



4 'Rise to Success' group summits Mt Kilimanjaro



5 UN experts slam online attacks on Indian journalist



13 Behind Cape Town's heavenly beaches, the hell of dogfighting



16 Indian 16-yr-old stuns chess world champion Carlsen



Russia faces sanctions blitz as Putin sends troops to Ukraine

Moscow recognizes breakaway regions • Germany halts gas pipeline project

Amir, Crown Prince meet Sisi



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives Egypt's President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi as HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah looks on yesterday. — KUNA (See Page 3)

KYIV: Russia faced a furious global diplomatic and economic backlash yesterday after President Vladimir Putin ordered his forces into Ukraine to secure two breakaway regions. Germany announced it was halting certification of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline from Russia and said the European Union would adopt "robust and massive" economic sanctions.

The White House welcomed Germany's decision on the pipeline, and said it would reveal its own measures later. Britain slapped sanctions on five Russian banks and three billionaires. Kyiv, meanwhile, recalled its top diplomat from Moscow as President Volodymyr Zelensky warned Putin's recognition of the breakaway regions heralded "further military aggression" against Ukraine.

Putin's move - which came with tens of thousands of Russian soldiers on Ukraine's borders and amid warnings of an all-out invasion - was quickly and widely denounced by Kyiv's allies in the West. "We strongly condemn all military and hybrid actions against Ukraine," Estonia's President Alar Karis declared after flying into Kyiv to stand in solidarity with Zelensky. "Indeed it is a decisive moment in European history. President Putin will answer to the future generations for his violent actions," he vowed.

The Kremlin order requires the Russian military

to secure the breakaway republics, but Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Rudenko insisted that no units had yet crossed the frontier. "For now, no one is planning to send anything anywhere. If there is a threat, then we will provide assistance in accordance with the ratified treaties," he said.

In some capitals there has been debate over whether sending troops into an area that was already controlled by Russian-backed rebels amounts to the kind of all-out invasion that would justify imposing the harshest sanctions. Nevertheless, in a statement issued during a visit to Washington, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said he was working with Kyiv's friends "to impose tough sanctions against the Russian Federation".

In Moscow the lower house of the Russian parliament, the Duma, voted to approve Putin's friendship deals with the so-called Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) and Lugansk People's Republic (LNR). This will give Putin legal cover for the deployment of forces into the rebel-held territories, but will not protect Moscow from the diplomatic consequences of his actions. Zelensky said he would decide immediately after his talks with Karis whether to cut diplomatic ties with Moscow.

Continued on Page 2

News in brief

'Most beautiful building on Earth' opens in Dubai



DUBAI: People attend the opening ceremony of the Museum of the Future yesterday. — AFP

DUBAI: Dubai opened its Museum of the Future yesterday, a structure it touts as the world's most beautiful building. The museum is a seven-storey hollow silver ellipsoid decorated with Arabic calligraphy quotes from Dubai's ruler. It takes pride of place on Sheikh Zayed Road, the city's main highway. The building's striking facade was lit up by a colorful laser light show in the evening as crowds gathered outside to catch a glimpse. It was officially opened later by Dubai's ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, whose vision of the future has been credited as the driving force behind the museum. — AFP

Dubai airports chief: No full recovery until 2024

DUBAI: Passenger traffic at Dubai international airport, the world's busiest, will not recover to pre-COVID levels before 2024, its CEO told AFP yesterday. Traffic remains "nowhere near pre-pandemic levels" despite rising to 29.1 million passengers last year. Dubai Airports chief Paul Griffiths said in an interview. The figures announced yesterday, up 12.7 percent from 2020, mean that Dubai remains the world's busiest airport for the eighth consecutive year. — AFP

Producers warn gas prices 'in God's hands'

DOHA: Major gas exporting nations said yesterday they could not guarantee prices or supplies at a summit overshadowed by the worsening Ukraine crisis which has pushed costs to record highs in Europe. Qatar's Amir, who hosted the talks, said gas producers were working to ensure "credible and reliable" supplies, on the same day as Europe's concerns over deliveries from Russia were further hit by Germany's decision to halt the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project.

The Gulf state's energy minister

said his country would help Europe as much as possible, but that the unprecedented prices paid by Europe's consumers were "in God's hands". Leaders and ministers from the 11-member Gas Exporting Countries Forum met after Russian President Vladimir Putin formally recognized two breakaway regions of Ukraine as independent and sent in troops. Germany responded by freezing the huge gas pipeline from Russia.

With Russia a key member of the exporters' forum, the Ukraine crisis was not mentioned in talks, officials said, or the final statement. Russia's Energy Minister Nikolay Shulginov made no reference to the tensions but he told the forum that "Russian companies are fully committed to existing contracts" for gas supplies.

Continued on Page 2

UAE invests in drones, robots

ABU DHABI: The United Arab Emirates is ploughing money into drones, robots and other unmanned weaponry as autonomous warfare becomes more and more widespread - including in attacks on the Gulf country by Yemeni rebels. Large, black drones with the orange logo of EDGE, the UAE's arms consortium, were on display at this week's Unmanned Systems Exhibition (UMEX), along with remote-controlled machineguns and other "smart" weapons.

The exhibition comes at a time of growing unmanned attacks around the region, including the January 17 drone-and-missile assault by Yemen rebels that killed three oil workers in Abu Dhabi, the first in a series of similar incidents. "Autonomous systems are becoming ever more prevalent around the world," Miles Chambers, EDGE's director of international business development, told AFP.

"We are really heavily investing in developing our autonomous capability... as well as in electronic warfare and in our



ABU DHABI: Visitors stand by a model of a "kamikaze drone" by EDGE at the UMEX exhibition yesterday. — AFP

smart munitions. These are our three pillars." EDGE, an Abu Dhabi-based defense consortium that groups 25 Emirati firms, was formed three years ago but reached an estimated \$4.8 billion in arms sales in 2020 - nearly all of them to the UAE government.

The group was ranked 23rd among the 100 top arms-producing and military services around the globe in 2020, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

EDGE's most lucrative deals have included maintenance of military jets, worth almost \$4 billion, as well as providing guided munitions at \$880 million. — AFP



DOHA: Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani chairs the final session of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum summit yesterday. — AFP

Only 9% of plastic recycled worldwide

PARIS: Less than 10 percent of the plastic used across the world is recycled, the OECD said yesterday, calling for "coordinated and global solutions" ahead of expected talks on an international plastics treaty. A new report by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development report found that 460 million tons of plastics were used in 2019, the number nearly doubling since 2000.

The amount of plastic waste had more than doubled during that time to 353 million tons, the Paris-based OECD said. "After taking into account losses during recycling, only nine percent of plastic waste was ultimately recycled, while 19 percent was incinerated and almost 50 percent went to sanitary landfills," it said in its Global Plastics Outlook. "The remaining 22 percent was disposed of in uncontrolled dumpsites, burned in open pits or leaked into the environment."

The COVID-19 pandemic saw the use of

plastics drop by 2.2 percent in 2020 compared to the previous year. However single-use plastics rose and overall use is "projected to pick up again" as the economy rebounds. Plastics contributed 3.4 percent of global greenhouse emissions in 2019, 90 percent of it from "production and conversion from fossil fuels", the report said.

In the face of rampant global warming and pollution, it is "crucial that countries respond to the challenge with coordinated and global solutions", OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann said in the report. The OECD proposed a series of "levers" to address the issue, including developing the market for recycled plastics, which only represent six percent of the total - largely because they are more expensive.

It added that new technologies related to decreasing the environmental footprint of plastic represented only 1.2 percent of all innovation concerning the product. While calling for "a more circular plastics lifecycle", the OECD said that policies must also restrain overall consumption. It also called for "major investments in basic waste management infrastructure", including €25 billion (\$28 billion) a year to go towards efforts in low and middle-income countries. — AFP

Local

EU, GCC ministers review 'fruitful progress' in strategic partnership

Kuwait's Foreign Minister participates in GCC-EU meeting

BRUSSELS: The EU and GCC reviewed the fruitful progress in the strategic partnership between the two blocs and stressed the importance of continuing to strengthen relations between both sides in light of regional challenges, in order to be a strong and effective basis for regional and international security and stability. This was stated in the Co-Chairs' Statement released Tuesday following the 26th Session of the GCC-EU Joint Council and Ministerial Meeting.

Kuwait's Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and Acting Defense Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah participated in the session. The GCC delegation was headed by Prince Faisal Bin Farhan Al-Saud, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia and Chairman of the current session of the Ministerial Council of the GCC, and the EU delegation was headed by Josep Borrell, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

The 19-point statement noted that the Ministers agreed on the importance of enhancing relations between the GCC and the EU in a wide range of areas, including political dialogue, regional security, counterterrorism, trade and investment, energy, climate change, education, health and cybersecurity and to strengthen coordination in multilateral forums. To this effect, they endorsed a Joint Cooperation program for the period 2022-2027. They affirmed that this partnership contributes to deepening mutual trust, achieving common interests, and maintaining regional and international security.

Joint action

The Ministers stressed the importance

of promoting joint action in combating climate change, protecting the environment and developing renewable energies. The Ministers exchanged views on issues of common interest, including the Middle East Peace Process, Yemen, Iran, Libya, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Afghanistan. They stressed the strategic importance of close coordination between the GCC and the EU in this regard. The Ministers stressed the urgent need to improve the humanitarian situation in Yemen, agree on a ceasefire without preconditions, and reach a political resolution to the conflict



Joint action to combat climate change

through negotiations facilitated by the UN, based on the GCC Initiative and its implementation mechanism, the outcomes of Yemen's National Dialogue Conference, and UN Security Council Resolution 2216. They underscored the importance of Saudi Arabia's initiative for a ceasefire and political solution in Yemen. The Ministers expressed their condemnation in the strongest terms of the terrorist attacks launched by the Houthi militia using missiles and drones against the UAE and Saudi Arabia, and expressed support for peaceful solutions for Yemen. They reaffirmed that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and

security. The Ministers reiterated their concern at the lack of progress towards resolving the dispute between the UAE and Iran over the three islands Abu Musa, Lesser Tunb and Greater Tunb. They reiterated their support for a peaceful settlement of this dispute in accordance with international law, either through direct negotiations between the parties or by referring the matter to the International Court of Justice.

The Ministers condemned the proliferation of ballistic missiles and drone systems used in hundreds of attacks against civilians, civilian infrastructure and the Global Coalition Against the so-called Islamic State (IS). The Ministers addressed the Iran nuclear talks in Vienna and stressed that a full and effective implementation of the JCPOA can contribute to comprehensive and lasting efforts to ensure that the Gulf region remains permanently free of nuclear weapons and help address other regional issues. The Ministers agreed on the importance of continued common international efforts to enhance stability and prosperity in Iraq, prevent the spread of violent extremism in the country, including (IS), and improve prospects for economic recovery, and energy independence. The Ministers expressed their concern regarding the humanitarian and economic crisis in Afghanistan, and agreed on the importance to urgently respond to the needs of the Afghan people, including refugees and displaced persons.

Humanitarian situation

On Syria, the Ministers expressed their deep concern over the deteriorating humanitarian situation. They agreed on the need to provide basic life-saving assistance in all areas of Syria, as part of the



BRUSSELS: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah attends the 26th Session of the GCC-EU Joint Council and Ministerial Meeting. — KUNA

implementation of the UN Humanitarian Response Plan. Regarding Lebanon, the Ministers viewed positively the resumption of regular meetings of the Council of Ministers of Lebanon and urged expeditious and effective decisions by the Lebanese Government to initiate direly needed reforms that would enable a quick conclusion of the agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). On the Middle East Peace Process, the Ministers called for de-escalation in Jerusalem and reiterated their commitment to a two-state solution that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people, based on 1967 lines and UNSC resolutions 242, 338, 2334 and other relevant UN resolutions, Jerusalem as the shared capital of both states, and a just and fair settlement for refugees. They reit-

erated the importance of sustained financial support for UNRWA. On Libya, the Ministers re-affirmed their support for the UN efforts to hold free, fair, inclusive and credible presidential and parliamentary elections. GCC and EU Ministers agreed to hold their next meeting in 2023 in the GCC region.

Sheikh Dr Ahmad had also met separately with Belgium Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sophie Willems on the sidelines of the 26th EU-GCC council ministerial meeting. The meeting was held in Brussels where they reviewed bilateral relations and ways to strengthen it in various fields to achieve the common interests of the two countries, in addition to discussing the latest developments on the regional and international arenas. — KUNA

Workshop to help support women's issues on social media

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The Women's Cultural Social Society held a workshop on the 'role of digital media in supporting women's issues', presented by Ashwaq Al-Mudhaf, who gave advice and tips to women to deliver their message. She started with how to use social media tools to deliver messages on important issues.

"Social media tools are available free of charge. The woman has a message, but it's not reaching the target. This is because she uses social media in a wrong way, as she doesn't have enough knowledge. So today I am presenting this workshop to give them plans and tools of social media that will help them deliver their message," Mudhaf said.

"In the beginning I focus on letting them know what their message is, how to define it, make it clear, explain it, plan when to post or publish it, and where (on which channel). They should know how to measure their performance. We all know that today 'what is measurable is manageable,'" she added.

The number of followers, whether on Twitter, Instagram, or any other app, is not very important. "What matters most is who or how many people retweeted or shared the post, which ensures that the message will reach the desired goal. If you have 10 followers, they can let your message reach 100 people. The number of followers is not a measure of the success of delivering the message. What matters is that my real followers passed the message. There is no sense of having 10,000 followers who are not active and do not forward my message, and most probably these are fake followers," explained Mudhaf.

"The user should always care about all her followers. She should respond to all their messages. If she is receiving many direct messages and is not able to respond to all of them, she can write in her bio on the top that she does not reply to DMs. You should respond to your attackers or critics, but be careful, as anything posted on the Internet will stay

there forever, and you will be responsible for it," she pointed out.

"If you have a message that you want to deliver, your account should be 'business' or at least public to show your messages. If you have bought fake followers, it will show in the likes and comments. On Twitter, you should always 'like' your message, and on Instagram, always pin your message in both the Feed and Highlights," she explained.

The time of posting the message also matters. "If you want to deliver your message, you should post it after 6:00 pm. In our community, people are not morning persons. The peak is between 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm. Friday is a dead day for Instagram, so don't post on Fridays," Mudhaf said. To deliver a message, there should be specific goals. "Mention even the small details. The more specific the details, the more realistic the goal. Any goal without a plan is a dream," she said.

Energy is a must to realize all of this. "Quality sleep, proper food and exercise all are important. Sleeping well will provide 50 percent of the energy. Proper nutrition will help realize your plan, and people should drink enough water," concluded Mudhaf.



KUWAIT: Ashwaq Al-Mudhaf speaks during the workshop at the Women's Cultural Social Society. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

EU stamp to mark anniversary of cooperation with Kuwait

KUWAIT: The European Union Ambassador to Kuwait Dr Cristian Tudor hosted in his residence the launch of the stamp to mark the 5th anniversary of the Cooperation Arrangement between the European External Action Service and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kuwait. The launch was attended by members of Kuwait Philatelic and Numismatic Society Mohammed Abdel Hadi Jamal and Dr Adel Hussain Al-Abdul-Razzaq as well as the French Ambassador to Kuwait Claire Le Flecher, as France holds the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union.

During the event, Dr Cristian Tudor thanked the Kuwaiti Philatelic and

Numismatic society for their valuable contribution to the design and production of the stamp. He also thanked the Ministry of State for Services Affairs for issuing the stamp. He said that the stamp consists of landmarks from each of the 27 EU Member States. He stressed that Kuwait was the first GCC country to sign a Cooperation Arrangement with the European Union. This Arrangement is a cornerstone in EU-Kuwait relations, which paved the way for the EU and Kuwait to deepen dialogue and to develop cooperation in various areas such as trade, investment, economy, human rights, security, humanitarian assistance cooperation and development. The EU Ambassador concluded his speech by sending his best

wishes to the Amir of Kuwait His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the Crown Prince His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the Kuwaiti people on the occasion of Kuwait's National Day and Liberation Day.

Dr Adel Al-Abdul-Razzaq, board member of the Philatelic and Numismatic Society addressed in his speech the design and the production of the stamp. He also thanked the Kuwaiti artist Jaber Al-Hindal from the Philatelic and Numismatic Society for his notable work in designing the stamp. Dr Adel presented to the EU Ambassador and the French Ambassador framed copies of the stamp.



KUWAIT: The European Union Ambassador to Kuwait Dr Cristian Tudor (left) with members of Kuwait Philatelic and Numismatic Society Mohammed Abdel Hadi Jamal and Dr Adel Hussain Al-Abdul-Razzaq.

Russia faces sanctions blitz...

Continued from Page 1

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that if Kyiv did so, it would be "an extremely undesirable scenario that would make everything even more difficult". Meanwhile, in the frontline town of Shchastya, shellfire rang out around an electric power station as fearful residents awaited the Russian deployment. A shell hit the roof of 59-year-old Valentyna Shmatkova's apartment block overnight, shattering all the windows in her two-room apartment.

"We spent the war in the basement," she said, referring to the 2014 fighting that saw the region break away from Ukraine. "But we weren't expecting this. We never thought Ukraine and Russia wouldn't end up agreeing." Asked what she thought of Putin's

decision to recognize the republics, Shmatkova laughed: "I have no idea what's going on, we have no light, no electricity, nothing!"

Most Western officials were not yet describing Putin's moves as an invasion, but US officials say there is a 150,000-strong Russian force poised to launch an all-out assault. Putin announced he was recognizing the territories, which broke away from Kyiv's control in 2014, in a day of political theatre in Moscow. After a dramatic televised meeting with his top government, military and security officials, Putin spoke to the Russian people in a 65-minute address from his Kremlin office.

In the often angry speech, Putin railed against Ukraine as a failed state and "puppet" of the West, accusing Kyiv of preparing a "blitzkrieg" to retake the separatist regions. The move to recognize them, Putin said, was "a long overdue decision". He was then shown signing "friendship" agreements with rebel leaders that allowed for the official deployment of Russian forces to "maintain peace" and the sharing of military bases and border protection. — AFP

Producers warn gas prices...

Continued from Page 1

The United States has asked Qatar to help Europe if Russian supplies are cut, but its Energy Minister Saad Sherida Al-Kaabi said his country could not rescue Europe alone. Russia accounts for about 40 percent of the European market and Qatar five percent. It would be "virtually impossible" for one country to replace that amount of gas, Kaabi told a news conference. Qatar's supplies are also tied up in long-term contracts, many with Asian countries including Japan, South Korea and China.

