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Kuwait Airways raises Airbus order to 31 jets in \$6bn deal

Deal to give airline greater flexibility • KAC eyes 100 direct destinations

News in brief

31 Roman tombs found in Gaza



GAZA: Palestinian workers excavate a newly-discovered Roman cemetery containing ornately decorated graves in Beit Lahia on Sunday. — AFP

GAZA: Construction workers at a building site in northern Gaza have uncovered 31 Roman-era tombs dating from the first century AD, the Palestinian territory's Islamist rulers Hamas said yesterday. The tombs were discovered near the town of Beit Lahia as work began on an Egyptian-funded residential area, part of the \$500 million reconstruction package Cairo pledged after the 11-day war in May between Israel and armed groups in the Gaza Strip. One technician said the tombs were believed to be part of a cemetery linked to a nearby Roman site in Balakhiya. — AFP

Indian conjoined twins vote



AMRITSAR: Conjoined twins show their inked fingers after casting their ballots at a polling station on Sunday. — AFP

AMRITSAR: A pair of conjoined twins wore dark glasses so they could not see who the other voted for as they cast ballots for the first time in northern India. Sohan and Mohan Singh, 19, are joined at the hip and share several organs as well as legs. They live in a charitable home after being abandoned at birth. Wearing colorful checked shirts and matching black turbans, the brothers cast their votes on Sunday in state elections in Punjab. The teenagers flashed their inked fingers while encouraging others to come out and vote. — AFP

Moroccans protest high prices

RABAT: Protests broke out in several Moroccan cities on Sunday as people rallied against rising prices and to commemorate the eleventh anniversary of demonstrations that called for reform. In the capital Rabat, dozens of protesters decried the high cost of basic goods and shouted slogans harking back to the "February 20 Movement". Dozens also rallied in Casablanca and Tangiers, according to videos posted on social media. Drought has hurt the country's economy and Moroccans are also feeling the pinch from high fuel prices. Some 3.8 billion dirhams (over \$400 million) is needed for flour subsidies alone in 2022. — AFP

KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways announced yesterday an expanded \$6 billion deal with Airbus for 31 planes, restructuring an agreement reached in 2014. The deal comes after what the airline labelled occasionally "heated" negotiations following probes over allegations of kickbacks surrounding the initial order.

"We have managed to agree on a monumental restructuring that will position Kuwait Airways in a much stronger place to succeed for the next 15 years," company chairman Ali Al-Dukhan told a news conference. The new agreement, which adds three new aircraft to the existing order of 28, includes nine Airbus A320neo, six A321neo, three A321neoLR, four A330-800neo, seven A330-900neo and two A350-900.

Dukhan said the reshaped after the travel industry was rocked by the coronavirus pandemic, now carried a "total value of about \$6 billion". "Although corrections were made in 2018, the deal needed further corrections to suit Kuwait Airways' future, especially with the need to transition and become more flexible in a post-COVID aviation industry," he said.

Continued on Page 2

Raisi on first Gulf trip for gas, nuke talks

DOHA: Iran yesterday signaled "significant progress" in talks on reviving a stalled accord on its nuclear program but President Ebrahim Raisi, on his first visit to a Gulf state, again insisted that the United States must lift its crippling sanctions. Iran's ultraconservative leader, a personal target of the US sanctions, spoke out ahead of a summit of natural gas exporting nations in Qatar. The summit will take place against the backdrop of mounting tensions in Ukraine and reported advances in resuming a deal limiting Iran's nuclear program.

The United States under former president

Australia finally reopens to tourists

SYDNEY: Jubilant visitors returned to Australia yesterday as the country reopened its borders to vaccinated tourists, nearly two years after the island

Iranian fighter jet crashes into school, 3 killed

TEHRAN: An Iranian F-5 fighter jet crashed into a school compound in the northwestern city of Tabriz yesterday, killing two crew and a passerby, authorities said. "Luckily the school was closed because of the COVID-19 pandemic," local official Mohammad-Bagher Honarvar told state television. The aircraft was on a training mission when it went down around 9:00 am (0530 GMT) in the city's central district of Monajem, said Honavar, who heads a crisis management unit in East Azerbaijan province.

The head of the local Red Crescent organization said the plane crashed into an external wall, and that one of the dead was a nearby resident.

Continued on Page 2



KUWAIT: Chairman of Kuwait Airways Ali Al-Dukhan shakes hands with President of Airbus Africa and Middle East Mikail Houari after signing a deal at the Kuwait Airways headquarters yesterday.

Donald Trump withdrew from the 2015 accord in 2018, saying it was not tough enough in curtailing Iran's weapons ambitions. Tehran has always denied seeking an atomic bomb. But months of negotiations in Vienna have brought the two sides closer to a new deal. Iran's foreign ministry said yesterday that "significant progress" has been made and the number of outstanding obstacles had been "considerably reduced".

"But the problems that remain are most difficult, the most difficult and most serious to be resolved," it added. Talks on reviving the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) have been held in the Austrian capital since November, involving Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia directly and the United States indirectly. After arriving in Doha and meeting Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, a close US ally who has encouraged the two sides to narrow their differences, Raisi again took

Continued on Page 2



DOHA: Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani presents Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi with the football jersey of Qatar's national team during their meeting yesterday. — AFP

nation imposed some of the world's strictest COVID-19 travel restrictions. At the country's two major international airports in Sydney and Melbourne, tired but elated family and friends rushed from gates to embrace loved ones after years apart.

Bernie Edmonds was emotional as he hugged his eight-year-old granddaughter, Charlotte, who had just landed in Sydney. "It's great to have her back," he said. "She's got to go again but we'll get her back again." The country closed its borders to almost everyone except citizens and permanent

residents in March 2020, trying to slow surging COVID-19 case numbers.

The travel ban - which also barred citizens from going overseas without an exemption and imposed a strict cap on international arrivals - earned the country the nickname "Fortress Australia". Sydneysider Jody Tuchin was excited to pick up her best friend, who she had not seen since 2018. "He made it back just in time for my wedding in four days," she told AFP.

Continued on Page 2



TABRIZ: Firefighters put out a blaze at the crash site of a fighter jet which fell in a residential area of this city in northwestern Iran yesterday. — AFP

Local

News in brief

Amir congratulates Saudi King on 1st Founding Day

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah congratulated Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz on the kingdom's inaugural Founding Day, wishing the neighboring country continued prosperity and development. His Highness the Amir expressed his warm sentiments in a cable he sent to the Saudi king, highlighting the impenetrable bond shared by the two Gulf Arab countries. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables to the Saudi king. —KUNA



Abdulfattah Al-Sisi

Abdelmadjid Tebboune

Egypt, Algeria presidents visit Kuwait today

KUWAIT: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, accompanied by an official delegation, is expected to arrive in Kuwait today on an official visit, where he is scheduled to meet His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune and his accompanying delegation are also expected to arrive in the country today on an official visit, where he is scheduled to meet His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: This picture taken yesterday from Kuwait City's landmark Liberation Tower shows a view of the city's urban skyline as a cargo ship sails towards Shuwaikh Port. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets Pakistani Ambassador to Kuwait Syed Sajjad Haider. —KUNA

Prime Minister welcomes outgoing Pakistan envoy

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received the outgoing Pakistani Ambassador in Kuwait Syed Sajjad Haider at

Bayan Palace yesterday. His Highness the Prime Minister's Diwan Chief Abdulaziz Al-Dakheel was present at the meeting. — KUNA

Foreign Minister meets European Council President



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah in a group photo on the sidelines of the meeting. —KUNA

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Minister and State Minister of Cabinet Affairs and Acting Defense Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah participated in a work breakfast with President of the European Council Charles Michel to discuss

the 26th EU-GCC joint council and ministerial meeting. During the meeting, they explored the means to enhance cooperation on regional and global challenges, and issues of common interest that require discussion and exchange of views. —KUNA

Australia finally reopens...

Continued from Page 1

Meanwhile, Qantas pilot Paul Grant said it was "nice to have passengers back on again". A Qantas flight from Los Angeles was the first to touch down in Sydney at 6:20 am (1920 GMT) followed by arrivals from Tokyo, Vancouver and Singapore.

"It's fair to say we've all been waiting a long time to welcome visitors back to Australia," Qantas chief executive Alan Joyce said.

The national carrier expects to bring more than 14,000 passengers into Australia this week - the start of what many believe will be a long, slow recovery for a tourism sector devastated by the pandemic. "I think we're going to see a very, very strong rebound," Tourism Minister Dan Tehan said at Sydney airport, wearing a t-shirt with the words: "Welcome Back".

Attracting tourists from China, previously Australia's biggest market, would be difficult while Beijing enforces a zero-COVID policy, Tehan admitted. "But as soon as that changes, Tourism Australia have been doing a lot of work to make sure that we will be ready to encourage those Chinese visitors to come." The Australian government has launched a A\$40 million (\$28.7 million) advertising campaign to lure tourists back, but only 56 international flights are scheduled to land in the country in the 24 hours after the re-opening - far below pre-pandemic lev-

els. Prime Minister Scott Morrison said he had "no doubt" traveler numbers will scale up in time.

Every month under "Fortress Australia" has cost businesses an estimated A\$3.6 billion, according to the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, with tourism particularly hard hit. Tony Walker, managing director of Quicksilver Group, which operates cruises, diving excursions and resorts across the Great Barrier Reef, told AFP he was "very excited about being able to re-open".

International tourists "make up around 70 percent" of business for tourism operators on the reef, Walker said, making the two-year border closure "incredibly difficult". During the pandemic, his company had to reduce its employees from 650 to the 300 it has today. Key to Australia's reopening is a government requirement that all overseas travelers must be fully vaccinated.

At Sydney Airport, American tourist Robert Landis said this had not dissuaded him from visiting. "I've just been looking for any opportunity to get down here," he said. However, the Australian Tourism Export Council warned this week that "there are worrying signs consumers are wary of travelling" to Australia, with "confusion over our various state travel restrictions and concern about snap border closures" a key issue.

Western Australia did not reopen to international travelers yesterday, holding off until March 3. Until recently, the state had pursued a strict COVID-zero policy, cutting itself off from the rest of the country. The decision sparked lawsuits - and the observation that it was easier for Australians to travel to Paris than Perth - but proved popular with West Australians. — AFP

deal's value had already been paid and the delivery had started," Dukhan said. He added: "We entered four months of serious, professional negotiations, which did get heated at times, but always maintained respect and understanding of each other's wants and needs."

Kuwait Airways had initially ordered 15 Airbus A320neo and 10 A350 in 2014, with delivery beginning in 2019. In Feb 2020, Kuwait's parliament opened a fact-finding panel to probe allegations of kickbacks, after Airbus paid huge fines to settle bribery cases in French, British and American courts. Under the settlement, Airbus agreed to pay A\$3.6 billion (\$4.1 billion) in fines to settle corruption probes into some of its aircraft sales.

Last week, the European giant announced record profits of €4.2 billion (\$4.8 billion) in 2021, after two straight years of losses during the pandemic. Deliveries of aircraft rose eight percent to 611 planes, Airbus said in an earnings statement. — AFP

Iranian fighter jet crashes into...

Continued from Page 1

A blaze broke out at the crash site and firefighters were seen battling the flames as a crowd looked on, in video footage by the official news agency IRNA. The charred remains of the warplane could be seen amid the rubble of the school's blackened facade.

The plane had been stationed at the Shahid Fakhouri air base in Tabriz, base commander General Reza Youssefi told the broadcaster, adding that it was heading back from the training mission when it encountered a technical problem that prevented it from landing. Iran's air force has some 300 warplanes, mostly Russian MiG-29 and Sukhoi-25 fighters that date back to the Soviet era, as well as Chinese F-7s, and French Mirage F1s.

The fleet also includes some American F-4 and F-5 jets that date back to the regime of the Western-backed shah, who was ousted in the 1979 Islamic revolution. Experts say that only some of

these aircraft are operational. In Aug 2006, Iran announced it had developed a new warplane named "Azarakhsh" (Lightning) which it described as similar to the F-5. A year later it unveiled another home-grown jet calling it "Saegheh" (Thunder), saying it was similar to the American F-18. But some Western military experts have said the Saegheh is a derivative of the F-5.

yesterday's fighter jet crash was the first accident involving a military plane reported by Iran since Dec 2019. Back then, a MiG-29 warplane went down near a dormant volcano in the country's northwest during a test flight, according to official media. Three days later the military confirmed the death of the pilot. In Jan 2019, a military cargo plane overshot a runway, crashed and caught fire during a botched landing near the capital Tehran. At the time the army said 15 people were killed in the accident.

A combat jet also crashed in Tabriz during military exercises in Sept 2011, local media reported. Iran has been subject to severe US sanctions since 2018 when the US withdrew from a landmark nuclear deal struck three years earlier between Tehran and world powers. Talks are underway in Vienna to revive the deal and Iran is calling for sanctions to be lifted. — AFP

Kuwait Airways raises Airbus...

Continued from Page 1

Kuwait Airways has so far received eight aircraft and "we expect two (more) before the end of the year," Dukhan told AFP. "Most of the aircraft will arrive by 2026." "The agreement will give us more flexibility to expand to more destinations," he said, adding that the airline was aiming to grow from 57 to 100 direct destinations within the next two years.

Negotiations took place against the backdrop of bribery allegations that cost Airbus billions of dollars in settlement fees in other countries in 2020. "As we initiated the negotiations, we knew we were already the underdogs going in as 40 percent of the

Raisi on first Gulf trip for...

Continued from Page 1

aim at the US sanctions that have ravaged his country's economy.

"The United States must show their desire to lift the main sanctions," he said. "To reach an accord, it is necessary to guarantee the interests of the Iranian people, in particular the lifting of sanctions, (give) a strong guarantee and end dossiers of a political character." Raisi was named in US Treasury sanctions in 2019 before he became president last year. The trip to Qatar is only his fourth abroad since he took office in August.

Qatar has added the Iran nuclear dispute to its list of diplomatic hotspots where it has taken a behind-the-scenes mediation role and the Amir called for more dialogue to settle the showdown. This month, Qatar's Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani went on an unannounced visit to Tehran after the Amir met US President Joe Biden in Washington. Sanctions have badly hit Iran's oil and gas revenues and the Tehran government is anxious to get new invest-

ment and customers.

The exporters' summit has been dominated by Ukraine tensions that have raised prices and European fears that its supplies of Russian gas may be cut. The United States has asked Qatar to help Europe by preparing emergency supplies if the Ukraine crisis worsens. But producing nations say they will not be able to provide substantial amounts of replacement gas if sanctions against Russia do affect Western Europe.

Raisi and the Qatari Amir will be joined at today's summit by Algeria's President Abdelmadjid Tebboune and Trinidad and Tobago's Prime Minister Keith Rowley. Energy ministers from the other seven forum members, who include Russia, will also take part. Ministers from the 11-member group met yesterday to approve a summit statement that industry analysts predicted would touch on the lack of spare supplies that could help Europe, where consumers are already paying record prices for gas.

Qatar and other countries have insisted that massive investment is needed in gas infrastructure, and that they need the certainty of long-term contracts to be able to guarantee supplies to Europe. The European Union has long resisted the 10, 15 and 20-year contracts signed by other major customers for Qatar's gas, which include China, Japan and South Korea. — AFP

Local

Digital marketing took center stage during pandemic, lockdowns

‘Over 80% of people spend more than six hours on phone’

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Any business depends on marketing as great part of its success. With the development of modern technology, even marketing has changed. The pandemic and lockdowns led a transition to online work and business in all fields, and digital marketing became an important part of this transformation.

Kuwait Times met Mohammed Fawaz, Digital Media Marketer and Content Creator, to talk about some interesting issues in digital marketing, obstacles faced by companies during the pandemic, tips to avoid bankruptcy and many others. Some excerpts:

Kuwait Times: How is digital marketing different from regular marketing?

