed troops against jihadists in Mali in 2013 but the insurgency was never fully quelled, and new fears have now emerged of a jihadist push to the Gulf of Guinea.

The announcement of the withdrawal comes at a critical time for Macron, just days ahead of a long-awaited declaration from the president that he will stand for a new term in April elections. It also coincides with Macron seeking to take a lead role in international diplomacy as he presses Russia to de-escalate in the standoff over Ukraine.

### Multiple missions

The working dinner hosted by Macron on Wednesday starting at 1930 GMT will bring together the leaders of France's key allies in the Sahel region—Chad, Mauritania and Niger. Officials from Mali as well as Burkina Faso, which also recently experienced a coup, have pointedly not been invited.

Other African leaders will also be present along with European Council President Charles Michel and European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen, as well as Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi. There are a total of 25,000 foreign troops currently deployed in the Sahel.

They include around 4,300 French troops, which under a reduction announced last year are due to fall to around 2,500 in 2023 from a peak of 5,400. Other forces deployed in Mali are the UN peacekeeping mission MINUSMA established in 2013 and the EUTM Mali, an EU military training mission that aims to improve the Malian military's capacity in fighting terrorists. Some 2,400 French soldiers are deployed in Mali as part of the Barkhane operation as well as the EU Takuba force set up in 2020, which was intended to increase in numbers as French deployment was scaled back. According to a French source, who asked not to be identified by name, even after departure France will for a period provide MINUSMA and EUTM with support in the air and medical back-up.

### 'Reinvent partnership'

Relations between France and Mali have plunged to new lows after the junta led by strongman Assimi Goita refused to stick to a calendar to a return to civilian rule. The West also accuses Mali of using the services of the hugely controversial Russian mercenary group Wagner to shore up its position, a move that gives Moscow a new foothold in the region.

Especially with the French elections looming, Macron's priority is to ensure that any withdrawal does not invite comparisons with the chaotic American departure from Afghanistan last year. Paris, however, intends to continue the anti-jihadist fight in the wider region, where movements affiliated with Al-Qaeda or the Islamic State group have retained an ability to attack despite the elimination of key leaders. — AFP

## Long shot: Putin's giant table sparks jokes and speculation

**MOSCOW:** White, glistening and six metres long; The table chosen for Vladimir Putin's meeting with world leaders has sparked a flurry of memes—and a slew of speculation about its symbolism. The stretching table has featured in photographs splashed across the internet in recent days, as the Russian president sits with Western leaders eager to defuse tensions over a feared Ukrainian invasion.

He sat across from French President Emmanuel Macron at the now-famous table last week, and on Tuesday sat at the same table with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. Officially, the six-metre (20-foot) long lacquered wood table is being used as a coronavirus protocol to ensure ample distance between Putin and his guests.

But analysts say its symbolism speaks volumes, showing Putin as a distant, isolated figure. "It is obvious that he is more and more alone," independent political analyst Konstantin Kalachev told AFP. "This loneliness is obvious, it seems he no longer cares what other people think of him."

Western nations have sounded the alarm in recent weeks of an imminent Russian invasion on Ukraine, prompting a flurry of shuttle diplomacy from diplomats and leaders

eager to ease tensions. Putin has denied plans to invade, but has demanded security guarantees from Washington and its allies.

### Nothing terrible here'

It is not the only long table preferred by Putin. The 69-year-old Russian leader, famously cautious about coronavirus, has also been pictured sitting at a long rectangular one for meetings with his advisors. On Monday, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu were forced to sit several metres away from Putin as they delivered reports on Ukraine.

Asked about these distancing measures, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Tuesday they were "temporary". He said they were in place to avoid the highly-contagious and often asymptomatic Omicron variant. "There is nothing terrible or special here. We are going through times that dictate special measures," Peskov told reporters. Extraordinary steps have been taken to protect Putin, who for over a year has been living in a strictly-controlled virus-free bubble.

Foreign leaders, journalists and officials were required to self-isolate in advance of being in contact with



MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin (left) and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz are seen ahead of their meeting over Ukraine security at the Kremlin on Feb 15, 2022. — AFP

Putin and a disinfection tunnel was installed at his residence outside Moscow. Members of foreign delegations and journalists wishing to go to the Kremlin must provide three negative PCR tests in the four days leading up to their visit.

And visiting leaders who want a face-to-face meeting with Putin must agree to a Kremlin-administered swab or settle for the far end of the table. Both Macron and Scholz declined the Kremlin test, opting instead to get one from their own medics.

Adding to the pomp of the long, white table is the decor-thick, draped

gold curtains on large light-coloured rug in a Kremlin reception room.

A small bouquet of flowers sits in the middle, exaggerating the table's largesse. The images have spawned widely-circulated memes online, one making the table look like a skating rink and another of the Last Supper. One features Putin looking across the table for an eye exam. Netizens have been quick to pounce on the images, dishing up humorous comments on social media despite the backdrop of crisis. Some jokes suggested that Ikea name one of their long tables after Putin. — AFP

## Shadow of Bulgaria's 'cocaine king' haunts Swiss trial

**ZURICH:** Vivid details of the murky world of organised crime in Bulgaria—the EU's poorest state and one of its most graft-ridden—are coming to light hundreds of miles away in a Swiss courtroom. Last week hearings began in Switzerland's Federal Criminal Court in a money-laundering trial which sees the country's second-largest bank, Credit Suisse, in the dock along with several other defendants.

While he is not one of the accused, the lengthy indictment revolves in large part around the activities of fugitive former wrestler Evelin Banev, dubbed Bulgaria's "cocaine king". Prosecutors say he was at the head of a large network, part of which laundered more than 146 million Swiss francs (\$158 million, 138 million euros) between 2004 and 2008 — and that Credit Suisse failed to stop them.

But the trial is only examining alleged money laundering from February 2007 to December 2008, after the defence cited the expiration of a statute of limitations. Three Bulgarians face charges in the trial. Two of them are close associates of Banev and the third is a woman who formerly worked as a relationship manager at Credit Suisse.

Banev, 57, is the subject of an Interpol red notice after his native Bulgaria sentenced him in 2018 for masterminding an organised crime group laundering drug-dealing profits. He has also been convicted in absentia by Romania and Italy.

Banev has been on the run since 2018. He was detained in Ukraine last September but was released when it transpired he had Ukrainian nationality and therefore could not be extradited. He has been summoned by the Swiss court to testify via video conference by the end of February but, when contacted by AFP, his lawyer in Bulgaria declined to comment.



ZURICH, SWITZERLAND: File photo shows the front entrance of the headquarters of Swiss bank Credit Suisse in Zurich. Vivid details of the murky world of organised crime in Bulgaria — the EU's poorest state and one of its most graft-ridden — are coming to light hundreds of miles away in a Swiss courtroom. — AFP

### Suitcases of cash

In the meantime, the court will hear from Banev's closest associates. One of them is a 60-year-old childhood friend who trained in the same wrestling club and whom prosecutors call Banev's "front man".

He and another defendant are accused of facilitating the laundering of drug trafficking proceeds in Switzerland. The third defendant is a former Bulgarian tennis champion who worked as a Credit Suisse relationship manager at the time when the gang performed its numerous transactions.

The 49-year-old is accused of carrying out transactions designed to conceal the criminal origin of the funds without making the necessary "clarifications". Prosecutors say she accepted as various banknotes that arrived in suitcases from various points in Europe as well as money from drug trafficking wired from offshore companies. — AFP

## Erdogan still hopes to host Ukraine summit with Putin

**ANKARA:** Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan reaffirmed his desire to host his Russian and Ukrainian counterparts for a three-way summit in Turkey to ease tensions in Ukraine in comments published yesterday. Erdogan earlier this month visited Kyiv and held talks with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, during which he offered to host a peace summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

He said Zelensky looked "favourably" on a three-way summit in an interview with Turkish journalists on board his plane returning to Turkey from a United Arab Emirates visit. "And if Mr Putin also looks on this positively, we can, God willing, come together in Istanbul or Ankara," Erdogan said, quoted by NTV broadcaster.

He also said he would "personally find out" Putin's view on a meeting in a phone call but did not say when they would speak. He previously said Putin had agreed to visit Turkey but the Russian side never provided a date. "It is not a good omen for war to really start in this region. It will not be good for the health of the region," said Erdogan who has tried to maintain good relations with Russia and Ukraine throughout the latest crisis.

Turkey has in the past two years also sought to improve relations with regional rivals including Zionist entity and Gulf countries such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia. There had been high hopes for a Saudi visit this month by Erdogan but instead he offered vague assurances that there was dialogue between the two countries.

"We're continuing our positive dialogue with Saudi Arabia. In the period ahead, we want to progress with concrete steps. We want to develop this process positively with Saudi Arabia," Erdogan said. — AFP

## International

## Xi orders Hong Kong to suppress outbreak 'above everything else'

## HK registering over a thousand confirmed cases a day

HONG KONG: Chinese leader Xi Jinping has called for Hong Kong to take "all necessary measures" to control an Omicron-fuelled COVID-19 outbreak, Beijing-affiliated newspapers in the city said yesterday, a day after leader Carrie Lam ruled out a China-style hard lockdown.



## Hospitals reach their breaking point

Hong Kong is currently in the throes of its worst-ever coronavirus outbreak, registering over a thousand confirmed cases a day as hospitals reach their breaking point. Lam this week insisted a hard "wholesale" lockdown—which the mainland has imposed on various cities in order to stamp out cases—will not be imposed on Hong Kongers.

By yesterday, local newspapers Ta Kung Pao and Wen Wei Po—which answer to Beijing's office in the city—reported Xi had called on authorities to "implement every necessary measure to ensure the protection" of public health.

Hong Kong needs "to prioritise stabilising and controlling the COVID situation above everything else", the papers reported China's leader as saying. Following the publication of Xi's remarks, Lam expressed "gratitude" for his concern.

"The government will, in accordance with the important instruction of President Xi Jinping, assume the main responsibility to... adopt all necessary measures to safeguard the lives and health of Hong Kong people," she said in a press release yesterday.

Authoritarian China remains one of the few places in the world sticking to a "zero-COVID" policy—stamping out any sign of an outbreak with weeks-long lockdowns of entire cities, widespread contact-tracing and testing. But it is unclear whether Hong Kong, one of the world's most densely-packed cities, could ever make it back to zero-COVID even with a full lockdown, given the sheer number of Omicron infections it now faces. The emergence of the extremely contagious Omicron variant sent authorities scrambling in 2022—upping social distancing measures, shuttering schools and night-time restaurant dining, and even culling hamsters when some rodents tested positive for the virus.

## 'Strong, positive energy'

Lam's administration had already sought aid from Chinese officials—specifically with testing capacities and the need for the brisk construction of more quarantine facilities—during a weekend meeting.

Beijing's Liaison Office in Hong Kong said that Xi's Wednesday proclamation had "injected strong, positive energy" into the virus-racked city. "Various sectors in the society are greatly encouraged and expressed one after another that President Xi's important instructions have made Hong Kong people feel extraordinarily warm," it said in a statement.

In recent days the city had resembled the early phase of the pandemic, with shoppers clearing out



HONG KONG: People lie in hospital beds with temperatures falling at nighttime outside the Caritas Medical Centre in Hong Kong yesterday, as hospitals become overwhelmed with the city facing its worst COVID coronavirus wave to date. — AFP

supermarket shelves to stock up on food and essentials. This week hospitals buckled under the strain of rising infections, with at least two facilities placing patients in beds in the open air.

As temperatures dropped Wednesday, many of the elderly in beds outside Caritas Medical Centre were huddled under multiple layers of blankets and aluminium thermal shields. The city has some of the lowest

vaccination rates for the elderly in the industrialised world—a government website puts it at about 43 percent for those aged 70-79, and 26 percent for those aged 80 and above.

Hong Kong yesterday reported 4,280 confirmed cases, a new record. So far, most of the COVID deaths recorded in the past week have been patients above the age of 70. — AFP



HEART: A rickshaw taxi driver looks on as burqa-clad-women walk a long road, in Heart. — AFP

## 'My heart and body shake': Afghan women defy Taliban

KABUL: One after the other, quickly, carefully, keeping their heads down, a group of Afghan women step into a small Kabul apartment block—risking their lives as a nascent resistance against the Taliban. They come together to plan their next stand against the hardline Islamist regime, which took back power in Afghanistan in August and stripped them of their dreams.

At first, there were no more than 15 activists in this group, mostly women in their 20s who already knew each other. Now there is a network of dozens of women—once students, teachers or NGO workers, as well as housewives—that have worked in secret to organise protests over the past six months.

"I asked myself why not join them instead of staying at home, depressed, thinking of all that we lost," a 20-year-old protester, who asked not to be named, tells AFP. They know such a challenge to the new authorities may cost them everything.

Four of their colleagues were recently seized for weeks, until the UN confirmed their release on Sunday. When the Taliban first ruled Afghanistan between

1996 and 2001, they became notorious for human rights abuses, with women mostly confined to their homes.

Now back in government and despite promising a softer rule, they are cracking down on women's freedoms once again. There is enforced segregation in most workplaces, leading many employers to fire female staff, and women are barred from key public sector jobs.

Many girls' secondary schools have closed, and university curriculums are being revised to reflect their hardline interpretation of Islam. Haunted by memories of the last Taliban regime, some Afghan women are too frightened to venture out or are pressured by their families to remain at home.

For mother-of-four Shala, who asked AFP to only use her first name, a return to such female confinement is her biggest fear. A former government employee, her job has already been taken from her, so now she helps organise the resistance and sometimes sneaks out at night to paint graffiti slogans such as "Long Live Equality" across the walls of the nation's capital.