"We are supportive of the European Union and we are ready to supply whatever is possible from our side and the volume that will be available while abiding by contracts," Kaabi said. The minister estimated

that 10-15 percent of shipments under Qatar's long-term contracts could potentially be diverted. But he insisted that the record prices in Europe had their roots in a lack of investment before the Ukraine crisis.

Qatar and other producer nations want long-term contracts of up to 25 years to "underpin" the huge investments made in extracting, processing and transporting gas. "Everything that is going on today in pricing is fundamentally because of a lack of investments and that will take time to catch up," Kaabi said. Asked whether European consumers would have to pay more because of the Ukraine crisis, he said: "Predicting how prices will be, (whether they) will go up or down, that is in God's hands not mine."

The summit statement made no mention of increasing supplies and instead stressed the "fundamental role" of long-term contracts and linking gas prices to oil values to bolster investment. But Qatar's Amir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, said forum countries were "working hard to ensure a credible and reliable supply of natural gas to world markets and preserve the stability of those markets". — AFP

Local

Amir discusses ties, various topics with Egyptian President

Talks focus on expanding scope of cooperation between Kuwait, Egypt



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi. — Amiri Diwan photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah welcomes Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah welcomes Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sees off Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi at the airport.



Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi meets Kuwait's Prime Minister His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday received Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, along with his accompanying delegation. The audience was attended by His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. His Highness the Amir and the Egyptian President held cordial conversations, depicting the solid and historic relations between the two brotherly countries and peoples. Moreover, the Kuwaiti-Egyptian summit talks dealt with means of boosting these close relations and the fruitful cooperation in various sectors for serving common interests within frameworks of the close and brothering bonds between the two states.

The audience was attended by Minister of the Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah and Head of the Amiri Diwan Sheikh Mubarak Faisal Saud Al-Sabah.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince received President Sisi at Bayan Palace, along with his accompanying delegation, on the occasion of their official visit to the State of Kuwait. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal headed the Kuwaiti side in official talks with the Egyptian party, led by President Sisi and attended by senior officials. His Highness the Prime Minister of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and ranking state officials were also present in the official discussions.

Kuwaiti Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah stated that the talks were held in a cordial atmosphere, reflecting depth of the solid and brotherly relations between Kuwait and Egypt. The Kuwaiti-Egyptian talks dealt with means of cementing further the deep-rooted relations for the sake of expanding the scope of cooperation, in addition to issues of joint concern, as well as latest developments on the international and regional arenas. Later, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal held a luncheon in honor of the Egyptian President and his entourage.

The visiting Egyptian President also received His Highness the Prime Minister at the guests' residence at Bayan Palace. The meeting was attended by the Foreign Minister, Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and the Acting Defense Minister, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, and head of the accompanying honorary mission and Adviser at the Amiri Diwan Mohammad Dhaifullah Sharar. President Sisi later wrapped up his official visit to Kuwait and was seen off at the airport by His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and senior state officials. — KUNA

Cabinet congratulates Kuwait on National, Liberation Days

KUWAIT: In its weekly meeting on Monday, the Cabinet, headed by His Highness the Premier Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, offered sincere congratulations to the Kuwaiti leadership, namely His Highness the Amir and His Highness the Crown Prince, and to the Kuwaiti people on the advent of the 61st anniversary of the National Day, and the 31st anniversary of Liberation Day. According to Deputy Premier and Acting Foreign Minister and Acting Minister for Cabinet Affairs Dr Mohammad Al-Fares, the Cabinet recalled the great sacrifices made by the Kuwaiti people to defeat the Iraqi invasion and adhering to the homeland's legitimacy as a nation. The Cabinet also extended its appreciation and gratitude to the blessed efforts made by brothers and friends to liberate the State of Kuwait and clear it from the invading forces. Then the Cabinet followed up on latest developments related to the Coronavirus pandemic, listening in this regard to a briefing by Minister of Health Dr Khalid Saeed. It voiced relief over declining number of positive cases; deeming it "positive results", while urging the public to keep on abiding by health measures en route back to normalcy.

The Cabinet then reviewed National Assembly affairs, mainly the one related to renewing confidence in Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah on the February 16th parliament session, congratulating the aforementioned Cabinet member on the matter, as well as praising his competence in addressing interpellation items. It also reviewed an interpellation filed by MP Abdullah



KUWAIT: His Highness the Premier Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah chairs the Cabinet's meeting. — KUNA

Al-Mudhaf to Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Ali Al-Moussa. Renewing support for the minister in question, the Cabinet said based on Article 135 of the National Assembly Bylaw, the interpellation would be included in the agenda of the Forthcoming parliamentary session. Noting that interpellation is a right for MPs guaranteed by the Constitution, the Cabinet affirmed its full confidence in the Minister Al-Moussa and its keenness on backing him so to pursue sincere efforts in fulfilling the tasks accorded to him.

Other issues discussed during the meeting included follow up on the State's annual plan (from April 1 to September 30, 2021), examining a draft law to approve the Second Protocol to the 1954 Hague Convention for criminal acts committed against cultural property, and approving the State of Kuwait joining a pan-Arab commercial services' agreement. All draft laws were forwarded to His Highness the Amir, then the National Assembly for ratification. It also reviewed latest Arab, regional and international developments, and expressed condolences to the friendly people of Brazil over victims of flash floods that hit the hillside city of Petropolis. — KUNA

The Chinese envoy also praised Kuwait's mediation for resolving the Gulf crisis, thus contributing to the preservation of the regional peace and stability. In Amman, the Kuwaiti Ambassador Aziz Al-Daihani said in an interview with the official news agency, Petra, marking the Kuwaiti national occasion, that the Kuwait-Jordan relations have been distinguished since 1961, noting that the two countries have signed 73 accords and memos covering diverse sectors. Kuwaiti investments in Jordan have reached \$18 billion, he confirmed, noting that stances by the two countries toward regional and international causes have been identical. In Gaza, Palestine's Ambassador to the State of Kuwait Rami Tahboub took part in an online seminar, organized by Israa University in Gaza, shedding light on Kuwait's support for the Palestinian cause. Ambassador Tahboub expressed felicitations to the Kuwaiti leaders on the national days, affirming that the Kuwaiti people have been among the most ardent supporters for the Palestinian cause, noting that the Kuwaiti stance has been based on the commitment to justice, the Arab and Islamic identity of Jerusalem. He noted that the Palestine Liberation Organization had been launched in Kuwait which also hosted hundreds Palestinian teachers, revealing that Kuwait paid \$100 million to the Palestinian administration over the past four years. Kuwait, since 2019, has paid \$50 million to the UN relief agency, UNRWA, he added. — KUNA

Diplomats mark Kuwait's National Days

KUWAIT: French Ambassador to Kuwait Claire Le Flecher yesterday expressed pride that her nation had participated in the liberation of the State Kuwait from "claws of the flagrant Iraqi occupation" in 1991. In remarks to KUNA marking the 61st anniversary of the State of Kuwait Independence and the 31st Liberation Day, the ambassador lauded Kuwait's leading role for bolstering regional peace and expressed satisfaction at the level of relations between the Gulf country and her nation. She congratulated Their Highnesses, the Amir and the Crown Prince, on the national occasions, wishing Kuwait further progress and prosperity. Meanwhile, the Chinese Ambassador to Kuwait Li Minggang said the achievements that has Kuwait made over the years are worth celebrating, expressing readiness to "twin" the two nations' development strategies. He expressed congratulations to the top Kuwaiti leaders on the national days as well as on the success in combating the novel coronavirus, where the country largely witnessed restoration of normal life.

On the occasion of the



Subscribe or renew your subscription
KD 20 instead of KD 30 for 1 year

For individuals only

Tel: 24833199 ext: 353-355-356



kuwaittimes.net

Local

Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First Daily in The Arabian Gulf

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF
ESTABLISHED 1961

Founder and Publisher
YOUSUF S. AL-ALYAN

Editor-in-Chief
ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYAN

EDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432
ADVERTISING : 24835616/7
FAX : 24835620/1
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 353-355-356
ACCOUNTS : 24833199 Extn. 125
COMMERCIAL : 24835618

P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.net

'Rise to Success' group summits Mt Kilimanjaro

Kuwait flag and Kuwait Times, Kuwait News banner raised on top



(From left) Basel Al-Jarallah and Kuwait Times Deputy Editor-in-Chief Abdullah Bofain



Sheikh Mohammad Al-Thani



The summiteers jubilate.

News in brief

Blood donation drive launched

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health announced yesterday the launch of a blood donation campaign (Kuwait in My Blood) starting today at the Central Blood Bank. In a statement to KUNA, head of the blood transfer department in the ministry of health Reem Al-Radhwan said that this campaign comes on the occasion of the national holidays of Kuwait. "This is the fifth year for the campaign, and it aims to spread awareness about giving for our country as our national duty towards it," she said. "In 2021, we were able to collect 83,778 bags of blood from all branches, but this year we seek to increase the number of donors to meet the clinical needs of the hospitals and to change the understanding of donation in the time of need," she noted. — KUNA

Bid to end violence against women

CAIRO: A Kuwaiti diplomat yesterday hailed a new pan-Arab plan to clamp down on violence against women, saying the introduction of new legislations over the matter is a "positive step" forward. Any measure aiming to generate awareness on the need to stop all forms of violence against women is supported by all Arab states, the Kuwaiti assistant foreign minister for human rights affairs said on the sidelines of pan-Arab talks on human rights. He mentioned recent laws his country had approved to combat violence against women, while the new Arab strategy would enable countries around the region to address the matter collectively. — KUNA

Pavilion displays relief efforts

DUBAI: Kuwait's pavilion at Expo Dubai 2020 displays the country's leading role in the humanitarian and relief field, for which Kuwait has been named a Humanitarian Center in honor of the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The display shows the efforts of all organizations and entities and their vital role in providing aid and relief for different countries and people. — KUNA



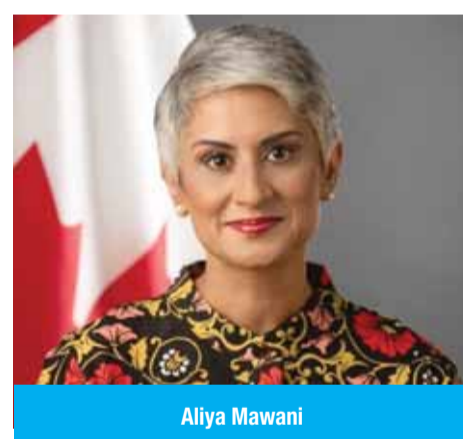
KUWAIT: Kuwait's flag and Kuwait Times and Kuwait News banner were raised 5,895 meters above sea level on top of Mount Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest summit. The 'Rise to Success' group organized a trip to Tanzania recently led by Sheikh Mohammad Al-Thani, featuring 27 participants from 17 countries. Kuwait was represented by Basel Al-Jarallah and Kuwait Times Deputy Editor-in-Chief Abdullah Bofain.

Kuwait: A Key Defense and Security Partner for Canada

By Ambassador of Canada to Kuwait Aliya Mawani and Brigadier-General Tim Arsenault, Commander of Joint Task Force IMPACT and Task Force Central, in Camp Canada, Kuwait.

KUWAIT: As Kuwait celebrates its 31st Liberation Day, we take the opportunity to recognize this country as one of Canada's most important defense and security partners in the Middle East. Canada and Kuwait have enjoyed strong bilateral ties since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1965, reinforced by Canada's role in helping to liberate Kuwait from occupation during the first Gulf War (1990-1991).

Three decades later, this partnership remains strong. Kuwait provides pivotal support to Canada's security and stabilization operations in the Middle East by hosting our Task Force headquarters and an operational support hub at Camp Canada, Ali Al Salem Air Base. Since 2011, Kuwait has been the base for several hundred Canadian service personnel, who take part in multinational counterterrorism and stabilization operations, including the Global Coalition against Daesh, and capacity-



Aliya Mawani



Tim Arsenault

building activities with partners across the region. Canada and Kuwait are also working together as members of the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), a multinational maritime partnership that promotes security, stability, and prosperity in the region.

The strength of our partnership was recently exemplified during evacuation efforts from Afghanistan. In August 2021, Kuwait facilitated Canada's evacuation of 3,700 Afghan and Canadian citizens from Kabul to Canada via Ali Al Salem Air Base. It was over 30 years ago, on August 24, 1990, that Canada deployed a naval task force to the Gulf. A month later on September 14, 1990, Canada dispatched CF-18 Hornet fighter aircraft to fly patrols. The force would grow to a Wing of 24 aircraft known as the "Desert Cats." Between August 10, 1990 and April 16, 1991, some 4,500 Canadian service personnel participated in the liberation of Kuwait.

The State of Kuwait has officially recognized the contributions of Canadian Armed Forces members and veterans who participated in the country's liberation, presenting them with medals in recognition of their service. Notably, the liberation of Kuwait marked the first time that women in the Canadian Armed Forces deployed to a war zone in combat roles, reflecting Canada's commitment to promoting gender equality in all aspects of society.

As Canada and Kuwait continue to work together to promote peace and security in the region, we pay tribute to all of the men and women who played a role in Kuwait's liberation and look forward to a strong and lasting Canada-Kuwait partnership. On this occasion, we would like to take this opportunity to extend our warmest congratulations to the State of Kuwait on its National and Liberation Days.

Mexican ambassador congratulates Kuwait on national holidays

KUWAIT: Ambassador of Mexico to Kuwait Miguel Angel Isidro released the following statement congratulating Kuwait on its national holidays:

"I am truly privileged and honored to celebrate alongside the friendly nation of the State of Kuwait and its people, the milestone of the 61st Independence Day and 31st Liberation Day celebrations. On this historic occasion, I wish to extend to His Highness the Amir of the State of Kuwait, His Highness the Crown Prince, His Highness the Prime Minister, the government and the people of the State of Kuwait, our heartfelt congratulations and best wishes.

"Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, our countries keep a friendly bilateral relationship, as well as close collaborations in different sectors. Also, Mexico and Kuwait are keen to expand economic and commercial relations between the two countries upon a mutually beneficial basis. Within this framework, we are optimistic that the bilateral relationship between the two countries will further strengthen in the years ahead to our mutual benefit.

"Let me conclude this message by extending again my best wishes to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for his personal



Miguel Angel Isidro

well-being, success, and health, as well as peace and prosperity to all citizens of the country as you celebrate your National and Liberation Days."

St Regis, Sheraton, Four Points celebrates Kuwait's National, Liberation Days

KUWAIT: To celebrate the 61st National Day and the 31st Liberation Day of Kuwait, The St Regis Kuwait, Sheraton Kuwait and Four Points by Sheraton Kuwait joins the country as it lights up with the colors of the national flag, offering the most magnificent view of the city of Kuwait.

Since the hotel's inception decades ago, this iconic complex continues to achieve brilliance, coupled with timeless hospitality and upgraded luxury services refined over five decades. It has remained a landmark, proven through its continued progress and a stellar record of accomplishments and history of achievements.

Marking the occasion of the national holidays, Fahed Abushaar, the General Manager of St Regis Kuwait and Sheraton Kuwait and Mounir Amer, the General Manager of Four Points by

Sheraton Kuwait expressed their pride in serving Kuwait and its gracious people through the unparalleled and personalized service within the integrated hotel complex. They offer their sincere congratulations and utmost appreciation to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Exclusive hotel packages await on rooms and suites for all valued guests during the national holidays promising a staycation with the highest standards of luxury and hospitality, in addition to exclusive culinary offers at the restaurants with delicious Kuwaiti and international dishes offered to the affluent tastemakers. We invite you to visit our Cake Boutique for a glimpse of our holiday-themed cakes and sweets.





Ex-factory boy aims for South Korean presidency

In Turkish-funded Syria camps, tents give way to homes

Page 6

Page 7

US, allies lambast Russia over Ukraine

Moscow still 'open to diplomacy for a diplomatic solution'

UNITED NATIONS, United States: The United States and its allies rounded on Russia during an emergency Security Council session Monday, denouncing Vladimir Putin's recognition of rebel-held areas in Ukraine and his ordered deployment of troops as a gross violation of international law and "pretext for war."

Addressing the council, US Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield heaped scorn on Putin's assertion that the Russian troops would take on a peacekeeping role in the Donetsk and Lugansk areas. "He calls them peacekeepers. This is nonsense. We know what they really are," Thomas-Greenfield said. Ukraine's ambassador Sergiy Kyslytsya insisted that his country's borders remain "unchangeable" despite Russia's actions.

Meanwhile, Russia's ambassador to the UN, Vasily Nebenzya, said Moscow is still "open to diplomacy for a diplomatic solution"—but warned against what he dubbed Ukrainian aggression. "Allowing a new bloodbath in the Donbass is something we do not intend to do," he added, referring to the region encompassing Donetsk and Lugansk.

Putin's order has been widely seen as paving the way for an operation to deploy part of the potential invasion force he has massed on Ukraine's borders. In a lengthy televised national address announcing his recognition of the rebel-held areas, Putin railed against Ukraine as a failed state and "puppet" of the West, repeatedly suggesting it was essentially part of Russia.

Thomas-Greenfield said the speech amounted to a "series of outrageous, false claims" that were aimed at "creating a pretext for war." Her remarks came

just before a White House spokesperson told AFP that Washington yesterday would impose sanctions on Moscow following Putin's order.

'Critical' moment

Russia—which currently holds the rotating presidency of the Council—had wanted the session to be closed, but the United States insisted it be public. Multiple countries had requested Monday's emergency meeting based on a letter from Ukraine that demanded its representative be able to attend. Speaking before the UN late Monday, Kyslytsya challenged the Security Council to defy Russian intimidation, saying: "The United Nations is sick." "It's been hit by the virus spread by the Kremlin. Will it succumb to this virus?" he said. "It is in the hands of the membership."

The Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, Rosemary DiCarlo, voiced "regret" that Russian troops were ordered to eastern Ukraine. "The next hours and days will be critical," DiCarlo said. "The risk of major conflict is real and needs to be prevented at all costs." Putin's recognition of the separatist republics effectively buries a fragile 2015 peace plan for the conflict, and opens the door for direct Russian military involvement. Moscow provided no details or date for any deployment of the "peacekeeping" forces, only saying that it "comes into force from the day it was signed."