Mohammed Fawaz: Statistically, over 80 percent of people are spending their time on their phones for more than six hours a day. People are more into visual advertisements due to their dynamic structure. Regular marketing covers billboards, printed media and TV channels, while the new digital marketing includes phones, tablets and computers. It's very easy to deliver the service and the message of your product through a short video or dynamic digital content.

KT: What tools do you use?

Fawaz: I focus on digital marketing and social media advertising, and the tools I use include search engine optimization, content marketing,

email marketing, social media advertising and website marketing.

KT: How can companies benefit from this?

Fawaz: There are a bunch of benefits in using these digital marketing tools, like an increase in brand awareness, reaching a very large audience, quick communication with customers, finding insights on every single piece of content the business is posting and checking out the interaction by clients, direct communication and increasing sales due the wide range of advertising.

KT: What about individuals - do they seek this service too?

Fawaz: Definitely, but use by individuals of these marketing platforms is different from the use of businesses. Influencers, bloggers and content creators should look to the concept of the king and queen rule in marketing, where the content must be as good as advertising. I always point out that content (which is the king) has to be good and competitive in order to distribute (advertise) it. We have to check if this content can offer the viewers something.

Digital marketing during pandemic

KT: What was the role of digital marketing during the pandemic?

Fawaz: As COVID-19 spreads across the globe, the structure of marketing plans has changed and competition to increase exposure of businesses online became more harder than before the pandemic. Digital marketing was the only solution to crank up sales and save the business, because people are sitting in their homes and using their mobile phones, tablets, watching TV and using their computers.

KT: How did you save some companies or entrepreneurs from bankruptcy during the pandemic?

Fawaz: During the pandemic, I had a very long days and nights of brainstorming new ideas to people to make my advertising content outstanding in the field of marketing. I decided to focus on showing the identity and then explaining the service. Then I did a big campaign of taking leads (data collection), so I can call people to an action after building the base. This was a very dynamic way to hit people's

emotions and show people how credible the business is.

KT: What advice can you give to companies that are facing problems?

Fawaz: The number one rule to survive in this new economy is to offer the customer a service that solves a problem, otherwise the customer will not be interested in your service. In other words, once your service can fix something or solve an issue to transform the current situation of the customer into a desirable one, the customer will take out their credit card and pay the business.

I do recommend companies to invest in their digital marketing department because without digital advertising, the business will never exist. Focusing on social media advertising and digital media advertising are crucial in the 2022 new economy. People are taking their actual lives into a digital world, and we started to see this through the new metaverse, where most big companies around the world are investing to advertise their products.



Mohammed Fawaz



‘Offer the customer a service that solves a problem’

Kuwaiti MPs propose amendments to ‘imitating opposite sex’ rule

KUWAIT: MPs Osama Al-Shaheen and Abdulaziz Al-Saqaabi proposed an amendment to the penal code article that penalizes ‘imitating the opposite sex’ in Kuwait. They proposed defining a person who imitates the opposite sex as “any male who wears women’s clothing or make up that make him appear as a female, or any female who wears men’s clothing that makes her appear as a male according to customs,” in addition to any person “who undergoes cosmetic surgeries or takes medications with the intention to alter their appearance contrary to their nature.” The lawmakers proposed a maximum three-year jail term and/or KD 7,000 fine for violators.

Last week, the constitutional court struck down the article in the penal code that barred imitation of the opposite sex. That article, used for many years against transgender people and those who dress similar to the opposite sex, was ruled by the top court as against the constitution. A number of lawmakers said later that they have submitted a draft legislation to criminalize such imitation.

Amnesty International had called the court’s ruling “a breakthrough for transgender rights in the region”. Kuwaiti lawyer Ali Al-Aryan, who filed a



MP Osama Al-Shaheen



MP Abdulaziz Al-Saqaabi

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 said in a press statement.

“Article 198 was deeply discriminatory, overly vague and never should have been accepted into law in the first place,” Amnesty International’s 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.”

Health minister requests financial incentives for staff dealing with COVID

KUWAIT: The Minister of Health Dr Khaled Al-Saeed addressed yesterday the Civil Service Commission (CSC) to approve the request of offering financial allowances to all medical staff who dealt with coronavirus (COVID-19) patients and other contagious diseases. The minister indicated in a press release that this came upon the CSC decision 13/2020 of offering financial bonuses for employees working in hazardous, noisy, infected, polluted working environments. All mentioned categories are always prone to hazardous situations, and infections, which resulted in infecting most of them due to their direct and indirect with COVID-19 patients, he affirmed. The ministry is not informed yet with the CSC response on that matter, requiring the commission to inform the ministry of its

decision on that matter in order to allow the Ministry to follow up with the required procedures, he affirmed.

The Health Ministry had announced yesterday 1,329 COVID-19 infections, 3,492 recoveries and one death. Health Ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad indicated that this brought the tallies of infections and recoveries to 614,344 and 595,156 respectively. The total of deaths stood at 2,530. He indicated that there were 80 patients in ICU due to COVID-19, while there were 16,658 active cases. Some 316 were occupying beds in COVID-19 wards as of yesterday, he added. Swabs, in the same period, reached 20,376 putting the total at 7,489,049, he added. —KUNA



Dr Khaled Al-Saeed



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Army concluded yesterday an air defense drill with live ammunition for the 2021/2022 training season. Kuwait Army Chief of Staff Lt Gen Khaled Saleh Al-Sabah and top military brass attended the drill.



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COMMERCIAL : 24835618P.O. Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.comKFH launches
cycling initiative

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has organized a sports initiative available to all its customers to practice the sport of cycling at Mishref Oasis. The event comes under the campaign "Better Health... Better Life", that sheds the light on the importance of sports and encourages a healthy lifestyle. This initiative which witnessed a large presence of audience, stems from KFH's social responsibility and within the "Better Health... Better Life" campaign, displaying excellence in social activities and competitions, which are gaining great importance in society.

The cycling event continues throughout the year and will be held every Tuesday for all KFH customers, as part of the various activities offered by the Bank to its customers in order to meet their aspirations and interests. This event comes with participation and collaboration with "Li3ib" application, for the fourth year in a row, and Mishref Oasis for the second year. "Li3ib" application provides many services such as booking "Padel" and football fields, in addition to booking bicycles.



CAIRO: Kuwaiti MP Dr. Mohammad Al-Huweila attends a meeting for the Arab Parliament's Committee for Foreign, Political and National Security Affairs in Cairo, Egypt yesterday. —KUNA

Arab parliament
calls for measures to
stop drones' threat

CAIRO: Drones are posing serious threat to the security and stability of the Gulf and Arab states, said head of the Arab Parliament's Committee for Foreign, Political and National Security Affairs and Kuwait's National Assembly member Dr. Mohammad Al-Huweila. He made his remarks at the conclusion of the committee's session, in preparation for the third session of the second legislative term tomorrow. He noted that the committee is thoroughly studying the issue and will also discuss it with all Arab states to come up with measures to resolve the issue, which is a new regional threat. Meanwhile, the MP said that the meeting also discussed the situation in Libya, Yemen, Sudan and Somalia, as well as the political situation in the Arab World.

Separately, Deputy Speaker of the Arab Parliament Dr. Hassan Al-Madhani called for a parliamentary vision to achieve the goals of sustainable development. This came in a statement at the conclusion of the Joint Committee on Sustainable Development, on the sidelines of the third legislative term of the Arab Parliament, which is scheduled to be held tomorrow.

Madhani stressed the importance of sustainable development, as it represents the best solution to achieve a safe recovery from the coronavirus pandemic. He added that the Parliament created last April "Sustainable Development Committee" under its chairmanship, which specialized in work programming to activate Arab parliamentary efforts in achieving the objectives of their 17 goals for a sustainable development plan.

He pointed out that the meeting also tackled the meeting of the Committee with the Department of Sustainable Development and International Cooperation in the Arab League and the International Red Cross Mission in Cairo, as well as a report on participation in the Arab Week for Sustainable Development, which was held during the period from February 13 to 15. It was agreed to develop a vision regarding support for medium, small and micro companies, stressing the importance to advance the economic recovery program of the youth after the breakout of the pandemic. Kuwait's National Assembly Member and Arab Parliament Member Khaled Al-Otaibi attended the meeting.

In other news, the Arab League's Committee of Senior Arab Officials on Nuclear and other Weapons of Mass Destruction announced that it will hold its 58th meeting under the chairmanship of Kuwait. Assistant Foreign Minister for International Organizations Abdulaziz Saud Al-Jarallah said in a statement to the press that the committee in a two-day discussion would hold several issues related to nuclear weapons and limiting their spread. He added that they would also evaluate the work of the second Session of the UN Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction. He pointed out on the conclusion of their work: the committee will submit the meeting results to the next meeting of the Arab League council on the Arab Ministerial level which is scheduled to be held on March 9, 2022. —KUNA

Kuwait Airways \$6 billion deal with
Airbus to help restructure fleet

KUWAIT: Pictures taken from the press conference to announce Kuwait Airways' \$6 billion deal with Airbus yesterday.

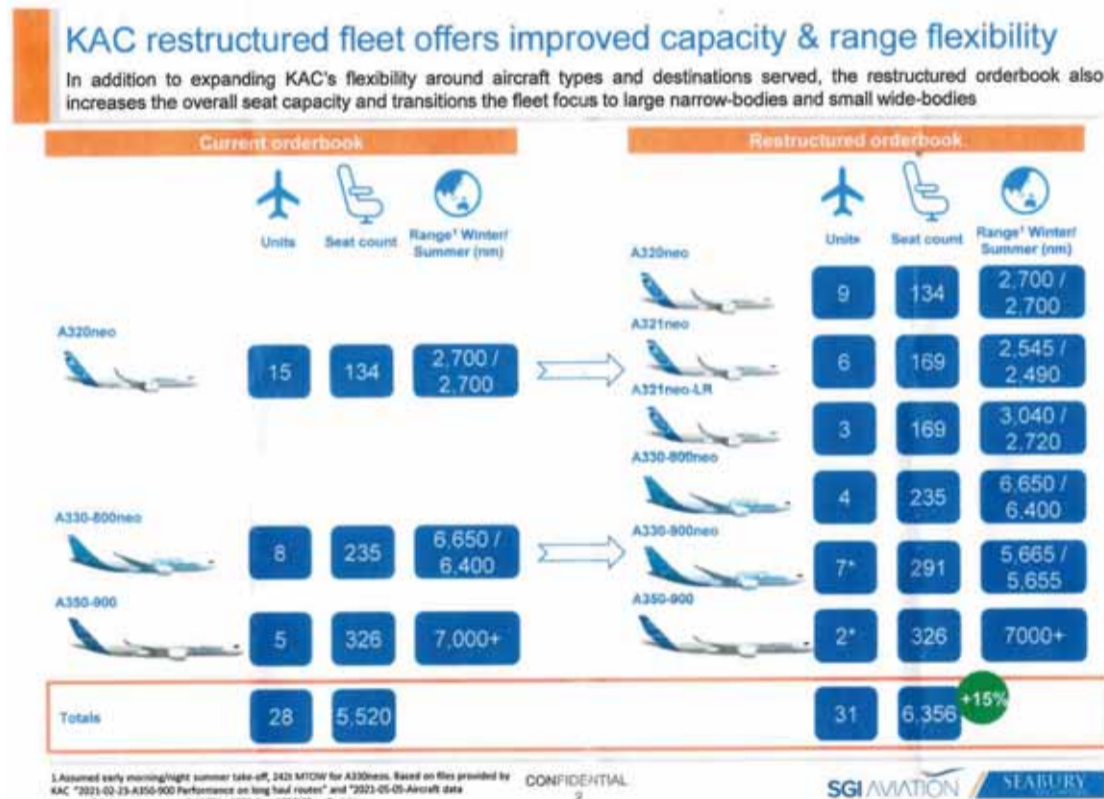
KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways announced yesterday an expanded \$6 billion deal with Airbus for 31 planes, restructuring an agreement reached in 2014. "I am happy to announce to you all this historic milestone in Kuwait Airways extensive timeline of achievements, Kuwait Airways' Chairman Ali Al-Dukhan said yesterday. "It includes 59 aircrafts and a total value of about \$6 billion and multiple type variants.

When I first became Chairman 16 months ago, I made it my top priority to restructure the deal struck with Airbus in 2014. Although the initial deal was good at the time it was signed in 2014, it was seriously disrupted with the sudden addition of 10 B777 to the fleet in 2016, the chairman explained.

"Although corrections were made in 2018, the deal needed further corrections to suit Kuwait Airways future especially with the need to transition and become more flexible in a post-covid aviation industry," he said.

"In order to resolve the issue, we first created a small technical team internally and studied all the options available to us until we reached the desired fleet which was approved and adopted by the board of directors and ready to be negotiated with Airbus. To maintain the highest degree of transparency and professionalism we decided from the get-go to involve a reputable consulting company, Seabury, to assist us in our upcoming negotiations with Airbus," he explained.

"As we initiated the negotiations, we knew we were already the underdogs going in as 40 percent of the deal's value had already been paid and the delivery had started," Dhukhan further noted. "We entered four months of serious, professional negotiations. After said negotiations, we have managed to agree on a monumental restructuring that will position Kuwait Airways in a much stronger place to succeed for the next 15 years."



ABK partners with KUMSA in 'Donate to Save a Life' blood drive

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) recently announced the successful conclusion of its blood donation drive held in partnership with the Kuwait Medical Student Association (KUMSA). The 'Donate to Save a Life' campaign was held at Al-Hamra Tower, encouraging the public to play an active role in giving back to the community and to raise awareness about the importance of donating blood. The campaign

offered visitors educational workshops and useful information, such as how to react during emergency situations such as bleeding-out prevention and more.

Fawzy Al-Thunayan, General Manager of Board Affairs at ABK said: "We are proud to partner with Kuwait Medical Student Association's awareness campaign as we firmly believe in the importance of supporting initiatives that encourage individuals to

contribute and make a life changing difference. 'Donate to Save a Life' encourages the public to donate blood in support of those who need it most, as well as supporting Kuwait's future doctors." ABK continuously seeks to make a difference in the communities in which it operates by collaborating with active organizations that share the aim of contributing towards a more prosperous future for Kuwait.





Shadowy messengers delivering threats to HK civil society

Donald Trump's new social media app begins gradual rollout

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AVDIIVKA, Ukraine: Ukraine's Military Forces servicemen shop in the Donetsk region town of Avdiivka, on the eastern Ukraine front-line with Russia-backed separatists yesterday. —AFP

Info war rages ahead of Russian invasion

Kremlin may use a staged attack as a pretext to order its feared assault

KYIV: The Russian TV reporter stands in a flak jacket and helmet near some army barracks on a crisp and sunny afternoon. "Are you ready," an off-camera voice asks him. The journalist nods and a burst of gunfire erupts as he starts running and shouting a breathless report into his microphone about "a group of saboteurs" attacking a Russian-backed position in east Ukraine.

"This is what Russian propaganda at 'work' looks like," a Telegram account that follows Ukraine closely remarked next to a clip showing the makings of the evidently staged report. The eight-year conflict in Ukraine's Russian-backed east has been accompanied by a ferocious disinformation battle between Moscow and Kyiv that tries to implicate the other side in grave crimes.

But the scale and breadth of this battle has reached epic proportions as Russian forces move en masse around Ukraine's borders and the West warns of an imminent invasion threat. Its importance is being heightened by fears that the Kremlin may use a staged attack as a pretext to order its feared assault.

"I think most of this fake news is aimed mostly at the international Russian audience," said former Ukrainian education minister and Mohyla School of Journalism director Sergiy Kvit. "It looks like they are preparing an invasion," he told AFP.