"I just want to be an example for young women, to show them that I will not give up the fight," she explains. The Taliban could harm her family, but Shala says her husband supports what she is doing and her children are learning from her defiance—at home they practise chants demanding education.—AFP

## Dutch try Afghan 'prison chief' for war crimes

THE HAGUE: An elderly Afghan man went on trial in a Dutch court yesterday for alleged war crimes while in charge of a notorious jail for the communist regime in the 1980s. The 76-year-old identified as Abdul R. came to the Netherlands in 2001, later acquiring Dutch nationality, and was arrested in 2019.

Prosecutors say that from 1983 to 1990 he was the chief of Pul-e-Charkhi prison east of Kabul, where regime opponents were held without fair trial in "appalling conditions." The trial in The Hague is the latest in a series of efforts in European countries to bring people to account for crimes in conflict-torn countries, including Syria and Afghanistan.

"This trial is about a man, whom we believe committed a number of war crimes in Kabul," prosecutor Mirjam Blom told AFP. "We suspect that he, as commander and chief of political affairs, was working in the prison where inmates were arbitrarily robbed of their personal freedom and treated them inhumanely."

Appearing in court in a wheelchair, father-of-four Abdul R. said he was the victim of a case of mistaken identity. "I am not the person you are looking for," he told the court, before refusing to answer questions, saying that he felt unwell and wanted to return to prison. "I don't remember anything, not even my own name." Prosecutors said police started investigating in 2012 after blogs said that the former commander of Pul-e-Charkhi under Afghanistan's Soviet-backed regime was possibly living in the Netherlands.

"Finally we picked up his trail. The public prosecution service has the point of view that he is here (in the Netherlands) under a false name," said Blom. Dutch authorities spoke to 25 witnesses in various countries and used "countless" open-source materials.

"We are convinced that we have the right person," Blom said. Notorious for its grim conditions, Pul-e-Charkhi has remained in use under various regimes until the Taliban freed prisoners from it last August. The Dutch proceedings are made possible by the legal principle of "universal jurisdiction"—which allows countries to try people for crimes of exceptional gravity, including war crimes, even if they were committed in a different country.—AFP

## Spain mourns trawler as Canada hunts for survivors

MADRID: Spain was in mourning yesterday a day after one of its fishing trawlers sank off eastern Canada, leaving 10 dead and 11 missing in its worst fishing tragedy in almost 40 years.

"Once again the people of the sea have been hit very hard," said Alberto Nunez Feijoo, head of Spain's north-western Galicia region where the boat was based.

"Galicia is a big family and when a family is struck by a tragic event, it unites in grief to seek comfort," he said in announcing three days of mourning for the victims.

In Madrid, lawmakers observed a minute of silence in parliament for the dead and the missing from the trawler, which went down some 250 nautical miles (463 kilometres) east of Newfoundland, leaving just three survivors.

"Spain is shocked by the shipwreck of the Galician fishing boat Villa de Pitaxo off the coast of Canada," said parliamentary speaker Meritxell Batet.

In total, there were 24 crew members aboard the vessel, among them 16 Spanish nationals, five Peruvians and three Ghanaians. Spain's agriculture and fisheries minister, Luis Planas, said it was "the biggest tragedy in the fishing sector in the last 38 years" in reference to the Islamar III, a sardine boat that sank off the Canary Islands in July 1984, claiming 26 lives. "This is a job which not only is very hard but is also very dangerous."



AT SEA: This undated Royal Canadian Air Force photo obtained from the Joint Rescue Co-ordination Centre in Halifax, shows a helicopter crew and vessels of opportunity searching the ocean for survivor of a Spanish fishing trawler which sank off eastern Canada. — AFP

## 'Six or seven metre waves'

Planas said eight vessels, among them Spanish and Portuguese fishing boats, were engaged in the search for survivors from the Villa de Pitaxo, a 50-metre (164-foot) fishing vessel which sent out a distress signal at 0424 GMT on Tuesday.

By yesterday morning, hopes of finding the 11 missing crew members were fading, with Spain's Salvamento Marítimo sea rescue service tweeting that rescuers were battling very rough seas with "6-7 metre high waves" that were "complicating the search operation and making visibility difficult".

"The weather right now is challenging for the search," Brian Owens of Canada's Joint Rescue Coordination Centre (JRCC) told AFP, saying rescuers had mobilised a helicopter, a military plane, a coastguard ship and several boats to search for the missing crew.

It was not immediately clear what caused the boat to founder, with Planas saying it was operating in a fishing ground "of immense value but which also has very significant climate problems". So far, there has been no information publicly released about the identities of the survivors nor the victims.—AFP

## News in brief

## Zuma fails to delay graft trial

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa's former president Jacob Zuma yesterday lost a new bid to delay his corruption trial over a 1990s arms deal involving French defence giant Thales. The ruling means Zuma's trial remains on track to resume on April 11. Zuma had sought to have lead prosecutor Billy Downer dropped from the case, accusing him of bias. High Court judge Piet Koen last year rejected that request, and on Wednesday denied Zuma's leave to appeal that ruling. His appeal "should not be entertained at this stage of the trial", Koen said, adding that an appeal now would "invariably result in delays and hence drawn-out trials to the detriment not only to the accused but to any co-accused, and also to the public". Koen also insisted the prosecutor had no conflicts of interest, calling Zuma's claims "frivolous, absurd... and devoid of any prospects of success". — AFP

## Myanmar military jet crashes

YANGON: A Myanmar military jet crashed in the north of the country yesterday morning, killing its pilot after a "technical failure", the junta's information team said in a statement. The jet, flying from Tada-U air force base near Mandalay, "lost contact about 10:43 am this morning (0413 GMT)," and later crashed into Yay Myet Gyi lake in Sagaing region, the statement said. The pilot had been flying a non-combat training mission and had been confirmed dead, according to an update. Local media said firefighters had reached the scene and published photos of rescuers wading near wreckage in a lake. Myanmar's junta has regularly called in airstrikes while battling "people's defence forces"—armed groups that have sprung up to fight the military government in several regions, including Sagaing.—AFP

## Quake strikes Guatemala

GUATEMALA CITY: A 6.2-magnitude earthquake struck western Guatemala early yesterday, the United States Geological Survey said, though no injuries had yet been reported. The epicenter of the quake, which had a depth of 84 kilometers (52 miles), was in the coastal district of Escuintla, just under 100 kilometers southwest of the capital, Guatemala City. Local authorities put the tremors at 6.8 in magnitude, saying it was followed by an aftershock of 4.8. The first earthquake caused landslides on roads, some light damage to houses, and power outages, but no casualties had been reported, according to rescue services. Local media reported power cuts and some structural damage in cities such as Mixco and Chimaltenango, close to the capital. —AFP

## 17 Zionists arrested

JERUSALEM: Seventeen Zionists have been arrested on suspicion of involvement in a racist attack on a Palestinian village in the occupied West Bank last month, police said yesterday. Police said Zionists armed with stones, clubs and "other objects" wounded one Palestinian and vandalised shops, vehicles and property in the northern West Bank village of Hawara on January 24. The suspects—who live in the West Bank, Jerusalem are under investigation for perpetrating "an attack, participation in a prohibited gathering and destroying property with a racist motive", police said. Human rights groups say that West Bank Palestinians face frequent attacks by Zionists and that perpetrators often go unpunished as Zionist entity security forces rarely take action.—AFP

# Business

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2022

## US retailers begin 2022 with a big jump in sales

### Industrial production roared back in January

WASHINGTON: US retailers more than regained ground lost in an unexpected December slump, with a surprise boom in January sales, according to government data released yesterday. Retail sales rose 3.8 percent last month, the Commerce Department said, double what was expected and a dramatic reversal of the 2.5 percent decline in December, which was worse than originally reported.

"The strength of this rebound adds credence to the idea that December sales were weak largely because people pulled holiday purchases forward, fearing shortages of popular items," Ian Shepherdson of Pantheon Macroeconomics said. He said the report points to better-than-expected GDP growth in the first quarter.

The auto industry, which continues to face lean inventories due to the global semiconductor shortage that has cut into production, bounced back last month with a 5.7 percent jump in sales of motor vehicles and parts, according to the Commerce Department.

Nonstore retailers encompassing e-commerce firms saw sales soar 14.5 percent, while furniture and home stores reported a 7.2 percent increase, and sales at department stores rose 9.2 percent, the report said. Building materials and garden equipment dealers saw a 4.1 increase in sales, and electronics and appliance business increased 1.9 percent.

Gas stations were among the few sectors that

reported a decline in sales in January, with a 1.3 percent fall. Sporting goods stores saw a three percent decrease, while bars and restaurants and health and personal care stores suffered dips of under one percent.

Meanwhile, US industrial production grew more than expected in January, the Federal Reserve reported yesterday, amid a surge in heating demand and strong mining activity. The 1.4 percent increase last month came after a slight decline in December, and was helped by a 9.9 percent surge in the utilities index as weather grew colder across the United States, the largest-ever jump in its history.

Mining saw a one percent increase that was in large part due to a 6.2 percent rise in oil and gas drilling, though it remains below its pre-pandemic level, according to the Fed. Manufacturing output was up a more modest 0.2 percent amid growth in most manufacturing sectors, though motor vehicles and parts production declined as automakers struggled to find semiconductors, as did coal and petroleum products. Oren Klachkin of Oxford Economics predicted a "solid year" ahead for industrial production, as manufacturers see continued demand and oil and gas producers benefit from higher prices.

"The biggest question facing the industrial sector is how quickly will supply chain and hiring headwinds dissipate," he wrote in an analysis. "We expect these challenges to diminish slowly



LOS ANGELES: In this file photo taken on January 28, 2022, sales signs are seen in the windows as people shop for bargains at a retail outlet in Los Angeles. US retailers more than regained ground lost in an unexpected December slump, with a surprise boom in January sales, according to government data released yesterday. —AFP

as the economy learns to live with COVID. However, even if the virus disappeared overnight,

it would take a while for supply chains to completely heal." —AFP

### IMF chief urges G20 to move faster on debt relief

WASHINGTON: Advanced nations should "immediately" provide relief to developing nations whose debt burdens have swelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said yesterday. In a message to Group of 20 finance ministers and central bankers gathering in Jakarta this week, the IMF chief renewed her call for urgent action from creditors, warning of dire consequences if they fail to do so.

"We estimate that about 60 percent of low-income countries are in or at high risk of debt distress, double 2015 levels," Georgieva said in a blog post. "These and many other economies will need... more grants and concessional financing, and more help to deal with debt immediately."

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the G20 put in place the Debt Service Suspension Initiative to help countries that ramped up borrowing to deal with the twin health and economic crises, but that program ended in December. The G20's Common Framework meant to offer a way to restructure large debt loads remains subject to uncertainty, and only three countries — Chad, Ethiopia and Zambia—have requested a negotiation under its terms.

Georgieva echoed the IMF's sister institution, the World Bank, calling for officials to take additional steps including "reinvigorating" the common framework, beginning with "a standstill on debt service payments during the negotiation under the framework." She also called for the program to be extended "a wider range of highly indebted countries." A key sticking point in the debt restructuring process is the lack of accurate information about borrowing levels, especially loans from China.

The Washington-based crisis lending institutions have called for greater transparency, including on the debts of private firms in those countries. Addressing the debt will be especially critical as rising inflation has prompted a "policy pivot" by central banks in advanced economies which are raising interest rates, which in turn will put more pressure on borrowers.

Georgieva cautioned that if "financial conditions tighten suddenly, emerging and developing countries must be ready for potential capital flow reversals." She said authorities may have to intervene in foreign exchange markets to deal with shocks, and even impose measures to contain the exodus of capital. Georgieva stressed that beating COVID-19 worldwide remains critical to ensuring the economic recovery, noting the IMF projects "cumulative global output losses from the pandemic of nearly \$13.8 trillion through 2024." "Ending the pandemic will also help address the scars from economic long-COVID," caused by business disruptions and time lost by students. —AFP

### Google to overhaul ad tracking system on Android devices

WASHINGTON: Google announced plans yesterday to limit ad tracking on its Android operating system, a sensitive privacy issue that rival Apple has already moved to address on its iPhones.

Tech giants are under growing pressure to better balance privacy and ad-targeting, as users complain, regulators threaten tougher rules, but the companies themselves try to maintain access to the data key to their many billions in ad revenue. Apple and Google's operating software run on the majority of the world's smartphones, thus any changes they make to their policies have the potential to impact billions of users.

"Our goal... is to develop effective and privacy enhancing advertising solutions, where users know their information is protected, and developers and businesses have the tools to succeed on mobile," Google said in a statement. For its part, Apple announced last year that users of its one billion iPhones in circulation can decide whether to allow their online activity to be tracked for the purpose of targeting ads.

It was a change which Apple said shows its focus is on privacy, but that critics noted does not prevent the company itself from tracking its users. Apple's tweak has sent ripples through the tech world, with Facebook parent Meta saying it expects that policy to cost the social media giant \$10 billion in lost revenue this year. A heavy impact is expected because less data will impact the precision of the ads Meta and other companies can sell, and thus their price.

#### Online advertising billions

Google gave an indication of the timing of its announced changes, saying "we plan to support existing ads platform features for at least two years, and we

### Wheat and corn prices ride the Ukrainian rollercoaster

KYIV: The crisis between Ukraine and Russia, two of the world's biggest wheat and corn producers, has sent the commodities' prices on a wild ride—with anything from a diplomatic statement to rumor of a maritime blockade roiling markets. Usually much less volatile than stocks or oil, agricultural commodities are now often subject to spectacular spikes and drops.

"The market doesn't know nuance: Either it's war and it goes up, or it's peace and it goes down," said Gautier Le Molgat, an analyst at Agritel. The grains' markets turned around three times in less than 24 hours this week: First on the Russian foreign minister's optimistic tone Monday, then on news of the United States relocating its Ukrainian embassy, and finally on Moscow's claims of a military pullback.