British envoy Barbara Woodward said the council must be united in urging Russia to "de-escalate" and "respect its obligations." "Russia has brought us to



LVIV, Ukraine: People take part in a shooting training course at a shooting complex outside Lviv yesterday. —AFP

the brink. We urge Russia to step back," Woodward said, as China called for restraint by "all sides." Geraldine Byrne Nason, Ireland's ambassador to the UN, called Russia's actions "a flagrant violation of international law," saying the

"unilateral step" had "cast into doubt all the diplomatic efforts of past weeks."

Martin Kimani of Kenya pointed out that many countries were "birthed by the ending of empire" and urged against "dangerous nostalgia" for past borders,

saying Russia's move "breaches the territorial integrity of Ukraine." "Multilateralism lies on its deathbed tonight. It has been assaulted today, as it has been by other powerful states in the recent past," Kimani said. —AFP

UN experts slam online attacks on Indian journalist

NEW DELHI: UN rights experts have called for an end to "misogynistic and sectarian" online attacks against a Muslim Indian woman journalist, asking the authorities to investigate the harassment.

Rana Ayyub, a fierce critic of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Hindu nationalist government of his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has been the target of a relentless campaign of online abuse—including death and rape threats.

She is the "victim of intensifying attacks and threats online by far-right Hindu nationalist groups", the independent rapporteurs, who do not speak for the United Nations but are mandated to report to it, said in a statement Monday.

They said these attacks were in response to Ayyub's reporting on issues affecting India's minority Muslims, her criticism of the government's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic, and her commentary on the recent hijab ban at schools in the southern state of Karnataka.

The rapporteurs added that the Indian government had failed to condemn or investigate the attacks. She "has been subjected to legal harassment by the Indian authorities in relation to her reporting", they said, including the freezing of her bank account and other assets.

Sectarian riots

Ayyub, 37, began as an investigative journalist



Rana Ayyub

and wrote a book accusing Prime Minister Narendra Modi of being complicit in deadly sectarian violence in Gujarat in 2002, when he was state premier. Investigators cleared Modi of involvement.

She has since become a commentator for The Washington Post and other media. This week, the Post put out a full-page advert saying Ayyub faces threats almost daily and that the free press is "under attack" in India.

The Indian mission at the UN in Geneva tweeted in response to the rapporteurs' statement that allegations of "so-called judicial harassment are baseless & unwarranted", and that advancing "a misleading narrative only tarnishes" the UN's reputation.

Ayyub told AFP she was not surprised by this dismissal of the experts' findings. "If I had not had the global support, I would possibly not have been alive (these past years)," she said, calling mainstream Indian media "a complicit and silent bystander" in the abuse she has suffered. —AFP

supporters also blocked a bridge for days between the Canadian city of Windsor and the US city of Detroit, freezing a major trade route critical for industry including automobile manufacturing.

'Tools to restore order'

The last big rigs were towed away Sunday from Canada's capital, where the streets were quiet for the first time in almost a month following a massive police operation to end the drawn-out siege. Canadian lawmakers were to vote later Monday on whether or not to support extending the Emergencies Act for an additional 30 days.

Trudeau stressed his government did not want to use the measure but felt it had been boxed into a corner. "After weeks of dangerous and unlawful activities, after weeks of people being harassed in the neighborhoods, (and) after evidence of increased ideologically motivated violent extremism activity across the country," local authorities needed "more tools to restore order," Trudeau said.

The prime minister has been criticized by supporters of the protests for heavy-handed tactics, but Trudeau shot back that the movement—which started as a home-grown protest—had been infiltrated by foreign elements.

"A flood of misinformation and disinformation washed over Canada" during the protests, including from foreign sources, he said, and the blockades and occupations "received disturbing amounts of foreign funding to destabilize Canada's democracy." Canadians have every right to disagree with him, Trudeau said. —AFP

Canada blockades lifted, 'emergency is not over'

OTTAWA: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Monday defended his use of emergency powers to end weeks-long trucker-led protests and argued that lingering threats require the measures to remain in force for now. Trudeau's decision earlier this month to invoke the Emergencies Act—for only the second time in Canada's history—has been criticized as overreach by his political opponents. The Canadian Civil Liberties Union is suing the government.

"This state of emergency is not over," Trudeau said in his first appearance before reporters since authorities at the weekend broke up what the prime minister called "dangerous and unlawful" protests that brought the capital Ottawa to a standstill and blocked border crossings into the United States.

"There continues to be real concerns about the coming days," he added. Canada has been in the international spotlight for weeks as thousands of protesters, led by truck drivers furious over Covid-19 vaccination requirements for driving freight across the border with the United States, converged on Ottawa and hunkered down for a siege.

Initially dismissed by authorities, the protesters later expanded their demands to a broader rejection of Covid restrictions in Canada. Truckers and their

FANTASTIC FEBRUARY OFFERS
23 FEB - 1 MAR 2022

600 TROLLEY FREE

لولو 600 ترولي مجاناً

لحمه 7 ايام For 6 Days

23 FEB - 28 FEB 2022

3rd February 2022 - 19th March 2022

15,000 KD Gift Vouchers

50 100 1000 500

Biryani Delights

Arabian Delights

EXOTIC CUTS

SHRIMP

FRUITFUL DEALS

Cheese

THRILLS

SCAN THE QR CODE

GET OUR WEEKLY OFFERS ON YOUR MOBILE

Where the world comes to shop, safely!

[LuluHypermarketKW](#) [luluhyperkw](#) [luluhyperkw](#) [luluhypermarket.com](#)

International

South Sudanese disillusioned by lumbering peace process

Economy has effectively been held hostage by political corruption

JUBA: When Tunda Henry's family fled South Sudan's brutal civil war five years ago, they vowed to return after the upheaval. But as the young nation's shaky peace process struggles to make progress, he fears that day may never come. Yesterday marked two years since President Salva Kiir and his deputy Riek Machar formed a unity government, cementing a peace deal signed in 2018 that brought an end to a conflict that cost almost 400,000 lives.

Since then, the world's newest nation has lurched from crisis to crisis, battling flooding, hunger, interethnic violence and political malaise as the promises held out by the peace agreement fail to materialise, leaving citizens like Henry deeply disillusioned.

"I am not happy," said the father-of-five, the only person in his family to stay in South Sudan. Fear continues to dog his life, making it near impossible for him to travel to his home village from the capital Juba. "Some people disappear on the way," he said, with rebel groups such as the National Salvation Front (NAS) — which did not sign up to the peace deal — still at large.

Meanwhile political bickering threatens to undo even the fragile gains made in implementing the peace process. Machar and Kiir have been unable to agree on key provisions such as the creation of a unified army that will bring

their forces under a single command.

With less than a year left before elections are due, South Sudan risks "going back to conflict", the United Nations warned earlier this month, barely a decade after winning its hard-fought independence from Sudan in 2011. The five-year civil war which erupted in 2013 forced millions of people to flee their homes, with Henry's family now living as refugees in Uganda.



'Some people disappear on the way'

The 40-year-old works two jobs in Juba, ferrying customers on his motorcycle to earn extra cash to supplement his teacher's salary of 35,000 South Sudanese pounds (\$80) — more than half of which is spent on rent. "My salary could not sustain me... I have to rent a house, I have to send money to my family," he said.

'Donor fatigue'

Despite being an oil-rich nation, South

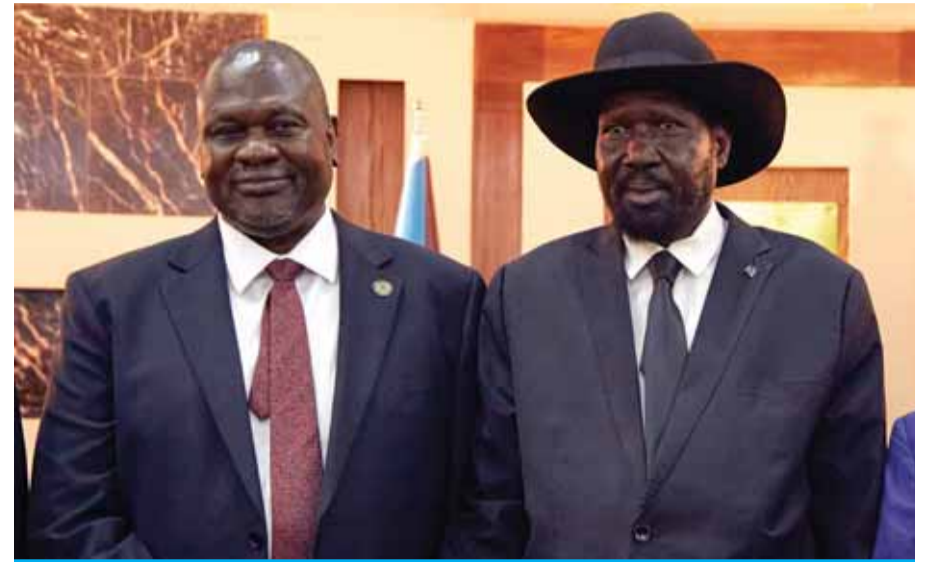
Sudan's economy has effectively been held hostage by political corruption, with a UN report last September accusing the ruling elite of looting tens of millions of dollars from public coffers.

The country is ranked at the bottom of Transparency International's corruption index along with Somalia and is hugely dependent on foreign aid — according to the United States, 75 percent of its population required humanitarian assistance last year.

Four out of five of South Sudan's 11 million people live in "absolute poverty", according to World Bank figures for 2018, and nearly two-thirds of its population suffer from severe hunger. Foreign donors, who provide hundreds of millions of dollars in emergency aid each year, have refused to foot the bill for the lumbering peace process, irking the government.

"Many of the chapters are not implemented simply because of lack of funds (from) the international community," Information Minister Michael Makuei told AFP in a phone interview. "Most of the countries did nothing... instead they decided to impose an arms embargo on us which has made (unification) of the forces difficult," Makuei said.

But international observers say they are frustrated by the lack of political will shown by the country's leadership in implementing the terms of the peace



JUBA: File photo shows South Sudanese President Salva Kiir (R) standing with First Vice President Riek Machar as they attend a swearing-in ceremony at the State House in Juba, South Sudan. Yesterday marked two years since President Salva Kiir and his deputy Riek Machar formed a unity government. —AFP

agreement. "There is of course donor fatigue," Christian Bader, the European Union ambassador to South Sudan, told AFP. "Some people have been disappointed. Some people have seen that the money they send out in this country has never brought the expected results," he said.

After years of limbo, few expect a government gripped by infighting to make

swift progress in time for next year's election deadline. "I am more comfortable about extending the peace agreement for about one or two years so long (as) the government officials (get) their act together to implement the remaining provisions," said Boboya James, an analyst at the Juba-based Institute of Social Policy and Research. —AFP

UN says 'race against time' as new storm nears Madagascar

GENEVA: The UN warned yesterday that authorities and aid workers were racing against the clock to protect people as Madagascar braces for its fourth tropical storm in as many weeks. Cyclone Emnati is expected to make landfall on southern Madagascar Tuesday evening — just weeks after the island was lashed by Cyclone Batsirai on February 5, affecting some 270,000 people and claiming 120 lives.

At the same time, some 21,000 people still remain displaced from when tropical storm Ana struck in late January. Another 5,000 were affected last week by tropical storm Dumako. "We are in a race against time to protect those who dealt with the fury of the first three extreme events from the impact of Emnati," Jens Laerke, spokesman for the UN humanitarian agency OCHA, told reporters in Geneva.

The UN's World Food Programme (WFP) also said it was on an emergency footing. "We are obviously praying for the best, but preparing for the worst," WFP spokesman Tomson Phiri told reporters. The agency has been prepositioning food and non-food aid to roll out rapidly in the aftermath of the storm, Phiri said.

The UN's World Meteorological Organization (WMO) describes Emnati as "a large and dangerous cyclone likely to cause considerable damage." Emnati had earlier been feared to strike with the strength of a category 3 or 4 cyclone. But a WMO spokeswoman said it had been downgraded and was now expected to make landfall as a category 2 event. Nonetheless, winds of up to 200 kilometres (120 miles) per hour were expected, she said. —AFP

Women workers must cover up 'even with a blanket': Taliban

KABUL: Women working in Afghan government departments must cover up — even with a blanket if necessary — or they may lose their jobs, the Taliban's religious police said yesterday. Most women have been barred from their government jobs, since the Taliban retook power in August, though Afghanistan's new rulers claim they will be allowed to return once some conditions are in place — such as segregated offices.

Yesterday, the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice issued a statement saying women should not go to work unless they were properly covered, and they could be fired if they did not follow guidelines.

The ministry earned notoriety during the Taliban's first stint in power from 1996 to 2001 for policing the leadership's strict interpretation of Islam. It was unclear why they issued yesterday's statement, as most women in Afghanistan have always covered their heads in public — with a loose shawl at least.

"They can follow the hijab the way they want," ministry spokesman Mohammad Sadeq Akif Muhajir told AFP when reached for clarification. But when asked if this meant they had to wear the all-covering burqa that the Taliban made compulsory during their previous rule, he demurred.

They can wear "any other sort of hijab, it is up to them, but they must (cover up) properly... even wear a blanket", he said. During the Taliban's previous stint in power, a strict interpretation of Islam meant policing people's day-to-day habits, actions, and clothing. —AFP

In Turkish-funded Syria camps, tents give way to homes

BIZAAH, Syria: Syrian mother of four Maryam al-Hussein was relieved to have a roof over her head as she moved from a tent camp into a housing complex built with Turkish support. "When I first heard that we were moving into a house, I couldn't believe it," the 28-year-old widow told AFP in opposition-held northern Syria.

"I was so happy that I couldn't think of anything other than the move," she said, sitting outside her new concrete home. The housing complex built near the Turkish-held Syrian city of Al-Bab is the latest in a series of residential projects sponsored by Ankara.

Turkey's goal is to create a so-called "safe zone" along its border to keep Syrians displaced by war from crossing into its territory, and to allow it to send back some of the millions who already did. The housing units, branded by local officials and their Turkish sponsors as a humanitarian action to assist displaced families, could also serve as a model for initiatives to resettle Syrian refugees living in Turkey.

Turkey and its proxies have seized control of territory inside Syria during several military operations launched since 2016. In these regions, the Turkish lira has become the main currency and Ankara has helped set up hospitals, post offices and schools that teach the Turkish language.

Turkish non-governmental group the Humanitarian Relief Foundation

(IHH) said it has supported the construction of more than 18,000 residential units in Syria's north since 2019. "More than 50,000 people have settled in the houses we have built so far," said IHH secretary general Durmus Aydin. Aydin said that twice as many will be sheltered in a total of 24,325 homes due to be completed by April.

'Temporary shelters'

The latest housing complex was built near the opposition-held area of Bizaah with the support of Turkey's AFAD emergency agency, local officials said. It consists of 300 one-storey concrete units with large metal doors and small side windows.

Each unit is made up of two rooms, a kitchen and a bathroom, and is equipped with its own water tank and costs about \$2,500 to build, Aydin said. They will be home to residents of a nearby displacement camp who were transferred there this month.

The complex — which is one of many similar housing projects supported by AFAD — includes a mosque and a school. A medical centre is currently under construction, local officials said.

For Maryam, the move marks a major upgrade from the dilapidated tent camps where she had lived with her father, brother and four children under harsh conditions. Maryam, whose husband was killed in battles between rebels and Syrian regime forces, was displaced by war in 2019



BIZAAH, Syria: Internally displaced Syrians unload their belongings from trucks upon arrival at a new housing complex in the opposition-held area of Bizaah, east of the city of Al-Bab in the northern Aleppo governorate, built with the support of Turkey's emergency agency AFAD. —AFP

and moved from one camp to another seeking refuge.

"In the winter, a house is better, because the rain does not seep in and in the summer it remains cool because stone deflects heat better than tents that turn into furnaces," she said. Local official Hussein al-Issa, who oversees the resettlement of displaced families, said the Bizaah housing complex was built on land managed by an opposition-affiliated local council with "the full cooperation" of Turkey. "These houses are temporary shelters for our displaced brothers," he said.

'Lying to ourselves'

While many displaced families are grateful to Turkey for helping provide shelter, Mohammad Haj Moussa

appeared dissatisfied. "It's like we are lying to ourselves," the 38-year-old father of four told AFP.

"We want a (permanent) solution. We want to return to our homes," added Haj Moussa, who was displaced by war five years ago. Since fleeing his home in the northwestern province of Idlib, Haj Moussa said he had moved from one displacement camp to another. "This unit isn't too different" from the camps, he said. "It's a joke." Nearby, Ahmed Mustafa Katouli said he was grateful to have a concrete roof over his head, but complained the units are too small. "These houses do not make up for what we have lost," said the father of six, displaced from Aleppo with his wife nearly a decade ago. —AFP

Queen Elizabeth II cancels engagements over COVID symptoms

LONDON: Queen Elizabeth II cancelled her planned virtual engagements yesterday due to "mild" coronavirus symptoms, Buckingham Palace said. "As Her Majesty is still experiencing mild cold-like symptoms she has decided not to undertake her planned virtual engagements today, but will continue with light duties," said a palace spokesman.

The 95-year-old head of state tested positive for the virus on Sunday, sparking renewed concerns about her health after she spent a night in hospital in October last year. She was forced to rest on medical grounds and cancelled a series of planned engagements, including hosting world leaders at the UN climate change summit in November.

Her appearances since then have been rare, although she returned to public duties before the start of her record-breaking 70th year as monarch on February 6. The queen is scheduled to hold more virtual meetings later in the week, including her weekly private audience with Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

But it was reported that she will decide on whether to attend them nearer the time. News of her illness came the day before Johnson announced all pandemic legal curbs in England would end later this week. On Monday he said compulsory self-isolation for positive cases would stop on Thursday, urging a shift from government intervention to personal responsibility.

The move prompted concern from scientists and

accusations from opposition critics that Johnson was more concerned with appeasing members of his own party angered at the curbs than protecting public health. The monarch — who is believed to be triple-vaccinated — resumed in-person audiences at her Windsor Castle home west of London last week.

But she complained to one attendee of suffering from stiffness and was photographed holding a walking stick. Her eldest son and heir Prince Charles, 73, had to pull out of a planned engagement on February 10 after testing positive for coronavirus for a second time. It was later revealed he had met his mother two days earlier.