'Undoubtedly staged'

The explosion of open-source intelligence in the past decade has helped to debunk many reports that might otherwise have been taken at face value. It exposed that a seemingly urgent call last Friday by Ukraine's separatist leaders for locals to evacuate to Russia had actually been recorded two days in advance.

"The president of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, will soon issue an order for his forces to go on the

attack," Donetsk rebel chief Denis Pushilin says in his video message. "Therefore today, on February 18, we are organising a large-scale evacuation of the civilian population into Russia," he says.

Telegram metadata showed that both Pushilin's message and one recorded by another separatist leader were uploaded on February 16 — one of the days Washington had originally suggested a Russian invasion might be launched. "Everything that happens today is clearly and undoubtedly staged," investigative journalist Mark Krutov tweeted as worries spread that the rebels were moving people



Levels of panic have been particularly high

out so that Russian tanks could move in.

'Ukrainian spy'

Analysts from the likes of Bellingcat—an award-winning online investigations group that was designated a "foreign agent" by the Kremlin last year—have been particularly busy in the past few weeks. Bellingcat and other disinformation warriors found visual evidence showing that a car bomb allegedly targeting a separatist police chief had actually been planted on a completely different vehicle.

They showed photographs of the police chief's registered license plate on a shiny new model SUV. That same plate then appears attached to the man-

and others." Under the "living with COVID" plan, the government says it intends this week to end a legal requirement for people to self-isolate when infected with the coronavirus. It says local authorities will be required to manage further outbreaks with pre-existing legal powers, and is expected to phase out free COVID testing for the general public.

The NHS Confederation, which represents senior managers in the state-run National Health Service, said internal polling showed a large majority of its members were opposed to ending self-isolation and free tests. Matthew Taylor, the confederation's chief executive, acknowledged that the government's mass vaccination programme and the emergence of new COVID treatments offered "real hope". "But the government cannot wave a magic wand and pretend the threat has disappeared entirely," he said.

'Very unwise indeed'

David Nabarro, a World Health Organization special envoy for COVID, said that scrapping the law on self-isolation was "really very unwise indeed". While the UK has suffered one of the world's worst per-capita death tolls in the pandemic, it remains a country with "an enviable record for public health expertise", the British official told BBC radio on Saturday.

"I really do worry that Britain is taking a line that is against the public health consensus—that other countries, other leaders will say if Britain is doing it, why

gled remains of an older green army vehicle blown up in an empty parking last Friday. No one was hurt but Russian state television soon aired what it claimed to be the confession of a "Ukrainian spy" involved in the purported bomb plot.

Other stories alleged the separatists had killed two Ukrainians who tried to blow up a chlorine storage tank, a story that echoed claims from Moscow that Kyiv was plotting a chemical weapons attack. Ukrainian accounts do not emerge completely blameless in this information war. Kyiv's independent Stopfake organisation pointed to some accounts posting about a supposed large anti-war protest in Moscow using images of a gathering that in fact took place in 2014.

'Panic'

Child and family psychologist Kateryna Goltsberg said this endless media bombardment has seen Ukrainians' anxiety levels spike. "In the last two months, the levels of panic have been particularly high. This is probably linked to even bigger information attacks," Goltsberg said.

"People really are very worried," she said. "They are worried for themselves, their children, their loved ones." Ukrainian newspaper editor Kateryna Kiselyova offered a case in point. She said her family had "emergency backpacks ready" and a clear plan in place in case of war.

"I talked to the children about what they would need to do," she said while attending a memorial for more than 100 people killed in Kyiv during Ukraine's 2014 pro-EU revolt. "Now I want to make sure their school's basement is prepared for an emergency."

Others worried that this sense of impending peril might hang over Ukraine for some time. "An existential threat—this will be the hallmark of our lives for the coming months, if not years," the Ukrainska Pravda newspaper wrote. —AFP



British Prime Minister Boris Johnson

can't we, and this will create a bit of a domino effect around the world," Nabarro added.

In the UK's devolved system, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland set their own health policies and are largely staying more cautious than Johnson's intentions for England.

The opposition Labour party said that ending free testing was akin to substituting "your best defender" with 10 minutes to go of a football match. "Boris Johnson is declaring victory before the war is over, in an attempt to distract from the police knocking at his door," Labour's health spokesman Wes Streeting said. —AFP

armed forces have been killed since August. Hakimi insisted, however, that the Taliban amnesty had worked well.

"If it hadn't been issued, we would have witnessed a very bad situation," he said. "The suicide bombers who were chasing a person to target him, are now the same suicide bombers protecting him," he added. There has been little evidence the Taliban have absorbed former troops into their ranks, but over the weekend they named two senior ex-Afghan National Army officers to top posts in the defence ministry.

Both are specialist surgeons attached to the country's main military hospital. "Our work on the formation of an army is going on," Hakimi said. "Professionals including pilots and engineers, service persons, logistical and administrative staff (from the previous regime) are in their

India arrests 'doctor' conman who married at least 18 women

NEW DELHI: Bibhu Prakash Swain believed in soulmates and true love, or so he told at least 18 women he allegedly married and conned across India before his arrest—weeks before his next two weddings. The diminutive 67-year-old scoured marriage websites posing as a 51-year-old doctor and persuaded professors, lawyers, medics and a paramilitary officer all over the country to tie the knot, police said.

In status-conscious India he claimed he was on a chunky salary, and used fake identification cards and appointment letters to bolster his credentials and family background. "He primarily did this for their money, and some sexual pleasure," senior police official Sanjiv Satpathy told AFP.

Satpathy's team arrested Swain in recent days after months on his trail, discovering his multiple identities, bank accounts and plans for two weddings in February and March. "He was always very persuasive," Satpathy said, "and only targeted successful single, widowed or divorced women in their late 40s."

A few "happy and satisfying days into the marriage", the police said, Swain used to make excuses to borrow his new wives' money or jewellery to help him with an emergency. He then moved on to his next target, hoping that the women's circumstances—as a single, widowed or divorced woman who had remarried in a conservative society—would scare them off going to the police.

Investigators believe Swain married more than 18 times and are now going through his mobile phone records where he saved his wives' contacts—as Madam Delhi, Madam Assam or Madam UP (Uttar Pradesh) — named after the places in India where they stayed.

Angry and cheated

Police launched a probe into Swain's multiple lives in May 2021 after a complaint by one 48-year-old wife who, by chance, discovered that he was already married to at least seven other women. The victim, feeling angry and cheated, police say, "quietly retrieved" the contact details of his other wives from his phone and contacted them individually about their shared predicament. "This is when we came in and made discoveries about his long history of cheating, impersonation and deceit," Satpathy said.

Swain, born in a small village in the eastern state of Odisha, first married in 1978 and has three children—two of them doctors and one a dentist—with his first wife. Trained as a lab technician, he fell out with his family and moved to the state capital Bhubaneswar where he started introducing himself as a doctor and ultimately married a doctor, his second wife, in 2002. "He has since used multiple names but always introduced himself as doctor or a professor while looking for wives online," Satpathy said. —AFP

places in the security sector."

Hakimi said they would form "a grand army... according to the country's needs and the national interests", although he did not specify a size. He said the army would only be one that the country could afford.

Afghanistan is, however, effectively bankrupt, with the country's \$7 billion in overseas assets seized by the United States. Washington said half will be reserved for a fund to compensate victims of the September 11, 2001 attacks, and half gradually released as part of a carefully monitored humanitarian aid fund. Hakimi told the news conference the Taliban had purged nearly 4,500 "unwanted people" from its ranks—mostly new recruits who joined in the aftermath of their takeover and were blamed for a spate of crime. —AFP

UK's PM to scrap all COVID legal curbs as criticism mounts

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson is set to announce an end to all pandemic legal curbs in England, insisting it is time to move on despite political opposition and unease from the UN's health agency. Two years after COVID-19 sparked the worst health crisis in generations, Johnson will address parliament to outline his plan, pressing ahead despite news on Sunday that Queen Elizabeth II had tested positive for the first time.

However, he stands accused by opposition parties of seeking to distract public attention, with his premiership in peril as police investigate a series of lockdown-breaching parties in Downing Street. "Today (Monday) will mark a moment of pride after one of the most difficult periods in our country's history as we begin to learn to live with COVID," Johnson said in a Downing Street statement.

"The pandemic is not over, but thanks to the incredible vaccine rollout we are now one step closer towards a return to normality and finally giving people back their freedoms while continuing to protect ourselves

Taliban aiming to create 'grand army' for Afghanistan

KABUL: The Taliban are creating a "grand army" for Afghanistan that will include officers and troops who served the old regime, the official tasked with overseeing the military's transformation said yesterday.

Latifullah Hakimi, head of the Taliban's Ranks Clearance Commission, also told a news conference they had repaired half the 81 helicopters and planes supposedly rendered unserviceable by US-led forces during last year's chaotic withdrawal.

He said Taliban forces took control of more than 300,000 light arms, 26,000 heavy weapons and around 61,000 military vehicles during their lightning takeover of the country. Afghanistan's armed forces disintegrated last summer in the face of a Taliban onslaught ahead of the August 31 US-led force withdrawal—often abandoning their bases and leaving behind all their weapons and vehicles.

The Taliban have promised a general amnesty for everyone linked to the old regime, but almost all senior government and military officials were among the more than 120,000 people who evacuated by air in the final days.

Many of the rank and file remained, however, melting back into civilian life and keeping a low profile for fear of reprisals. The United Nations said in January more than 100 people linked to the old

International

Donald Trump's new social media app begins gradual rollout

'We want customers to tell us what they would like to have on the platform'

SAN FRANCISCO: Donald Trump's new social media app started a gradual rollout late Sunday and should be "fully operational" by late March, potentially raising the former president's profile more than a year after he was banned by major platforms. "This week, we will begin to roll out to people on the Apple App store," said Devin Nunes, CEO of the Trump Media & Technology Group (TMTG), parent company of the new app Truth Social.

The former Republican congressman was speaking Sunday on conservative Fox News. "I think, by the end of March, we're going to be fully operational—at least within the United States," added Nunes, who resigned from the US House to lead the Trump group. Trump has described Truth Social as an alternative to Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, all of which banned him following the assault on the US Capitol by his supporters on January 6, 2021.

The former president has been accused of inciting his followers to use force in a bid to overturn the result of the 2020 election. On Sunday, the App Store was allowing visitors to pre-order Truth Social which began yesterday, the Presidents Day holiday in the United States. Later Sunday, the app was reported as available to some of those who had pre-ordered. "It's actually very moving for me to see people that are on the

platform that have had their voice canceled," Nunes said.

'The truth is coming'

"We want (customers) to tell us what they would like to have on the platform, which is the opposite of some Silicon Valley tech oligarch freak telling people what they want to think and deciding who can or cannot be on the platform," he said.

Trump and his wife Melania Trump also plan to offer for sale 10,000 NFTs, or non-fungible tokens, illustrating key moments in the Trump presidency. NFTs are certified digital images that can be bought and sold.

"TRUTH is coming..." congresswoman Elise Stefanik, the third-ranking House Republican, tweeted Friday, in an allusion to the ominous "Winter is coming" catchphrase of television series "Game of Thrones." She posted a screen grab of her message on Truth

Beta, the test version of the new site, saying, "I'm so excited to be on TRUTH!"

And Donald Trump Jr. celebrated on Twitter, posting, "Time for some Truth!!!" and including what he said was his father's first post on Truth Social: "Get Ready! Your favorite President will see you soon!" TMTG, asked for comment by AFP, did not immediately respond.

The group reportedly has a \$1.25 billion treasure chest as it seeks a niche in a crowded conser-



LOS ANGELES: This file illustration photo taken on October 20, 2021 shows a person checking the app store on a smartphone for "Truth Social", with a photo of former US president Donald Trump on a computer screen in the background, in Los Angeles. —AFP

vative social-media marketplace, currently served by platforms such as Gettr, Parler and Gab. Before being banned by Twitter, Trump had some 89 million followers there and used the platform constantly, both for presidential statements and to attack rivals. Trump, who is 75, has hinted but nev-

er definitively said whether he will seek the presidency again.

He is currently under the shadow of multiple investigations and lawsuits, including over his tax filings and his efforts to cling to power after losing the 2020 election. —AFP

Greece resumes search for ferry fire survivors

CORFU, Greece: Greek rescuers yesterday resumed the search for 10 people still missing from a ferry fire that has killed at least one truck driver. Television footage showed smoke still billowing from the Italian-flagged Euroferry Olympia, more than three days after a fire ripped through the vessel as it sailed from Igoumenitsa in Greece to Brindisi in Italy with nearly 300 people aboard.

Most of the passengers were quickly evacuated, and a 21-year-old Belarusian truck driver emerged alive on Sunday. But 10 other truck drivers — seven Bulgarians, two Greeks and one Turk — remain unaccounted for.

The body of a 58-year-old Greek truck driver was recovered Sunday, the first confirmed fatality of the accident. Yesterday, more than 40 firefighters were taking part in the search and rescue operation with tugboats and coastguard vessels on standby nearby, amid reports that the weather was due to deteriorate later yesterday.

"It is a very difficult operation," a fire department spokeswoman told AFP. "There is major thermal stress and a lot of smoke." Rescue coordinator Dimitris Kontogiannis told Greek public television ERT that temperatures on board the smouldering ferry "are over 400 degrees Celsius (752 Fahrenheit) in some areas."

Two of those rescued were Afghan nationals not on the ferry manifest, sparking fears that more undocumented passengers might also have been onboard. The missing drivers reportedly slept in their vehicles because cabins on the ferry were unsuitable, according to the Greek truck drivers' union. —AFP

Turkey 'silences critics' with presidential insult law

ISTANBUL: Turkish journalist Sedef Kabas begins her second month in detention today for "insulting the president", an increasingly common offence which observers believe is stifling critical voices 16 months before the presidential election. The 52-year-old has already spent longer in jail than any other journalist for this alleged offence, according to the NGO Reporters Without Borders (RSF).

During a television interview on January 14, Kabas quoted an old proverb affirming that a crowned head generally becomes wiser, and added: "but we see it is not true". She repeated the line, deemed to be derogatory to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his regime, on her Twitter account which has more than 900,000 followers.

Three weeks later, Kabas was formally charged. Her request for bail was rejected and President Erdogan, the head of state, filed a claim for 250,000 Turkish liras (around \$18,300, 16,100 euros) in damages. She will be tried on March 11 and risks a total of 12 years and 10 months in prison for insulting the president and two of his ministers.

"This anti-democratic 'lese-majeste' law has become a tool of repression which illustrates the authoritarian policy of the government," said Erol Onderoglu, RSF's representative in Turkey. Onderoglu believes the offence of insulting the president-article 299 of the penal code-allows the government "to silence critics and weaken the media", prompting RSF to call for its repeal. —AFP

Algeria's 60 years of complex relations with former occupier

PARIS: In the 60 years since Algeria won independence from France, it has gone through multiple crises with its former occupier, often fuelled by domestic politics. Yet the two sides had surprisingly good relations for the first four decades, and it was only in the 1990s that things started to fall apart, experts say.

"Generally, despite appearances and criticism, there has been a stable, very balanced relationship," said Luis Martinez, a Maghreb researcher at Sciences Po university in Paris. That is despite the devastation caused by the eight-year war of independence that finally led to the signing of the Evian accords on March 18, 1962, ending the conflict.

French historians say half a million civilians and combatants died — 400,000 of them Algerian—while the Algerian authorities insist 1.5 million were killed. Under French General Charles de Gaulle, whose administration signed the accords, and his successor Georges Pompidou, Paris had good relations with Algiers.