The stakes are especially high for wheat, with Russia being the world's top exporter and Ukraine the fourth, according to estimates by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Together, the two countries account for almost a third of wheat's world trade. On the corn side, Ukraine



intend to provide substantial notice ahead of any future changes." At present, the internet search giant assigns an identity to Android-powered devices, which enables advertisers to have a profile of people's habits and thus send them ads they might be interested in.

Google said it is working on ways to better protect users' privacy, which would "limit sharing of user data with third parties and operate without cross-app identifiers, including advertising ID."

It contrasted its plans with Apple's moves, saying, "we realize that other platforms have taken a different approach to ads privacy, bluntly restricting existing technologies used by developers and advertisers." While Google argued that the changes would protect

users' anonymity, it could also further strengthen the dominance the tech giant already holds over the digital advertising industry.

Google's parent Alphabet pulled in over \$60 billion in the fourth quarter of 2021 just in ad revenue, which makes up over 80 percent of its income. But new pressure to change is building on Big Tech due to advancing landmark European legislation that could set unprecedented oversight, and similar efforts are underway in the United States. The Facebook whistleblower scandal last year boosted regulation efforts long-stalled by sharp partisan divides in Washington, but for the moment no major legislation has gotten significant momentum. —AFP

ranks fourth among exporters and accounts for approximately 22 percent of trade.

To date, however, the Russian army's movements have had little effect on Russian or Ukrainian exports. While global wheat prices surge, Ukraine has seen its own rates fall by four percent over the last month, according to S&P Global Platts.

"If we remain in a latent conflict, volatility will remain in place and Russia and Ukraine will be losers in this," Le Molgat said. "Their currencies will depreciate and few will risk buying from a distant origin without guaranteed delivery." Ukraine is also the top sunflower oil exporter, with Russia a close second.

"We did see some customers that were pulling back buying sunflower oil from Ukraine, because they had worries about whether they would be able to deliver if they're involved in a military conflict with Russia," said Arlan Suderman, chief commodities economist at StoneX Financial.

However, according to Scheve, "over time, (such a latent crisis) would just be accepted as it's the risk that you face." "And then until the problem rears its head again, that wouldn't necessarily put a premium on prices."

He also pointed out that exports from Ukraine and Russia traditionally slow down in March, "so that might be less of an issue."

#### Blockade and embargo

Those involved in commodities trading have a worst-case scenario in mind. Were conflict to arise and Russia block the port of Odessa, Ukraine would have trouble

exporting, Le Molgat said.

"In such a situation, one can imagine that there will be economic sanctions. The United States could thus decide to prohibit the trade of Russian wheat in dollars," he said. Apart from Ukraine and Russia, the countries the most impacted would be their biggest customers, namely Egypt, Turkey, Indonesia and Morocco, which would be forced to find wheat elsewhere, probably at a higher price.

On the supply side, the European Union, United States and Australia, the other major players in terms of wheat, would be major beneficiaries of the disruption. The exceptional uncertainty and volatility in the agricultural markets is a huge draw for investors. Earlier this month, the amount of short wheat positions (bets on price dropping) rose to levels not seen since July 2020.

In recent days, Teucrium, which manages ETF funds tracking agricultural commodities, has recorded inflows from investors looking to benefit from the price hike, said managing director Jake Hanley. A diplomatic end to the crisis or the continuation of status quo in Ukraine would provide market relief, by all accounts, but prices could remain high. Wheat and corn are currently 22 and 18 percent above their prices this time last year respectively. The upcoming US wheat crop is threatened by a drought in the southern Plains, while corn crops are also expected to suffer from lack of rain in Argentina and Brazil. "There's been so much focus on Russia, Ukraine," said Suderman, "that the global markets have pretty much lost touch with some of the other issues around the world." —AFP



## Business

# British annual inflation hits fresh 30-year high

## Cost of living jumps piling pressure on BoE

LONDON: UK annual inflation has hit the highest level since 1992, data showed yesterday, adding pressure to the cost of living and on the Bank of England to keep raising rates. The Consumer Prices Index (CPI) edged up to 5.5 percent in January from 5.4 percent in December, also a level not seen in almost three decades, the Office for National Statistics said in a statement.

The rate is now at the highest level since March 1992, the ONS added. Prices have soared globally over the past year, in large part owing to surging energy prices, while consumers are facing also higher food costs as economies reopen from pandemic lockdowns.

"We understand the pressures people are facing with the cost of living," British finance minister Rishi Sunak said in response to yesterday's data. "These are global challenges," he added.

Annual inflation in the eurozone stands at a record-high 5.1 percent, while CPI in the United States hit 7.5 percent in January—the largest increase in almost 40 years. As global inflation reaches decades-high peaks, central banks are deciding on how fast to hike interest rates.

The Bank of England earlier this month lifted its main interest rate for the second time in a row aimed at bringing down inflation, which is rising faster than workers' wage increases.

### Rate hikes

The BoE has forecast Britain's annual inflation rate to peak at 7.25 percent in April, far above its 2.0-percent target. The latest "increase in CPI inflation... will

add a bit more pressure on the Bank of England to continue raising interest rates rapidly", said Paul Dales, chief UK economist at Capital Economics. Policymakers in December lifted borrowing costs from a record-low 0.1 percent to 0.25 percent—their first tightening in more than three years.

They raised them again this month, to 0.5 percent. With prices shooting higher, Sunak earlier this month unveiled a support package worth £9 billion (\$12.2 billion, 10.7 billion euros) targeted at 28 million poorer and middle-income households.

This is likely to be offset, however, by a surge in domestic energy bills and a salary tax hike from April. Victoria Scholar, head of investment at Interactive Investor, said "markets should brace for an aggressive (BoE rate) tightening cycle ahead, with the potential for much higher price levels in the face of April's energy price cap hike".

### Ukraine crisis

Scholar also pointed to "the possibility of further supply constraints if tensions between Russia and Ukraine flare up again". World oil prices this week struck the highest levels since 2014, before cooling, as investors grow increasingly worried about energy supplies in the event of a war between major producer Russia and Ukraine.

As prices soar in the UK, hundreds of people protested in London and other cities Saturday, demanding government action to tackle the sharply rising cost of living.

One of the marches organized by The People's



KUWAIT: British Consumer Prices Index (CPI) edged up to 5.5 percent in January from 5.4 percent in December, also a level not seen in almost three decades.

Assembly headed for Downing Street in London where they called for the resignation of scandal-hit Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

Similar demonstrations were held in several UK cities, including Glasgow in Scotland where a placard

read "Freeze Prices Not the Poor". Many demonstrators' banners mocked Johnson for lockdown-busting Downing Street parties, amid a police probe into whether the festivities were legal that has shaken his premiership. — AFP



## Gulf Bank awarded with 'Most Rewarding Prepaid Card' in MEA

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank was awarded with "Most Rewarding Prepaid Card" by Mastercard for its Mastercard MOUJ Cashback Prepaid Card. In partnership with Mastercard, in June 2021, Gulf Bank had launched the new MOUJ Cashback Prepaid Card, the first-of-its-kind in the Middle East to offer cashback to its cardholders. The card is available for all Gulf Bank customers and can be requested digitally through Gulf Bank's Online or Mobile Banking services and in-person at any of the bank's branches.

With the MOUJ Cashback Prepaid Card, cardholders can earn up to 5 percent cashback on all their purchases locally and internationally throughout the year. Moreover, customers can also benefit from discounts at their favorite stores and restaurants, with more than 850 outlets across Kuwait to choose from. For a quicker and more convenient shopping experience, Gulf Bank's MOUJ Cashback Prepaid Card is also equipped with NFC technology, allowing cardholders to enjoy contactless transactions, without the hassle of inserting or swiping their cards at check-out.

On this occasion, Mohammad Al-Qattan, General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank, said: "Customer experience is always among our top priorities at Gulf Bank, and we are always keen to provide only the best and most innovative products to our customers. We are excited to receive this award from Mastercard as it reflects the innovation and excellence that Gulf Bank that has always been striving towards. Our collaboration with Mastercard to present Gulf Bank's MOUJ Cashback Prepaid Card, the first prepaid bank card in the Middle East to offer a cashback feature has created a benchmark for all future Prepaid Cards in Kuwait and the region. We promise our customers even more developments that will continue to solidify our pioneering position as the Kuwaiti Bank of the Future."

All MOUJ Cashback Prepaid cardholders can enjoy cashback of up to KD 600 annually on all purchases across retail, co-ops, supermarkets, electronics, dining, and more, and on all travel spends including flights, hotels, and shopping - both locally and internationally. Cardholders can also avail multiple instant discounts across various restaurants and retail outlets. In addition, the new card is designed to be suitable for the use of all family members, including children, and allows cardholders to load their cards with the amounts of their choosing in order to monitor expenses. Nadia Ghissassi, Country Manager for Qatar, Kuwait and Oman, Mastercard, said: "We are pleased to award Gulf Bank with "The Most Rewarding Prepaid Card in Middle East and Africa" for its MOUJ Cashback Prepaid Card, the first cashback prepaid card in the Middle East. Our partnership with Gulf Bank has paved the way to provide consumers in Kuwait an opportunity to enjoy exciting offers while ensuring their payments needs are met. This continuous effort over the past year to transform the domestic payments ecosystem in the country and wider region is unmatched in addition to delivering a seamless, secure and more convenient way to pay."

It is worth noting that Gulf Bank's MOUJ Cashback Prepaid cardholders can also enjoy discounts of up to

25 percent at more than 550 renowned restaurants and cafes in Kuwait. Cardholders can also avail instant discounts of up to 30 percent at more than 300 retail outlets across travel, entertainment, health, beauty, and lifestyle segments. The card is also equipped with fraud protection with Gulf Bank's 3D secure feature for a safer online shopping experience.

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank gives its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience.

Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining a robust sustainability program at the community, economic, and environmental levels through sustainability initiatives that are strategically selected to benefit both the country and the Bank. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with the different relevant parties to achieve it.

For more information on Gulf Bank's various initiatives and activities, customers can visit one of Gulf Bank's branches or log on to Gulf Bank's Online/Mobile Banking services. Customers can also direct their queries via WhatsApp for round-the-clock assistance from Gulf Bank representatives or call the Customer Contact Center on the same number.

## Indian tax officials search Huawei offices in Delhi

NEW DELHI: Indian tax officials yesterday conducted searches at the offices of Chinese tech giant Huawei, the firm said, days after New Delhi banned a host of Chinese apps over national security concerns. Tensions between New Delhi and Beijing have been running high since a deadly 2020 clash involving their militaries in a disputed Himalayan border area.

The latest volley from India saw officials from its income tax department search Huawei India's premises in Gurgaon, on the outskirts of capital New Delhi, and in the southern tech hub of Bangalore, according to the company. "We have been informed of the visit of income tax team to our office and also of their meeting with some personnel," Huawei India said in a statement emailed to AFP.

Huawei was confident their operations in India were "firmly compliant" to local laws and they would fully cooperate with the authorities, the statement added. Indian authorities were not immediately available for comment. Local media reports said the officials were looking at the financial documents, account books, and Huawei's Indian businesses as well as overseas transactions. — AFP

## Facebook co-workers now 'Metamates' as image evolves

LOS ANGELES: Meta chief Mark Zuckerberg laid out revamped company values Tuesday, urging workers to be "Metamates" who treat one another with respect and look to the future. Zuckerberg shared his note to employees on his Facebook page, the revamped credo coming on the heels of the internet giant being renamed Meta in October.

"As we build the next chapter of our company as Meta, we just updated the values that guide our work," Zuckerberg wrote. Facebook last reworked its professed values in 2007, according to the company's co-founder and chief.

An ethic of "move fast and break things" from Facebook's early days has evolved into simply "move fast" as a team to deliver innovations. Meta's new credo also calls for being direct, but respectful to colleagues, collaborating as "Metamates."

"Meta, Metamates, Me is about being good stewards of our company and mission," Zuckerberg wrote. "It's about taking care of our company and each other." The stated values also call for focusing on the long-term and building "awesome things." The notion of Zuckerberg urging employees to be Metamates in a morale-building pitch was promptly mocked on Twitter.

Some joked that the word sounded better suited to a bad dating app, or even to sailors on a ship in troubled waters. "Metamates report to the Metatorium for a Metameeting," read one of the many quips fired off on Twitter. Others portrayed it as part of an effort to divert attention away from problems at Facebook.



LOS ANGELES: A file photo taken on October 28, 2021 and taken in Los Angeles shows a person using Facebook on a smartphone in front of a computer screen showing the META logo. — AFP

Critics have derided Facebook's rebrand as an attempted distraction from an avalanche of damaging revelations from whistleblower Frances Haugen.

The "Facebook Papers" showed that company executives knew of their sites' potential for harm on numerous fronts, including the uncontrolled spread of hate speech in developing countries as well as Instagram's impact on teen mental health. "For those of us living in the present, @Meta Facebook isn't 'nicing us to death', Haugen said in a tweet Tuesday.

"Facebook must recognize the damage they are causing today, not pivot to the @Meta-verse and never look back." — AFP



## ECB must not act 'too late' on inflation: Official

BRUSSELS: The European Central Bank should start thinking about gradually withdrawing its economic stimulus measures, as the risk of acting "too late" against soaring inflation grows, an ECB policymaker has told the Financial Times. The comments by Isabel Schnabel, a member of the ECB's executive board, will strengthen the position of "hawks" on the governing council, who would like to see a faster tightening of monetary policy.