Age concerns

The queen and her husband, Prince Philip, moved to Windsor in March 2020 when the pandemic first struck, given the risks of catching coronavirus due to their advanced age. But she still made public appearances, popping up on video conference calls with members of the public, and made a rare televised address to the nation during lockdown, urging people not to give up hope.

Philip, her husband of 73 years, died in April 2021, just a few weeks before his 100th birthday. His funeral took place under restrictions limiting mourners to just 30. Buckingham Palace announced her positive test at the weekend with a virtually identical statement to that yesterday.

With the infection coming two months before the queen turns 96, royal expert Richard Fitzwilliams said: "There will be concerns because of her age, no doubt about that. "But the queen by nature is stoic. I think she's someone who looks at things in a very, very positive way," he told AFP, anticipating "reasonably regular updates" from the palace.

Elizabeth has generally enjoyed robust health over her long life, but fears grew in October after



Queen Elizabeth II

the palace was forced to reveal she spent an unscheduled night in a private London hospital. She had been at the clinic for unspecified tests.

The COVID scare comes with the royal family mired in difficulties, including tensions with Charles's second son Prince Harry, who now lives in California with his wife Meghan. The queen's second son Prince Andrew settled a sexual assault civil lawsuit in the United States last week, reportedly for £12 million (\$16.3 million, 14.3 million euros) — which reports say the monarch will partly fund.

Meanwhile police in London are investigating claims that a Saudi tycoon was offered UK honours in return for donations to Charles's charitable foundation. —AFP

International

Hong Kong to see three rounds of compulsory virus tests

Tests will be spread out over a number of days

HONG KONG: Hong Kong's population must undergo three rounds of compulsory coronavirus testing, the city's leader said yesterday, as she confirmed mainland Chinese officials were stepping up oversight of the financial hub's response to its worst outbreak yet. The densely populated metropolis is in the throes of a record virus surge with thousands of confirmed cases every day threatening to overwhelm hospitals and the city's strict isolation system.

residents also having to take multiple rapid antigen tests every day at home in between.

"Those who do not take the universal test will be held liable," Lam warned, adding that there was no guarantee the steps would fully stamp out the current outbreak. Schools and multiple businesses such as gyms, bars and beauty salons will remain closed into late April with education facilities turned into local testing centres. Flights from nine countries including Britain and the United States will remain banned.

Isolation units

Lam also confirmed that Hong Kong would continue trying to isolate all coronavirus patients, including asymptomatic patients, in temporary facilities which are being built with the help of mainland authorities. "We reiterate that isolation is still our policy objective," she said.

Hong Kong's strict, China-style zero-COVID policy successfully kept the virus mostly at bay the last two years at the expense of marooning the city internationally. But when the highly contagious Omicron variant eventually broke through earlier this year, authorities were caught flat-footed with few preparations in place and a dangerously under-vaccinated population.

Hospital wards were overwhelmed, testing capacity limits were quickly reached and there has been a massive shortfall in isolation units. As many rival cities reopened, many public health experts and business leaders argued that Hong Kong should move to a mitigation strategy that planned for living with the coronavirus.

But China, the only major economy still sticking with zero-COVID, made clear last week that was not an option. During the pandemic's early stages, Beijing used citywide lockdowns and mass testing to stamp



HONG KONG: People queue up for COVID-19 tests in pouring rain in Hong Kong yesterday, as the city faces its worst coronavirus wave to date. — AFP

out cases. But it has never managed to tackle an outbreak the size of the one facing Hong Kong, even in Wuhan where the coronavirus first emerged. Lam said that, with mainland help, Hong Kong expected to boost daily testing capacity to one million a day. Tens of thousands of isolation units and treatment beds would be built in the coming weeks, she added.

But cases in Hong Kong continue to rise exponentially, and it is not clear whether enough units will be available when more cases are discovered during mass testing. Before the current wave hit in late December, Hong Kong had recorded just 12,000 infections and

some 200 deaths.

In the current outbreak it has seen 54,000 cases and 145 deaths. A new model from the University of Hong Kong estimated that the current outbreak will peak in March with some 180,000 daily infections and nearly 100 deaths per day. Despite ample supplies, Hong Kong has poor vaccination rates among the elderly. Only 43 percent of people aged 80 or over have received even one dose. Yesterday health officials revealed that, of 102 recent deaths in the current wave, only seven had two doses of a vaccine, while 63 were from care homes for the elderly. — AFP



Flights from nine countries banned

Yesterday, Chief Executive Carrie Lam revealed a doubling down of the city government's zero-COVID approach to bring the response much closer to mainland China's as she admitted local authorities had failed to stamp out the current surge.

"This quickly worsening epidemic has far exceeded the Hong Kong government's ability to tackle it, so there is great need for the central government's support in fighting the virus," she told reporters. Xia Baolong, Beijing's Hong Kong and Macau affairs chief, was coordinating the mainland's response from the border city of Shenzhen, she added.

Under the new rules, all 7.4 million residents will have to go through three rounds of compulsory testing in March, although Lam did not give a start date. The tests will be spread out over a number of days with

Prominent anti-China activist arrested in Mongolia

ULANBAATAR: A prominent anti-China activist has been arrested in Mongolia, part of what campaigners have said is a wider effort to "clean up" Beijing's critics in the country. Landlocked Mongolia is dependent on mineral exports to its giant neighbours, Russia and China, but there have also been protests in the capital Ulaanbaatar over Beijing's language policy in Inner Mongolia.

Critics of the policy in the Chinese border region-home to an estimated 4.5 million ethnic Mongolians-say it mirrors moves in other areas such as Xinjiang and Tibet to assimilate local minorities into the dominant Han culture and eradicate minority languages.

Munkhbayar Chuluundorj was arrested Friday in Ulaanbaatar on suspicion of "receiving instructions and funds from a foreign intelligence group", the country's spy agency said. The General Intelligence Agency (GIA) said he had "engaged in illegal cooperation activities" but gave no more details.

Campaigners said they suspected Munkhbayar's comments on China had brought him under official scrutiny. In Facebook posts, he recently called for the Mongolian prime minister to resign over his close relationship with Beijing, saying "our nation's independence will be lost and all citizens of Mongolia will become slaves of China".

Footage of the arrest published by Mongolian outlet Eguur News showed a man being led away by armed police down a shop-lined road. Visits from relatives are being denied and a closed-door trial is being held, the Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Centre, an overseas NGO that advocates for ethnic Mongols, quoted his brother Munkh-erdene as saying.

The NGO said Munkhbayar is "one of the most vocal critics of the Mongolian government's cosy relationship with China". Munkhbayar has "defended Inner Mongolian human rights, culture, history and land rights", according to Baljinima Bai, a language rights advocate originally from Inner Mongolia.

"Mongolia has started to 'clean up' these people... who oppose China," he told AFP. Bai said he had also been summoned for questioning by the GIA in relation to Munkhbayar's case. Inner Mongolian activists in Mongolia say they have faced threats and intimidation from authorities after a widespread protest movement against Chinese-language curriculum reforms across the border was met with a harsh police crackdown. —AFP

China, Russia arming Myanmar junta: UN

GENEVA: UN Security Council members China and Russia, as well as Serbia have continued supplying Myanmar's junta with weapons used to attack civilians since last year's coup, a UN rights expert said yesterday. United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights situation in Myanmar, Tom Andrews, urged the Security Council to convene an emergency session "to debate and vote on a resolution to, at a minimum, ban those arms transfers that the Myanmar military are known to use to attack and kill Myanmar civilians."

He released a long-awaited report yesterday detailing where the junta is getting its weapons from, highlighting that two permanent members of the Security Council itself, who hold veto power over its decisions, remain among the main suppliers.

"Despite the evidence of the military junta's atrocity crimes being committed with impunity since launching a coup last year, UN Security Council members Russia and China continue to provide the Myanmar military junta with numerous fighter jets, armoured vehicles, and in the case of Russia, the promise of fur-



SEJONG, South Korea: Picture shows South Korean presidential candidate Lee Jae-myung (C) of the ruling Democratic Party posing with supporters during an election campaign at a market in Sejong. — AFP

Ex-factory boy aims for South Korean presidency

CHEONGJU, South Korea: Cultural hits from Netflix show "Squid Game" to Oscar-winner "Parasite" have raised South Korean inequality to global prominence, and one presidential hopeful claims his working-class credentials make him the best man to fix a broken system. Former child factory worker Lee Jae-myung, a school dropout maimed in an industrial accident as a teen, is the ruling Democratic Party's maverick candidate in the March 9 election.

A rarity for politicians in status-obsessed South Korea, Lee is playing up his rags-to-riches tale in a bid to convince voters he can solve their economic woes. Sky-high real estate prices, stagnant growth and stubborn youth unemployment are among voters' top concerns in an election where polling is neck-and-neck and the campaign has been dominated by mud-slinging.

From universal basic income to government-funded hair-loss treatment, former mayor and provincial governor Lee is proposing a slew of unorthodox policies that his campaign says are a reflection of his impoverished childhood. "You can worry about people outside shivering in the cold while you sit in your warm living room," Lee told AFP in an exclusive interview in his campaign van. "But you can never really understand their pain."

The opposition decries his proposals as populist, saying Lee is trying to "buy votes with free money" and will "burden the next generation with debt". And a series of scandals have marred Lee's run for top office: his wife was accused of misappropriating public funds; he is being scrutinised over a suspect land development deal, and he is dogged by rumours of mafia ties.

He started his campaign by being forced to apologise for a profanity-laden family phone call, and was the subject of a controversial book describing his efforts to section his brother in a mental hospital.

No bow tie

Last year, his campaign published two photographs: one showing a floppy-haired young Lee in an ill-fitting suit, the other of teenage Yoon Suk-yeol, the presidential candidate for the People Power Party, in a bow tie. It was an effort to hammer home the contrast between Yoon, raised in an affluent family, and Lee, who dropped out of school at 11 then put himself through night school.

Lee's story appears to resonate with supporters. At a recent rally in the central city of Cheongju, many waved placards saying: "Only those who know the pain of hunger understand the tears of the ordinary people."

But it is unclear whether it will be enough to propel him to victory in a tight race, with most recent polls falling within the margin for error. One survey released Tuesday showed Yoon in the lead by 2.5 percent. Political analyst Park Sang-byoung said how the candidates perform in two upcoming televised debates, and whether they can broaden their message to attract swing voters, would be decisive. —AFP



KAYIN STATE: This photo shows Myanmar refugees and their children, who fled a surge in violence as the military cracks down on rebel groups, at a camp in Nawphewlawl near the Myanmar-Thailand border in Kayin state. — AFP

ther arms," Andrews said in a statement.

"During this same period, Serbia has authorised rockets and artillery for export to the Myanmar military," said Andrews, who is an independent expert appointed by the UN Human Rights Council, but who does not speak on behalf of the world body.

'Crimes against humanity'

In his report, he maintained that the arms transfers by the three countries had "occurred with the full

knowledge that they would be used to attack civilians, in probable violation of international law."

Myanmar has been in chaos, its economy paralysed, and more than 1,500 civilians have been killed in a military crackdown since the putsch in February 2021, according to the UN. Since the February 1, 2021 coup, at least 12,000 people have been detained, including the de facto head of the civilian government, Aung San Suu Kyi, while more than 440,000 people have been forcibly displaced. —AFP

News in brief

Australian police nab hitman

SYDNEY: Australian police have arrested a suspected mafia hitman after a 12-year nationwide manhunt during which he used disguises and even a fatsuit to evade capture after skipping bail. The search ended on Monday when officers found Graham Potter hiding out in a derelict house in the small town of Ravenshoe, Queensland after a tip-off from the public. In 2010, Potter fled before his court date, while facing serious charges including the allegation he was involved in a planned hit at an underworld wedding. Potter was listed as one of the country's 10 most wanted fugitives, with a Aus\$100,000 (\$72,000) reward offered for information leading to his capture. Authorities had suspected he would look for work as a caretaker, farm hand on an out-back station, and was said to have "welding, bee-keeping, hydroponics, aquaponics, gold prospecting and earth moving skills." — AFP

Sudan slams Ethiopia over dam

KHARTOUM: Sudan has condemned neighbouring Ethiopia for launching power generation at a controversial dam on the Blue Nile without the agreement of downstream nations, saying the "unilateral move" violated international commitments. Sudan "has emphasised its rejection of all unilateral measures with regard to filling and operation" of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, the spokesman for its negotiating team, Omar Kamel, said in a statement late Monday. He said the Ethiopian move was a "fundamental breach" of its commitments under international law. The other downstream nation, Egypt, which has been bitterly opposed to the dam project ever since construction started more than a decade ago, has also sharply criticised Ethiopia for starting up the turbines on Sunday. — AFP

Nearly 600 migrants rescued

ROME: Nearly 600 migrants packed into overcrowded fishing boats in bad weather were rescued overnight off the coast of Calabria, Italy's coast-guard said yesterday, adding that one body had been found. The 573 migrants were found aboard "two overloaded fishing boats and left at the mercy of waves with unfavourable weather conditions that were expected to worsen significantly," it said in a statement. A large ship and three patrol boats aided in the rescue, which took place about 110 kilometres (70 miles) off Cape Spartivento at the southern tip of Calabria, it said. Among those rescued was a body of a migrant who "had already been dead for a few days," according to witnesses, the coastguard said. — AFP

Greece ferry fire

CORFU, Greece: Smoke billowed yesterday from a ferry that caught fire off the Greek coast, as coastguards prepared to tow the vessel into port and hopes dwindled of finding more survivors after five days of searching. At least one person was killed and three passengers are in hospital after fire ripped through Italian-flagged Euroferry Olympia on Friday. Most of the passengers aboard the ship, north of the island of Corfu, were quickly evacuated but the fire has continued for days and 10 truck drivers remain missing. The ferry is to be towed to "a safe port" in western Greece "to continue the operations with maximum security", the coastguard said. "The search and rescue possibilities on Euroferry Olympia in its current position have been exhausted," it added. — AFP

Business

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2022

Zain Business launches Smart Security as a Service

Advanced SSaaS solutions help businesses achieve highest levels of security

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced the launch of Smart Security as a Service (SSaaS) solutions for enterprise customers. Through SSaaS, Zain offers a wide range of smart solutions beyond video surveillance, including advanced video analytics and intelligence, self-service, centralized monitoring, and more via Zain's secure cloud to help businesses achieve higher levels of security and more accumulated smart insights.

The announcement comes as part of the company's continuous efforts to offer a refreshed portfolio of world-class, advanced security solutions to the local business community, serving businesses of all sizes, including large enterprises and SMEs. This comes in line with Zain's digital transformation strategy that aims at empowering a more efficient business sector in the Kuwaiti market.

SSaaS introduces a number of advanced features, including video management and recording, basic video analytics and cloud archiving. The service utilizes artificial intelligence tools to automatically detect and recognize faces, license plates, and objects while providing behavioral analysis, business intelligence, classification, and tracking data on-screen.

The service features secure and private connectivity and is linked to a detailed GIS map where footage based on geo-map location of the camera can be accessed.

SSaaS also offers Unified Incident Management, including surveillance controls, navigation, stream management & analytics, and alarm integration. Centralized Monitoring provides instant and easy access to real-time footage of all branches from one platform. The service also features a user-friendly end-user portal which offers the customer self-service capabilities.

Zain's SSaaS solution offers a number of benefits to customers, including lower

From a technical perspective, Zain's SSaaS solutions enjoy strong reliability, operating via numerous data centers located in the cloud that can protect customers' data and systems against failures. The service is highly flexible with a plug & play model, allowing coverage of several branches, adaptable to wide range hardware, security subsystems, and applications. The service is also highly modular with a scalable architecture of different modules supporting on demand expansion in storage, processing power, memory, and cameras as per the customer's needs.

Zain Business also provides secure and easily accessible data storage and management, with 24/7 surveillance, in addition to a wide range of connection types with various bandwidths and speeds to choose from depending on every customer's business needs. Zain has collaborated with the best video surveillance tech companies to offer the best services to all types of businesses, regardless of their size.

Zain's strategy is centered around digital transformation leadership and empowering the community to enjoy a smarter portable lifestyle, as well as using advanced technology to enable an easier and more flexible life. The company places itself as an active partner in creating the future of smart life in Kuwait. Yesterday's launch will contribute to prove the company's full potential in triggering the digital community.



Launch part of Zain's digital transformation strategy

upfront investment, as the service is based on monthly installments, allowing customers to invest capital into other business areas. The service also allows lower power costs, with a shared infrastructure that gives better hardware utilization with more efficient power use and lowers the cost of electricity. In addition, the service allows reduced IT staffing costs by lowering a company's total IT cost and redeploying employees with the cloud provider's IT staff shared infrastructure.

Oil nears \$100 as West prepares Russian sanctions

LONDON: Oil prices surged close to \$100 per barrel yesterday as major crude producer Russia prepared to send troops into two breakaway regions of Ukraine, sparking Western nations to ready economic sanctions against Moscow. After heavy falls at the open, European stocks edged into positive territory, as the Kremlin said it remained open to all diplomatic contact over Ukraine.

Asian stock markets had earlier ended their sessions with heavy falls. Brent North Sea crude oil reached \$99.50 per barrel, the highest level in seven years. At around 11:15 GMT, it pulled back to just below \$98, still a gain of around 2.5 percent compared with late Monday.

"The intensifying crisis between Russia and Ukraine has raised concerns

about the supply disruptions that would ensue as sanctions look set to cripple Russia, the world's second largest oil exporter and the world's top natural gas producer," noted Victoria Scholar, head of investment at Interactive Investor.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said he was suspending the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project with Russia in response to Moscow's recognition of breakaway regions Donetsk and Lugansk. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had demanded an immediate halt to the project, set to pipe Russian natural gas to Germany via the Baltic Sea. Zelensky said Russia must be punished for its recognition Monday of Ukraine's two separatist-held regions with "immediate sanctions" that include "the complete stop of Nord Stream 2".

It comes as the United States, Britain and the European Union prepared to launch economic sanctions on Russia. "Our response will be in the form of sanctions, whose extent the ministers will decide," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said.

Russia's recognition of the breakaway

regions of Ukraine will meanwhile "strongly increase" economic uncertainty for the EU, the bloc's economy commissioner Paolo Gentiloni said.

Russian troops were believed to be deploying into Donetsk and Lugansk in eastern Ukraine, after Russian President Vladimir Putin issued decrees ordering his army to assume "peacekeeping" functions in the separatist territories.