The same was true of the administration of Francois Mitterrand, even though he had been interior minister when Algeria's armed independence struggle began in 1954 and remained opposed to the country's independence. "Mitterrand was surrounded by Socialist Party people, who were all pro-FLN," said historian Pierre Vermeren, referring to the National Liberation Front, which led the revolt and has dominated Algerian politics ever since.

"(Mitterrand) was able to take a back seat" and let others deal with Algeria, said Vermeren, a professor at the Sorbonne University. France was allowed to continue its nuclear tests in the Algerian Sahara until 1967, and de Gaulle managed to negotiate a secret deal with the new Algerian state to allow for chemical weapons tests until 1978.

But in 1992, Paris raised hackles by criticising Algiers for suspending elections, in which Islamist

parties had won the first round. Algeria withdrew its ambassador in response.

The polls' cancellation sparked another decade of devastating conflict in the North African country, until Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who rose to the presidency in 1999, offered an amnesty that paved the way for peace.

Despite being close to France, Bouteflika made use of anti-French discourse, primarily for domestic consumption, Vermeren said. "To win back control of the ideological and political sphere after the civil war, (the Algerian leadership) 'forgot' that France had helped them fight the Islamists," he said. "They went back to their traditional enemy."

'Good ties in secret'

Under Bouteflika, Algerian leaders used ever-stronger language, accusing France of "genocide" during its more than 130-year occupation of Algeria. Then, in 2019, a vast protest movement toppled the autocratic leader after two decades in power—but the new regime has kept up the anti-French discourse. Observers say however that cooperation behind closed doors has been surprisingly close. In 2013, Algeria allowed French forces to use its airspace to reach Mali, where they were battling jihadists. "French-Algerian relations are good when they're in secret. They're more hostile when they're in public," said Naoufel Brahimi El Mili, who has written a book on 60 years of "secret stories" between the two countries.

When Emmanuel Macron became president, he had good relations with Algeria. Visiting Algiers during his campaign in February 2017, he described colonisation as a "crime against humanity". After his election, he made gestures aimed at healing past wounds on both sides of the Mediterranean.

But he refused to apologise for colonialism, a highly sensitive topic in France, which for decades saw Algeria as an integral part of French territory and where far-right discourse has been escalating. Comments reported last October dampened hopes around reconciliation.

Macron accused Algeria's "political-military system" of rewriting history and fomenting "hatred towards France". In remarks to descendants of independence fighters, reported by Le Monde, he also questioned whether Algeria had existed as a

prohibit hunting on weekends and during school holidays "because that's when there's the biggest risk."

Macron will likely face questions at his scheduled appearance at the Paris Agriculture Show on Saturday, a crucial annual visit for all politicians looking to court the rural vote. According to French daily Le Monde, citing France's biodiversity office, there have been 3,325 hunting accidents in France since 2000, resulting in 421 deaths.

'Tighten the rules'

France is one of the few European countries that do not prohibit hunting on certain days during the season, instead allowing hunters to shoot at all times as long as they alert others of their activity—a requirement decried by critics as insufficient. A petition last autumn seeking to outlaw hunting on Sundays and Wednesdays, when many schools do not have class, garnered 120,000 signatures and prompted the Senate to create a panel to assess its safety.

Macron's government has always steered clear of expressing hostility to the traditional practice of hunting but has repeatedly left open the possibility of a more restrictive approach. "If it turns out we need to tighten the rules further, we will do so," Macron's secretary of state in charge of biodiversity, Berangere Abba, told AFP, noting that France has announced the creation of an app that could indicate areas where hunts are taking place.

But such apps are often opposed by hunting groups, who say they could be used by anti-hunting activists to disrupt organised hunts. Abba said the young hunter, who had tested negative for drug or alcohol use, had obtained her permit when 16.



EVIAN, France: This photograph shows the Beau Rivage hotel, where the former mayor Camille Blanc was killed on March 31, 1961, in an attack before the beginning of negotiations of the Evian Accords, in Evian, central France. —AFP

nation before the French invasion in the 1800s. Once again, Algeria withdrew its ambassador.

'Algeria votes Macron'

Now, weeks ahead of the French presidential election in April, relations appear to be looking up again. Millions of French citizens of Algerian origin and descendants of Europeans who left after independence are among those casting votes. "Algeria will vote for Macron," said author El Mili. "Algerians are convinced that a Macron II will be bolder."

Xavier Driencourt, a former French ambassador to Algeria, shared that view. "They don't want (candidate) Valerie Pécresse who has a fairly right-wing tone, and definitely not (Eric) Zemmour or Marine Le Pen," he said, referring to conservative Pécresse and two far-right presidential hopefuls.

But much remains to be done. In recent years Algeria has diversified its international ties, with China becoming its main trade partner. Martinez from Sciences Po said Macron's comments had done a lot of damage.

"They'll go back to the drawing board, and try to see what they can agree on," he said. Former envoy Driencourt said "it takes two sides to have a relationship". Would Algeria be interested after the election? "I'm not very optimistic," he said. —AFP



PARIS: French far-right party Reconquête! presidential candidate Eric Zemmour and French far-right Rassemblement National (RN) party presidential candidate Marine Le Pen shake hands as they pass each other during the presentation of their economic campaign programs. —AFP

"We need to verify that the hunt was correctly communicated and marked," Abba added, in particular with posted signs to alert hikers and others. Willy Schraen, head of the FNC, which has long resisted limits, said on Facebook that local chapters were being contacted "to remind everyone of all the safety rules."

France has in recent months banned traditional hunting techniques of birds in line with a 2009 EU directive, such as hunting with nets or bird cages or glue hunting. Macron, who is favourite to win the election, has yet to formally declare his candidacy and speculation is fizzing over whether the announcement will be made before or after the agriculture fair. —AFP

International

Shadowy messengers delivering threats to Hong Kong civil society

China flattens pro-democracy movement

HONG KONG: Covert meetings, whispered threats, and mysterious phone calls—warnings of reprisals by authorities from shadowy messengers are hounding Hong Kong's civil society as China flattens a pro-democracy movement. Unlike the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong long hosted a vibrant landscape of citizens' groups who cultivated rights advocacy, union mobilisation and civil disobedience as a key fabric of the once-outspoken city.

But a national security law imposed by Beijing in 2020 to snuff out dissent has knee-capped the sector, leaving people fearful that the law's vaguely defined crimes will be used to target their work. More than 50 civil society groups specialising on issues ranging from labour to education have since announced their closure or been shuttered after national security arrests.



'Approach of intimidation'

Often the pre-emptive shutdowns came after staff were subjected to a shadowy campaign of threats and intimidation, according to five people AFP spoke to with firsthand knowledge. The warnings typically arrived via phone calls and messages from so-called "middlemen", who assumed a conversational tone while revealing knowledge of each recipient's personal life. Some came face to face.

Veteran NGO worker Mario—using a pseudonym due to fears for his safety—said his colleagues received disconcerting messages from several middlemen last summer. "They would tell you different stories but at some point the conversation would reach the same conclusion: you must shut down," he told AFP. A month after first contact, Mario's organisation made the decision to close.

'We respect civil society'

Hong Kong's civil society groups have in recent years been labelled "anti-China elements" by officials and state media. Beijing has made clear it believes they were a key part of democracy protests that exploded in 2019 with huge rallies and frequent clashes with police.

The national security law's vague language, combined with the middlemen's warnings, suddenly made the threat of lengthy jail terms very real for people like Mario. "Every normal thing civil society did in the past three decades is now subject to political reprisal," he said.

Shuttered organisations range from the city's largest trade union to Amnesty International, as well as the Hong Kong Alliance—which used to organise the annual vigil remembering victims of China's Tiananmen Square crackdown in 1989.

Hong Kong's leader Carrie Lam has repeatedly denied that a deliberate campaign targeting organisations is taking place, insisting "we respect civil society". China's ruling Communist Party and its Liaison Office in Hong Kong have openly accused some groups of violating the law, calling the collapse of these organisations "a choice of their own making".

Both China's Public Security Ministry and its Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office did not respond to requests for comment from AFP. The city's Security Bureau and the Committee for Safeguarding National Security also declined to comment on what they called "allegations by individuals".

New sheriff in town

Under a "One Country, Two Systems" principle that Beijing agreed to before the 1997 handover by Britain, Hong Kong was allowed to retain key freedoms and autonomy for 50 years. These included the city being left to police itself using its own laws. The national security law changed all that, toppling the legal firewall that existed between the financial hub and Beijing.

Among the legislation's many precedent-setting provisions was a clause empowering the mainland's security apparatus to operate openly in Hong Kong. Days after the law's enactment, mainland security officials requisitioned a hotel for their staff—unbound by local laws—as they conducted investigations on perceived threats to China.

The middlemen are regarded as an extension of this new sheriff in town, according to two sources who told AFP they had been contacted directly. Both described similar face-to-face meetings but asked for key details to be omitted to maintain anonymity.

The meetings were held in a pre-booked private room at public businesses and featured a Cantonese-speaking man claiming to be a mainland security agent. The conversations stayed largely polite but could flip-flop with one source saying the agent he met sounded at



HONG KONG: File photo shows a woman walking past a poster for the National Security Law in Hong Kong. The national security law imposed by Beijing in 2020 to snuff out dissent has knee-capped Hong Kong's civil society sector. —

times "as if he was interrogating me".

Another said the middleman asked what he thought about disbanding his group, citing various possible security law breaches. "At first I thought it would be silly to disband when we didn't know what offences we have committed," he told AFP.

"But when he could name a very specific charge, we started to worry." The messengers possessed personal information, both recalled, dropping details of their relatives and daily habits into conversation. AFP was not able to independently verify the sources' accounts.

'Approach of intimidation'

The use of middlemen to channel information and deliver political messages is not new. Beijing's presence in Hong Kong is maintained through the Liaison Office, which has played an increasingly prominent advisory role in recent years—at times calling in local establishment politicians to be briefed by Chinese officials.

For opposition figures, Beijing preferred using middlemen, according to Ted Hui, a former opposition lawmaker now in Australia. Such meetings were commonplace—mainly as intelligence-gathering for author-

ities' decisions—until one year before the 2019 protests, he said.

"But after the security law came in, it became an approach of intimidation... So under the table, they can send those middlemen to say things the government cannot openly say." More than 160 people have been arrested under the national security law so far—most of them opposition politicians, journalists and rights workers.

Against the backdrop of these detentions, the slow-burn whisper campaign has been an effective tool to shut down organisations critical of the government. "We are so inexperienced that many of us decided to disband under these threats," said Connie, a rights worker who said she received a call from a stranger giving her a deadline to quit.

Oliver, another rights worker, said he got a text message from someone posing as a "friend" warning he could be arrested. With so many other groups shuttering and new arrests each month, Oliver felt compelled to take the threat seriously and decided to fold. "If all those big groups... were not spared, how could you be?" — AFP



ISLAMABAD: This handout photograph taken and released by Pakistan's Press Information Department (PID) shows Pakistan's President Arif Alvi (C) confers the country's second highest civilian award, Hilal-e-Pakistan, on American Microsoft founder-turned-philanthropist Bill Gates (L), in recognition of his services for the eradication of polio. — AFP

Pakistan introduces fake news law targeting criticism of military

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's government has introduced a new cybercrime law that could see social media users jailed for up to five years for posting "fake news" about the military, judiciary or public officials. Critics say the legislation is the latest example of creeping restrictions on freedom of expression in the nation, already ranked among the world's most dangerous for media workers.

It was approved by Prime Minister Imran Khan's cabinet and swiftly adopted into law by President Arif Alvi over the weekend, an official in the presidential office said yesterday. The legislation takes effect immediately but must be presented to parliament within 90 days for approval, though it is expected that Khan's coalition government will easily pass it.

In recent years the space for dissent in Pakistan has shrunk with the government cracking down on social networks and traditional media outlets, who say pressure from above has resulted in widespread self-censorship.

Criticism of the security establishment has long been seen as a red line and rights groups say the new law further shields it—and other state institutions—from scrutiny. "It will ... inevitably be used to clamp down on dissenters and critics of the government and state institutions," said the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, which called the legislation "undemocratic".

The law amends existing defamation rules forbidding false online information that "intimidates or harms the reputation or privacy" of an individual. It broadens the scope to include "any company, organisation or body of persons" and "institution, association, authority or any other body established by the government". — AFP

HK to launch vaccine pass as Omicron outbreak rages

HONG KONG: Hong Kong will launch a vaccine pass scheme this week, officials said yesterday, as hospitals struggle under an Omicron-fuelled outbreak and the finance hub sees record-high departures. The densely populated metropolis is currently in the throes of its worst-ever coronavirus outbreak, registering thousands of confirmed cases every day as hospitals and isolation units run out of space.

Starting Thursday, all residents aged 12 and above entering restaurants and clubhouses will be required to provide proof of having at least one COVID vaccine shot or a doctor's exemption. "Everyone should carry along their vaccine record or exemptions like their ID cards," said Kevin Choi, deputy secretary of food and health, at a press conference yesterday.

Other public spaces—including wet markets, supermarkets, hospitals and government premises—will not require a show of proof, but will be subjected to spot checks by authorities and fines. Later phases of the scheme will include requiring eligible residents to have received three vaccine shots, they added. City leader Carrie Lam had said last month she hopes the scheme could push the vaccine-hesitant to get the jab.

"If you choose not to get vaccinated... you must bear some of the consequences," she said. Hong Kong,

which follows China's "zero-COVID" policy, enjoyed months of no local infections last year. But few preparations were made for a mass outbreak and health policy experts say more efforts should have been spent boosting its meagre vaccination rate—particularly among the elderly, whose numbers remain below 50 percent for two jabs.

Authorities do not allow those with COVID to isolate at home and are now scrambling to build new isolation facilities with the help of mainland China and requisition hotel rooms. But it is not clear if enough rooms can be provided. Cases are expected to rise to "literally hundreds of thousands" in the coming weeks, said Karen Grepin of the University of Hong Kong's School of Public Health.

"All of the data seems to suggest that we are very much at an early stage in this wave," she told the city's public broadcaster RTHK yesterday. The city is currently preparing to test all of its residents for Covid with support from the mainland—a move that came after Chinese President Xi Jinping called for "all necessary measures" to control the virus.

Hong Kong has remained cut off from the world for much of the last two years and is also undergoing a political crackdown. With little sign of that changing, departures have soared. Government data showed that the one-time "Asia's World City" saw a record 27,703 departures last week—the highest rate since the pandemic started more than two years ago.

Charities on Friday also raised the alarm on the treatment of foreign domestic workers, who they say have been sacked after testing positive for COVID and forced to sleep outdoors. — AFP



HONG KONG: A usually busy MTR station in Hong Kong's Causeway Bay district is seen almost empty yesterday, as the city faces its worst COVID-19 coronavirus wave to date. — AFP

New Zealand police say anti-vaxxers hurled human waste

WELLINGTON: New Zealand police accused anti-vaccine demonstrators of throwing human waste at them yesterday, during a pre-dawn operation to place roadblocks around a protest camp outside Wellington's parliament building.

The protesters took control of the parliamentary grounds and surrounding streets almost two weeks ago, setting up a camp that continues to grow despite police appeals to move on. The number of vehicles clogging downtown roads almost doubled to 800 over the weekend as more protesters joined the action, inspired by Canada's "Freedom Convoy" trucker protest.

In a bid to prevent further expansion, about 300 police deployed at 3:30am escorting forklifts which were used to place concrete barricades on key roads. Police said "a large number of vocal protesters were present" and eight arrests were made.

"Seven officers sustained injuries during the opera-

tion, ranging from scratches to an ankle injury," they said in statement.

"Some officers also had human waste thrown over them by protesters." Police said they would "hold to account" those responsible, pointing out that attempting to deliberately infect someone with a disease can attract a 14-year jail term.