Record 5.1 percent inflation in the eurozone in January meant "the risk of acting too late has increased and therefore we need a careful reassessment of the inflation outlook," Schnabel told the Financial Times in an interview published late Tuesday on the bank's website. The bank's assessment had to be reviewed in light of the relatively mild impact of the Omicron variant on the economy, Schnabel said, as well as a recent drop in unemployment which could mean wage growth—and therefore inflation—is "stronger than we originally expected".

"All of this implies that it has become increasingly likely that inflation is going to stabilize around our two-percent target over the medium term," Schnabel said, according to a transcript of the interview

released by the ECB. Approaching this aim meant the bank had to "start thinking about a gradual normalization of our policy", Schnabel said.

At their last meeting at the beginning of the month, ECB policymakers confirmed a "step-by-step" reduction in the bank's massive bond-buying program, its main crisis-fighting tool, aimed at stoking economic growth. The ECB also held its interest rates at record lows, including a negative deposit rate that effectively charges banks to park their money with the ECB overnight.

Under the ECB's plan, any rate hikes will only come after it has brought a close to its bond-buying. Soaring inflation has however forced other central banks, such as the United States Federal Reserve and the Bank of England, to dial up rate hikes and put pressure on the ECB to respond.

The Frankfurt-based institution is set to publish new economic forecasts alongside its next meeting in March, which could see inflation figures revised upwards. In December, the ECB foresaw a 3.2 percent rise in prices in 2022, with pressure easing over the course of the year.

It was "increasingly unlikely" that the monthly inflation figure would fall below two percent by the end of the year as the bank had expected, Schnabel said.

The ECB executive also warned about the rising cost of housing in the eurozone, with only rental costs added in the inflation figure. Research suggested that were recent housing price increases to be included, "core inflation would have been 0.6 percentage points higher", Schnabel said, bringing the bank closer to its target. — AFP

## Business

# KFH maintains efforts to maximize profitability and ROE: Al-Rushood

'Positive financial results for 2021 confirm KFH's success in achieving its strategic goals'

**KUWAIT:** Acting Group CEO of Kuwait Finance House (KFH), Abdulwahab Essa Al-Rushood said that the positive financial results for the year 2021 confirmed KFH's success in achieving its strategic goals relating to the sustainability of profits and its ability to deal with the challenges with high professionalism. KFH has taken proactive steps to deal with the conditions imposed by the pandemic, whether in terms of services and products or human resources.

He added that KFH maintains its efforts to maximize profitability and ROE, improve asset quality, manage costs, and develop policies for granting credit across all KFH's subsidiaries in Turkey, Bahrain, Malaysia, and Germany. We are increasing investment in green Sukuk, diversifying the financing portfolio and continuing the strategy of focusing on the core banking business.

Al-Rushood pointed out that KFH achieved positive results in all key financial indicators and maintained good ratios in terms of the cost to income, NPFs, debt coverage ratio as well as other financial indicators. Also, KFH successfully maintained the Group's capital support and improvement of asset quality, through a robust business model and disciplined implementation of plans and strategy.

He explained that KFH maintained strong liquidity and operational performance and achieved a growth in the financing portfolio for the retail and corporate sectors in addition to the increase in customers' deposits.

He said: "By providing a wide range of banking and financing solutions for retail and corporates as well as the SME sector, KFH is moving forward in its developmental role and in supporting government initiatives." Al-Rushood added that KFH has expanded investment and trading activities in the primary and secondary capital markets, where KFH Group Treasury executed Sukuk deals worth over \$16 billion during 2021. KFH maintained its position at the top of the main dealers in the issuances of the International Islamic Liquidity Management (IILM) of the Primary Sukuk Market. The bank also topped the

Secondary Market Dealers list. It is worth noting that this is the first achievement whereby a financial institution tops the two lists in the Sukuk primary and secondary markets.

He pointed out that KFH's social contributions and initiatives are a milestone and consolidate KFH's position in this field. The bank has contributed to many strategic community initiatives such as: paying, in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice, over KD 20 million in debts to release approximately 10,000 defaulting debtors; KFH signed an agreement with the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) to implement relief and medical projects in collaboration with the Jordan Red Crescent. Moreover, KFH signed two agreements with the King Hussein Cancer Foundation and the KRCS to treat cancer patients among refugees in Jordan. KFH also signed a partnership agreement, the first of its kind in the Kuwaiti banking sector, with Kuwait Society for the Handicapped to support people with special needs, not to mention many environmental and sustainable initiatives, supporting youth as well as many other initiatives.

## Shadi Zahran, Group Chief Financial Officer

Shadi Zahran, Group Chief Financial Officer presented the financial performance of KFH group for 2021. Zahran said that the Group has achieved net profit after tax attributable to Shareholders for the year ended 31st December 2021 of KD 243.4 million higher by KD 95 million or 64 percent compared to LY 2020 of KD 148.4 million.

Zahran pointed out that net Operating income at KD 503.1 million increased by KD 3.5 million or 0.7 percent compared to last year; the increase is mainly from higher both Investment income and net gain from foreign currencies. Total Operating Expenses are KD 11.9 million or 4.0 percent higher than last year is due to increase in economic activity compared to the situation that occurred last year. The increase in operating expenses resulted in a slight



Abdulwahab Essa Al-Rushood



Shadi Zahran



Fahad Al-Mukhaizeem

increase in group cost to income ratio to reach 37.97 percent. Zahran mentioned that at KFH-Kuwait, C/I ratio at 30.30 percent is still below both the local Islamic Banks average of 44 percent and local conventional Banks average of 41.1 percent (calculated from published financials for third quarter 2021).



## Kuwait Finance House Earnings Webcast FY-2021

### Financing receivables

Zahran said: "Growth in financing receivables mainly in Kuwait in both: Corporate and Retail, while a decline in Turkey mainly due to devaluation of Turkish Lira. Investments in Sukuk at KD 2.7 billion is maintained at the 2020 level. Additionally, deposits for 2021 at KD 15.9 billion are KD 0.5 billion or 3.6 percent above 2020 level.

He added that the group was able to maintain favorable deposits mix with healthy contribution from CASA deposits at 54.6 percent of total group deposits as at the end of 2021 compared to 53.3 percent in 2020. He said that customer

deposits as a percentage of total funding improved further to reach 84.9 percent reflects healthy funding mix and shows robust liquidity.

In the last slide looking at the key performance ratios which reflects improvement in profitability, NPL ratio improved to reach 1.60 percent (as per CBK calculation) in 2021 compared to 2.20 percent for 2020. Provisions Coverage ratio for Group is 326 percent in 2021 compared to 223 percent for 2020.

### Fahad Al-Mukhaizeem, Group Chief Strategy Officer

Meanwhile, Fahad Al-Mukhaizeem, Group Chief Strategy Officer covered highlights of the Kuwait operating environment with an overview on KFH. He also shared KFH's strategy, as well as FY-2021 results. Al-Mukhaizeem added: "A rebound in international oil prices, driven by global demand for oil, will help to restore economic output to pre-pandemic levels by the end of the 2021/22 fiscal year. The Kuwaiti economy will benefit from strong oil prices in 2022-2023 as the government is expected to boost its support for capital-intensive projects under the New Kuwait Vision 2035 plan. Furthermore, the latest forecasts from the IMF (International Monetary Fund), expect Kuwait GDP growth to accelerate to 4.3 percent in 2022, helped by rising oil production and healthy global oil prices, as well as a recovery in the non-oil sector."

Referring interest rates, Al-

Mukhaizeem said that the Central Bank of Kuwait kept the interest rate at 1.5 percent after the last cut of 100 basis points on the 16th of March 2020. He added that "KFH" enjoys a high creditworthiness, Moody's assigned an A2 long-term deposit rating with a Stable Outlook in September 2021, Fitch Ratings has downgraded Kuwait Finance House (KFH) Long-Term Issuer Default Rating (IDR) to A from A+ and revised its outlook to Stable from Negative. The rating actions follow a similar action on Kuwait's sovereign rating on 27 January 2022. In addition, KFH Group has recently been named as the Best Islamic Financial Institution in the World by Global Finance Magazine, the Bank of the year in the Middle East and in Kuwait by The Banker, the Best Domestic bank in Kuwait by AsiaMoney, and Best Treasury & Cash Management Banks in Kuwait by Global Finance Magazine.

Al-Mukhaizeem explained that KFH is moving forward in leading the Islamic finance industry and contributing to attracting new players and developing products and services to become an active pillar in implementing economic visions, providing greater support for growth and sustainability, and taking into account environmental, social and governance (ESG) standards. Al-Mukhaizeem continued: "KFH is keen on the sustainability front through the issuing of Green Sukuk and the successful arrangement of \$350 million of sustainability Sukuk transaction for KFH-Turkey.

## ABK-Egypt logs EGP 1.29bn profit before tax in 2021

**KUWAIT:** Continuing its strong performance since its inception in Egypt's financial market, Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait - Egypt (ABK-Egypt), one of Egypt's fastest growing banks yesterday reported an increase of 25 percent year-on-year in Net Profit for 2021. The steadfast growth momentum is a testament to ABK-Egypt's prudent growth strategy and ambitious aspirations, as Net Profit reached EGP 833 million for the year ended 2021, compared to EGP 666 million in 2020. Net Interest Income grew by 14 percent to EGP 2.13 billion.

ABK-Egypt's net operating profit for 2021 was EGP 1.7 billion, a 25 percent year-on-year increase compared to EGP 1.4 billion in 2020. The bank's customer deposits increased by 43 percent year-on-year to reach EGP 47.9 billion compared to EGP 33.6 billion, while the Bank's loan portfolio grew 26 percent in 2021 to reach EGP 27.4 billion. The Non-Performing Loan (NPL) ratio reached 2 percent, with a coverage ratio of 130 percent.

Ali Ebrahim Marafi, Chairman of ABK-Egypt, said: "ABK-Egypt has remained resilient with a remarkable 25 percent year-on-year growth in Net Profit. This commendable performance demonstrates the strength of our strategy, allowing us to deliver results irrespective of the prevailing economic conditions. ABK-Egypt's portfolio grew at a faster rate than the market due to the Bank's agility and transformational capabilities.

"I would like to thank the Central Bank of Egypt and the Egyptian government for their valuable guidance. I also thank our Board of Directors,

shareholders and clients for their trust and loyalty. In closing, I thank our Executive Management and all our employees for their hard work and dedication throughout the year."

Commenting further on the results, Khaled El Salawy, CEO and Managing Director of ABK-Egypt, said: "Our team successfully executed the bank's prudent strategy adopted at the end of 2020, which focused on effectively navigating unprecedented changes that the Egyptian banking sector witnessed.

"We also focused on small business owners and launched very small business loans to support this growing ecosystem. By providing a multi-purpose flexible financing solution, a 5-year repayment period, simplified documentation and an accelerated process, supported with competitive rates, we were able to help very small businesses and start-ups achieve their business goals."

In closing, El Salawy said: "I would like to thank my colleagues for their outstanding performance and dedication, which is a key element to ABK's success. In 2022, we will continue working on our expansion strategy, with a focus on service excellence and exploring new customer segments through offering innovative products that cater to our clients' needs. We will also continue to invest in the Bank's technology infrastructure to enhance our customers' experience."

Additionally, ABK-Egypt added several new services such as cardless ATM services, special loan programs for doctors, university instructors, bankers and residential compound owners, a special account for youth above 16 years old, and a savings account with a free accidental death insurance policy, to attract and serve its growing customer base.

Another highlight in 2021 was ABK's Pay Sticker in collaboration with Mastercard, which is the latest addition to the Bank's digital payment services,



Ali Ebrahim Marafi



Khaled El Salawy

responding to the country's increasing demand for cashless payment solutions and cementing its commitment to boosting digital payments across the region to facilitate a seamless payment experience for customers.

ABK-Egypt remains committed to Financial Inclusion, and moving into 2022, the bank will further extend its product offerings to Small and Medium Enterprises. It will continue to work alongside the Central Bank of Egypt (CBE) to increase financial literacy amongst unbanked segments and eliminate the barriers that exclude these segments from joining the financial sector. In alignment with national direction, the Bank's strong SME proposition will effectively enable this high impact sector to grow and drive economic prosperity.

In line with its ongoing commitment to supporting the communities in which it operates, in 2021 ABK-Egypt continued to provide aid to those in need through an array of social initiatives in partnership with non-profit organizations, ranging from the provision of financial donations, outreach to the underprivileged with clothing, shelter, food supplies and medical care, through to exploring opportunities to help children, women, individuals with special needs, and the financially incapable.

## China govt to help run coal power plants at full capacity

**BEIJING:** China will help its coal-fired power plants run at full capacity, the government has announced, raising further alarm about the fate of Beijing's climate pledges.

Swathes of the world's second-biggest economy were paralyzed last year because of power shortages, partly caused by a drop in coal supply as global prices of the fossil fuel soared. China is the world's biggest emitter of the greenhouse gases responsible for climate change, and has pledged to peak emissions by 2030 and become carbon neutral by 2060.

But coal production has been ramped up since last year's energy shortages, sparking uncertainty and concern about those targets. The focus on energy security and economic growth was reiterated at a high-level meeting of China's State Council, chaired by Premier Li Keqiang, state news agency Xinhua reported Tuesday.

It was decided in the Monday meeting that "coal supply will be increased and coal-fired power plants will be supported in running at full capacity and generating more electricity" to meet industrial and residential demand, according to Xinhua. The move comes weeks after President Xi Jinping told top policymakers to ensure that emissions reductions do not hurt economic growth and energy security—widely seen as a signal to limit restrictions on the coal sector.