Oil surge

The jump in oil prices is compounding worries about inflation around the world, with the US Federal Reserve coming under intense pressure to tighten monetary policy to prevent prices running out of control. That has in turn battered equity markets in recent months, and the latest developments out of Europe led to another day of hefty selling yesterday. Russia's MOEX index plunged eight percent at the open, having lost 10 percent Monday. The ruble though recovered after sharp losses against the dollar.

Haven investment gold climbed past \$1,900 an ounce before pulling

UK hails 'sea change' for women in top company boardrooms

LONDON: Britain has experienced a "sea change" in the proportion of women in top company boardrooms, with London gaining ground on Paris, according to a government study published yesterday. Women comprised almost 40 percent of all board positions of companies listed on London's FTSE 100 index last year, data compiled by the state-backed FTSE Women Leaders Review showed.

London jumped from fifth place to sit behind the Paris CAC 40 index, which retained the top spot with just under 44 percent. The panel said this highlighted "a major sea change in attitudes to getting women leaders to the top table of business in the UK".

There were however just eight women chief executives of the British capital's top 100 listed companies in 2021. Nevertheless, the FTSE 100 had just 12.5 percent of women in board positions ten years ago.

'Enormous progress'

"UK businesses have made enormous progress in recent years to ensure that everyone, whatever their background, can succeed on merit," said Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng.

"Today's findings highlight this with more women at the top table of Britain's biggest companies than ever before." The panel proposed measures including

a new voluntary target for FTSE 350 boards and leadership teams to be increased to a minimum level of 40 percent by the end of 2025.

"It is excellent to see the progress being made, but we know there is more to be done," added women and equalities minister Liz Truss, who is also foreign secretary. "This government is committed to ... working to tackle inequality and promoting equality of opportunity, including at senior level, so everyone can thrive." The FTSE Women Leaders Review monitors and sets recommendations to improve women's representation in 24,000 positions across the boardrooms and leadership teams of the largest UK firms. The review, which charts progress in getting more female executives into senior roles, also wants other targets for the top 350 listed companies.

'Much to do'

And it wants to extend the scope of the review beyond the FTSE 350 to include Britain's 50 largest private companies by sales. "We know there is much more work to do and no shortage of experienced, capable women, ambitious for themselves and their company across all sectors of business today," said review chief executive Denise Wilson. — AFP

HSBC reports \$1bn share buyback as annual profits double

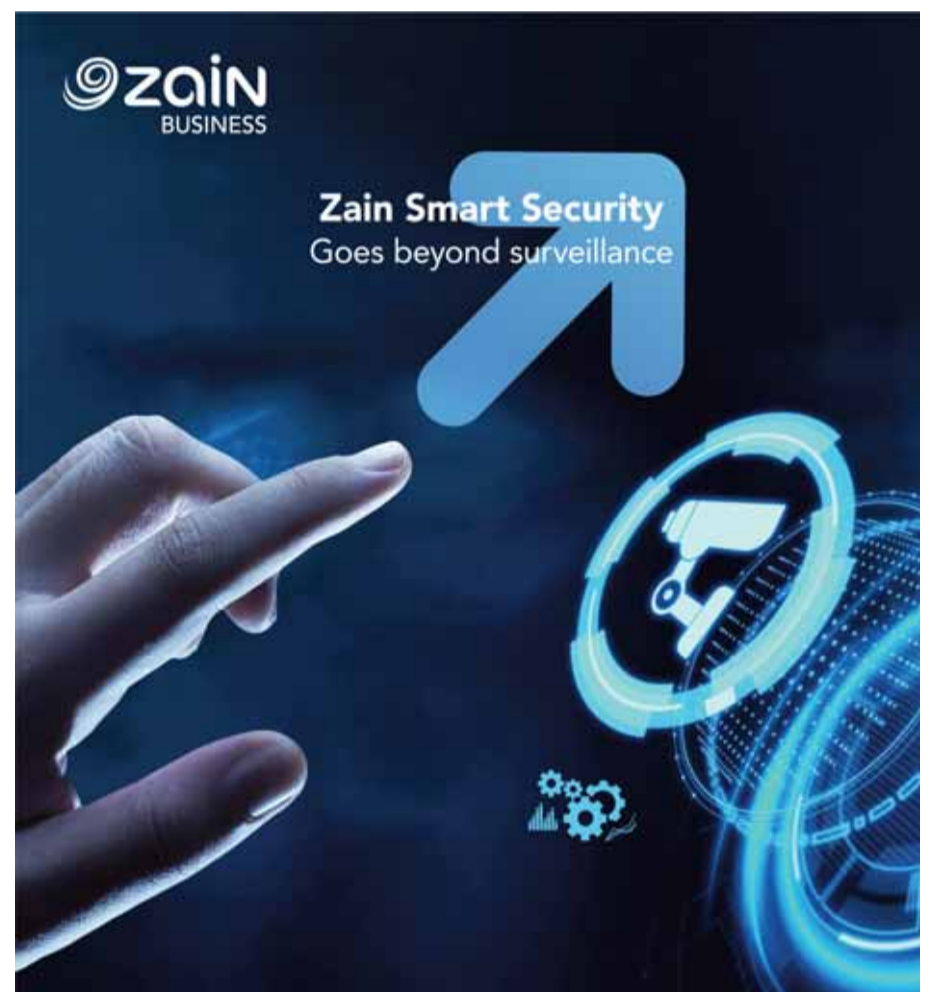
HONG KONG: HSBC yesterday announced bumper 2021 profits and plans to repurchase shares worth up to \$1.0 billion as the Asia-focused bank continues its recovery from the coronavirus pandemic and major restructuring. The lender endured a tumultuous 2020 like the rest of the banking sector as the virus outbreak rocked the economy just as it embarked on a restructuring program to slash 35,000 jobs to refocus on its most profitable areas in Asia and the Middle East.

Pre-tax profit soared 115 percent to \$18.9 billion in 2021 from the prior year, helped by lower bad loans and operating expenses. Net profit more than tripled to \$12.6 billion, up from \$3.9 billion last time around.

"We have good momentum coming into 2022 and are confident that we can continue to execute against our strategy," Chief Executive Officer Noel Quinn said in the statement. "We also remain cognizant of the potential impact that further COVID-19-related uncertainty and continued inflation might have on us and our clients."

In a boon for investors, the bank announced plans for a \$1.0 billion share buyback, adding to a \$2.0 billion buyback announced last year. HSBC also ramped up its staff bonus pool by almost a third to \$3.5 billion, citing the "strong" financial performance and the "extraordinarily competitive" labour market.

HSBC made 65 percent of its profit in



TOKYO: Pedestrians walk past an electronic share price board showing the closing numbers on the Tokyo Stock Exchange in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

back. Away from the Ukraine crisis, German auto giant Volkswagen yesterday said it was drawing up plans to list its luxury brand Porsche as it looks to raise the funds for its move to electric vehicles.

In London, HSBC bank announced bumper 2021 profits and plans to repurchase shares worth up to \$1 billion as the Asia-focused bank continues its recovery from the coronavirus pandemic and major restructuring. — AFP



This file photo taken on August 2, 2021 shows pedestrians walking past a local branch of HSBC bank in Hong Kong. — AFP

Asia last year, down from as high as 90 percent previously, as the group was partly hit by a slowdown in China's recovery. Early last year it published a new strategy laying out plans to redouble its attempt to seize more of Asia's market.

HSBC is also hopeful of a significant boost to income thanks to the prospect of higher interest rates to fight surging global inflation. However its reliance on China could also be a vulnerability. Both the mainland and Hong Kong are among the last few remaining places rigidly sticking to a zero-Covid strategy.

That strategy has crumbled in Hong Kong this year during a wave of infections forcing the reimposition of economically painful restrictions and a deepening of the financial hub's international isolation.

Quinn, however, played down the impact. "We do not believe the current COVID situation in Hong Kong threatens the long-term growth in Hong Kong," he told reporters on a

conference call. After strong growth for much of last year, China's recovery also slowed in the last quarter.

'Closely watching' Russia

Yesterday's results were published against the backdrop of spiking geopolitical tensions, as Russia prepared to send troops into two breakaway regions of Ukraine. Western nations are readying economic sanctions against Moscow in the event of such a move. Asked about fallout, Quinn told reporters that HSBC had "very modest" exposure with 250 staff in Moscow serving international clients.

"We'll watch closely for the next few weeks," he added. "Any military action would be a concern... in terms of collateral damage on market confidence." HSBC added yesterday that its reported profit after tax jumped \$8.6 billion to \$14.7 billion last year. Fourth quarter profit before tax rose \$1.3 billion to \$2.7 billion. — AFP

Business

Germany halts controversial Russian gas pipeline project

Nord Stream 2 pipeline put on ice in response to Moscow's Ukraine move

BERLIN: Germany yesterday put on ice the controversial Nord Stream 2 pipeline in response to Moscow's recognition of two breakaway regions in eastern Ukraine, finally halting the 10-billion-euro project that has long irked allies. Berlin had over the years doggedly pursued the pipeline which was set to double natural gas import capacity from Russia, despite opposition from the United States and Eastern Europe which fear it would leave the continent too dependent upon Russian energy.

Through controversies that had weighed on German-Russian ties—from the poisoning of Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny to several spying scandals to a series of cyberattacks, the German government had pushed on with the project, which was finally completed last year and was awaiting regulatory approval. But hours after Putin's decision on recognizing separatists in eastern Ukraine, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said yesterday he had asked for the approval process to be halted, despite a severe energy crisis that has sent gas prices soaring in Europe.

"That sounds technical, but it is the necessary administrative step so there can be no certification of the pipeline and without this certification, Nord Stream 2 cannot begin operating," he said. The White House immediately hailed the decision, while Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba called it "a morally, politically and practically correct step in the current circumstances".

Meanwhile Dmitry Medvedev, vice president of Russia's council of security said Germany was just shooting itself in the foot. "The German chancellor Olaf Scholz has asked to suspend the certification of Nord Stream 2... well, welcome to the new world where

Europeans will soon pay 2,000 euros for 1,000 cm³ of gas," he tweeted.

Rising tensions

Germany's ambivalent attitude on Nord Stream 2 had long been a source of friction with allies. Even as Russia massed over 100,000 troops on Ukraine's borders, Scholz refused to utter the name of the pipeline when asked about possible sanctions against Russia. Former chancellor Gerhard Schröder's involvement as chairman of the Nord Stream AG shareholders committee has also become a source of embarrassment for Germany as the West faces off with Russia in the worst crisis since the Cold War.

The mixed messaging over the gas pipeline had led NATO partners, including the United States, to question if Germany was on board as the West sought to hold off what it viewed as an expansionist Russia. With doubts swirling, German ministers found themselves forced to reiterate repeatedly that they would indeed pull the plug on the pipeline should Russia march on Ukraine.

Kyiv, in conflict with Russia since Moscow's 2014 annexation of Crimea, has long been a critic of Nord Stream 2. The pipeline bypasses Ukraine's own infrastructure, depriving it of around a billion euros annually in gas transit fees and, Kyiv fears, removing a key check on potential Russian aggression.

President Volodymyr Zelensky has insisted that Nord Stream 2 poses a serious global security threat. "We view this project exclusively through the prism of security and consider it a dangerous geopolitical weapon of the Kremlin," he said last year. Running from Russia's Baltic coast to northeastern Germany, the 1,200-kilometre (745-mile) underwater Nord Stream 2 follows the



BERLIN: Germany yesterday put on ice the controversial Nord Stream 2 pipeline in response to Moscow's recognition of two breakaway regions in eastern Ukraine.

same route as Nord Stream 1, which was completed over a decade ago. Like its twin, Nord Stream 2 would be able to pipe 55 billion cubic metres of gas per year from Russia to Europe, increasing the continent's access to relatively cheap natural gas at a time of falling domestic production.

Russian giant Gazprom has a majority stake in the 10-billion-euro (\$12 billion) project. Germany's Uniper and Wintershall, France's Engie, the Anglo-Dutch firm Shell and Austria's OMV are also involved. Europe's top economy imports around 55 percent of its gas from

Russia—up from 40 percent in 2012 — and believed the pipeline has a role to play in the transition away from coal and nuclear energy. But it will now have to accelerate its build up of other energy sources—including importing LNG from elsewhere—in order to meet its energy needs.

Vice-Chancellor and Energy Minister Robert Habeck admitted yesterday that there will be "consequences in terms of energy policy, geopolitics and strategy" for Germany. "We will not forget this winter anytime soon," Habeck said. — AFP

EU warns of economic uncertainty

BRUSSELS: Russia's recognition of breakaway regions of Ukraine will "strongly increase" economic uncertainty for the EU, the bloc's economy commissioner Paolo Gentiloni said yesterday.

"Uncertainty remains around us. And the violation of international law through Russian recognition of two separatist territories in Ukraine will strongly increase this uncertainty," Gentiloni told a Brussels conference. Gentiloni was speaking as EU ambassadors met to agree on sanctions against Russia for its recognition a day before of two separatist regions in Ukraine that have been militarily supported by Moscow for the past eight years.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has ordered troops into those separatist regions, breaking international agreements he had signed on to. He portrayed the incursion as a "peacekeeping" mission. The European Union was expected to unveil limited and targeted economic punishment, both to keep its sanctions powder dry should Russia push further into Ukraine and because of the pain it would feel too from sectoral sanctions.

Russia supplies more than a third of the EU's natural gas supplies, and energy prices are already spiking to uncomfortable levels for European consumers and governments. Gentiloni, speaking at an EU conference on the bloc's economic situation, noted that the growth forecasts for this year had already been revised down earlier this month to 4.0 percent, and up to 2.8 percent for next year. Conflict or tough sanctions on Russia that blowback into Europe could add to the downward pressure on the COVID-hit economy. — AFP

IMF says Somalia funding at risk over poll delays

WASHINGTON: The International Monetary Fund could stop its program in Somalia in three months if long-postponed national elections encounter fresh delays, a senior official told AFP, as she began a mission to the troubled Horn of Africa nation yesterday.

The IMF's program in Somalia is due for a review in mid-May, but election delays mean that a new administration may not be ready to endorse planned reforms in time, said Laura Jaramillo Mayor, the fund's mission chief for the country. "That review of the IMF supportive program for Somalia needs to be completed by May 17th 2022, if it is not completed by that date the programme automatically terminates," she told AFP in an interview.

That in turn would severely affect the impoverished country's budget and an agreement to reduce its debt from \$5.2 billion (4.6 billion euros) in 2018 to a target of \$557 million eventually, she added.

Somalia's polls are more than a year behind schedule, with voting for the lower house of parliament due to be completed by Friday—a deadline many observers expect the country to miss, with over 100 seats still pending. Under the terms of the IMF program, Somalia's debt could fall to \$557 million or around six percent of its estimated gross domestic product as early as "next year", allowing Mogadishu to attract more funding from international partners and help develop its private sector, Jaramillo said.

One of the poorest countries in the world, with nearly 70 percent of its population living on less than \$1.90 a day, Somalia is struggling to recover from decades of civil war and has also been battling an Islamist insurgency for decades. Every month, the country's federal government runs short of \$10 million to cover crucial expenses such as staff salaries. — AFP



SYDNEY: Australia's largest energy firm and biggest carbon emitter AGL yesterday rejected a takeover bid from green-minded tech billionaire Mike Cannon Brookes, who planned to shutter the firm's coal-fired power plants.

Mining firms targeting Brazil's indigenous lands: Report

BRAZILIA: Major mining companies are seeking to expand to currently protected indigenous lands in the Amazon rainforest, bolstered by billions of dollars in financing from international banks and investment firms, a report found yesterday.

Nine mining giants including Brazil's Vale, Britain's Anglo American and Canada's Belo Sun have filed applications seeking authorization to mine on indigenous reservations in Brazil—even though that is currently illegal, said the report by the environmental group Amazon Watch and the Association of Brazil's Indigenous Peoples (APIB).

The firms appear to be betting Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro, who has pushed to open protected lands to mining and agribusiness, will succeed in passing legislation introduced by his government that would allow them to operate on indigenous territories, it said. As of November, the companies had a total of 225 active mining applications to Brazil's National Mining Agency (ANM) that overlap 34 indigenous lands, for a total area more than three times the size of London, it said.

"The environmental damages and threats against the lives of forest peoples by mining activities are brutal and have only worsened under Bolsonaro's administration," Ana Paula Vargas, Brazil program director at Amazon Watch, said in a statement. "With the rainforest at the tipping point of ecological collapse, we need

to involve all the actors behind this industry."

Experts say preserving indigenous lands is among the best ways to protect the world's biggest rainforest, a vital resource in the race to curb climate change.

Alleged violations

The report found the mining firms, which also included Glencore, AngloGold Ashanti, Rio Tinto, Potassio do Brasil and Grupo Minsur, received a total of \$54.1 billion in financing from international investors over the past five years for their Brazilian operations. It urged banks and financial firms backing such companies to pull out of them, saying many also had a history of human rights violations and environmental destruction. Major backers of the nine mining companies include US firms BlackRock, Capital Group and Vanguard, which invested \$14.8 billion in them over the past five years, it said. Banks including France's Credit Agricole, US-based Bank of America and Citigroup and Germany's Commerzbank are also major financiers of the companies, with a total of \$2.7 billion in loans and underwriting, it said.

Many of the companies denied the report's findings. Anglo American said it had "legacy tenure applications" for indigenous lands that it had "fully and formally withdrawn several years ago."

Vale said it had done the same last year. Belo Sun, Peru's Minsur and Potassio do Brasil said they had no activity relating to indigenous territory, and defended their social and environmental records.

A spokesperson for Vanguard meanwhile said the firm "regularly engages with mining companies" to promote sound environmental and social practices.

And Credit Agricole said it financed no mines in the Amazon. "We have contacted Anglo American and Vale, which both confirmed they had no exploration permits for indigenous lands," it said. — AFP

InterContinental Hotels in profit as economy reopens

LONDON: InterContinental Hotels Group yesterday said it returned to annual profit as governments shed Covid curbs, boosting the world's appetite for travel. IHG, whose brands include also Crowne Plaza and Holiday Inn, booked net profit of \$266 million (235 million euros) last year after a loss after tax of \$260 million in 2020.