Police have largely taken a hands-off approach to the protest, saying attempts to forcibly clear the camp from parliament would result in violence. "Police would have to move in using batons, probably using tear gas, to clear that crowd off the grounds—it's likely to lead to extended confrontation," Commissioner Andrew Coster told TVNZ Sunday. — AFP

Myanmar to contest ICJ Rohingya case, without Suu Kyi

THE HAGUE: Myanmar's junta is set to replace Aung San Suu Kyi at the UN's top court yesterday as it seeks to dismiss a case over the alleged genocide of Rohingya Muslims. Suu Kyi personally presented Myanmar's arguments at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) when the case was first heard in December 2019, but was ousted as civilian leader in a military coup last year.

The Nobel peace laureate, who faced criticism from rights groups for her involvement in the case, is now under house arrest and trial by the same generals she defended in The Hague. In its "preliminary objections" yesterday, Myanmar will argue that the court has no jurisdiction over the case, and must throw it out before it moves on to substantive hearings.

Local Myanmar media said the junta has a new delegation led by Ko Ko Hlaing, international cooperation minister, and Thida Oo, attorney general, who will attend virtually. Both have been hit with US sanctions over the coup. The case brought by the mainly Muslim African nation of The Gambia accuses predominantly Buddhist Myanmar of genocide against the Rohingya minority over a bloody 2017 military crackdown. The ICJ made a provisional order in January 2020 that Myanmar must take "all measures" to prevent the alleged genocide of the Rohingya while the years-long proceedings are underway.

Bloody crackdown

Gambia will make its counter-arguments on Wednesday. Around 850,000 Rohingya are languishing in camps in neighbouring Bangladesh while another 600,000 Rohingya remain in Myanmar's southwestern Rakhine state. The ICJ was set up after World War II to rule on disputes between UN member states. Its judgments are binding but it has no real means to enforce them. The Rohingya case at the ICJ has been complicated by the coup that ousted Suu Kyi and her civilian government, and triggered mass protests and a bloody military crackdown. More than 1,500 civilians have been killed, according to a local monitoring group.

Suu Kyi now faces trial herself in Myanmar on a raft of charges that could see her jailed for more than 150 years. Ahead of the hearing, the shadow "National Unity Government" dominated by lawmakers from Suu Kyi's ousted party said it, not the junta, "is the proper representative of Myanmar at the ICJ in the case". — AFP

Business

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2022

Zain Business introduces Z-HUB

All-new integrated hub to serve business needs of SMEs

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, introduces Z-HUB, an all-new, fully integrated hub to serve all business needs of startups and Small & Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the Kuwaiti market. The hub offers a wide range of services and solutions in over 6 essential business areas to help SME owners expand their businesses, take them towards the road of success, and rise above the competition.

Z-HUB gathers the best tools that serve the needs of SMEs in one place, focusing on six essential business areas including services for e-commerce, marketing, HR, location and online presence, insurance, tendering, Zain Business solutions, and more. Zain presents these services and more for the most competitive prices in the market.

The new hub comes in collaboration with a number of SMEs specializing in the above-mentioned areas. Zain will design special and exclusive offers for its SME



Hamad Al-Marzouq

- Kuwaiti market is full of promising talents, Z-HUB will solidify our SME services portfolio and open up new horizons to entrepreneurs.
- Hub offers solutions for e-commerce, marketing, HR, location, insurance, tendering, and more services.
- Z-HUB services offered by entrepreneurs for entrepreneurs, enriching the spirit of collaboration and developing the local SMEs ecosystem.

find a variety of services tailored to meet the needs of SMEs in one user-friendly place to ensure the swift expansion of their business. Zain offers special and exclusive offers to its customers, tailored to every customer's company, customer base, and business partners, ensuring efficiency and flexibility in their everyday operations.

The new hub features tools and solutions in over six essential business areas, including e-commerce services and integrated platforms where customers can manage their products with ease, marketing services like analysis, strategies and branding customizable for every customer, HR services that aid business owners to manage their employees, location services to help customers get recognized on Google Maps and create an online presence, insurance services to provide consultation and risk assessment, tendering services to facilitate the tendering process across all sectors, as well as a wide range of tech services and tools from Zain Business. The Z-HUB partners' ecosystem features a number of SMEs specializing in their own respective industries, including:

UPayments: Online e-commerce tool to meet every business need that includes UStore, Upay, and Uinterface.

Zyda: Fully customizable restaurant delivery platform. **ExpandCart:** Offering complete e-commerce tools, solutions, and plans that include ExpandCart Professional, ExpandCart Ultimate, and ExpandCart Enterprise.

Tendering Center: Tendering Center offers a one-year tendering plan and notifications designed to facilitate tenderers and bidders.

Chrysalis Digital: Chrysalis General Trading Company helps customers get Google Business verification in addition to 360 virtual walkthrough tours, and more.

MenaITech: Providing consultancy services such as MenaLite Core, MenaLite HR and MenaTracks, as well as MenaCRM that helps to develop innovation.

Al-Othman Pearls: Helps create comprehensive insurance packages for customers' businesses at a below-market price.

Totals: Totals offers multiple packages for marketing, advertising, and content creation based on every customer's needs, such as Total's Starter, Growth and Enterprise Packages.

Zain strongly believes in the crucial role played by private sector organizations in supporting social and economic sustainability projects, as well as further pushing the entrepreneurial community's growth in the country. Springing from its growing commitment towards practicing its social responsibility, the company is committed to printing a positive print through all its activities. This has led Zain to embrace the most influential issues in the community, including the support of entrepreneurship and innovation.



Offers wide range of solutions in over six essential business areas



customers in partnership with its partners to tailor each offer to each customer's unique business needs. The offerings are designed to maximize efficiency, increase productivity, elevate customer satisfaction rates, and reduce the time needed to process transactions all while cutting costs.

Commenting on the announcement, Zain Kuwait's Chief Enterprise Business Officer Hamad Al-Marzouq said: "We are proud today to launch Z-HUB, our all-new integrated hub to serve the Kuwaiti startups market. Through this service, we gather all of our most advanced, world-class solutions and put them in the hands of SME owners, supporting them to build a digital infrastructure for their business and helping them serve their customers with utmost efficiency".

Al-Marzouq added: "The Kuwaiti market is full of promising talents, and we at Zain are well aware of the important role played by SMEs in achieving economic and social development in the nation. We believe SMEs represent a big part of the country's production chan-

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A Wonderful World

nels, and they play an essential role in the growth of national economy. That is why we are always committed to offering them the best and most advanced solutions, especially that Zain is a leading digital service provider in Kuwait and the region. We hope this step opens up entire new horizons in front of Kuwaiti entrepreneurs".

Al-Marzouq continued: "Since its inception, Zain has always enjoyed a solid ecosystem of strategic partnerships with the world's top tech leaders, making it the first destination to serve the technical needs of companies of all sizes. Today, we expand this ecosystem by partnering with a number of SMEs, each specializing in

their respective industries, so that Z-HUB's services are offered by entrepreneurs for entrepreneurs. We believe this will help enrich the spirit of joint collaboration and contribute to developing the local SMEs market".

Al-Marzouq concluded: "This launch reflects our continuous efforts to grow our services portfolio for Kuwait's SME community, who have grown to become a great part of our corporate customer base. This is why we will always be committed to offering such refreshed offerings in line with our digital transformation strategy that aims at empowering a more efficient business sector in the Kuwaiti market".

Z-HUB is an integrated hub where customers can



Germany to enter recession due to virus: Bundesbank

FRANKFURT: The Bundesbank said yesterday the latest wave of the coronavirus pandemic risked pushing the German economy-Europe's largest-into a technical recession before staging a recovery from the second quarter. After gross domestic product shrank by 0.7 percent in the last quarter of 2021, "overall economic output could again sink noticeably in the first quarter of 2022, before picking up speed again in the spring," the German central bank said in its monthly economic report.

Pandemic restrictions were mostly to blame for the drop, the Bundesbank said, with measures "hitting some service-sector branches hard". Manufacturing, meanwhile, continued to report "serious" problems with a lack of raw materials and components, as well as a shortage of labour.

"The pick-up in industrial production, however, suggested a certain eas-

ing" in the supply situation at the end of 2021, the central bank said.

A recession is technically defined as two consecutive quarters of economic contraction. Germany's European neighbors have seen their economies recover more strongly from the initial impact of the pandemic. Germany registered 2.8 percent growth in 2021, while France surged ahead with growth of seven percent. The spread of the Omicron variant in Germany led to a record number of infections at the start of the year.

The government has said it will start to roll back health restrictions as the cases begin to ebb, with most rules lifted by the end of March under the plan.

Meanwhile, economic growth in the eurozone jumped sharply in February as coronavirus restrictions were eased, a key survey showed yesterday. Growth accelerated to a five-month high, IHS Markit said in its closely watched monthly survey-but it also noted that persistent supply constraints and soaring energy prices also pushed inflation to a record level.

Its purchase managers' index (PMI) surged 3.5 points to 55.8, higher than the 52.3 recorded in January. A figure above 50 indicates growth. The rise

was attributed to the eurozone-the 19 EU countries using the euro-exiting two months of tough restrictions designed to slow the spread of the Omicron variant. Omicron is now the dominant strain in Europe, but governments regard it as less grave than previous variants because widespread vaccinations and booster jabs have muted its impact.

After two months of curbs that hit the eurozone economy, "February saw these restrictions ease to the lowest since November," IHS Markit said. The service sector led the newfound optimism, as increased travel and tourism pushed it to its highest level since last November.

Manufacturing increased "also accelerated slightly, attaining the fastest expansion since last September, thanks in part to improved supply availability" and a rise in demand. However, supply constraints remained, causing backlogs, and average prices for goods and services spiked to the highest level recorded in the PMI surveys.

"Soaring energy costs and rising wages have added to inflationary pressures, resulting in the largest rise in selling prices yet recorded in a



FRANKFURT: The Bundesbank said yesterday the latest wave of the coronavirus pandemic risked pushing the German economy-Europe's largest-into a technical recession before staging a recovery from the second quarter.

quarter of a century of survey data history," said IHS Markit's chief economist, Chris Williamson. "The intensification of inflationary pressures will add to speculation of an increasing hawkish stance" at the European Central Bank, he said.

The survey showed that growth in the eurozone's powerhouse Germany was at a six-month high, with an index reading of 56.2. The second-biggest economy, France, was doing even better, with growth at an eight-month high and an index reading of 57.4. — AFP

Russia seeks to regulate cryptocurrencies

MOSCOW: The Russian finance ministry said yesterday it had submitted

draft legislation regulating cryptocurrencies, including client identification and a cap on investments. Russia is one of the world's top crypto-mining nations and authorities have for years criticized cryptocurrencies over fears they can be used for illegal activities and called for regulation. In January, the central bank proposed an outright ban on cryptocurrencies but the finance ministry has been

pushing to regulate the sector to help attract investment.

"The proposed changes are aimed at creating a legal market for digital currencies with the establishment of rules for their circulation and the circle of participants," the ministry said in a statement. Under the bill, cryptocurrencies would be permitted only as an investment instrument.

Foreign cryptocurrency exchanges will also have to obtain a license in Russia, among other proposals. "Operations involving the purchase or sale of cryptocurrency will be possible only if the client is identified," the finance ministry also said, a move that would put an end to anonymity, a key principle of the crypto world. The draft legislation also foresees introducing literacy tests

for those wishing to invest in digital currencies. Upon a "successful" completion of tests, Russians will be able to invest in digital currencies up to 600,000 rubles (\$7,700, 6,800 euros) a year, the finance ministry said. Without such tests, the limit would be 50,000 rubles. Russian authorities granted cryptocurrencies legal status in 2020, but their use in payments was never authorized. — AFP



A photograph shows thread rolls displayed at the New Craft House, a sewing workshop studio and designer deadstock fabric shop in Hackney, East London. — AFP photos



(From left) Rosie Scott and Hannah Silvani, co-founders of The New Craft House, a sewing workshop studio and designer deadstock fabric shop, pose for pictures in Hackney.

Fast-fashion fallout: Young people in UK spurred into sewing

From jogging outfits to summer dresses, Lea Baecker has stitched together most of her wardrobe herself from inside her London flat, part of a burgeoning number of young amateur seamstresses. Like many others in the growing horde of sew-it-yourself enthusiasts, she has grown increasingly disillusioned with the retail clothing industry, viewing it as too destructive. "My main motivation was not having to buy ready-to-wear clothes anymore because I didn't want to support fast fashion," Baecker, 29, told AFP, referring to clothes made and sold cheaply to be thrown away after minimal use. The doctoral student in neuroscience only started sewing in 2018, beginning with small bags before moving on to clothes.

Four years on, she estimates about 80 percent of clothes in her wardrobe are homemade, from pyjamas to long fleece coats, as well as jeans made with denim scraps scalped from relatives. Baecker now buys new clothes "very rarely", she added, wearing one of her self-made long, hand-sewn dresses.

'Scale'

The fashion and textile industry is the third most polluting sector globally after food and construction, accounting for up to 5 percent of greenhouse gas emissions, according to a 2021 report by the World Economic Forum. Low-cost fashion retailers are regularly criticized for their waste and pollution, as well as the pay conditions imposed on their workers. Tara Viggo knows fast fashion only too well, having worked in the industry for 15 years as a



A photograph shows thread rolls displayed at the New Craft House.

pattern maker. "I realized the scale that the fashion industry was working at and it was a bit terrifying," she told AFP. In 2017, Viggo decided to start creating her own patterns—the blueprint drawings on paper before garments are made. She started out small, selling only around one set of patterns per year, a far cry from the four a day that she would sometimes churn out in the ready-to-wear industry.

Viggo conceded independent operators like her were only tiny competitors to the big brands, but insisted they still could have a meaningful impact. "The more of us that do (it), the better," she said. "It's like a trigger... People start to look at where their consumption" is, she added noting it also made you aware of the true costs involved. "Once you know how to sew your own clothes, you can't fathom

that a shirt should be £3 (\$4.10, 3.60 euros) anymore."

'More young people'

Viggo's "Zadie" jumpsuit is now a top seller on "The Fold Line", an online platform selling independently produced sewing patterns, according to its co-founder Rachel Walker. Since its launch in 2015, the website has grown from about 20 designers to more than 150 today. Rosie Scott and Hannah Silvani, who run a London workshop selling fabrics from fashion designers' unsold stock, have also seen the resurgence in sewing's popularity, particularly among young people. "The clients have changed," said Scott.

"More young people have shown interest in sewing—young people who are really interested in making their own clothes and



Molly prepares an online order at The New Craft House, a sewing workshop studio and designer deadstock fabric shop in Hackney.

making them sustainably." Women make up more than 90 percent of the clientele, she also noted. Customers can choose from some 700 designer fabrics, sold from £8 a meter for cotton voile—a sheer, lightweight cotton fabric—to £110 for the same length of lace. Orders soared during the pandemic and are still going strong despite the lifting of restrictions, Scott said.