Following the energy crunch last year, China reopened dozens of coal mines and scrapped production quotas, unraveling earlier steps to curb emissions. The country's coal output hit a record of over four billion metric tons last year—the highest in a decade—after imports were disrupted by the pandemic. — AFP

## Mazda welcomes you to discover its latest models in 360 Mall

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Automotive Imports Company, the authorized distributor of Mazda in Kuwait, is delighted to welcome you to 360 Mall from 10 February to 2 March. Here you can discover the ultimate combination of technology, style, and comfort with Mazda.

### Why Mazda

Because Mazda cars are engineered to deliver pure driving joy, Mazda aspires to offer all our customers both driving pleasure and outstanding environmental and safety performance. That

begins with an alluring design that conveys personality and soul. Every car in our lineup aims to appeal to the senses, and design is the language we use to communicate that. This philosophy underpins Mazda's commitment to safety research and development to achieve our ultimate goal: a safe, accident-free automotive society.

### Mazda MX-5

Mazda MX-5 RF delivers a flawless driving experience, fitted with premium performance features, including BBS wheels. Safety rules supreme in Mazda MX-5, with a range of intelligent and intuitive features designed to keep you well and truly out of harm's way. The Mazda MX-5 is the world's best-selling roadster in history. So far, since the beginning of the production in 1989.

### Mazda CX-5

The elegant new shape of Mazda CX-5

is captured perfectly by our distinct design philosophy, KODO - Soul of Motion. The exterior conveys an appearance of both speed and grace. The innovations and detection devices help drivers recognize potential hazards to avoid collisions better or lessen their impact. So you can focus on what matters—the road ahead.

### Mazda CX-9

Mazda CX-9 elevates the driving experience by subduing road, wind, and engine noise. We added 53 pounds of sound-deadening material, used sound-insulating glass, and installed even better seal insulation than the previous generation. All this makes the Mazda CX-9 remarkably quiet ensuring your time behind the wheel is one of minimal stress and maximum enjoyment.

Ashish Tandon, General Manager of KAICO (Kuwait Automotive Imports Co WLL - Alshaya & Alsagar) stated, "It is



our pleasure to exhibit Mazda's newest, high-tech and comfortable models at 360 Mall" Waleed Al-Qahtani, Mazda Brand Manager stated, "As we celebrate the Hala February season, we are pleased to exhibit our latest Mazda model in 360 Mall". Issa

Abdallah, Marketing Manager of KAICO (Kuwait Automotive Imports Co WLL - Alshaya & Alsagar) stated, "We are always striving for customer satisfaction, and now they can touch and feel the Mazda cars at their convenience in 360 Mall."



Photos show installations related to French writer and aviator Antoine de Saint Exupery as part of an exhibition entitled 'A la rencontre du Petit Prince'. — AFP photos

# 'LITTLE PRINCE' MANUSCRIPT VISITS FRANCE FOR FIRST TIME

The manuscript of "The Little Prince" travels to France for the first time this week as part of an exhibition about its legendary author Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. The pilot-explorer wrote his beloved tale about an alien prince and his interstellar travels while in exile in the United States in 1942, having fled France after the Nazi invasion. He left the US the following year to fight on the North African front, leaving the manuscript with his mistress, journalist Sylvia Hamilton, who sold it to the Morgan

Library and Museum in 1968. Its first visit to Paris is part of an exhibition, "Meeting the Little Prince" at the Museum of Decorative Arts that runs from Thursday until June. Among the treasures on display are the original watercolors of the Little Prince's asteroid home and the hero wearing his trademark long coat with red lapels. Saint-Exupéry disappeared during a mission over the Mediterranean in July 1944, never to know of the worldwide success of his book, which had been published



only in the US. But he had found his voice—after being initially reluctant to illustrate the story himself.

The exhibition shows how long the story was in gestation, with a letter to his future wife in 1930 in which he shares his idea about "a child who discovers a treasure and becomes melancholic". We also see what was left on the cutting-room floor: characters including a snail, a butterfly collector and an old couple that chase him from his home. Or a discarded opening in which the narrator admits he doesn't know how to draw an airplane. "There is always mystery around this work. Any single sheet brings up some enigma," said curator Alban Cerisier. — AFP



## Lipa doesn't eat after 6 pm as she reveals fitness secrets

Dua Lipa admits she doesn't "eat after 6pm" as she reveals her health and fitness secrets. The 26-year-old pop star has opened up on her routine that helps maintain her sculpted physique, and it even goes down to the time she

has her meals. Speaking on the 'At Your Service' podcast, she said: "I don't eat after 6pm... When I eat really late my body does not really work through and it takes too long to process food. I drink a lot of water for my skin. I take vitamins, I take Omega 3. I fast. I feel like, with my skin, it helps."

The "Hotter Than Hell" hitmaker - whose parents are Kosovo-Albanians - admitted her heritage made her a busy bee, and she was always burning the midnight oil. She added: "There is a saying in Albanian, 'Never leave today's work for tomorrow'. I live by it. I see my job as a 24-hour job. "For as long as I have butterflies and as much as it scares me going on stage, I know I am in the right place." Dua previously admitted it was the love of her job that kept her busy, and she felt incredibly lucky to be able to do what she loves everyday.

She said: "I think just the love I have for my job. I feel very lucky to be doing something I've dreamed of my whole life. My hobby is my job, that's not to say that there aren't hard things about it, there's crazy schedules and not really spending enough time at home for example. "But I get to do everything I'd imagined and more, things I didn't even know would be possible like performing at the UEFA Champions League, I never thought I'd see myself in front of loads of football fans. It's really exciting seeing what new things this career brings me, I'm just so grateful."—AFP



## Metronomy see a 'Small World' emerge from pandemic

As the title of his new album suggests, Metronomy's Joe Mount found an unexpected sense of connection to the rest of the planet in the midst of the pandemic. The multi-instrumentalist returns on Friday with his seventh album of retro pop gems, "Small World". It reflects a surprisingly enriching couple of years, holed up with his family and young children in the English countryside. "Growing up, you hear people talking about the population of the world being too big and getting ever bigger. Suddenly the numbers felt more manageable. I felt there was a community suddenly," Mount told AFP. "Everyone was in the same place, everyone experiencing the same thing," he said. It was also a chance to take a breather after 20 years of writing and touring. "The good thing about being at home for the pandemic was realizing you don't need to consume stuff. I was quite happy just being at home. "I've experienced time in a very different way these past two years. How hours make days and days make weeks—I feel like I've lived every minute."

### 'A bit strange'

Mount has always been comfortable working alone. From his early days writing music in his Devon bedroom, the award-

winning musician has always written and recorded everything himself, only adding band members for touring as his career took off. The first single from the new album, "It's Good to be Back", might suggest Mount was keen to get back on stage. But "it's actually about coming home," he said with a laugh. And in fact, one of the first comeback gigs was an unusual affair amid the towering glass and water features of the Louis Vuitton Foundation in Paris in November.

"I was more nervous than usual," said Mount. "The idea of pure pleasure on stage isn't true. There's anxiety. It can feel

a bit strange. It ultimately felt good but it's never all that simple." While the new album is a very upbeat affair musically, some of the lyrics—such as opening track "Life and Death"—suggest a more unflinching look at life as Mount turns 40 this year. "There's a sort of maturity in being comfortable about speaking about anything," he said. "I think about that with my children. You have to be comfortable to talk about anything because if you don't, you can give them complexes.—AFP



In this file photo members of English band Metronomy pose for photographers at the Eurokeennes festival in the eastern French city of Belfort. — AFP



A driver maneuvers a horse cart on the ice of Cildir Lake at Cildir District, in Kars. — AFP photos



This aerial view shows a snow cart travelling on the ice of Cildir Lake at sunset at Cildir District, in Kars.



Orhan Goller checks his fishing net in a hole made in the ice of Cildir Lake at Cildir District, in Kars.



Orhan Goller poses as he throws a fish in the air past his fishing net in a hole of the ice of Cildir Lake at Cildir District.

## One-horse open sleigh ride across frozen Turkish lake

By the time Kismet the horse sets off, Orhan Goller's bare fingers have already turned blue from the freezing temperatures. But the pure white surroundings and the echo of hooves are enough to delight his customers in eastern Turkey. Between December and March when the ice is sufficiently thick on Cildir Lake, one of the biggest in the Anatolia region, the 19-year-old who lives close by introduces tourists to the area which borders Georgia. "We have 25 centimeters (9.8 inches) today," he says. "But the thickness can reach 40 centimeters. Some days the temperature falls to -30, -40 Celsius (-22, -40 Fahrenheit). It's not always sunny like today... But there you go, it's our livelihood."

The lake, which is 20 kilometers (12 miles) long, is a paradise in the summer for migrating birds, especially gulls, swans and wild geese. The region mainly produces cheese, including "gravyer" which is a form of gruyere, made in the eastern province of Kars, with holes like the European original. The cheese is a legacy of a visit by a Swiss citizen invited by the tsar when the Russians occupied the regional capital 70 kilometers from the lake in the 1870s.

But at nearly 2,000 meters altitude (6,500 feet), the winter is long and harsh and activity is rare so taking tourists on board horse-drawn sleighs is a small sup-

plement to locals' income in a country where inflation reached nearly 50 percent in January. Since the arrival of affluent visitors from Ankara by the Eastern Express, a tourist train which travels across Anatolia in 36 hours from the capital, revenue has risen.

Caucasian horses racing across the ice, javelin throwing, fishing under the ice which "we show to visitors to explain how we live here" Goller says as he lifts a fishing line from a hole made in the ice on the lake's surface. Three visitor access points have been created along the shore where



Tourists stand next to a horse cart on the ice of Cildir Lake at Cildir District, in Kars.

### 'Mode of transport'

Goller, an agronomy student in Kars, has grown up by the shores of Cildir Lake and is happy to be a guide at weekends. "We bring our culture, our traditions to life. In normal times, these sleighs are our mode of transport. In the past, our grandparents used them to go to hospital, to travel across the region's villages," Goller says. "Nowadays, people are curious and so we take them." Attractions include

restaurants and tea houses have sprung up along with hot wine kiosks to warm those on excursions to the lake. When the majority of businesses have packed up and closed for the day, it's just then as the sun fades that the frozen lake offers its utmost beauty. — AFP



Tourists jump as they pose for a photograph on the ice of Cildir Lake at Cildir District, in Kars.

## Chainsaws, ice and a sauna in India's frozen north

High in the barren Indian Himalayas, artists are chainsawing blocks of ice from a frozen river creating what they hope will be the beginnings of India's answer to China's Harbin International Ice Festival. So far the Kangsing collective have created what they call a "mini-colosseum", a cafeteria and a sauna near the appropriately named village of Chilling in the northern region of Ladakh. The instal-

lation at 11,000 feet (3,350 metres) serves as the take-off point for the popular seven-day Chadar Trek along the surface of the frozen Zaskar river through breathtaking "frozen desert" scenery that has been shut for two years due to the pandemic.

"We're thinking we might have a festival big enough, grand enough like Harbin International Festival, something where

we can ask artists from all over the world to come and participate," group member Tashi, who uses only one name, told AFP. For now the mini-colosseum stands just a little higher than the average person. But one day its creators hope to emulate the famous ice hotel in Jukkasjarvi, Sweden.

The spot was selected for its lack of sunshine that might melt the ice and where whistling icy winds keep tempera-

tures at a bone-chilling minus 17-20 degrees Celsius (plus 1.5 to minus 4 Fahrenheit) throughout the day. With some support from the local government the group, which includes a doctor, has also built a sauna at the bank of the frozen river, where they manage to raise the temperature up to 60 degrees Celsius.

A hardy handful in their underpants then plunge straight into a pit outside, dug

into the frozen Zaskar, to take an ice bath lasting about a minute-if they can take it. "Its extraordinary and rejuvenating," said an invigorated Tundup Gyaltsan, a local policeman. "You don't feel the cold at all." — AFP



In this picture a man accompanied by a child visits the "mini-colosseum" cafeteria in Chilling village in India's northern region of Ladakh. — AFP photos



In this picture Kangsing, a group that performs ice and snow workshops, visits the "mini-colosseum" cafeteria in Chilling village in India's northern region of Ladakh.

## Lifestyle | Features

Family of woman killed on 'Rust' set sues **Alec Baldwin**

The family of a woman shot by Alec Baldwin on the set of the movie "Rust" sued the US actor on Tuesday, claiming "substantial" damages for her wrongful death. Baldwin was holding a Colt gun during a rehearsal for the low-budget Western in New Mexico in October when it discharged a live round, killing cinematographer Halyna Hutchins. At a press conference Tuesday, lawyer Brian Panish alleged the "reckless conduct and cost-cutting measures" of Baldwin and the other "Rust" producers had led to Hutchins' death.

The attorney representing Hutchins' husband Matthew and son Andros also presented a list of "at least 15 industry standards" he said the producers had ignored on set. These included failure to use a prop gun rather than a live weapon,



In this file photo actor Alec Baldwin attends the 'Exploring the Arts' 20th anniversary Gala at Hammerstein Ballroom in New York City. — AFP

a lack of individuals qualified to handle weapons on set at the time of the shooting, and lack of protective equipment for crew. Panish also alleged that Baldwin had "refused" training on cross-drawing

the gun. He presented a 3D animated reconstruction of the shooting.

The lawsuit has been filed in New Mexico, where the incident took place. Asked what level of compensation the family would seek, Panish said: "We believe it is going to be substantial." "Halyna Hutchins deserved to live, and the defendants had the power to prevent her death," said the lawsuit. The document alleges that producers instead opted for "cutting corners on safety procedures where human lives were at stake, rushing to stay on schedule and ignoring numerous complaints of safety violations." Baldwin's lawyer did not immediately respond to AFP request for comment.