Revenue rallied more than a fifth to \$2.9 billion in 2021. "As vaccination rates rise and restrictions are lifted around the world, we are seeing the demand for travel increase," chief executive Keith Barr said in the earnings statement. "While there may be unexpected challenges ahead, we are confident in our ability to respond and adapt to what consumers and owners need as we position IHG for strong future growth." — AFP

Alibaba shares slump 5% on Ant Group scrutiny

BEIJING: Shares in Alibaba slumped more than five percent yesterday following a report that Beijing regulators had ordered a fresh investigation into state firms' links with the Chinese e-commerce giant's fintech arm Ant Group. China's biggest state-owned firms and banks were told to begin a new round of checks on their financial exposure and other links to Ant and its subsidiaries, Bloomberg reported, in another blow to the beleaguered company and Alibaba's billionaire co-founder Jack Ma.

Since late 2020, Chinese regulators have launched a wide-ranging crackdown on alleged anti-competitive practices by Alibaba and other domestic tech giants, which saw a record-breaking planned IPO by Ant Group pulled at the last minute. Bloomberg described the fresh investigation as "by far the most thorough

Fed official says March rate hike will depend on data

WASHINGTON: A US Federal Reserve official said Monday she expected high inflation through at least the first half of 2022 and therefore backs an interest rate hike in March, though by how much would depend on data. "I support raising the federal funds rate at our next meeting in March," governor Michelle Bowman said, stressing that should the economy evolve as she expects, "additional rate increases will be appropriate in the coming months."

She did not specify how big a hike she expects at this point. "I will be watching the data closely to judge the appropriate size of an increase," she said during a speech at the American Bankers Association Community Banking Conference.

US inflation is sitting at its highest level in four decades, battering President Joe Biden's popularity and dealing a heavy blow to households and businesses in the world's largest economy. Markets already are anticipating the first of several rate hikes to come at the March 15-16 policy meeting, and some economists predict a strong 50 basis-point increase, double the usual amount. Bowman anticipates "uncomfortably high inflation will persist at least through the first half of 2022."

"We may see signs of inflation easing in the second half of the year, but there is a substantial risk that high inflation could persist," she warned. She also said labor market conditions are "currently consistent" with the Fed's goal of full employment. The unemployment rate was four percent in January, and employers are facing a significant labor shortage. Another measure that should help slow inflation will be the reduction of the Fed's balance sheet. The central bank has since November been tapering its monthly purchases of bonds and securities meant to help the economy weather the COVID-19 downturn.

These asset purchases will be reduced to zero by March. This "will remove another source of unneeded stimulus for the economy," Bowman said, adding that "in the coming months, we need to take the next step, which is to begin reducing the Fed's balance sheet by ceasing the reinvestment of maturing securities already held in the portfolio." — AFP



Michelle Bowman

and wide-ranging look into deals with Ant", citing anonymous sources familiar with the matter.

It is unclear what triggered the fresh scrutiny, the report said. Alibaba shares slumped by 5.1 percent in early Hong Kong trading yesterday, reaching the lowest point since it was listed in the city in 2019. Beijing's regulatory crackdown on the tech sector after years of runaway growth has affected several other firms specializing in food delivery, gaming, tutoring and ride-hailing. Shares in Chinese food delivery giant Meituan also extended their losses yesterday, dipping almost five percent. It had plummeted more than 20 percent since Friday—the stock's biggest fall in seven months—when China's top economic planner ordered internet platforms to lower fees for struggling restaurants. — AFP



Business

Kamco Invest completes 22 investment banking transactions worth \$4.8 billion

Transactions in 2021 cover equity markets, debt markets and M&As

KUWAIT: Kamco Invest, a regional non-banking financial powerhouse with one of the largest AUMs in the region, successfully completed 22 investment banking transactions in 2021 worth \$4.8 billion in all three sectors of the business that include equity capital markets, debt capital markets and mergers & acquisitions.

The investment banking teams penetrated new markets including Saudi Arabia, Oman, Jordan, and Bahrain, besides the previous activity in Kuwait, Egypt, and UAE.

The equity capital markets team concluded six transactions worth \$801 million. The transactions included the private placement and listing of a logistics company on Boursa Kuwait, the accelerated equity offering of a 26.2 percent equity stake in another Boursa Kuwait-listed company, and four follow-on offerings of listed companies on Boursa Kuwait. Furthermore, the team launched iktatib.com, a new online subscription platform that held the first private placement in Kuwait solely relying on an online sub-



Abdullah M Al-Sharekh

scription platform.

The mergers & acquisitions team successfully concluded six landmark transactions during the year, including three sell-side and three buy-side transactions, totaling to \$336 million. The team acted as the exclusive sell-side advisor for the sale of a 60 percent stake in a UAE-based pharma-

ceutical company, in addition to two sell-side mandates in the United States and Egypt. The team led the acquisition of a minority stake in a listed company on Boursa Kuwait and facilitated the acquisition of two insurance companies in Kuwait and Jordan by a local insurance group, where Kamco Invest was the exclusive buy-side advisor.

2021 was another record year for the Company's

Debt Capital Markets activities, closing ten transactions worth \$3.7 billion. The team managed nine bond and sukuk issuances in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Bahrain, in addition to one debt advisory transaction worth \$330 million. The issuances included six USD international debt issuances and three KWD denominated debt issuances worth \$3.4 billion. A notable transaction in 2021 was the pioneering role structuring an innovative debt capital instrument for the local capital market, the first bond issuance by an insurance company and first perpetual bond issuance denominated in Kuwaiti Dinar, representing an important milestone in Kuwait's capital market.

Abdullah M Al-Sharekh, Managing Director of Markets and Investment Banking, said, "This has been an exciting year for Investment Banking on all aspects, setting a record high in terms of number and value of completed transactions. We are proud of the track record we have built over the years and for maintaining our position as one of the most active investment banks in the local and regional markets. With multi-

sector expertise and technical capabilities, a strong regional footprint, and placement power, we managed to provide strategic advisory services, successfully structuring and executing key transactions that added value to both clients and the overall market."

He added, "We expect another active year for debt issuances and equity capital transactions within the MENA region, but probably at a slower pace. This will mainly be driven by corporates seeking to finance their expansion while benefiting from low interest rates and the positive sentiment in capital markets. Additional M&A transactions are also expected in the region as the need for inorganic growth and competitive advantage increases."

With 22 transactions completed in 2021, Kamco Invest has acted as investment banker on deals totaling \$29.2 billion since inception; across equity capital markets, debt capital markets and mergers & acquisitions. Furthermore, the Company widened its regional footprint to cover new markets, strengthening its position as one of the key regional investment banks.

ABK announces Sayed Ahmad Sayed Mohammad Rajab as winner of weekly draw prize of KD 10,000

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) announced Sayed Ahmad Sayed Mohammad Rajab as the winner of KD 10,000 in the Alfouz weekly draw. The draw was held under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry on Monday. The Alfouz draw account offers ABK customers the chance to win life-changing rewards. With Alfouz, ABK customers will get a chance to win KD 10,000 in Kuwait's highest

single weekly draw and the ultimate grand prize of KD 5,000 monthly additional income for 10 years. Both new and existing ABK customers can benefit from this opportunity, with a minimum account balance of KD100 only.

The next draw winner announcement will be on Thursday, 24th February 2022, due to the following Monday being a public holiday.

KFH announces winners of 4th draw in 'with Your Card... the Journey Begins' campaign

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has announced the winners of the Land Rover (Defender) car and the 50 winners of the 50K miles in the 4th draw of "With Your Card... the Journey Begins" campaign. The campaign was developed exclusively for KFH Mastercard cardholders, in cooperation with Mastercard, Kuwait Airways Corporation - Oasis club and Ali Al-Ghanem & Sons Co.

The winner of the Land Rover (Defender) is Saud Faleh Al-Nami. Also, KFH announced the 50 winners of 50K miles each through its social media accounts (KFHGroup). On the sidelines of the draw held at KFH Auto showroom in presence of the Ministry of Commerce & Industry representative, KFH Executive Manager Credit and Charge Card Products, Talal Al-Arbeed said: "Congratulations to our 4th draw-winning customers in this campaign providing 204 winners with the opportunity to win by using KFH Mastercard credit and prepaid cards". He indicated that the campaigns launched by KFH are unique, distinguished and add value to customers' experience.

Al-Arbeed explained that transactions that qualify the customer to enter the draw include all purchase transactions using KFH Mastercard credit and prepaid cards locally and globally, with every KD 1 local purchase transaction giving the customer one chance to enter the draw while every KD 1 global purchase transaction will give the customer 10 chances to enter the draw.

Al-Arbeed said that the campaign draw prizes would be distributed as follows:

Draws for Oasis club Miles, 200 winners of a journey according to customer's choice: (50 winners each month). Each winner shall win 50K miles from the Oasis club.

Draws for Land Rover (Defender) cars - 4 winners (one winner each month)

Al-Arbeed pointed out that winning prizes with card usage inside or outside Kuwait would enhance the use of cards in the local market, activate merchants' sales, serve the mutual interests of KFH and its partners and create an added value to the customers experience in shopping and banking services as tar-



Talal Al-Arbeed

geted by KFH. Al-Arbeed emphasized that KFH is always keen on enhancing cooperation with its partners to plan and execute several campaigns, as this would reflect positively on the customer's satisfaction, usage volume, expand KFH market share and enhance KFH pioneering position in the banking cards market. He stressed KFH's keenness to enhance the security and comfortable features and valuable rewards as well as easy payment experience customers aspire to with KFH Cards.

On the other side, KFH has organized a program comprising several activities and events for customers and society as part of its campaign "With your card ... The journey begins". The program comprised also various competitions, prizes, and innovative events to ensure fulfillment of customers aspirations.

KFH organized the (KFH EXIT) event in Benaider as part of its campaign (With your card ... The journey begins) which was highly admired and appreciated by the audience. The event comprised competitions and valuable gifts with the participation of 10 Kuwaiti businesses e.g., restaurants and cafes.

KFH has favored its Mastercard holders with exclusive advantages through its pavilion in the event. KFH has given a KD 4 discount for any project available in the event through its V-THRU application where customers with KFH Mastercard have got a special code to benefit from this discount. Total customers holding KFH Mastercard who have benefited from this special discount approximated 500 customers.

Also, a virtual walking competition was held during the event in cooperation with V-THRU application where the participants received prizes for achieving the required number of steps by walking in the same site and location. KFH pavilion witnessed significant attendance by customers who have inquired about KFH new cards on the national festivals (Oasis - Signature - Platinum). These cards are environment friendly cards manufacturing wise. The cards carry a special design carrying the flag of Kuwait, bearing in mind that the quantity is limited.

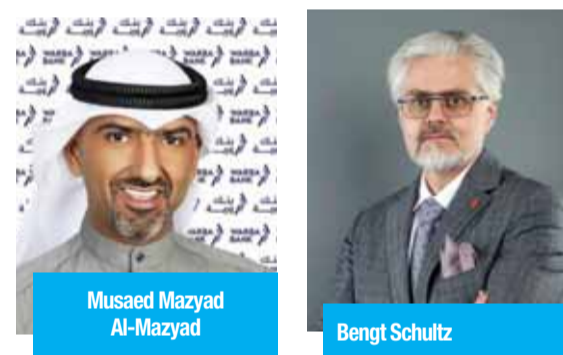
Warba Bank, MNSS sign deal to launch car leasing offers

KUWAIT: Warba Bank has announced the signing of an agreement with MNSS, to lease Toyota and Lexus vehicles at competitive prices and unique services, and the agreement allows the customer to apply for car leasing through any of the showrooms spread throughout Kuwait.

Through this agreement, Warba Bank seeks to facilitate all procedures for applicants for car leasing in Kuwait at the best prices, knowing that this cooperation includes Toyota, Lexus, and their long-standing vehicles, whether sedan or 4x4, where the customer can lease them through flexible Leasing programs over one or two years.

In this regard, Acting Chief Retail Banking Officer at Warba Bank, Musaed Mazyad Al-Mazyad, said that this deal with MNSS comes within the framework of the bank's endeavor to cooperate with major economic entities in the automotive sector, and aims to support and enhance our services that we provide to the bank's customers in the car financing sector through Murabaha contracts, vehicles, where the bank was able to occupy an advanced position in the field of car financing.

He continued to state that: "We are very pleased to have signed this agreement with MNSS, which confirms Warba Bank's leading position in the market in the field of strategic partnerships aimed at strengthen-



Musaed Mazyad Al-Mazyad

Bengt Schultz

ing the customer base, and this project and our partnership with MNSS Group originally stem from mutual trust in the efficiency and effectiveness of the two institutions."

MNSS has been selected as one of the first names in the automotive distribution sector in Kuwait, in addition to having a huge distribution network of car showrooms and service facilities in Kuwait, allowing Warba Bank to be with its customers in all provinces and regions of Kuwait on an ongoing basis.

Bengt Schultz, Chief Operating Officer of Al-Sayer group, said: "This agreement is characterized by competitive offers and prices on all Toyota and Lexus vehicles, explaining that the customer will enjoy leasing services directly with Toyota and Lexus service facilities, and will receive VIP coverage for all services during the leasing period."

In addition to facilitating all services for the lessor customer, pointing out that the beginning of this partnership will be the leasing of vehicles of the type of Lexus and Toyota. Schultz explains that 2022 will be a unique year in the Automotive market.



Weyay App on App Store and Google Play

KUWAIT: Weyay — Kuwait's first digital bank, designed and built for the youth by the youth, launched in Apple Appstore and Google Playstore earlier this year. Now, the app is available to all eligible customers to download and sign up at their own convenience, using their Kuwait Mobile ID or scanning their Civil ID. Within a few weeks of launching in the stores, Weyay has already enabled thousands of young customers to open a bank account in just a few minutes, totally paper-free. Interestingly, over half of these customers chose to open their accounts later in evenings and at night, typically after traditional bank branches' working hours.

Weyay supports seamless transfer and crediting of the university allowance for Kuwaiti Students to their account. Research with the new users shows they are most excited about the smooth account opening experience, without the need to go anywhere or to sign any

documents. They also love the fact that they can choose and customize their debit card and have it delivered to them promptly. Many took to social media to show off their freshly delivered Weyay cards and its unique packaging.

Staying true to its commitment to engaging with the youth in the most exciting ways, Weyay launched its uniquely entertaining Pop-up experience center, starting with the 360 Mall and slated to go around universities and other malls over the coming months. The pop-up store reflects world-class experience and design, inviting customers to get playful, win instant surprises, learn more about the Weyay app or just show off their talents in the special community section of the pop-up.

Speaking on this, Mohammed Al-Othman, GM-Consumer Banking Group at National Bank of Kuwait said: "Through in-depth researches and studies, we knew that we needed a fundamental change in our approach to banking. We had to provide an experience most relevant to the needs and ambitions of our youth."

"Weyay provides the youth with innovative, first of its kind services in the Kuwaiti banking sector, and we will continue to offer more banking products and solutions that meet their expectations," Al-Othman continued. "We believe in the spirit of You Can and are here



Mohammed Al-Othman

to power this young ambitious generation to achieve their goals and unlock new possibilities for themselves and our nation. Therefore, we launched our campaign "Tegdar Weyay" which resonates the brand's purpose and the ideas of all of the young minds that helped shape Weyay as it is today," he added.

Al-Othman concluded by saying: "We are proud of the youth's remarkable interest in opening new accounts, and promise to sustain and enhance their trust by continuing to offer brand new innovative services that are on par with leading international standards." Last year in November, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) had announced that it was introducing a brand new digital bank, Weyay, and opened up the brand for early registrations. In just a few weeks from then, the bank started selectively inviting its first set of registered users to sign up and open an instant bank account.

It is worth mentioning that the exceptional interest of the youth in opening new accounts with Weyay is the fruit of many months of research and close collaboration with groups of GenZ-ers, based on which Weyay was created as a brand and product personalized to the needs of Kuwait's youth. Weyay is the vehicle of Gen Z's ambitions helping them grow to progress Kuwait further through their individual success.

Sri Lanka inflation hits record high as crisis worsens

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's inflation hit a record high for the fourth consecutive month, official data showed yesterday as an economic crisis driven by a crippling foreign exchange shortage worsens.

The National Consumer Price Index (NCPI) rose 16.8 percent in January from a year earlier, the fourth consecutive record rise and more than double October's figure of 8.3 percent. The record highs came as the South Asian island struggles to find dollars to finance essential imports, including food, fuel and medicines. The energy ministry announced Monday it was struggling to buy fuel on credit and reported shortages at many pumping stations, leading to queues and forcing some to shut. The ministry said the main state-owned oil company, the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation, was straddled with outstanding debt of \$3.5 billion and was no longer able to raise new commercial loans.

The main petroleum company is banking on a proposed credit line of \$500 million from the Indian government to procure oil in the coming months, officials said. In a further blow to the government's plans to raise much-needed revenue, the Supreme Court yesterday shot down a new tax bill which targeted an additional 50 billion rupees (\$250 million) this year. The court ruled that the Special Goods and Services Tax—which would have empowered the finance minister to determine rates and sectors to be taxed—was a violation of parliament's financial authority.

Sri Lanka's cabinet is divided on seeking a bailout from the International Monetary Fund while the opposition has called for restructuring the country's \$35 billion external debt to overcome the shortage of foreign exchange. The worsening economic crisis has already led to food rationing with supermarkets restricting the quantity of rice, milk powder, sugar, lentils and tinned fish sold to consumers. —AFP

Business

Global recovery continues in 2022, but bumpy road lies ahead: Report

Coface Barometer Q4 2021 sees supply chain disruptions will run the extra mile

HONG KONG: Two years after the onset of the pandemic, the global economy continues to recover, but still faces significant challenges. After the lull in the 3rd quarter of 2021, Omicron has highlighted the unpredictability of the pandemic and exacerbated one of the main factors affecting the recovery: disruptions in supply chains. The other major risk is the lasting inflation slippage. In this highly uncertain environment, Coface has made few changes to its risk assessments following the waves of upgrades in previous quarters. In total, four country risk assessments were upgraded, including Denmark, and two were downgraded. In terms of sector risks, Coface upgraded twelve assessments, notably in the paper and wood industries, where prices remain buoyant, and made five downgrades, mainly in the energy sector in Europe.

The economy continues to slow down

The health situation has once again required the implementation of restrictions in many countries. However, although some European countries implemented partial lockdown measures, the measures were overall much less drastic than before. The direct economic effects were therefore less significant, even if the fallout remains negative for sectors such as air transport, tourism, hotels and restaurants.