Instagram key

The sector's explosive growth would not have been possible without Instagram, where the sewing community has made a pastime once seen as unfashionable much more trendy. The photo-sharing platform "is really important", Baecker said, allowing sewists to post images of their designs and engage with each other. This is what prompted her to join the social net-

work, where she now regularly shares her latest works. "I found each pattern has a specific hashtag that you can look up and then you can see a lot of different people wearing the same pattern and you can imagine how it can look on yourself," she explained. For example, Viggo's #Zadiejumpsuit—which comes in velvet or cotton, with or without sleeves—has been tagged in almost 11,000 posts. Meanwhile, the hashtag #handmadewardrobe features in more than 900,000 posts. With Baecker sharing so many of her creations, she has also inspired friends to join the growing sewing revolution. "That is my proudest achievement... getting my friends into sewing as well," she said. — AFP

London Fashion Week



Models present creations from British fashion brand Halpern during the catwalk show for the Autumn/Winter 2022 collection on the second day of London Fashion Week in London. — AFP photos

Lifestyle | Gossip

Bieber tests positive COVID-19, Las Vegas concert postponed

Justin Bieber's "Justice World Tour" will have to hold for a little while. The singer was set to take the stage in Las Vegas on Sunday evening, but the concert has now been delayed

due to an outbreak of COVID-19 among the pop star's team. Bieber himself has tested positive for COVID-19, reps for the singer confirmed to Variety. The Vegas concert has been pushed back a few

months, now setting a date of June 28. Tickets for the original concert date will be honored and refunds are now available for those that elect to seek one out.



Dame Helen Mirren: I don't feel deserving of a lifetime achievement award

Dame Helen Mirren doesn't feel worthy of a lifetime achievement award. The 76-year-old Hollywood legend is set to be honored with just that at the SAG Awards in Los Angeles next week, but she has admitted she doesn't believe she is deserving of such an accolade, despite a storied career. Mirren already has an Academy Award and a British Academy Film Award for her portrayal of Queen Elizabeth II in 'The Queen', a Tony Award and a Laurence Olivier Award for the same role in 'The Audience', three BAFTAs for her performance as DCI Jane Tennison in

'Prime Suspect', and four Primetime Emmys. Of her latest honour, she told the Mail on Sunday's You Magazine: "It's extraordinary. I genuinely do not feel I remotely deserve it, except that I'm still alive and working. I've done some wonderful films and I've done some pretty awful films. It took me by surprise, completely. A great honor." The 'Duke' star admitted she is very "self-critical" and expects to be "found out" any time now. She confessed: "I think of myself as still being the way I was in my mind, in my body, through my twenties, thirties and forties: struggling, ambitious, frustrated

and self-critical. "I still feel the same person. I wonder if that ever goes? There's always that endless, giggling feeling, 'Oh god, I'm going to be found out any minute now. I got away with it that time, but the next time I'll be found out'. Because you can never be absolutely sure that you're that good at what you do." Mirren added: "It's not like being a doctor or a surgeon or an architect or a gardener where you can look at your work and go, 'Oh yeah, that's really good.' It's a much more mutable thing, our job."

Perry won't 'sugarcoat tougher times he went through' on show in memoir

Matthew Perry's upcoming memoir won't "sugarcoat" the "tougher times" with his 'Friends' co-stars. The 52-year-old actor - who played Chandler Bing on the legendary US sitcom - is set to release the tell-all tome, 'Friends, Lovers and the Big Terrible Thing', and it's said to be a "juicy read" as the star dishes on the ups and downs of his time on and off the screen. A source told Us Weekly: "It wasn't always a bed of roses for Matthew on and off the 'Friends' set. "And Matt isn't going to sugarcoat the tougher times that he went through with the cast." The insider added: "It's not going to be salacious or mean, just totally honest. "But given the nature of Matt's life and his experiences, that guarantees this will be an incredibly juicy read!" It's anticipated that Matthew will open up on the 'Friends: The Reunion' special last year, which saw him reunite with Jennifer Aniston [Rachel Green], Courteney Cox [Monica Geller], David Schwimmer [Ross Geller] Lisa Kudrow [Phoebe Buffay], and Matt LeBlanc [Joey Tribbiani]. Matthew recently admitted he feels grateful he has "lived to tell the tale" of his life. The actor admitted he has experienced some "highs" and "lows", and he is pleased to be able to tell fans his story, but he also admitted there were times when it looked as though he would never get the chance to speak about his life. After sharing the cover and title of his upcoming autobiography, which is released in November, he said: "So much has been written about me in the past. I thought it was time people heard from me. "The highs were high, the lows were low. But I have lived to tell the tale, even though at times it looked like I wouldn't. And it's all in here." Matthew then jokingly said sorry that his forthcoming tome is "not a pop-up book". The star first revealed in October that he is to release an autobiography, admitting it is time to tell his own story "directly from the horse's mouth". He said at the time: "There has been so much written about me by others in the past. I thought it was time people heard it directly from the horse's mouth. In this case, the horse's mouth being me." Matthew is said to have penned a seven-figure deal with Flatiron Books, a division of Macmillan, for the upcoming memoir. The star previously admitted he felt like he was "going to die" while shooting every 'Friends' episode. He said: "To me, I felt like I was going to die if they didn't laugh. It's not healthy, for sure, but I would sometimes say a line and they wouldn't laugh and I would sweat and just go into convulsions if I didn't get the laugh I was supposed to get. I'd freak out."



Cox not planning to marry McDaid any time soon

Courteney Cox is not planning to tie the knot with Johnny McDaid any time soon. The 'Friends' star was previously engaged to the Snow Patrol rocker - whom she met through mutual friend Ed Sheeran - in 2014, but the pair called it off and briefly split before rekindling their romance. Courteney, 57, was previously married to actor David Arquette - with whom she has 17-year-old daughter Coco - between 1999 and 2013. However, she has no desire to walk down the aisle again just yet. Speaking to The Sunday Times Style magazine, she said: "Marriage is a beautiful thing but it's not in my brain." On what first attracted her to the dashing musician, 45, she said: "I remember looking over and seeing Johnny playing the piano and I thought, 'God, look at those eyes.' They were piercing." On their split, she said: "It was a really important time for me to grow and look in, as opposed to blame." As well as his good looks, the 'Scream' star loves how much "love" her man has for his family. She added: "I've never met someone who has such a regard for love. Love for his family, love for love, love for his relationship. He's a poet, a writer." Courteney - who first started dating Johnny in 2013 - previously insisted she's "not opposed" to getting hitched again. She insisted: "I don't know. I'm definitely not opposed to it. I just don't think about it." Courteney previously confessed that it had been tough for herself and Johnny to maintain their romance amid the coronavirus pandemic. The 'Shining Vale' star spent lockdown in California while Johnny was in Europe. Courteney - who eventually moved to London in order to be closer to the music star - said: "People from the UK, they still can't come to America. You're not allowed in still, which is crazy. "He's been vaccinated and he can't come in. I don't understand it. People can go from Florida to Los Angeles, no quarantine. I don't get it. I don't know why they can't come to America and quarantine the way I did. "I've been on this five-day test and release. I'm going out tonight, can't wait. I don't mean out, just to a restaurant. I just want to go out - literally, out of the apartment. I have not left [McDaid's apartment] except to get a nose swab at Heathrow [Airport]." — Bang Showbiz



Cindy Crawford wishes she was 'kinder' to her younger self

The American supermodel has marked her 56th birthday (20.02.22) with a poignant letter to "little Cindy" and documented the things she would tell her if she could. The mother-of-two - who has Presley, 22, and Kaia, 20, with husband Rande Gerber - admitted she could be hard on herself and she would advise young Cindy to not be "afraid to make a fool of herself" and "fake it until you make it". She wrote on Instagram: "On the eve of another birthday, looking back at little Cindy and thinking about what I would tell her. "I would tell her to be kinder to herself, to treat herself the way she treats her friends. I would tell her everyone feels nervous in new situations and sometimes you just have to fake it 'til you make it. "I would tell her not to be afraid to make a fool of herself - dance, sing, etc more - even if she isn't good at it. Laugh as much as possible. "Risk showing her true self to people she loves - the payoff is worth it. Practice gratitude. Keep growing and learning and becoming ... life is a blessing!" Cindy previously admitted she expected her modeling career to be over by the time she was 25. The brunette beauty always knew life on the catwalk was typically short-lived so



she's astonished to still be in the spotlight, more than three decades after she first began working. She said: "Models used to be replaced every five years, so I assumed that at 25 I would have to go back to school. Here I am at 53! I'm rep-

resenting different brands, which is appropriate, but every time I get my picture taken, to me, that's modeling." Cindy joked she and her fellow modeling icons, Christy Turlington, Linda Evangelista, Naomi Campbell, Claudia Schiffer and Kate Moss, were like a "boy band" because of how they looked when put together. She said: "Before Christy, Linda, Naomi, Claudia, Kate and I, models weren't well known." It was almost like we were a new boy band - we were all different, but we looked good together. "Fashion was all about glamazonian shoulder pads, high heels and strong women. We didn't look like victims, we looked empowered. I really think that we felt that way, too." While the catwalk veteran doesn't miss the runway, she does long for life backstage. She said: "It was like a slumber party. We were all tired and a little bit punchy, but real friendships were formed." Cindy's kids both followed in their mother's footsteps and she joked she's more well known now for her association with her daughter in particular. She laughed: "I feel I'm most known for giving birth to Kaia now."

Fisher believes she deserves more credit for her acting

Isla Fisher feels that she does not get the credit she deserves for her acting. The 46-year-old star has claimed that she is often asked about her husband Sacha Baron Cohen or her celebrity lifestyle in interviews when she would prefer to be talking about her own acting ability. Isla told The Independent: "Usually it tends to be (questions) about when I last saw an infinity pool, or details about my husband. "Without sounding like a luvvie and getting all 'thespian', I did go to clown school. I studied with Jacques Lecoq, who's a phenomenal clown teacher. He taught me to think about (my characters) walk and talk - it's like putting on a costume, and doing that then informs all the internal work. You prepare and you prepare, and you try to be as meticulous as you can." Isla stars as a character called Mary alongside Josh Gad in the new TV series 'Wolf Like Me' and she believes that the comedy-drama is different from typical shows. The 'Blithe Spirit' actress said: "We're so used to seeing romcoms where we're only given the nice bits of people connecting. "It feels quite original. Love is scary! Once you give somebody your heart and they gave theirs, obviously you're completely vulnerable. The show is more an exploration of love mixed with shame and fear." Isla added: "I also enjoyed playing Mary because she's so lonely. I'm super gregarious, I love people, I socialize whenever I can. Mary's the total opposite of me, and she's got all this baggage and

doesn't feel safe being around people." Isla also claimed that comedy performances do not always get the credit they deserve - especially in the eyes of awards bodies. She said: "Comedy is the most vulnerable sort of performance. If you miss the mark, there's nothing to catch you. It's not like drama, yet comedy just isn't considered equal to it, particularly in the eyes of the Oscars."



Usher's son was born to 50 Cent's In Da Club

Usher's son was born to the sound of 50 Cent's 'In Da Club'. The 43-year-old star - who welcomed Sire Castrello Raymond with girlfriend Jenn Goicoechea back in October - revealed that he had prepared a playlist for the birth, and when the baby entered the world, the rap legend's explicit song came on. He said: "I came fully prepared. I brought speakers, I brought batteries, I had a whole playlist that I worked on for about two weeks. [And the song that was playing when the baby was born] was 'In Da Club.' Usher - who also has daughter Sovereign Bo, 18 months, with Jenn, as well as sons Naviyd Ely, 12, and Usher V, 13, with ex-wife Tameka Foster - explained that he had prepared the music so carefully this time round after things had gone awry in the past. He said: "The first time, I was in charge of the music but I did a terrible job. I had this phone and a speaker, but right before we go into the room, the wi-fi died. I had one song on my phone so I kept playing it over and over again and she was like 'Can you play another song please?'. It was terrible!" The 'U Got it Bad' hitmaker also went on to reveal that he has two pet goats which he has named after rappers LL Cool J and Diddy.



Indian Ambassador Sibi George inaugurates eNamaste Kuwaiti festival as Joice Sibi looks on.



The culture-connect: 'Namaste Kuwait' celebrates national days

Indian embassy holds weeklong festival, showcasing dance, music and films

By Sajeev K Peter

KUWAIT: The curtain went up on 'Namaste Kuwait', a weeklong cultural festival at the Indian Embassy on Sunday on the occasion of Kuwait's National and Liberation Days. Marking a long cultural history and cherished Kuwait-India partnership, the festival celebrates the vibrant culture-connect between the countries during the festive month of February.

At a glittering function, Indian Ambassador Sibi George and his spouse Joice Sibi jointly lit the traditional lamp to officially inaugurate the celebration. Organized by the Indian Embassy in association with the Indian Cultural Network (ICN), the festival is a tribute to the rich cultural heritage and diversity of both Kuwait and India.

"Today's event is a celebration of the vibrant and dynamic partnership between our two friendly countries, India and Kuwait. Our ties are time-tested. They have been built over strong foundations by our peoples over centuries based on mutual trust and respect. Over time, nurtured by a vibrant people-to-people connect and civilizational



affinities, the partnership has blossomed into a forward-looking dynamic partnership," the ambassador said in his inaugural address.

The celebration commenced with some dazzling dance performances, delineating the special bond shared by India and Kuwait, followed by a segment of musical performances by well-known artists in Kuwait. Several Indian artists and students joined hands in presenting this cultural extravaganza.

On this special occasion, the ambassador released a musical album named "Ya Kuwaithee Marhaba" in three languages: Arabic, Hindi and Malayalam. A captivating visual treat, the album is conceptualized and created by more than a hundred artists. It seeks to depict Kuwait's rich legacy and history and highlight India and Kuwait's deep-rooted relations.

The ambassador conveyed greetings to Kuwait's leadership, the government and the people of Kuwait on the occasion of the



National Day and Liberation Day. "In recent years, we are seeing an increased engagement between our two peoples. This festival is another effort by the embassy to further broaden the rich canvas of cultural engagement and further strengthen our already close civilizational affinities and linkages," George said.

"I am confident that this relationship will continue to prosper and evolve into a new age, a new India-new Kuwait partnership connecting the visions of the leadership of

our two countries for mutual development and progress of the peoples of our two countries," he said. This weeklong festival also marks the 75th anniversary of India's independence and 60th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between Kuwait and India. The festival will continue till Feb 28, 2022 with an impressive array of cultural programs including music, dance and screening of Indian films.



Nara city, home to friendly wild deer

The ancient capital of Nara in western Japan is famous for wild deer that freely roam around a public park in the heart of the city. The free-roaming deer are even seen to cross busy streets or visit houses nearby Nara Park. According to the Nara Deer Preservation Foundation, more than 1,100 wild deer, including some

80 fawns, roamed in and around the 5 sq km park as of July 2021.

The free-roaming deer have been believed to be messengers of a god visiting the 1,250-year-old Kasuga Grand Shrine located in the park. They are protected under Japan's cultural properties protection law. Visitors can interact with

deer and feed them "deer crackers" called "shika senbei," which are sold at JPY 200 (\$1.7) in nearby shops. The snack, made from wheat and rice bran, is digestive and sugar-free. — KUNA



Sports

Marseille slump to shock home defeat by Clermont

Nice edge out Angers 1-0; Strasbourg held to a 2-2 draw

PARIS: Marseille slipped to a surprise 2-0 loss to struggling Clermont at the Stade Velodrome on Sunday to miss the chance to strengthen their grip on a top-three place. Jorge Sampaoli's second-placed side had won their last two games to move four points clear of third-placed Nice and five ahead of fourth-placed Strasbourg coming into the weekend. Nice edged out Angers 1-0, but Strasbourg were held to a 2-2 draw at Saint-Etienne.

But Marseille passed up the opportunity to create a seven-point buffer to Strasbourg, as goals in either half from Mohamed Bayo and Jim Allevinah gave Clermont a third win in four league games. Marseille have now won just one of their last five home league games and were booed off the pitch by their fans. "It's hard for us here, we've dropped a lot of points," said Sampaoli. "We have to correct that and win games at home." The whistles are normal. The fans wanted to see what they came for and we couldn't give it to them."

OM had few clear-cut chances despite dominating possession, with Dimitri Payet's shot which was saved by Ouparine Djoko shortly before half-time the closest they came to a goal. Victory would have moved the hosts to within 10 points of Paris Saint-Germain after the capital giants' 3-1 loss at Nantes on Saturday, but the runaway leaders remain 13 points clear. Earlier, Justin Kluivert scored as Nice won at home to Angers. The Dutch winger's smart finish in 19 minutes was his third goal in as many games.