**'A lie'**

The family's lawsuit is the latest in a

flurry of civil proceedings over the fatal shooting, which has sent shockwaves through Hollywood, and led to calls for guns to be permanently banned from sets. In November, the movie's chief lighting technician Serge Svetnoy sued Baldwin for negligence, and script supervisor Mammie Mitchell in a separate lawsuit accused Baldwin of playing "Russian roulette" with safety.

Hannah Gutierrez-Reed, the set's armorer in charge of weapons, last month sued the film's ammunition supplier, accusing him of leaving real bullets among the dummy cartridges. A criminal investigation is ongoing. Investigators have not filed criminal charges over the tragedy, but have refused to rule them out against anyone involved, including Baldwin.

Baldwin has handed his cell phone to authorities probing the shooting, after a warrant was issued for the device, and has said claims he was not complying with the investigation are "a lie." The former "30 Rock" star has said he was told the gun contained no live ammunition, had been instructed by Hutchins to point the gun in her direction, and did not pull the trigger. In his first major interview since the shooting, Baldwin told ABC in December that he does not feel guilty for Hutchins' death. "I feel that someone is responsible for what happened and I can't say who that is. But I know it's not me," said Baldwin. "I mean, I honest to God, if I felt that I was responsible, I might have killed myself," he said. — AFP



People look at a digital reproduction of 'Ritratto di Musico (Portrait of a Musician)', by Leonardo da Vinci, displayed as part of the 'Eternalising Art History: From Da Vinci to Modigliani' exhibition at the Unit London gallery in London. — AFP photos



A gallery assistant looks at a digital reproduction of the painting 'Madonna del Cardellino (Madonna of the Goldfinch)' by Raphael, displayed as part of the 'Eternalizing Art History: From Da Vinci to Modigliani' exhibition at the Unit London gallery in London.

## UK GALLERY OFFERS 'REAL' MASTERPIECES - FROM DIGITAL TOKENS

Want to "own" a Leonardo da Vinci or Amedeo Modigliani? One London gallery is showing digitally re-rendered versions of priceless Italian masterpieces—although they still don't come cheap. In what it called a first for the UK, Unit London opened an exhibition on Tuesday built on blockchain technology that allows buyers to acquire a framed screen and a "non-fungible token" (NFT) conferring ownership of the digitized version.

The frames were hand-made in Tuscany as exact replicas of the original frames held in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence

and other sites in Italy where the actual works are on display. They contain high-resolution renderings of the original works, and the owner can then display the electronic screen on a wall in something more akin to the real gallery experience in Italy, according to Unit London. Also included in the limited-edition run are works by Caravaggio, Raphael and Francesco Hayez.

Prices range from £100,000 (\$135,000, 120,000 euros) to £500,000, with half of the revenues going back to the host galleries in Italy and a cut also taken by Cinello, the Italian company that made the

digital versions. The London gallery's director Joe Kennedy said that after pandemic closures, "it's really about providing that outlet for those museums in a time where museums are really, really struggling to bring money in, stay open and continue their efforts".

The exhibition, he told AFP, allows art lovers to experience "a whole new dimension to what people perceive as NFTs, as being screen-based, or phone-based, 2D works". NFTs are unique lines of computer code that confer ownership, built on the same blockchain technology that powers cryptocurrencies, which cannot be forged

or otherwise manipulated.

The art world has seen a particular boom in the tokens, including a staggering \$69.3 million paid last year for a digital work by artist Beeple at a sale at Christie's. But NFTs have also attracted concerns about money-laundering, given the anonymity that underpins blockchain. In another UK first, Britain's tax body on Monday said it had seized three digital artwork NFTs while investigating suspected tax fraud, as it issued a warning to people using crypto-assets to hide money. — AFP



In this file photo taken on May 10, 1986 Brazilian film director Arnaldo Jabor is seen at the Cannes International Film Festival. — AFP

### Acclaimed Brazilian filmmaker **Arnaldo Jabor** dies at 81

Filmmaker, writer and journalist Arnaldo Jabor, a leading figure in Brazil's "cinema novo" movement whose work won acclaim on the international festival circuit, died Tuesday at 81. Known for award-winning films such as "All Nudity Shall Be Punished" (1972) and "Love Me Forever or Never" (1986), Jabor was also a noted author, columnist and political commentator. His family said he died of complications of a stroke for which he had been hospitalized since December.

"Jabor has become a star, my son has lost his father and Brazil lost a great Brazilian," his ex-wife, producer Suzana Villas Boas, wrote on Instagram. Jabor was an influential director of "cinema novo," or new cinema, a movement that emerged in the 1960s that sought to reflect the realities of Brazil.

Several of his features were selected for the Cannes Film Festival, including "Pindorama" (1970) and "Love Me Forever or Never" (1986), starring Fernanda Torres, who won the best actress prize for the role. "I Love You" (1981), starring iconic Brazilian actress Sonia Braga, was featured in the Un Certain Regard category at Cannes. — AFP

### India's 'disco king' **Bappi Lahiri** dies at 69

Indian singer-composer and "Disco King" Bappi Lahiri, who collaborated with the likes of Snoop Dogg and Samantha Fox, has died aged 69, his family said yesterday, prompting tributes from the world of politics and Bollywood. Born in West Bengal to a musical family, the larger-than-life Lahiri was renowned for his trademark gold chain and sunglasses and was credited with popularizing disco music in India.

He had several collaborations with international stars, including English model and singer Fox in the 1995 Hindi film "Rock Dancer" and with Snoop Dogg on Punjabi song "Patiala Peg" in 2015. Lahiri's family said in a statement that his death was a "deeply sad moment" for us. "We are seeking love and blessings for his soul," his wife and two children said.

Lahiri had "multiple health issues" and died in the film industry capital Mumbai late Tuesday, said Deepak Namjoshi, director of CritiCare Hospital. He had just been discharged from a month-long hospi-

tal stay on Monday, Namjoshi told the Press Trust of India, but was readmitted Tuesday after his condition deteriorated.

"He died due to OSA (obstructive sleep apnea) shortly before midnight," he said. Lahiri had fans dancing to hit songs in 1970s and '80s Bollywood films such as "Chalte Chalte", "Disco Dancer" and "Sharaabi". He also voiced several characters for Hindi-language versions of Hollywood films.

In the early 2000s, he won a copyright case against US rapper-producer Dr Dre for using parts of one of his songs. Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted that Lahiri's music was "all-encompassing, beautifully expressing diverse emotions" and that "people across generations could relate to his works".

"His lively nature will be missed by everyone. Saddened by his demise. Condolences to his family and admirers. Om Shanti," the Indian leader added. Oscar-winning composer A.R. Rahman tweeted his condolences and called Lahiri the "Disco King of Hindi cinema". Bollywood megastar Akshay Kumar added that Lahiri's voice "was the reason for millions to dance, including me". "Thank you for all the happiness you brought through your music," he wrote on Twitter. — AFP



In this file photo Bollywood singer, music composer Bappi Lahiri interacts with the media before planting a tree during an environment awareness campaign in Mumbai. — AFP



In this file photo author PJ O'Rourke attends 2015 House Of SpeakEasy Gala at City Winery on January 28, 2015 in New York City. — AFP

### US satirist **PJ O'Rourke** dead at 74

US political satirist PJ O'Rourke, who skewered both Democrats and his fellow Republicans in barbed works including "Republican Party Reptile," has died at age 74, the writer's friends and employers said Tuesday. O'Rourke also wrote about his experiences in various countries and conflict zones around the world as Rolling Stone magazine's chief foreign correspondent in the 1980s and '90s, particularly in his best-selling books "Holidays in Hell" and "Give War a Chance," and had been a prominent feature on US talk shows and the commentary circuit for decades.

The irreverent, cigar-chomping wit often contrasted his own youthful flirtation with the left with his later persona as a caustic conservative in books such as "Age and Guile beat Youth, Innocence and a Bad Haircut." He once wrote of the United States' two dominant political factions: "the Democrats are the party that says government will make you smarter, taller, richer and remove the crab grass on your lawn. The Republicans are the party that says government doesn't work and then get elected and prove it."

However, he announced in 2016 that he had voted for Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton rather than the Republican contender Donald Trump, saying that her winning would be the "second-worst thing that can happen to this country." — AFP

### Italian director **Taviani** flies solo after brother's death

After more than half a century making acclaimed films with his brother Vittorio, Italian director Paolo Taviani premiered a movie on his own in Berlin on Tuesday at the age of 90. But despite Vittorio's death in 2018, "he is still with me", Taviani told AFP ahead of the first screening of "Leonora Addio" at the 72nd Berlinale film festival. The two brothers initially came up with the idea for the film, which explores death and the legacy of creative endeavours, long before Vittorio's death, Taviani said. The inspiration came from a short story called "The Nail" written by Italian author Luigi Pirandello just 20 days before his death.



Italian director and screenwriter Paolo Taviani poses on the red carpet for his film 'Leonora addio' presented in competition during the 72nd Berlinale Film Festival in Berlin on February 15, 2022. — AFP

The first part of the film tells the somewhat absurd story of Pirandello's ashes as they are transported from their initial burial site in fascist Rome to a permanent resting place in Sicily. Then, in a second section, the film goes on to render the story of "The Nail" itself, about a Sicilian boy who kills a young girl in New York. According to Taviani, the result is "a complex film which is sad but also not sad. I did all I could to show you sad situations but also grotesque situations and also love stories," he said. Taviani and his brother were fascinated by the journey of the ashes because it held "so much narrative richness", he said.

**'Powerful roots'**

"Some of it is true, some of it is invented, it's a bit of a mixture, and it is also a big confusion, a bit like the confusion in our lives and around us in this pandemic time," he said. "When we decided to do cinema, Vittorio was 18 and I was 16. And it was because we saw 'Paisan' by (Roberto) Rossellini," Taviani told AFP. "We realized that if films can change lives and can reveal us, our truth, then we wanted to make movies in our lives. This is what we did and many years after we won the Palme d'Or for 'Padre Padrone', it was given to us by Rossellini. And it was like a circle closing, the completion of a circle," he said. "Padre Padrone", set in Sardinia, won the top Palme d'Or prize at the Cannes film festival in 1977.

Another of the brothers' critically acclaimed films is 2012's "Caesar Must Die", for which they won the Golden Bear prize at the Berlinale. "Leonora Addio", a contender for the Golden Bear at this year's festival, contains several references to films from the golden age of neorealism in Italian cinema. "It was like the Renaissance when there were lots of extraordinary artists, with directors like (Luchino) Visconti and (Federico) Fellini," Taviani said. Is this golden age over? "I think it was like a tree. That tree grew roots in the ground... — AFP

## Sports

# Man United climb back into top four; blank Brighton 2-0

## Ronaldo ends six-game goal drought

**MANCHESTER:** Cristiano Ronaldo ended his six-game goal drought on Tuesday as Manchester United recovered from an insipid first-half display to beat 10-man Brighton 2-0 and clamber back into the Premier League top four. The match dramatically changed complexion early in the second half, with Ronaldo scoring his first goal in 2022 before Lewis Dunk was sent off three minutes later. But the home side still managed to make heavy weather of the situation, wasting a number of great chances to double their lead until Bruno Fernandes sealed the points deep into stoppage time.

Ralf Rangnick's team had blown half-time leads to draw 1-1 in their previous three matches in all competitions, dropping crucial points in the league and exiting the FA Cup on penalties. In his pre-match interviews, United's interim manager had spoken about how he wanted his team to be more like Dr Jekyll and less like his literary evil alter ego Mr Hyde. The German said after the match he had seen both sides of his team, who have struggled to find consistency and fluency under his stewardship.

"First half was Mr Hyde, second half Dr Jekyll and for a change it (the result) was different," he said. "In the end it was important to get the three points against an in-form team." Rangnick praised 37-year-old Ronaldo, who returned to the score-sheet for the first time since December 30. "Very important not only that he scored but it was an outstanding goal," he said. "It was important for all of us, but his overall performance was one of the best since I arrived here."

### United struggles

Forward Anthony Elanga and midfielder Fred came into United's starting line-up for Marcus Rashford and Paul Pogba, with defender Raphael Varane also missing out due to illness. Jadon Sancho was denied early on but the hosts created precious little as mid-table Brighton controlled the game, enjoying nearly 60 per cent of possession in the first half. David de Gea was forced to make a spectacular save to keep out a Jakub Moder header and the half-time whistle drew boos from a frustrated home crowd, with United fortunate to be level at 0-0.

The home side took the lead in the 51st minute when Scott McTominay found Ronaldo, who darted forwards, cutting past Adam Webster and firing beyond goalkeeper Robert Sanchez from the edge of the box. It was the Portugal forward's 15th goal since he returned to United from Juventus in August. Things got dramatically better for United minutes later as Elanga's pace caught out Dunk, who brought down the teenager. Referee Peter Bankes showed a yellow card to the Brighton captain, only to change it to red after reviewing the foul on the advice of the video assistant referee. United were now on top but they failed to kill off the game despite their man advantage. They almost paid for their profligacy when Moder beat De Gea but he saw his shot cannon back off the crossbar in the 78th minute and ex-United player Danny Welbeck flashed a late header high as the home fans breathed a sigh of relief.

United wrapped up the victory in the 97th minute when substitute Pogba took a quick free-kick and Fernandes collected the ball inside his own half and raced forward before firing home. The three



**MANCHESTER:** Brighton's French striker Neal Maupay (left) fights for the ball with Manchester United's Scottish midfielder Scott McTominay during the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and Brighton on February 15, 2022. —AFP

points lift United into the fourth Champions League qualification spot, two points ahead of West Ham and four behind third-placed Chelsea, who have a

game in hand. Arsenal, Wolves and Tottenham are also within striking distance of the top four and all have games in hand. —AFP

## Crosby scores 500th goal as Penguins rally past Flyers

**LOS ANGELES:** Canadian hockey superstar Sidney Crosby, who has spent his entire career with the Pittsburgh Penguins, scored his 500th NHL career goal on Tuesday. The 34-year-old, three-time Stanley Cup winner becomes just the second player in franchise history to reach the milestone, joining hall-of-famer Mario Lemieux, who retired with 690.