Supply chain disruptions

After initially affecting the automotive industry, supply chain difficulties have spread to most sectors, from manufacturing to construction. While the time of return to normality remains hard to predict, it seems that the consensus of a gradual easing from the 1st half of 2022 is overly optimistic and that disruptions and material shortages are likely to continue. This has led Coface to lower its 2022 GDP growth forecasts for several European countries, as well as for the US and China.

Furthermore, although the recovery is continuing, the number of insolvencies, which is still very low for the moment in most countries, including the United

States, France and Germany, should gradually rise in 2022, as it is already the case in the United Kingdom.

Inflation, a key concern

The other major risk, inflation, is becoming increasingly important, particularly as the rebound in commodity prices continues, fuelled by short-term supply inertia and geopolitical tensions. This inflation is now also being driven by the prices of manufactured goods in many economies, as companies pass on increases in production costs to consumer prices.

These high commodity prices are benefiting the usual big winners. The Gulf region is expected to post strong growth performance in 2022. Norway has recorded its highest ever trade surplus thanks to buoyant oil and gas exports. Finally, many African countries, even those affected by armed conflict or political upheaval, have still benefited from high prices for energy, minerals, timber and agricultural products. In the United States, inflation and supply-side issues have dampened the recovery momentum. While GDP growth is expected to remain solid in 2022 (+3.7 percent), these factors will continue to weigh on activity. In the 4th quarter of 2021, the annual inflation rate reached 7.0 percent, its highest level in 40 years. In response to this price surge, the US Federal Reserve has become more aggressive and has hinted at an imminent rate hike, triggering monetary tightening in some emerging countries.

In Europe, disruptions in supply chains, combined with strong demand, led to higher producer and energy prices. Germany has experienced the highest inflation in over 30 years. The situation is somewhat mixed in the rest of the euro area: inflation remains relatively moderate in France, while prices have soared in Spain. In the United Kingdom, inflation has risen to 5.4 percent and has led the Bank of England to become the 1st major central bank to raise its interest rate in December 2021, before doing so a second time in early February.

Our central scenario remains one of near peak

COFACE SECTOR RISK ASSESSMENT CHANGES - ASIA PACIFIC REGION (Q4 2021)



inflation, which will ease as energy prices and supply chain bottlenecks ease in the second half of the year.

China going against the grain

China's slowdown deepened in Q4 2021, with an annual growth rate of 4.0 percent, the slowest pace since the peak of the pandemic in 2020. China's economic recovery has been affected by the slowdown in the property market, the continuation of the "zero-COVID" strategy, which has weighed on household spending, weak investment growth and energy shortages. In 2021, Chinese GDP grew by 8.1 percent. Heavily affected by the Delta variant in Q3 2021, the Asia-Pacific economies rebounded at the end of the year. Pacific economies rebounded at the end of the year, in line with the easing of restrictions. Most of the region's economies had returned to their pre-crisis GDP levels by the end of 2021, with the notable exceptions of Japan and Thailand. However, the continued recovery could add to inflationary pressures, especially if labor markets tighten.—AFP

Inflation is likely to exacerbate social pressures

This sharp rise in inflation risks exacerbates social pressures in emerging and developing countries, which had already been reinforced by the increase in inequality associated with the pandemic. In Africa, high energy & food prices, which weigh heavily on households, have limited consumption to the extent that food insecurity and poverty have increased. Fiscal support, already very limited on the continent due to public debt levels, has been withdrawn and unemployment is high in most countries. South Africa, Algeria, Angola, Mozambique, Nigeria, DRC, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Guinea and Tunisia are examples of countries experiencing increasing social pressures as a result of the crisis.

Boeing congratulates Kuwaiti leadership: Positive momentum in aviation sector



Musaad Al-Hawli

national strategy, Kuwait Vision 2035, which aims to transform Kuwait into a financial and trade hub regionally and internationally, is a testament to Kuwait's efforts to pursue the best international practices in the civil aviation industry.

KUWAIT: Musaad Al-Hawli, Boeing Managing Director for Kuwait, expresses his sincere appreciation to the leadership for placing the aviation sector as one of the key entities that would contribute to achieving Kuwait's 2035 development vision. On behalf of Boeing and its employees, I offer our sincere congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khalef Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, on the occasion of the 61st Kuwait National Day.

This year's national day is an opportunity to highlight the travel and tourism potential within the country as the region's air travel commences its path to recovery. It is also an opportunity to reflect on the remarkable efforts put forth by Kuwaiti leadership, carriers, and aviation bodies and to acknowledge the incredible work done during the pandemic.

During this period, we are proud to say that Boeing products and services enabled some critical aspects of the country's response. Using the C-17 Globemaster III, Kuwait was able to complete life-saving missions and deliver medical aid. The aircraft delivered personal protective equipment (PPE), carried critical medical supplies, repatriated citizens, and transported COVID-19 patients. National carriers also operated numerous onboard repatriation flights onboard Boeing aircraft.

I believe that Kuwait's leadership remained strong and steadfast in the face of adversity with visionary governments affirming their commitment to supporting the recovery and growth of the aerospace sector. The

team at Boeing and I wish success to the leadership of Kuwait, and the continued blessings of security, safety, and prosperity for the country.

We are also proud of our initiatives in the community. Over the years, Boeing has supported various education and training programs and initiatives in Kuwait through partnerships with academic establishments such as Kuwait University and NGOs such as AMIDEAST and INJAZ Kuwait. For example, to help strengthen support in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education for Kuwait's youngest generation, Boeing has partnered with AMIDEAST to bring the popular "STEM for Kids" program to Kuwait. Another example of our commitment to Kuwait's community is Boeing's partnership with INJAZ, which supports a number of career readiness, entrepreneurship and women empowerment programs. Boeing will continue to explore opportunities to reinforce its partnerships, with participation that will bring mutual and long-term benefits, while enhancing the country's aviation sector.

The team at Boeing and I wish success to the leadership of Kuwait, and the continued blessings of security, safety, and prosperity for the country.

ABCK-AmCham hosts webinar on digitization of healthcare sector

KUWAIT: ABCK-AmCham Kuwait's Healthcare Focus Group in collaboration with Viatrix, Dell Technologies and CISCO hosted a webinar on "The Digitization of Kuwait's Healthcare Sector", with the support of the US Embassy Kuwait and Kuwait's Ministry of Health (MoH). The event focused on different aspects of the digitization of the healthcare sector, its strategic approach in reducing the cost of innovation, and it highlighted healthcare facility efficiencies through digitization of systems.

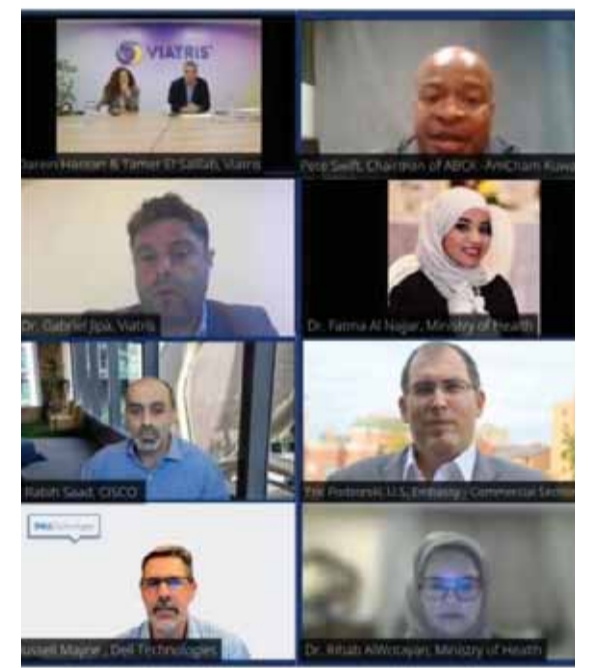
The event started with the opening remarks by AmCham Kuwait's Chairman Pete Swift, who welcomed the participants and gave a warm welcome to Eric Podzorski, the US Embassy's Senior Commercial Officer. Swift also welcomed and thanked the Chair of the event Dr Fatma Al Najjar, Assistant Undersecretary for Private Medical Services Affairs at the Ministry of Health.

During her opening remarks, Dr Al-Najjar stated "The Ministry of Health has already implemented various digitalized processes which have proven to be a great help and success; especially during the early days of the pandemic of COVID-19 and thereafter. There is no other area in healthcare that offers so much potential for increasing efficiency, improving medical quality, enhancing patient safety, and achieving sustainable economic success as digitalization."

Tamer El Sallab, Chair of AmCham Kuwait's Healthcare Focus Group opened the discussion by introducing Dr Gabriel Jipa, who spoke on the topic of Healthcare Digitization Strategy and Innovation. Dr Jipa highlighted the key components of digital healthcare, along with cost optimization for innovation and how to bring a new perspective and innovation together.

Dr Jipa finalized his presentation by discussing the challenges and the opportunities of data-driven systems which involve tackling challenges for how this data will be utilized and protected, as well as artificial intelligence regulatory frameworks and how these can be done in a safe and ethical way. "Digital strategy is not a goal by itself, and it must be tied to the outcomes that are expected, and it should be aimed towards the benefit of the healthcare ecosystem," said Dr Jipa.

Following the discussion, Rabih Saad, Senior Engineering Manager GCC at Cisco Systems, highlighted that this is a crucial time for the use of technology to change our world and build bridges to the future of care. Saad gave in-depth information about healthcare's main pillars which include operational transformation which enables the transformation of digital and physical healthcare spaces, enabling



healthcare systems, applications, and users to connect at scale. The second pillar focuses on security, the third pillar focuses on remote patient care through telehealth and virtual care, and the last pillar is the data-driven clinical workflows and hybrid cloud platforms.

Subsequently, Russell Mayne Healthcare Field Director, MERAT (Middle East, Russia, Africa and Turkey) at Dell Technologies, addressed the topic of cybersecurity in the healthcare sector and how we can use a standards-based approach to drive healthcare digitization. In his presentation, he spoke about the exponential growth of patient data, which has led to an increased number of healthcare cyber threats. He mentioned that the utilization of healthcare digitization must be done with a strong foundation of secure care.

Cyber-resilient strategies must be in place because without it, organizations put themselves at risk of a successful attack. This would have significant financial, organizational, operational, and clinical impact. Mayne suggested that to digitize with intent and focus, organizations and governments should look into utilizing a standard system from organizations like HIMMS (Healthcare Information and Management System Society Standards) which are internationally recognized. This provides focus on governance, workforce, interoperability standards, Cyber-resilience, Patient-focused, and have strong regulatory clarity. The presentations were followed by a Q&A from the audience.

To finalize, Dr Rihab Al-Wotayan, Director of International Health Relations at the Kuwait Ministry of Health, stated: "Kuwait's Ministry of Health Kuwait is looking forward to collaborating with AmCham Kuwait in creating new opportunities in the digital health field by serving the patients in simplifying the system".

Volkswagen eyes separate market listing for Porsche



STUTTGART, Germany: This file photo taken on March 4, 2020 shows the logo of German luxury car maker Porsche AG at the company's production site in Stuttgart, southwestern Germany. — AFP

STUTTGART: German auto giant Volkswagen yesterday said it was drawing up plans to list its luxury brand Porsche as it looks to raise the funds for its move to electric vehicles. Volkswagen and its largest shareholder Porsche SE had "negotiated a framework agreement which should form the basis for further steps" towards a separate stock market listing, the carmaker said in a statement.

A "final decision" on the future of the storied sports car brand had not yet been taken, the group said.

The flotation would represent a major shake up at Volkswagen, which is searching for a way to finance its shift away from traditional combustion engines towards electric vehicles. According to the daily Handelsblatt, Volkswagen could be willing to part with 49 percent of Porsche shares, which it currently holds in their entirety. Volkswagen group's parent company and main shareholder is Porsche SE, which is also listed on the Frankfurt Stock Exchange. Shares in both the carmaker and the holding company jumped on the news. Volkswagen shares were up almost nine percent to 190 euros (\$216) around 1330 GMT, while the holding group's stock rose by over 12 percent.

Blockbuster deal

Analysts value Porsche, maker of the famous 911 sports car, at between 60 and 80 billion euros. The blockbuster deal could see the similarly named holding company directly "purchase stock in Porsche AG", it

said in a statement. Porsche SE, which manages the investments of the Porsche-Piech family, could in turn finance the move by selling part of its majority stake in the Volkswagen group, according to recent reports in the local press. The consent of the two parties' supervisory boards is still needed for the deal to go through.

But approval seems likely given the familial ties between the two groups and the fact that a number of members of the carmaker's supervisory board also have roles at the holding company.

The Volkswagen group-whose 12 brands include Audi, Porsche and Skoda-is pumping 35 billion euros into the shift to electric vehicles and aims to become the world's largest electric carmaker by 2025. The world's second largest automaker is in a tussle with its American rival Tesla, which has parked its tanks on Volkswagen's lawn by building a factory in Germany. Herbert Diess, the German group's CEO, has sought to overhaul the group's image, turning it from an auto behemoth into a more of a technology company focused on electric vehicles. —AFP

German business confidence rises in February

FRANKFURT: The German business climate improved again in February, survey data published yesterday showed, despite the aggravation of the crisis in Ukraine and persistent supply chain issues.

The Ifo institute's closely watched indicator rose to 98.9 points from 96 in January, with companies reporting an improvement in their expectations for the near future. "The German economy is betting on an end to the coronavirus crisis," Ifo president Clemens Fuest said in a statement, after the government indi-

cated it would roll back most of the health restrictions designed to contain the coronavirus pandemic by the end of March. High case numbers around the turn of the year depressed domestic demand, hitting services particularly hard, and were a factor behind the economy shrinking in the last quarter of 2021.

The flagship manufacturing industries were also "clearly more satisfied", the Ifo said, though "material shortages continue to hamper production". Bottlenecks in supply of raw materials and components have weighed heavily on Europe's largest economy, which draws much of its strength from the export-strong sector. Nonetheless, "the escalation of the crisis engulfing Ukraine remains a risk factor," Fuest said.

Rising tensions with Russia have already contributed to rising prices for energy, with Europe and Germany in particular highly dependent on the country for supplies of natural gas.—AFP



In this picture disk jockey (DJ) Kei Notoya, who has collected around City Pop's 3,000 records, poses for a photo following an interview with AFP at a studio in his house in the Koganei area of Tokyo. — AFP photos



In this picture disk jockey (DJ) Kei Notoya selects records at a studio in his house in the Koganei area of Tokyo.

City Pop: The soundtrack to Japan's boom years goes viral

Tel Liyanto wasn't alive during Japan's 1980s boom, but she loves the "timeless" City Pop hits of the era, now going viral thanks to a new generation of young, international fans. The glamorous soundtrack that accompanied the country's economic miracle is exploding in popularity decades after its upbeat synths, influenced by soft rock, boogie and soul, first hit the airwaves. The retro genre is so hot that Canadian star The Weeknd sampled the 1983 track "Midnight Pretenders" on his latest release, and record companies are racing to reissue long-forgotten City Pop vinyl.

"It's like disco: a nostalgic sound, but also modern," said Liyanto, a 27-year-old from Indonesia who works for a creative agency, as she danced to City Pop in a Tokyo bar. "I listen to it when I'm dancing, I listen to it when I'm chilling," she told AFP. From its origins in niche online music circles, the revival was amplified by YouTube's algorithm, which detects when a song is being liked and shared and recommends it worldwide.

The most popular tracks, like Mariya Takeuchi's "Plastic Love", have tens of millions of views on YouTube. The song's funk bassline and flamboyant brass have the optimistic vibe of "Club Tropicana" by Wham! — but the soaring Japanese vocals tell another story. "Since the day I was heartbroken, I've been living life with day and night reversed," Takeuchi sings in the track that commenters call a "hidden gem". "Why am I suddenly listening to Japanese 80s pop? And why is it so good?" wrote one.

Fresh, but familiar

Kei Notoya, a 33-year-old DJ, was hooked by City Pop the first time he heard it at a university party. He has since collected around 3,000 records, some of which sell out in seconds from his online shop Tokyo Condition. "Japanese music

songs-ignored for many years, but recently unearthed by music lovers-keeps interest in the genre alive, Notoya said. He boasts of "new finds every week" in second-hand record shops, and released the compilation "Tokyo Glow" in December. The Weeknd's sample of Tomoko Aran's

'Not pure hedonism'

Gary Leong, the co-owner of White Noise Records in Hong Kong, said that while fans prefer hunting for original City Pop presses, the "Plastic Love" reissue has been "really popular" in his shop. Young people who listen to the song on

through all the City Pop songs and gains them virality. There's something sad about it too-it's not pure hedonism." Nothing lasts forever though, and early trendsetters who started getting into City Pop online in the 2010s are already moving on, St Michel said. They have



Disk jockey (DJ) Kei Notoya, who has collected around City Pop's 3,000 records, poses for a photo in the Shinjuku district of Tokyo.

back then copied a lot of American rock, soul, R&B," he told AFP. "It sounds fresh, but at the same time, familiar." "People who weren't born can feel the energy, the atmosphere of the 80s and 70s by listening to these songs." The buzz has prompted Japanese record companies to upload more of their back catalogue onto streaming services.

But the huge number of "slept-on"

hit on his new track "Out of Time" is "the most mainstream example of any Japanese older music being introduced to a wider audience", said Patrick St Michel, a Japan-based music writer. "Midnight Pretenders" was reissued on vinyl last year along with other City Pop favourites including "Plastic Love", which has also been refreshed with a modern-day music video by record label Warner Japan.



Disk jockey (DJ) Kei Notoya, looks through various Japanese records from the 1970s and 1980s in Tokyo.

YouTube want to buy the reissue "as a souvenir, or for the artwork", he told AFP. The music is also popular on TikTok, where fans match their favorite tracks to anime-style sunset illustrations or dance along in 80s clothes.

But beyond cheesy fun, new listeners are also drawn to City Pop by the "element of melancholy lurking within," said St Michel. "That's something that creeps

"already kind of said clearly, 'it's already over for us, we're moving on to the 90s.'" "It's like a race to find what internet crowds will be into. But they're the ones to decide," he added. "That's the beauty of it." — AFP

CHILE MUSEUM TO RETURN EASTER ISLAND 'HEAD'

Chile's National Museum of Natural History said Monday it will return to Easter Island an enormous stone statue taken from the Rapa Nui people and brought to the mainland 150 years ago. The monolith is one of hundreds, called Moai, carved by the Rapa Nui in honor of their ancestors and sometimes referred to as the Easter Island heads. The statues are today the island's greatest tourist attraction, sculpted from basalt more than 1,000 years ago. The one being returned, dubbed Moai Tau, is a 715-kilogram (1,500-pound) giant brought by the Chilean navy some 3,700 kilometers (2,300 miles) across the Pacific in 1870. Eight years later, it was moved to the natural history museum to be displayed.