Nice had lost their past two league games but put an end to their slide despite Khephren Thuram and Andy Delort having goals ruled out by VAR. "We wanted to start the match strongly and try to score quickly," said Delort. "It's a shame the two goals were disallowed because we wanted to put the match to bed, but I think we controlled it from start to finish." Christophe Gallier's side visit Strasbourg next weekend and then play fourth-tier Versailles in the semi-finals of the French Cup on March 1.

Strasbourg, whose only European Cup appearance came when they reached the quarter-finals in 1979-80, lost ground on Nice with their draw against Saint-Etienne. Ryad Boudebouz gave Saint-Etienne an early lead but Strasbourg struck twice through Habib Diallo and Lucas Perrin before Wahbi Khazri's equalizer earned the hosts a point. "We keep the points tally ticking over with one more. The dynamic is very positive with 16 points from 21 since the start of 2022," said Strasbourg coach Julien Stephan.

"We won't be favorites against Nice because we weren't expected to be where we are in the standings unlike them." Rennes are two points behind Strasbourg following a 4-1 win over Troyes, while Bordeaux drew 1-1 against Monaco in David Guion's first game in charge. Remi Oudin opened the scoring for Bordeaux, who played almost an hour with an extra man after Aurelien Tchouameni's red card, but an own goal by Marcelo denied them victory. Montpellier won 1-0 at Lorient and Reims drew 1-1 with Brest. — AFP



MARSEILLE: Marseille's French defender Matteo Guendouzi (left) fights for the ball with Clermont's French Beninese defender Cedric Hountondji during the French L1 football match between Olympique Marseille (OM) and Clermont Foot 63 on February 20, 2022. — AFP

The Jet Ski World Finals in Pattaya, Thailand, were taxing on his body, as Burbayea was dealing with nagging back pain. He had to overcome it to remain competitive, and even though he lost a couple of races to the talented Danish racer Marcus Jorgensen, the European star was not able to defeat Burbayea for the World Series title.

"It was the most challenging starting race and competition of them all," Burbayea said when asked about the races at the Thailand World Series. Burbayea communicated his deepest thanks and appreciation to the Kuwait Public Sports Authority, the Kuwait Marine Sports Club, Kuwait Finance House, Power Sport Kuwait, Core Build, the M Center for rehabilitation and physiotherapy, Red Bull Kuwait, and ProRider Garage Kuwait.



When Burbayea was asked if he would want to compete again in the Jet Ski World Series, he said, "I'd love to go back and defend my title for a third time." It is also certain that his fans would be eager to see him return to attempt a three-peat performance at the major event. Mohammed Burbayea is a world record breaking professional jet ski racer. He lives and trains in Kuwait City, Kuwait. To find out more about Mohammed Burbayea and the Jet Ski World Series, follow @RedBullKuwait on Instagram and Twitter, and @RedBull on Facebook, or visit www.redbull.com

Burbayea soars at Jet Ski World Series Final in Thailand

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti jet ski superstar has repeated his previous success at Jet Ski World Series with another championship run at the prestigious major event, which was held between 2021 and 2022, and spanned three continents. Mohammed Burbayea has returned to his home country of Kuwait a back-to-back champion at the Jet Ski World Series, in the Pro Runabout Grand Prix racing category.

At the end of the first leg of the tournament he'd set his sights on winning the championship for a second time in a row, and he was off to an excellent start, having just been crowned the champion at the Eurofinals. That first round was held in Poland, and proved to him that the competition was going to remain tough to beat. He went to America and Thailand for rounds two and three.

"I'm overjoyed with winning a fierce and challenging championship," Burbayea said. The Pro Runabout Grand Prix category that Mohammed Burbayea competes in is known for its extreme difficulty, high level of never-ending endurance, and heavy-duty use on the jet skis, many of which cannot keep up with the stress of the race.

Even so, Burbayea was able to bring his goal to fruition, and was, by the numbers, the most consistent rider in all three country tournaments. Where other riders occasionally took podium spots, Burbayea was able to keep his score tally up there, thus remaining competitive until the last race. Speaking on how he achieved such steady consistency throughout the multiple stages of the tournament, Burbayea pointed to the efforts of his team, in his typically humble fashion. "My team is 100% Kuwaiti," he said. "They've been with me from the start of the competition, going above and beyond."



CLEVELAND: Stephen Curry #30 of Team LeBron holds the Kobe Bryant Trophy after being named MVP during the 2022 NBA All-Star Game on February 20, 2022 in Cleveland, Ohio. — AFP

Curry wins MVP with 16 threes

LOS ANGELES: Somebody forgot to tell Stephen Curry that the three-point contest was Saturday as the Golden State Warriors superstar put on a shooting clinic to lead Team LeBron to victory in the 2022 NBA All-Star Game. LeBron James sank the game-winning basket as his side edged Team Durant 163-160, giving James his fifth straight all-star win as team captain. But Curry was the brightest shooting star, winning the MVP award with a 50-point performance that included a record 16 threes in front of a crowd of 19,400 at Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse in Cleveland, Ohio.

He finished just two shy of Anthony Davis' single-game scoring record of 52 points but shattered Paul George's previous record of nine threes in 2016. "I tried, I tried," said Curry of flirting with the single-game scoring record, held by Los Angeles Lakers' Davis who scored 52 points in 2017. "When I get going the energy picks up. It is pretty special being back in Ohio. "Obviously this trophy has very special meaning. I am very humbled, very blessed and I appreciate it." The All-Star Game was preceded by the three-point shooting contest on Saturday, a competition Curry won in 2021 in Chicago. Karl-Anthony Towns won this year's contest, which Curry did not enter. Curry was booed during the introductions because of the three titles he won over the Cleveland Cavaliers with the Warriors. Ohio-born local hero James nailed the winning shot with a fadeaway jumper to elevate Team LeBron to the target score of 163.

"I could not have dreamed of that moment, any better than the actuality that just happened," James said. The 37-year-old was playing in his 18th all-star game, which ties him with the late Kobe Bryant and moves him to one shy of the record held by Hall of Famer Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. James was one of two captains, the other being Brooklyn Nets star Kevin Durant, who did not attend the game due to the death earlier Sunday of his grandmother.

Memphis Grizzlies rising star Ja Morant scored six points and was one of seven players making their all-star debut. The other first-time all-stars were the Charlotte Hornets' LaMelo Ball, Cleveland Cavaliers duo Jarrett Allen and Darius Garland, the Golden State Warriors' Andrew Wiggins, the San Antonio Spurs' Dejounte Murray and the Toronto Raptors' Fred VanVleet. During Saturday's halftime, the league honored the NBA's 75th Anniversary Team with players from every decade of the league's existence in attendance for the diamond anniversary. The 76 players who made up the anniversary team-including six 2022 all-stars-have combined for 736 all-star selections. "I was like a kid in a candy store just watching all the greats, all the legends," said Curry of meeting his boyhood heroes. "That helped me in the third quarter because I just let loose and had fun. "You walk around talking to the best of the best, it brings out the best in you." —AFP

News in brief

Olympian faces punishment

TAIPEI: Taiwan's government has denounced one of its Olympic flagbearers after the speed skater was seen in an online video wearing the suit of the Chinese national team, with one lawmaker calling her attire the "uniform of the enemy". China and Taiwan have been at odds for decades as Beijing regards the island as its territory, vowing to seize it one day-by-force if necessary. Self-ruled, democratic Taiwan is often held up as a bastion of liberalism but authorities have said Olympian Huang Yu-ting could be punished after she hit a nerve in January when she posted a clip of herself in the Chinese suit. She removed the video following a barrage of criticism, explaining later that a Chinese friend had given her the uniform and she wore it "for friendship". As the Beijing Winter Olympics drew to a close over the weekend, an official said Huang will be investigated and faces "appropriate punishment" at the orders of Taiwanese Premier Su Tseng-chang. — AFP

India sweep T20 series

KOLKATA: Batsmen Suryakumar Yadav and Venkatesh Iyer helped India beat West Indies by 17 runs in the third Twenty20 international on Sunday to sweep the series 3-0. Yadav, who smashed 65, and Venkatesh, who made an unbeaten 35, put on 91 runs for the fifth wicket to guide India to 184 for five after being invited to bat first in Kolkata. Venkatesh also took two wickets with his medium-pace as the bowlers restricted West Indies to 167-9 as the hosts remained unbeaten in the six white-ball matches including a 3-0 ODI triumph. India, led by Rohit Sharma who was appointed Test captain on Saturday to complete his leadership takeover across formats, will now overtake England as the world's number-ranked T20 team. "It was a good challenge for us to defend in both games, and we did well," Rohit said after the clean sweep. — AFP

Asian golf great dies at 61

SINGAPORE: Kyi Hla Han, one of the biggest figures in Asian golf both as a player and an official, has died, it was announced yesterday. The 61-year-old former Asian Tour number one and executive chairman died in Singapore on Saturday due to complications arising from cancer treatment. "Asian golf has lost one of its greatest players, its greatest personalities and its greatest leaders," Cho Minn Thant, commissioner and chief executive of the Asian Tour said in a statement. "We will forever remember Kyi Hla." Kyi Hla Han, who represented Myanmar in five World Cups and was pivotal in the growth of Asian golf after his retirement from competition in 2004, was described in the statement as "one of the most iconic figures in Asian golf". Tributes began to come in from Asia and beyond with former European Ryder Cup captain Thomas Bjorn tweeting: "This is real sad news." — AFP

Peterborough's Ferguson quits

LONDON: Darren Ferguson, the son of Manchester United legend Alex Ferguson, resigned as manager of Championship strugglers Peterborough on Sunday. Ferguson's final game was a damaging 1-0 defeat at relegation rivals Derby on Saturday. Peterborough are five points adrift of safety and without a win in the league since December 11. Ferguson, who led Peterborough to automatic promotion from League One last season, resigned in a phone call to co-owner Darragh MacAnthony. "Myself and my two partners regard Darren as one of the greatest managers of this football club, most certainly in the modern era," MacAnthony said. "I want to personally thank him for all his hard work on behalf of the club, particularly in his third spell. "He dealt with the unquestionable frustration at the season being cut short due to Covid-19 and then responding by securing promotion the following season against all the odds." — AFP

Temporary concussion substitutes

MANCHESTER: Temporary concussion substitutes are needed to safeguard players because of the pressure on medical teams to make quick assessments, the English Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) said yesterday. On Sunday, Leeds United's Robin Koch was substituted 19 minutes after suffering a head injury that needed to be bandaged in a 4-2 loss to Manchester United. Permanent concussion substitutes have been used in the Premier League for the past year, allowing each side up to an extra two changes. If players are replaced they cannot return to the field. In rugby, in contrast, a substitute comes on while an off-field head injury assessment is carried out. "The injury to Leeds United's Robin Koch demonstrates again that the current concussion protocols within football are failing to prioritize player safety," the PFA tweeted yesterday. — AFP

Chile's Niemann wins title

LOS ANGELES: Joaquin Niemann's gritty even par 71 was enough to give the 23-year-old Chilean his second US PGA Tour title on Sunday, a two-shot triumph in the Genesis Invitational at Riviera Country Club. Niemann couldn't match the fireworks of the back-to-back 63s he shot on Thursday and Friday. But his 19-under total of 265 gave him a two-stroke victory over world number two Collin Morikawa and US rookie Cameron Young. Morikawa surged up the leaderboard with an impressive six-under par 65 for 267, while Young, who started the day three adrift, carded a one-under 70. "To be honest it was a really long day today," admitted Niemann, who was feeling the pressure to complete a wire-to-wire victory and claim a second career title after winning at The Greenbrier in 2019. "I'm so happy it's finally done." Niemann could finally smile as he accepted the trophy from tournament host Tiger Woods. — AFP

Sports

Bayern and Borussia Dortmund return to their winning ways

Dortmund humiliate Borussia Moenchengladbach 6-0

BERLIN: Borussia Dortmund captain Marco Reus said his side had regained their confidence after he inspired them to a cathartic 6-0 win over Borussia Moenchengladbach on Sunday, and set his sights on a Europa League comeback against Rangers in midweek. "We had to show a reaction today and we did just that," said Reus after Dortmund bounced back from their 4-2 defeat to Rangers with a thumping win over Gladbach. "We know that we have an all-or-nothing game on Thursday, and we've got our confidence back now," he added, looking ahead to the second leg of their Europa League tie in Glasgow.

The Dortmund captain was involved in five of the six goals as his side rampaged past Gladbach on Sunday, scoring two himself and picking up a hat-trick of assists. The hosts took the lead on 26 minutes when Donyell Malen forced a save from Yann Sommer and Reus smashed in the rebound. Malen doubled the lead shortly afterwards, beating Sommer in a one-on-one after slipping away from Gladbach's high defensive line.

Dortmund's US midfielder Giovanni Reyna left the pitch in tears shortly after Reus' goal with an apparent hamstring problem, but his team continued their charge after the break. Marius Wolf smashed a brilliant shot in off the bar to make it 3-0 and 17-year-old Youssoufa Moukoko added another with a tap-in five minutes later. Reus, who had set up both of those goals, picked up his second goal with a neat finish into the bottom corner 10 minutes from time. Emre Can completed the rout with a penalty in injury time after Rami Bensebaini brought down Wolf in the box.

Lewandowski at the double

Dortmund remain six points behind league leaders Bayern, who also bounced back from a disappointing week with a 4-1 win over bottom club Greuther Fuerth. Bayern, who lost at promoted Bochum last weekend, came from behind to beat Fuerth thanks to a second-half brace from Robert Lewandowski. "This was an important win for us, psychologically and in terms of the table," Bayern coach Julian Nagelsmann told DAZN. Fuerth striker Jamie Leweling was twice denied by Sven Ulreich after breaking free of the Bayern back line, before Branimir Hrgota gave his side the lead with a deflected free-kick shortly before half-time.

Having lost Corentin Tolisso to injury midway through the first half, Bayern appeared to be facing yet another miserable afternoon. But the champions bounced back just seconds after the restart, Lewandowski bundling the ball over the line from close range after a sharp run down the right from Serge Gnabry. They took the lead just after the hour when Sebastian Griesbeck turned a Thomas Mueller cross into his own net to score an own goal against Bayern for the second time this season.

Fuerth refused to roll over, with Max Christiansen and Marco Meyerhoefer both hitting the post a few minutes later. Lewandowski ended the resistance 10 minutes from time, nodding the ball in from close range after Niklas Sule had set him up with a pinpoint header across the face of goal. Eric-Maxim Choupo-Moting completed the comeback with a tap-in in injury time. In Sunday's late game, RB



DORTMUND: Dortmund's German defender Mats Hummels (center) and Moenchengladbach's German defender Matthias Ginter (2nd left) fight for the ball during the German first division Bundesliga football match between BVB Borussia Dortmund and Borussia Moenchengladbach on February 20, 2022. —AFP

Leipzig reclaimed fourth place with an impressive 6-1 win at Hertha Berlin. Leipzig took the lead on 20

minutes when Linus Gechter deflected in Benjamin Henrichs' shot.—AFP

She Believes Cup: Kiwi 3 own goals lift US to victory

LOS ANGELES: Three own goals by New Zealand defender Meikayla Moore helped deliver the reigning Women's World Cup champion United States a 5-0 victory Sunday over the Football Ferns in the She Believes Cup. Moore, who plays for Liverpool in the English Women's Championship, knocked US crosses in the fifth, sixth and 36th minutes into the Kiwi net. US forward Sophia Smith kicked the ball from the left side and Jordan's Abdallah Al-Sabae won second place. The second round will be held in Doha, Qatar in March.