"I've been able to witness most of them," Lemieux said of Crosby's goals. "And I'm sure there will be plenty more in the future." Crosby scored his 500th on a power play in the opening period after taking a pass from teammate Evgeni Malkin and beating Flyers goaltender Carter Hart to make it 2-1 for Pittsburgh.

Crosby also added an assist in the third period as the Penguins rallied from a two-goal second period deficit to beat Philadelphia 5-4 in overtime. After the puck went in Crosby was mobbed by his teammates at the side of the Flyers' net. It was the 14th goal of the season for Crosby, who is considered one of the greatest NHL players of all-time. It was also his 50th career goal against the Flyers.

The Halifax native now has 46 points in 39 games. He has been leading the team in scoring since returning from an injury that kept him out of the lineup at the beginning of the season. This was Crosby's biggest score since his "Golden Goal" in overtime that gave Canada the gold medal over the United States in the 2010 Vancouver Olympic hockey final. It is regarded as one of Canada's most iconic sports moments.

Crosby also anchored Canada's gold medal winning team at the Sochi Olympics and earned gold at the 2015 World Championships in the Czech Republic. Crosby, the No 1 overall pick in 2005, has only played for the Penguins in his career, and though he's battled injuries this season, he is still at the top of his game. His career high in goals came in the 2009-10 season, when he finished with 51, and he's topped 30 goals nine times.

Crosby is also the only player in Penguins history to have won both trophies that carry the name of the late Penguins rising star Michel Briere. Crosby won the Michel Briere Memorial Trophy as the MVP of the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League in 2004 and 2005 and the Michel Briere Rookie of the Year Award as the top Penguins rookie in 2006. Briere died in 1971 following injuries sustained in a car crash. —AFP

## Zain crowns champions of Street Football League

**KUWAIT:** Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, crowned the champions of Street Football League (SFL), the country's biggest street football competition. The company is the main sponsor of SFL, which aimed at creating a community for street football enthusiasts and encouraging them to showcase their skills and talents within a professional setting.

Zain was present at the awarding ceremony held at Al Eslah Community Center's grounds at Roudha, where it crowned the champions of SFL's first and second divisions, Zain Cup winner, as well as a number of categories including Best Player, Best Team, and more.

Zain's support to this unique competition came as part of its strategy that closely focuses on supporting and developing the local sports and youth scenes. The company puts the support of Kuwaiti sports at the forefront of its priorities, especially when it comes to shouldering similar programs that target enthusiasts and non-pro players,

## Snowboard king Su showcases a more confident China

**BEIJING:** Sporting shoulder-length hair, rings and baggy trousers, teenage snowboarding sensation Su Yiming looked every inch the cool, confident ambassador of China's new youth as he swept to home Olympic gold. The former child actor is one of the breakout stars of the Beijing Olympics having won silver and then on Tuesday gold, catapulting the 17-year-old to stardom and amassing him an avid social media fanbase at home.

Su heralds the rise of a new generation of young, patriotic Chinese athletes with the kind of aura of cool that has eluded the young Olympians who, unlike Su, are products of China's grueling Soviet-style sports academies. China's first men's Olympic medalist in snowboarding has earned a legion of Chinese fans through his down-to-earth demeanor, effortless style and love of music—as well as becoming the new face of a sport that champions individualism and daredevil courage.

"Snowboarders have a particular style to them which Su fits perfectly. It's something that would definitely resonate with younger generations in China and elsewhere," said China-based sports analyst Mark Dreyer, author of "Sporting Superpower: An Insider's View on China's Quest to Be the Best". After a scintillating run in the slopestyle last week, where he won silver, Su clasped his hands to his mouth and repeatedly screamed a profanity in English live on air.

"My worry is that at some point they're going to ask him to conform and basically be a snowboarder without (a personality)," added Dreyer. "He could legitimately become a great soft-power ambassador for China—but not necessarily the soft-power

## F1 driver Latifi hires bodyguards over death threats

**LONDON:** Formula One driver Nicholas Latifi revealed on Tuesday that he hired bodyguards in London because of death threats after the controversial Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. The Canadian, who drives for the British-based Williams team, received a torrent of online abuse after his crash resulted in a late safety car that contributed to Britain's Lewis Hamilton losing the world championship. Latifi, who had talked about the abuse before, said on Tuesday that it was so extreme he hired personal security for a visit to a Christmas

event in the British capital with his model girlfriend Sandra Dziwizsek.

"It sounds silly to some people but at the end of the day you don't know how serious people are," the 26-year-old said at Tuesday's launch of the new Williams car for the 2022 season. "All it needs is one drunk fan at an airport, or you bump into someone who is having a bad day and they are intoxicated under the influence of something and they have these really extreme opinions. It takes just that one-in-a-million person. I was back in London after the race and I had security with me when I went to Winter Wonderland with my girlfriend."

"You have to take the threats seriously because you don't know what might happen and it is just an unfortunate reality of the world we live in and there were extreme death threats which went way over the line." Hamilton was on course to claim a record-breaking eighth world

encouraging them to enjoy the sport they love within an organized and pro setting. Street Football League aims at creating a community for street footballers, encouraging talents to showcase their skills, and contributing to elevating Kuwait's football scene. SFL also aims at supplying talents to professional clubs, offering a pro setting for enthusiasts and street footballers, as well as spreading values through awareness campaigns.

SFL's season included four competitions: First Division, Second Division, League Cup, and Super Cup. The season featured over 80 teams, of which 40 were divided between the first and second divisions. The Super Cup featured an encounter between the First Division champions and the Cup champions. Games were held weekly within a professional setting supervised by volunteers.

Zain strongly believes in the important role played by the private sector in developing the youth and sports sectors in Kuwait. The company makes this concept a reality by sponsoring and supporting various major sporting events in Kuwait, as well as sponsoring and encouraging many Kuwaiti athletes who represent Kuwait in local, regional, and international arenas.

ambassador that China wants."

### One billion views

Hailing from frigid northeastern China, Su first took to the slopes as a toddler. He joined the Chinese national team aged 14 after years spent balancing his passion with a fledgling acting career. He landed his first brand deal with snowboard manufacturer Burton at age seven, although his commercial endorsements are a fraction of his fellow teenage star Eileen Gu, the Californian-born Chinese freestyle skier who has also won silver and gold.

"He's really just come into the top echelon of riders in the last four to six months," said Dreyer. Described by his coach as mature beyond his years, the snowboarder has said in interviews that he trains "320 days a year", sometimes for six hours a day when trying to master a tricky new move. His father says that he has an "innate passion for snowboarding". When not training abroad, Su surfs on China's southern island of Hainan during the summer off-season.

"For him to compete and stay at the top level, he's got to be in Europe and the United States. He's getting all those influences and becoming more of an international person," said Dreyer. Within hours of his Big Air gold on Tuesday, the hashtag "Su Yiming gold medal" racked up more than one billion views on China's Twitter-like Weibo. "If you have a goal, have courage to try it and give your all to it," Su told state broadcaster CCTV.

### Privilege debate

These young, culturally confident stars—including the 18-year-old Chinese-American Gu—are a valuable addition to China's soft-power arsenal at a time when Beijing is keen to project cultural influence abroad and showcase domestic confidence. The cosmopolitan lifestyles of Su and Gu have sparked social media reflection on their relative privilege compared to figures such as 14-year-old Olympic diver Quan Hongchan, who has



**BEIJING:** China's Yiming Su competes in the snowboard men's big air final run during the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games at the Big Air Shougang in Beijing. —AFP

spoken about earning competition money to support her farmer parents.

While Beijing has held a firm grip on its rigid state academy system for athletes—prioritizing sports with greater medal chances—experts said it has slightly relinquished control in certain disciplines, particularly as it pushes winter sports. Zheng Jiming, professor of sport management at Singapore's National Institute of Education, said this has allowed market forces to create a more organic interest in "cool" sports among younger generations of Chinese who have grown up in better economic conditions.

"But can those who are interested in these cool sports successfully access resources which can enable them to embark on, undertake quality training and progress in these sports?" asked Zheng. Analysts also questioned whether these new sports celebrities would be able to retain authenticity as their popularity in China snowballs. The more China wants Su to conform to their idea of a healthy role model, "the more it takes away from his appeal in the first place", said Dreyer. —AFP

title at the season-ending race in December before Latifi crashed into a wall with five laps left, which led to the deployment of the safety car. That gave Verstappen time to pit for fresher tyres, enabling him to overtake Hamilton when the race was restarted.

"Lewis did send me a message a few days after the race," Latifi added. "I will not go into what he said, but I got messages of support from other team members at Mercedes and there was an outcry of support from drivers and teams on social media, too, which was nice to see." Latifi will be partnered by London-born Thai driver Alexander Albon at Williams this season following George Russell's departure to Mercedes. The British team, heading into an F1 season for the first time since founder Frank Williams died in November, finished eighth in the constructor standings in 2021. —AFP



Zain crowns the champions of SFL.



Sports

# Manchester City on the brink of Champions League quarter-final

## Silva's brace inspires a masterful 5-0 rout of Sporting Lisbon

LISBON: Pep Guardiola insisted Manchester City still have room for improvement after Bernardo Silva's brace inspired a masterful 5-0 rout of Sporting Lisbon in the Champions League last 16 first leg on Tuesday. Guardiola's side produced a swaggering display at the Jose Alvalade Stadium to all but secure their quarter-final place before the second leg in Manchester on March 9. Riyad Mahrez opened the scoring and Silva bagged the second before Phil Foden made it three by the 32nd minute.

With City at their imperious best, Portugal forward Silva struck again on his return to his homeland and Raheem Sterling's gem rounded off the demolition after the interval. City are unbeaten in their last 13 games in all competition, a hot streak that now includes 12 wins. Sterner tests will await City later in the competition but this was a significant statement of intent that will have been heard all around Europe.

Determined to keep his players grounded, Guardiola said: "The difference between the two teams is not 5-0 but we were so clinical. We punished them. We had some simple passes that we lost. Against the top sides in Europe we would be punished. We have one more game to be in the quarter-finals and this is what you want. The players know me and the way we work that we can do better. I'm incredibly happy, please don't misunderstand me, but we can do better."

With City nine points clear at the top of the Premier League in their pursuit of a fourth title in five years, there is no questioning Guardiola's domestic preeminence. But Champions League success has been harder to come by. Guardiola insisted this week that critics of his flawed European record over the last decade are "jealous"

of his achievements. Yet the Spaniard hasn't won the Champions League since 2011 with Barcelona, while City are still waiting to lift the trophy for the first time.

City's Champions League history is littered with unexpectedly premature exits, but they came painfully close last season, losing 1-0 to Chelsea in the final in Porto. Back on Portuguese soil to launch a knockout stage campaign they hope will climax with silverware in the final in Saint Peterburg, City's sublime performance underlined their desire to go one better this time.

### Sumptuous City

Sporting's fans did their best to make it a hostile evening, loudly jeering Silva, Ruben Dias and Joao Cancelo for their spells with arch rivals Benfica. But City took just seven minutes to silence the ear-splitting din with a sumptuous move. Silva found Foden in the Sporting area and his shot was pushed out by Antonio Adan to Kevin De Bruyne, who scooped it back into the six-yard box for Mahrez to slot into the empty net.

Initially disallowed for offside, it took a lengthy VAR check before Mahrez could celebrate his 10th goal in his last 11 Champions League appearance. City were in the groove and Silva produced a moment of magic in the 17th minute. When Rodri's header dropped in the Sporting area, the hosts were too slow to react and Silva pounced with a blistering half-volley that flashed in off the underside of the crossbar. Guardiola's team were so slick that even Sporting's supporters were moved to applaud after the visitors' third goal. Mahrez twisted and turned on the right flank before whipping in a low cross that evaded Sporting's flailing defence, allowing Foden to finish with ease on his 150th City appearance.



LISBON: Manchester City's Portuguese midfielder Bernardo Silva (left) fights for the ball with Sporting Lisbon's Portuguese midfielder Pedro Goncalves during the UEFA Champions League round of 16 first leg football match between Sporting CP and Manchester City on February 15, 2022. — AFP

City weren't done yet and the fourth goal arrived in the 44th minute. Cancelo's lofted pass picked out Sterling's run into the Sporting area and his cut-back was dispatched by Silva via a deflection. Silva

was denied a hat-trick five minutes into the second half when his header was ruled out for offside. But Sterling put the seal on City's masterclass in the 58th minute, taking aim from 20 yards and curling a superb strike into the far corner.— AFP



## Women Football National team preparing to Games

KUWAIT: Kuwait Women Football National team continues its daily training at one of the halls of Jaber Al-Ahmad City Youth Center - the temporary premise of Kuwait Olympic Committee, with a daily average of 24 players, led by Iranian coach Shahrazad Mudhafar. The Blues began training five days a week following the conclusion of the URC

Football League, in preparation for the third Gulf Games to be held in Kuwait from May 15-31 and West Asian Championship to be held in Saudi Arabia from June 10-22.

Team Manager Farah Budai said she is happy with the players' commitment, adding that the women committee at Kuwait Football Association approved the preparatory program that was submitted by the technical department which will include a training camp in Croatia for 16 days during which there will be four friendly matches. The team will leave on Friday Feb 25. "We are looking forward to have several tactical plans while developing the individual skills of the players. The general technical level of the players has improved notably," coach Shahrazad said.



Shahrazad Mudhafar



Farah Budai

## 'Unstoppable' Mbappe underlines value and leaves Messi in shade

PARIS: Kylian Mbappe's importance to Paris Saint-Germain was all too evident long before his stoppage-time strike gave them a narrow win over Real Madrid in the first leg of their Champions League showdown on Tuesday and left them on course for a place in the quarter-finals. It is understood that PSG rejected an offer worth up to 180 million euros (\$204m) from Real in August for Mbappe, despite the France World Cup-winning striker being in the final year of his contract.

They wanted at least one more season with Mbappe at the Parc des Princes knowing that, even with Lionel Messi and Neymar there too, he is the man they need if they are finally to win a first Champions League title since the Qatari takeover of 2011. Mbappe is still expected to leave at the end of the campaign for Real, the club who have tracked him since he was a teenager but who are now in danger of going out of the Champions League after his last-gasp winner.

The last-16 first leg in the French capital was still goalless in the fourth and final minute of injury time when the 23-year-old Mbappe burst into the box and finished through the legs of Real goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois. That gave PSG a 1-0 victory that even Real coach Carlo Ancelotti admitted was deserved after a game dominated by the home side. Mbappe had the Ligue 1 leaders' best chance of the first half and forced a good save from Courtois early in the second half before winning a penalty just past the hour mark when he was fouled by Dani Carvajal.

Messi took the spot-kick only for Courtois to save, but Mbappe kept tormenting the Real defense and eventually got his reward, confirming why the Spanish giants are so desperate to secure



PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain's French forward Kylian Mbappe (left) fights for the ball with Real Madrid's Spanish defender Dani Carvajal (right) during the UEFA Champions League round of 16 first leg football match between Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) and Real Madrid on February 15, 2022. — AFP

his signature. "I have been working with him for just over a year now and you could see tonight just how good a player he is," said PSG coach Mauricio Pochettino. Ancelotti described him as "unstoppable" and Real risk being exposed by his terrifying pace on the break as they chase the tie in the return in three weeks.

### Speculation over future

Mbappe's late strike against Real came four days after he also scored a last-minute winner in a Ligue 1 game against Rennes. He now has 22 goals this season in all competitions, while PSG's second-top scorer is Messi with seven. Indeed Mbappe-Ligue 1's top scorer in the last three seasons—has four more goals than Messi, Mauro Icardi, Angel Di Maria and Neymar combined in the current campaign.

For all the outstanding talent around him, he is the man who makes the difference and PSG's Qatari president, Nasser Al-Khelaifi, can only hope a victory in the tie might persuade the one-time Monaco prodigy to sign a new contract. "Too many questions are asked and too many things are said," Mbappe insisted when asked about the ongoing speculation over his future.

"The truth is that we are talking about Paris Saint-Germain and Real Madrid, two big clubs. I am a PSG player and I am still really happy. I said I would give everything here. I had to come out and prove it. I did it this first time and now I need to do it a second time at the Bernabeu." In contrast, Messi is struggling to reproduce his Barcelona form and he failed from the spot. The Argentine, who won his seventh Ballon d'Or last year, has missed five of the 23 penalties he has taken in the Champions League. — AFP

## Jacobs aiming to recapture Tokyo heights

ROME: Lamont Marcell Jacobs told AFP he wants to prove that his shock Olympic 100 meters triumph was no fluke as he gears up for this year's indoor and outdoor world championships. The Italian sprinter said in an interview that he was "getting back in shape" after his recent return to competition more than six months after pulling off that stunning victory at the Tokyo Games.

"I would like to run every two days," said 27-year-old Jacobs. "My aim is above all to try to win everything possible to maintain the standard I set in Tokyo." Jacob's return has dredged up suspicions that doping played a part in his sudden success—and questions about why he skipped the rest of the season after his Tokyo glory. He won Olympic gold in 9.80sec, a rapid improvement. He had never broken 10 seconds before 2021.

He brushed off the misgivings, in particular from media outside Italy, which have dogged him since his stunning victory. "After a certain point, continuing to talk about it (doping) is quite sad on their part," Jacobs tells AFP. "It's not my fault that they're not able to understand that someone other than the favorite won. It's not OK, especially as they don't have any kind of proof." Jacobs says his long break was due to his desire to avoid injury after a long season leading up to the Olympics.

Now he is looking forward to the two world championships this year—the indoors in Belgrade in March and then the outdoor world championships in Eugene, Oregon. "I missed the competition a lot, the adrenaline of taking on opponents," he says. "But after the Games, I was exhausted, not only physically, but also mentally... I wanted to avoid hurting myself." Jacobs has won both the 60m races he has run, in Berlin and Lodz, this month as he ploughs through the indoor season.

### Coleman on the horizon

Today he competes in Lievin in France, and takes on a top American for the first time this year, when he faces Ronnie Baker who finished fifth in Tokyo. "Thursday will be my first real challenge against one of America's best, one of the world's best over 60 meters," says Jacobs, who is focusing on that distance to boost his sharpness over 100 meters ahead of a potential clash with reigning world champion Christian Coleman in Eugene.

Coleman was absent in Tokyo as he was serving a ban for missing doping tests. "The 60 meters gets me out of my comfort zone as my strength (over 100m), is from 40 and 50 meters. I have to work hard on the first 30, 40 meters in order to improve," Jacobs said. "He (Coleman) will be the favorite over 60 meters but I think I can give him a run for his money over 100 meters at the outdoor worlds."

Jacobs' European 60m indoor title from last year had already led experts to wonder how his performances could have improved so quickly without the help of doping. Jacobs has argued that he was new to sprinting, after switching from the long jump. He also credited his improvement to mental coaching which helped him deal with personal problems, in particular relating to his absentee American father. — AFP



YANQING: France's Clement Noel competes in the first run of the men's slalom during the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games at the Yanqing National Alpine Skiing Centre yesterday. (Inset) Russia's Kamila Valieva competes in the women's single skating short program at the Capital Indoor Stadium in Beijing.—AFP photos

## Valieva hunts for 2nd Olympic title

### 'One-shot' Noel takes Olympic slalom gold for France

**BEIJING:** Teenage Russian figure skater Kamila Valieva will go for a second Beijing Olympics title today, the next chapter in a damaging doping scandal which has overshadowed the Games. The 15-year-old burst into tears after topping Tuesday's first half of the women's singles competition to put herself in prime position ahead of the all-important free skate.

Valieva has dominated the second week of the Games in the Chinese capital after the Court of Arbitration for Sport ruled that she should not be thrown out of the Olympics despite failing a drugs test in December. Valieva played a central role in propelling the Russians to skating team gold last week, before news of her test broke, but no medal ceremony ever took place and will not during these Olympics-unprecedented for a Games.

There will also be no medal ceremony if Valieva—the pre-Games favorite for gold—comes in the top three today. CAS cleared her to stay at the Games, citing her age as one of the “exceptional circumstances”, but she has not been absolved of doping and still faces further investigation in a case that looks set to rumble on well after the action ends in Beijing.

Games testing authorities said last week that the teenager tested positive for trimetazidine, a drug used to treat angina but which is banned for athletes by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) because it can boost endurance. In a fresh twist, The New York Times reported that her sample also contained

the substances Hypoxen and L-Carnitine, which are also used to treat heart conditions. They are not on WADA's prohibited list.

Senior IOC member Denis Oswald said Tuesday that Valieva informed the CAS panel that she tested positive because of “contamination” from her grandfather's medicine. The New York Times report said the grandfather provided a pre-recorded video message to a hearing with Russian anti-doping officials on February 9 in which he said he used trimetazidine. Valieva's mother told the same hearing her daughter took Hypoxen for heart “variations”, the Times said.

The affair puts the spotlight once more on doping by Russian athletes, who are not allowed to take part at these Games under their flag because of a state-sponsored doping program that reached its peak at its home 2014 Sochi Olympics. Some of Valieva's fellow skaters made plain their anger that they had to compete against her. “I don't know every detail of the case, but from the big picture obviously a doping athlete competing against clean athletes is not fair,” the 16-year-old American skater Alysa Liu said.

#### Gold for France

Clement Noel claimed France's first alpine skiing gold medal of these Games when he won the men's slalom. Noel was sixth fastest after the first run but his lightning-quick second run gave him a combined total of 1min 44.09sec to hold off Johannes Strolz, the Austrian former traffic policeman who had already

won a gold in the alpine combined event.

“That was one of the most important races in my career. It's not often that you are able to win a medal in the Olympic Games,” said 24-year-old Noel. “It's one shot—one minute and 40 seconds every four years.” In the men's ice hockey, Slovakia eliminated the United States in the quarterfinals, stunning the Americans with a tying goal in the final minute of regulation before winning 3-2 in a shootout.

Deprived of its National Hockey League (NHL) stars by the pandemic, the USA squad of relative unknowns had inspired comparisons to the over-achieving 1980 gold-medal winning “Miracle on Ice” team as they went 3-0 in group play. They were 44 seconds from clinching a spot in the Beijing semifinals when Slovakia's captain Marek Hrivik slotted home to tie it 2-2 and send the game into overtime. Slovakia scored once in the penalty shootout, leaving USA captain Andy Miele with one last shot, but his effort was smothered by goalie Patrik Rybar.

There was better news for the US with Alexander Hall winning the men's freestyle slopestyle gold, taking the title ahead of countryman Nick Goepper. In cross-country skiing, Germany triumphed in the women's team sprint classic and Norway took the men's honours. Sweden won gold in the biathlon women's 4x6 kilometer relay. Norway top the medals table with 13 golds, ahead of 10 for Germany 10 and the United States have eight. The Games end on Sunday.—AFP

### Valieva saga puts spotlight on teen skaters' ages

**BEIJING:** On the ice, the 15-year-old Russian Kamila Valieva exudes composure and emotional maturity. But as a Beijing Olympic doping scandal exposes the teenager's vulnerability, debate has reopened over age in women's figure skating and whether young athletes are adequately protected. Female skaters have always skewed young, with six of the last seven Olympic golds won by teenagers.

This year is likely to be no exception, with Valieva and her 17-year-old teammates Alexandra Trusova and Anna Shcherbakova tipped to sweep the podium. All three train with coach Eteri Tutberidze, who has led a revolution in women's figure skating over the last eight years, producing teenage Russian star after star capable of athletic feats of ever-increasing complexity.

But concerns have been raised over whether the technical brilliance they display withers away with puberty, leaving them prone to burn-out, injury and, ultimately, the figure-skating scrapheap. Former figure skater Katarina Witt, who won gold in 1984 and 1988 for East Germany, used the term “throwaway society”. “For years I have asked why 15 and 16-year-old Russian talents win the Olympic Games with exceptional performances and then leave the world stage of competitive sports forever, too often with health issues,” she wrote on Facebook.

Witt called for the minimum competition age for senior skaters to be raised from 15, an idea which has been floated before in the sport but has never borne fruit. In Tuesday's short programme in Beijing—which Valieva won—Karen Chen, considered a veteran at 22, said that when she was young she wasn't afraid of anything. “I was just kind-of-I don't know if robot was the right word—but my coach would tell me to go do something and I would just go do it,” said the American.

Her teammate Mariah Bell, at 25 the oldest US woman to compete in Olympic figure skating since 1928, said she “absolutely” believed the age limit should be changed. Switzerland's Alexia Paganini agreed that it would provide more “motivation to create a skater who has longevity”, while Natasha McKay of Britain said that injuries might be reduced. Tutberidze's school of skating sensations exemplify these concerns—so far, none have seen more than one Olympics. Her breakout star, Yulia Lipnitskaya, was 15 when she won Olympic gold at the 2014 Sochi Games in the team event.—AFP

### Giannis pours in 50 in Bucks victory; Celtics win ninth straight

**LOS ANGELES:** Giannis Antetokounmpo led a potent Milwaukee attack, scoring a season-high 50 points Tuesday as the Bucks snapped a modest two-game losing skid with a 128-119 win over the Indiana Pacers. The teams went back and forth in the third quarter before the Bucks outscored the Pacers 29-24 in the fourth for the win and a four-game sweep of the season series.

Antetokounmpo grabbed 14 rebounds and had 17-of-21 shooting while Khris Middleton contributed 19 points and eight assists for Milwaukee, who shot 50 percent from the field for the fifth time in the last seven games. Antetokounmpo set a career high with his seventh 40-point game of the season and scored 50 for the first time since the title-clinching contest in the NBA Finals last season against Phoenix, which gave the Bucks their first championship in 50 years.

“Obviously, it's a nice feeling to have 50, you'll always remember it, but I care about the win. I want to win games,” Antetokounmpo said. “We have another one today. We'll try to finish and go to the All-Star break on a good note.” Jrue Holiday notched 14 points and eight assists and reserve Lindell Wigginton had a career-high 12 points in the win.



MILWAUKEE: Lindell Wigginton #28 of the Milwaukee Bucks is fouled by Lance Stephenson #6 of the Indiana Pacers during the first half of a game at Fiserv Forum on February 15, 2022.—AFP

Buddy Hield paced Indiana with 36 points and hit eight of 12 shots from behind three point range. Tyrese Haliburton recorded 17 points and eight assists. Goga Bitadze chipped in 12 points, and Jalen Smith added 11. Milwaukee jumped out to an early seven-point lead thanks to 12 points from Antetokounmpo and 56.5 percent shooting from the field in the first quarter. Eighteen of their first

34 points came inside the paint. The Bucks attacked the basket throughout the first half, hitting 28 of 46 shots (60.9 percent). Elsewhere, Jaylen Brown had 29 points and eight rebounds while Jayson Tatum added 28 points and 12 rebounds as the Boston Celtics clobbered the Philadelphia 76ers 135-87 to earn their ninth consecutive victory.—AFP