Abdallah Al-Shatti was satisfied with third place and having the Kuwaiti flag hoisted high in one of the most important motorcycles rally in the world adding "competition was difficult especially that the race covered 600 km and had much naturally difficult topography". Al-Shatti said he wish to win first place in Qatar adding "I have a good idea about the technical levels of competitors, and I will train accordingly to increase speed and improve physical fitness before entering the second round.

goal, where it deflected into the goal off Moore's left foot. The 25-year-old from Christchurch slumped forward, bent at the waist, for several seconds after watching the third own goal. She was soon replaced and consoled on the sidelines.

It marked the first match the US women had ever gotten the benefit of three own goals, their pressuring early attack a byproduct of settling for a goal-less draw in their tournament opener against the Czech Republic. "This game we just came out with a wad of energy and I think that was big for us," Smith said. "There was just more urgency for us to get in behind and score goals and create opportunities so I would say overall we played with energy and urgency."

US reserve Ashley Hatch nodded home a goal off a Huerta pass in the 51st minute and Mallory Pugh scored a final goal off a feed from Hatch three minutes into stoppage time. The Americans improved to 17-1-1 in the all-time series against New Zealand, including a 6-1 US rout at last year's Tokyo Olympics. The US women stretched their home soil unbeaten streak to 64 matches, including 57 triumphs and seven draws. They have kept 16 straight home clean sheets since last surrendering

a goal in a 3-1 win over Japan in 2020's She Believes Cup.

Iceland wins 2-1

The Americans conclude the round-robin tournament on Tuesday against Iceland, which defeated the Czechs 2-1 in Sunday's second game. Natasha Anasi scored in the 11th minute and Selma Sol Magnúsdóttir followed in the 18th to give Iceland a half-time lead. Michaela Khyrova answered the for the Czechs in the 85th minute but it was not enough. The US women must defeat Iceland in order to capture the title, while a draw on Tuesday will be enough to give Iceland the crown.

The Football Ferns, who opened with a 1-0 loss to Iceland, will close against the Czechs in the final double-header at Frisco, Texas. The tournament serves as a warm-up for US qualifying for next year's Women's World Cup and the 2024 Paris Olympics. That North American event will be played in July at Monterrey, Mexico. New Zealand will serve as co-hosts with Australia of the 2023 Women's World Cup, where the United States hopes to win a record third consecutive crown.—AFP

Juve's struggles continue despite new blood

MILAN: Juventus made a splash in the January transfer window when they snatched hot prospect Dusan Vlahovic and Switzerland midfielder Denis Zakaria, but their arrival has yet to provide the hoped-for boost ahead of today's Champions League visit to Villarreal. Massimiliano Allegri's side travel to Spain as the only Italian side with a realistic hope of making the last eight after Inter Milan were beaten 2-0 at the San Siro by Liverpool on Wednesday.

However they go into the first leg of their last 16 tie in unsure form, with results and above all performances that have left fans unsatisfied with Allegri's first season back in black and white. Vlahovic arrived at Juve to great fanfare after joining from Fiorentina for an initial fee of 70 million euros (\$80.2 million), with Zakaria arriving three days later on deadline day. Thrown straight in at the head of the Juve attack, with Alvaro Morata accommodating by shifting to a wide position, Serbia striker Vlahovic got off to a blistering start to life in Turin with a goal just 12 minutes into his debut against Verona.

But in the three matches since has shown some growing pains. He struggled to make a mark at Atalanta last weekend, when Danilo saved Juve from what would have been a damaging defeat with a stoppage time header, and was kept almost anonymous by the impressive Bremer in his new team's 1-1 derby draw with Torino on Friday. Allegri substituted Vlahovic with a quarter of an hour remaining against Torino and his team in need of a goal to consolidate their position in Serie A's Champions League places.

"At Fiorentina he played one match a week and now it's a game every three days... it's part of his development," said Allegri. "He needs to get used to playing every three days, and do it using his technique and not just his strength. Otherwise he won't be able to physically handle playing 95 minutes twice a week." After an atrocious start to the season, which also saw last season's top scorer Cristiano Ronaldo leave for Manchester United, Juve have been slowly creeping up the Serie A table despite some rag-tag performances.—AFP

Kuwait cyclist shines in 'Baha Jordan' rally

KUWAIT: Kuwait cyclist Abdallah Al-Shatti placed third in the first round of the motorcycles world championship that was held within the international "Baha Jordan" rally. Meanwhile, UAE's Mohammad Al-Beloushi took the first place and Jordan's Abdallah Al-Sabae won second place. The second round will be held in Doha, Qatar in March.

Abdallah Al-Shatti was satisfied with third place and having the Kuwaiti flag hoisted high in one of the most important motorcycles rally in the world adding "competition was difficult especially that the race covered 600 km and had much naturally difficult topography". Al-Shatti said he wish to win first place in Qatar adding "I have a good idea about the technical levels of competitors, and I will train accordingly to increase speed and improve physical fitness before entering the second round.



Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000	Rawda	22517733
Amiri Hospital	22450005	Adaliya	22517144
Maternity Hospital	24843100	Khaldiya	24848075
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700	Kaifan	24849807
Chest Hospital	24849400	Shamiya	24848913
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010	Shuwaikh	24814507
Adan Hospital	23940620	Abdullah Salem	22549134
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300	Nuzha	22526804
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000	Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9	Qadsiya	22515088
		Dasmah	22532265
		Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
		Shaab	22518752
		Qibla	22459381

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CHANGE OF NAME

I, Pemmadi Srinu S/o. Sriramurthy, R/o. Door No. 14-122/1, Nunnnavari Badava, Razole (V & Mdl), East Godavari Dist. n 533249, A.P., hereby state that my Son's name in his Passport bearing no. L1634452 was recorded as Pemmadi Narayana. His actual & correct name as per his Aadhar card is Pemmadi Nagaraju. Hence, both names are

one & same. (C 1423)

I, Mohammed Wahid Ali Badruddin Khan Sarguroh (Old Name) S/o Khan Sarguroh Budruddin Khurshid, A-1/305 Noble Height, near Kalsekar College, Kausa, Thane, Maharashtra 400612, have changed my passport (T6759924) name correction as Abdul Wahid (Given Name) Khan Sarguroh (Surname) S/o Khan Sarguroh Badruddin Khurshid. (C 0859)

Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is 1889988

EMERGENCY
112



VALENCIA: Barcelona's Spanish forward Adama Traore (left) vies with Valencia's Spanish defender Toni Lato during the Spanish league football match between Valencia CF and FC Barcelona at the Mestalla stadium on February 20, 2022. —AFP

Barca climb to La Liga's top 4

Aubameyang hat-trick fires Barcelona to victory

MADRID: Pierre Emerick-Aubameyang marked his first La Liga start for Barcelona with a hat-trick on Sunday as the Catalans thrashed Valencia 4-1 to climb back into La Liga's top four. Aubameyang scored twice in the first half either side of a Frenkie de Jong tap-in as a free-flowing Barca hit Valencia with three goals in 15 minutes before the interval. And while Valencia briefly raised hopes of a comeback when Carlos Soler headed home Bryan Gil's cross, a long-range Pedri strike flew in off Aubameyang's back to complete an impressive victory.

In his post-match interviews, Aubameyang believed the fourth goal was Pedri's but Barcelona later confirmed the referee had attributed it to Aubameyang, giving the Gabonese striker his hat-trick. It is the 32-year-old's first treble since August, when he put three past West Brom for Arsenal, and the first time anyone has hit a hat-trick for Barca since Lionel Messi scored four against Eibar in

February 2020.

"It's a luxury to have a player like him arriving for free," said Sergio Busquets. "When he arrived he hadn't played many minutes but he's getting them now and I hope he helps us like he has today because he's a great player." Aubameyang had made two substitute appearances in La Liga before starting against Napoli in the Europa League on Thursday, but this was his first league start for Barcelona since having his contract terminated by Arsenal last month.

The third goal might have been Pedri's in all but name but Aubameyang was at his pin-point best for the first, as he raced clear and unleashed an emphatic finish. Xavi singled out Pedri for special praise. "There's nobody in the world with his talent and he's only 19," Xavi said. Barcelona's quick-fire treble began with a simple chip over the top from Jordi Alba but Aubameyang still had work to do, the striker taming the ball on its third bounce

before firing it high into the net under pressure from Omar Alderete.

The second was more intricate, a superb team goal going through Busquets and Alba before Ousmane Dembele generously sidefooted across for De Jong to finish. Dembele was key to the third too, as his through ball released Gavi, who crossed to the back post where Aubameyang tapped in a third. Valencia thought they had a goal back before half-time through Soler's acrobatic finish but replays showed the ball had rolled out for what should have been a throw-in during the build-up.

Martial limps off

Soler, though, scored shortly after the restart, heading in Gil's whipped cross from the left to revive Valencia, who pushed for a second, with Soler going close with a long-range drive. But Pedri killed their momentum with his wonder-strike from distance, the youngster curling

a stunning shot from 40 yards off Aubameyang's back and into the top corner, even if goalkeeper Giorgi Mamardashvili might have done better. Sevilla had earlier stumbled again at Espanyol, another slip meaning they have now won only once in their last five league games. Rafa Mir put Sevilla in front at Cornella but Sergi Darder equalised for Espanyol early in the second half.

Sevilla's pursuit of a winner was made harder by Jules Kounde being sent off with 14 minutes left, although Youssef En-Nesyri had a golden opportunity in injury-time, only to see his finish saved. Anthony Martial, who joined Sevilla on loan from Manchester United in January, went off injured in the first half and could now miss next weekend's crunch derby at home to third-placed Real Betis. Betis, in third, can move two points behind Sevilla if they win the derby after they beat Mallorca 2-1 thanks to a late penalty from Willian Jose. —AFP



MILAN: Sassuolo's Italian goalkeeper Andrea Consigli (right) jumps for the ball with Inter Milan's Bosnian forward Edin Dzeko during the Italian Serie A football match Inter Milan vs Sassuolo on February 20, 2022. —AFP

Inter Milan miss out on top spot

MILAN: Inter Milan missed the chance to reclaim the Serie A summit on Sunday after falling to a 2-0 home defeat to giant-killers Sassuolo which allowed AC Milan to keep top spot. First half strikes from Giacomo Raspadori and Gianluca Scamacca gave Sassuolo an impressive win at the San Siro which left Inter two points behind Milan, who had opened the door for their local rivals with Saturday's draw at bottom side Salernitana. It was the latest triumph for Sassuolo at one of Italy's big three after also winning at Milan and Juventus this season. "We created a lot, and we conceded a fair amount too but we know we have quality so we faced them head on," said Sassuolo coach Alessio Dionisi to DAZN. "That's what we wanted to do and we were rewarded for it."

The ball is now in Napoli's court in an exciting three-way title race as Luciano Spalletti's side, who sit a point behind Inter in third, can move top on goal difference with a win at Cagliari on Monday evening. Simone Inzaghi's side were missing midfield lynchpin Marcelo Brozovic and starting centre-back Alessandro Bastoni to suspension and looked tired after midweek defeat to Liverpool. "We'll try to recover some physical and mental energy. We're still in the fight, there are still 13 matches left and we want to keep going," said Inzaghi.

Inter's current fragility was exposed in the eighth minute when after Berardi pinched the ball from Hakan Calhanoglu he fed Raspadori who hit a low shot which squirmed home past Samir Handanovic. And Scamacca, who is hotly tipped to move to Inter alongside teammate Davide Frattesi in the summer, stunned the home fans when he drifted into the area unmarked and headed home his 10th Serie A goal of the season from Hamed Traore's inswinging cross. The away side could have easily been three goals up at the break, as Domenico Berardi thumped a beautiful shot off the bar in the 38th minute. However Inter only had themselves to blame for not having made more of a game of it, as a wave of second-half pressure brought enough chances to at least escape with a draw. The worst offender was Lautaro Martinez, who left Inter fans opened-mouthed in the 72nd minute when he somehow poked wide with an open goal at his mercy. —AFP

After Australia furor, Djokovic kicks off his season in Dubai

DUBAI: Novak Djokovic's season, derailed in January when he was deported from Australia, finally started yesterday in Dubai with the world number one insisting players in the locker room "have been positive and welcoming" on his return. Djokovic missed the chance to win a 10th Australian Open, and 21st Grand Slam, due to the cancellation of his visa in Melbourne and eventual deportation as a result of not being vaccinated. He returns to the tour this week in the Emirates, where he will be competing for the first time since the Davis Cup Finals in Madrid last December.

Ahead of his opening round against Italian wildcard Lorenzo Musetti, Djokovic spoke to reporters on Sunday night about how it feels to be back on the tennis circuit, and whether there has been any negative reaction from his peers. "So far here most of the players that I've seen have been positive and welcoming. It's nice to see obviously, I can't say that was the case in Australia. It was a little bit strange. But here it's well so far," the 34-year-old Serb said.

Dubai organizers have dubbed the first day of the ATP event 'Magnificent Monday' and a couple of other marquee entrants, Marin Cilic and Andy Murray, will also be in action. But all eyes will be on Djokovic who last played in Serbia's Davis Cup semi-final defeat by Croatia. Djokovic, who saw Rafael Nadal win in Australia to claim a 21st major, is able to play in Dubai as

a coronavirus vaccine is not a requirement to enter the United Arab Emirates.

The Serbian is a five-time winner in Dubai and he finally starts his season with a point to prove and his number one ranking under threat. Even if he wins in Dubai, Djokovic could lose the top spot, which he has held since February 2020, to Daniil Medvedev, who is in action this week almost 15,000km away in Acapulco. Even if Djokovic defends his status this week, his refusal to get vaccinated could cause problems and cost him ranking points, particularly with two Masters tournaments coming up in the United States.

'Follow the rules'

He is on the entry list at Indian Wells from March 7 to 20, even though it is currently restricted to vaccinated players. That is followed by the Miami Open from March 21 to April 3. "I just have to follow the rules. Whatever tournament that I'm able to play, I'll be trying to get to that country and play the tournament," Djokovic said Sunday. "I really can't choose right now. It's really about where I can go and play. Wherever I have an opportunity, I'll be using probably that opportunity and going to play because this is what I do, it's what I love to do still."

There are still three more Grand Slam tournaments to play—French Open, Wimbledon and the US Open. Djokovic is the defending champion at



DUBAI: Serbian Tennis player Novak Djokovic is seen during a training session ahead of the ATP Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championship in Dubai. —AFP

Roland Garros and the All England Club. "We all hope that the health crisis will evolve in a positive direction, but if that does not change, he will need a vaccination pass and therefore Novak Djokovic will not be with us," at the French Open, French Sports Minister Roxana Maracineanu told RTL radio on Sunday.

Djokovic and Musetti have history, with the 19-year-old taking the first two sets off the Serb when they met in last year's French Open. Musetti eventually retired due to injury with Djokovic leading the last 16 clash 6-7 (7/9), 6-7 (2/7), 6-1, 6-0, 4-0. Cilic, a former world number three, will open the action against Czech qualifier Jiri Vesely. Murray is on court immediately

before Djokovic, against Australian Christopher O'Connell.

At 34, former world number one Murray is playing with a metal hip after surgery in 2019, and won just a single game as he was crushed by Spaniard Roberto Bautista Agut in Qatar last week. The second seed Andrey Rublev, fresh from a ninth career title in Marseille at the weekend, faces Briton Dan Evans on Tuesday. Number three Canadian Felix Auger-Aliassime has been drawn against Georgian Nikoloz Basilashvili and number four Italian Jannik Sinner will play Spaniard Alejandro Davidovich Fokina. Last year's Dubai winner Aslan Karatsev will face American Mackenzie McDonald. —AFP