The Rapa Nui, for whom the Moai represent the spirits of their ancestors, have been asking for the statue's return for years—as well as other cultural treasures taken from their island. "For the Rapa Nui, their ancestors, funerary objects and ceremonial materials may be as alive as members of their communities themselves," said a museum statement. The



A Rapa Nui native performs at the Natural History Museum in Santiago. — AFP photos

return of the monolith "is profoundly significant as a gesture towards our indigenous peoples," said museum curator Cristian Becker. With delays due to the coronavirus epidemic, the statue will finally depart from the port of Valparaiso next

Monday on a trip of about five days to Easter Island, said the museum, "after a complex technical and diagnostic process" to guarantee its structural integrity.

A traditional ceremony was held at the museum Monday to send the statue safely on its way. "It is essential that the Moai return to my homeland. For them (the community) and for me, this day is very much awaited," said Veronica Tuqui, a Rapa Nui representative. Back on Easter Island, the Moai will be exhibited at the Father Sebastian Englert Anthropological Museum. The Rapa Nui community has also asked the British Museum in London to return another Moai, dubbed Hoa Hakananai'a, that was taken in 1868 from Orongo, a ceremonial village on Easter Island. The Rapa Nui in 2017 gained self-administration over their ancestral lands on Easter Island, a special territory of Chile. — AFP



View of the Moai Tau, a statue from Easter Island, displayed at the Natural History Museum.

Lebanese theater scene suffering due to economic crisis

As the dire economic situation continues to drag on in Lebanon, the theater scene—as in the case of various other sectors—has been down on its luck with producers, actors, and staff suffering from lack of financing, earnings, as well as the ever-looming threat of the coronavirus. "We continue to strive to provide the best theatrical, musical, and artistic performances despite the gloomy situation engulfing Lebanon," founder and director of Al-Madina theater group and actress Nidal Al-Achkar told KUNA in an interview. Al-Achkar added that the theater group carried on with the help of friends in Lebanon and abroad who covered the expenses of production and paid for actors. Al-Madina Theater would continue to strive providing the best for those seeking entertainment, affirmed Al-Achkar who insisted that supporting artists was the best way to keep talent from migrating elsewhere. On his part, Georges Khabbaz—producer, writer, and actor—indicated that the fall of the Lebanese currency and the presence of COVID-19 had heavily affected national theater scene.

"It is possible to produce 'monodrama' and 'pocket theater' due to lower cost of production," indicated Khabbaz who noted that these aforementioned theater styles, with their solo and students-ran

natures, were an alternative for big production theater. Khabbaz revealed that most Lebanese talents had migrated to theater and television production elsewhere in the Arab world so that they could escape the absurd situation back at home, hoping that at some point the



Nidal Al-Achkar

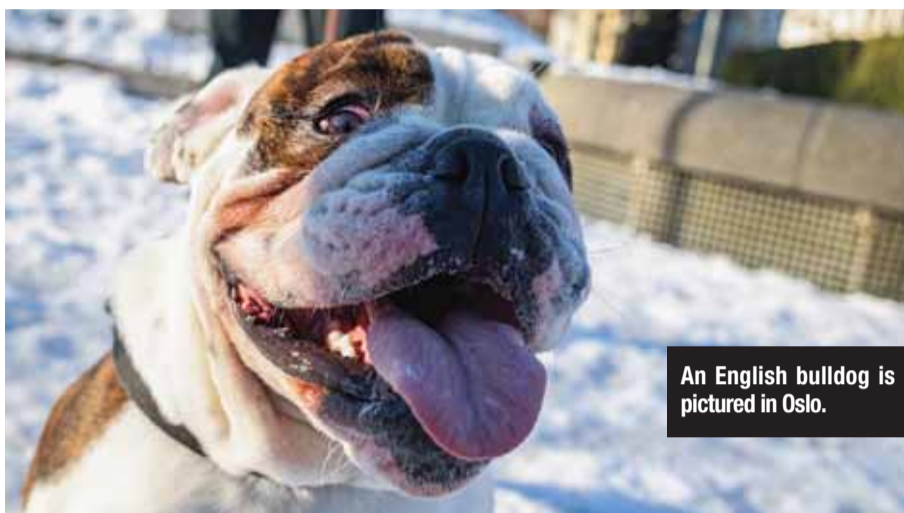
economy would recover to allow the artistic scene to thrive again in Lebanon. The problems in the Lebanese theater scene predates the current economic and health crises, claimed Mirna Khayat, a director and actress, while speaking to KUNA. Entertainment theater and comedy theater had been prevailing lately due to their small cost and ease of production, she indicated, noting that anyone who sought large-scale theater production in Lebanon was taking a big risk. She said that if there were any kind of major theater in Lebanon at this moment, it was usually funded from abroad, driving most actors and theater staff to seek such kind of work or switch to other performance arts to cover their expenses. — KUNA



Lifestyle | Features



Breeder Lise Gran-Henriksen poses with a Cavalier King Charles Spaniel in Oslo, Norway.



An English bulldog is pictured in Oslo.



Two English bulldogs are pictured in Oslo, Norway.—AFP Photos

Breeding ban for bulldogs and cavaliers in Norway

Cavalier King Charles Spaniels are known for their tiny heads, English bulldogs for their smushed wrinkled muzzles—traits their owners love. But in an unprecedented move, Norway has banned the breeding of these dogs because being cute is causing them suffering. In a recent ruling, the Oslo district court banned the breeding of the two purebreds on the grounds that it inflicts harm on them, in violation of Norwegian animal protection laws.

Hailed by animal rights activists and criticized by breeders, the verdict comes amid a growing debate: is the quest for cute pets going to extremes at the expense of the animals' well-being? "A lot of our breeds are highly inbred and have a massive burden of disease," Ashild Roaldset, the head of the Norwegian Animal Welfare Society, told AFP. Her organization brought the legal case against dogbreeding companies and individuals. "We need to change the way we breed dogs," she said. "The way we breed dogs was maybe acceptable 50 years ago but is not acceptable anymore."

Inbreeding has caused the two breeds to develop a "disease guarantee", a long list of hereditary illnesses that affect most



A Cavalier King Charles Spaniel is pictured.

individuals, if not all. Fierce-looking but gentle—and since World War II a symbol of British tenacity—the English bulldog has developed respiratory difficulties due to its flattened muzzle, as well as dermatological, reproductive and orthopaedic problems. More than half of all bulldogs born

in Norway over the past 10 years had to be delivered by Caesarian section.

"The race's genetic inability to give birth naturally is reason alone for bulldogs not to be used for breeding," the district court judges wrote in their ruling. As for cavaliers—which have won the hearts of

many over the years, from Queen Victoria to Ronald Reagan and Sylvester Stallone—they often suffer headaches because their skull is too small. They also have heart and eye problems. Roaldset said these diseases cannot be bred away with other purebreds from abroad due to an overall lack of genetic diversity.

The two breeds will eventually be led to extinction, she said. "And it's going to be painful for them because they're just going to get more and more diseases," she said.

'Puppy factories'

The January 31 court ruling has been appealed and has therefore not come into force yet. But it delivered a shock to professional breeders. "In the judgment it was said that the dogs are born with headaches, I cannot understand that," says Lise Gran-Henriksen, who has been a breeder for 25 years, as she watches five of her Cavalier King Charles Spaniels frolic on the ice outside her Oslo home. "If so, they would not be so happy. They are happy dogs that run around and look very healthy, and that's what I think they are," she insists. Professional breeders readily admit that the two breeds do pose "chal-

lenges", but say these can be overcome by selective breeding of individuals that meet certain requirements.

In addition, they note that the court ruling does not ban the ownership, sale or import of bulldogs or cavaliers—only their breeding. Walking her English bulldog Oscar in an Oslo park, Anne Grethe Holen fears a rise in "undocumented dogs" from "puppy factories" abroad. "Demand will not decline. And the dogs that are sold will be more sick," she says. "They won't be subjected to any veterinary requirements and you won't know anything about their pedigree," she adds. Meanwhile, the Animal Welfare Society says the future of the two breeds lies in crossbreeding them with other types of dogs to get rid of their genetic flaws. "If the cavalier gets a slightly larger skull to fit their brain, it's still... going to be the cutest dog in the world," says Roaldset. "And if the bulldog gets a little bit less wrinkly, a little bit longer snout and a better skeleton, it's not going to be a horrible dog. It's going to look a little bit different, but you can still call it a bulldog." — AFP



Behind Cape Town's heavenly beaches, the hell of dog fighting

Ocean View is a contender for one of the world's most ironic place names. Stuck between mountains and exquisite white-sand beaches, this distant suburb of Cape Town has, in fact, no sea vista. It was created in 1968 by South Africa's apartheid regime as a "township" for so-called colored people, who themselves had been forced out of areas that looked out on the Atlantic. Houses made of stone and brick lie



Men pose with their dogs in Ocean View, Cape Town. — AFP photos



Men pose with their dogs in Ocean View, Cape Town.

among vacant, grassless lots, signaling a middle-class life by South African standards—one without extreme wealth or poverty, but still touched by the country's rampant problems of unemployment, substance abuse and crime. Breeding or owning a fierce dog is part of the local culture to protect one's home from burglars, for instance.

But some turn to dog fighting, a brutal and illegal activity, for fun and money, pitting pitbulls and other hounds bred and trained to kill against each other. "These fights can get the owner between 5,000

and 20,000 rand (\$330-1,300 / 300- 1,200 euros) if his dog wins," said one dog owner, who said he had given up the business.

Combat takes place in a ring, which is set up either in an apartment or "in the bush", out in the countryside, where the noise of barking or distressed dogs cannot be heard by passers-by. Owners set the date for the fight around eight months in advance, giving them enough time to raise and maltreat a dog so that it is ready to fight with mindless ferocity.

Combat continues until one dog dies. "It can last between 40 minutes to three

hours," the source said, speaking on condition of anonymity. Police try to crack down on the illegal activity, often using informers to bust a network, said an insider. But dogs are not just bred for fighting. Having a fierce dog provides social status as a sign of virility, and also provides protection. "Nobody will jump over my fence because my dog is a bad one," said one owner proudly. — AFP

Napoli denied Serie A lead with Cagliari 1-1 draw

Nigeria forward Osimhen saves a point for Napoli



Napoli's Nigeria forward Victor Osimhen

MILAN: Napoli missed out on the chance to move top of Serie A on Monday after Victor Osimhen snatched a barely deserved 1-1 draw at rejuvenated Cagliari. Nigeria forward Osimhen saved a point for Napoli when he crashed in a powerful header with three minutes remaining but it was not enough for the away side to take first place from AC Milan.

Luciano Spalletti's outfit would have taken top spot ahead of Milan on goal difference had they won in Sardinia but instead are two points back in third. They were outplayed by a Cagliari team who took the lead through Gaston Pereiro in the 58th minute and were disappointed with the draw after having more than enough chances to seal the win before Osimhen struck.

"It was a difficult match for us. Maybe we didn't deserve what we got here, or rather Cagliari deserved more," Spalletti told DAZN. "We never had the game under control, so it's probably a good result for us. We didn't do enough." Cagliari would have moved out of

the relegation zone with a win but stay 18th, level on 22 points with Venezia who are one place outside the bottom three due to Osimhen's late leveler.

Walter Mazzarri's side looked doomed to Serie B after losing at Juventus just before the winter break but have won three of their seven league matches since the turn of the year-losing just once. "We played really well, it's a shame that we didn't get the win but we need to continue playing like this, with the same spirit," Pereiro told DAZN. "Then the three points which we deserved today will come the next time."

It was another reprieve for Milan following their 2-2 draw at bottom side Salernitana on Saturday, as second-placed Inter, who are level on 54 points with Napoli, were beaten 2-0 by Sassuolo on Sunday. Napoli were missing a host of players to injury including captain Lorenzo Insigne and key midfielders Stanislav Lobotka and Andre-Frank Zambo Anguissa, and the performance at a windy Unipol Domus stadium will have caused concern ahead of Thursday's

Europa League showdown with Barcelona.

Pereiro was handed what looked like being the winning goal by David Ospina shortly before the hour mark, when the Napoli goalkeeper let a week shot squirm through his fingers and into his net. However Ospina then redeemed himself with some important saves which kept the deficit to one goal and allowed substitute Osimhen to earn Napoli a draw when he thumped home Mario Rui's deep cross.

Joao Pedro and Alessandro Deiola had already missed great chances before Ospina flapped at Pereiro's shot and the home fans could barely believe their eyes two minutes later when Napoli's stopper pulled off a great save to keep out Deiola's close-range header before Daniele Baselli somehow fired over. Ospina saved Napoli's skin again with four minutes remaining, tipping over Razvan Marin's dipping, curling shot from the edge of the area and seconds later Osimhen popped up to reward his goalkeeper's sterling work with the equalizer.—AFP

Ajax star Haller out to extend Champions League scoring streak

AMSTERDAM: Sebastian Haller will be bidding to continue his remarkable scoring record in this season's Champions League when his Ajax side face Benfica in the first leg of their last-16 tie yesterday. Ajax take on Benfica at the Estadio da Luz as they return to Lisbon, where Haller scored four times on his Champions League debut when the Dutch champions beat Sporting 5-1 along the road at the Jose Alvalade in September.

Ivory Coast international Haller went on to score 10 times in the group stage, becoming just the second player to find the net in all six group games in a Champions League campaign after Cristiano Ronaldo in 2017. "Before the competition if you asked me if I would score that many goals of course I would say no," Haller told Ajax TV ahead of the knockout stages of Europe's elite club competition. "I was happy with one already. I score one goal in the Champions League and my life is done."

Haller, who is 27, was the first player to score a quadruple on his debut in the competition since Marco van Basten in 1992 and his goals helped Ajax top their group with maximum points, beating Sporting, Borussia Dortmund and Besiktas home and away. His tally of 10 goals puts him one ahead of Bayern Munich's Robert Lewandowski in the competition's scoring charts and is as many as Dortmund's Erling Haaland managed last season when he finished as the Champions League's leading marksman.

"Ten is ok, it's a good number because we created a lot of chances. I could have scored even more but 10 is a really great number," Haller added. Signed from West Ham United in January last year, French-born Haller recently marked his 50th appearance for Ajax with a hat-trick of close-range finishes in a 5-0 hammering of FC Twente. He has 28 goals in 28 games in all competitions this season, including six in four games since returning from the Africa Cup of Nations in Cameroon, where the Ivory Coast went out in the last 16 to Egypt.

However, Haller was not among the goals as Erik ten Hag's side won 1-0 at Willem II at the weekend to stay five points clear of PSV Eindhoven at the top of the Dutch Eredivisie and make it 10 straight wins in all competitions. Ajax have been rocked off the field by the recent resignation of sporting director Marc Overmars after he admitted sending a "series of inappropriate messages" to female colleagues. Yet on the pitch Ten Hag's side are threatening another deep run in the Champions League, three years after they reached the semi-finals with Matthijs de Ligt and Frenkie de Jong their young stars.—AFP



Sebastian Haller

Napoli fretting on injuries ahead of Barca showdown

MILAN: Luciano Spalletti is hoping to have a fit first-choice team ready to face Barcelona as Napoli turn their attentions to their decisive Europa League clash in Naples after escaping Cagliari with an undeserved 1-1 draw on Monday. Victor Osimhen saved a point for Napoli in Sardinia with an 87th-minute equaliser but did not start the game as Spalletti tried to save the players he could for the showdown with Barca at the Stadio Diego Armando Maradona.

Captain Lorenzo Insigne and key midfielders Stanislav Lobotka and Andre-Frank Zambo Anguissa were among those unavailable on Monday, and Spalletti also started with Fabian Ruiz and Adam Ounas on the bench with an eye on Thursday's clash. "We're hoping to play them with players who are fit and in a position to play," said Spalletti. "We hope to have them all available. This is the kind of game that



MANCHESTER: Brighton's English striker Danny Welbeck controls the ball in front of Manchester United's Spanish goalkeeper David de Gea (right) during the English Premier League football match in Manchester, north west England.—AFP

Manchester now 'home' for De Gea; memories of failed Madrid move fade

MANCHESTER: David de Gea returns to the city of his birth and club where he grew up today as Manchester United head to Atletico Madrid in a Champions League clash between two giants that have fallen on hard times. United sit fourth in the Premier League, 17 points behind local rivals Manchester City, and out of both domestic cup competitions, leaving European glory their only remaining shot at ending a five-year wait to win a trophy.

Yet, not for the first time in the 11 years since the then fresh-faced, skinny Spaniard swapped Madrid for Manchester, De Gea has risen to the challenge of playing in a struggling team. The fact the 31-year-old has by a distance the most saves of any Premier League goalkeeper this season with 96 is testament to both his form and United's failure to protect their goal as a team.

De Gea's stats for outperforming expected goals conceded by nearly 10 goals in 26 games is the best for 'keepers in Europe's top five leagues. A return to the sort of form that earned him United fans' player of the year four times in five years between 2014 and 2018 looked long gone at the end of last season. His place even as number one at the club was in danger with Dean Henderson finishing the 2020/21 campaign as the regular starter in the Premier League.

De Gea was retained by then manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer for the Europa League, but was the only player of the 22 to take a penalty not to score as

you dreamed about as a child...I've waited a lifetime to play them." Napoli emerged with a lot of credit from last week's 1-1 draw at the Camp Nou which leaves the tie on a knife-edge.

They played with verve and confidence for the first hour, deservedly going ahead through Piotr Zielinski before succumbing to tiredness and Barcelona's trademark possession football. Ferran Torres leveled from the penalty spot but missed a number of chances which could have easily pushed the tie in the Catalans' favour. Barca come into the match in high spirits after running out 4-1 winners at Valencia and moving into La Liga's top four thanks to Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang's hat-trick.

Xavi's team are unbeaten in five and with the Gabon striker in their ranks after he quit Arsenal they have a serious goal threat who could push Barca back into the Champions League. "It's a luxury to have a player like him arriving for free," said Barca icon Sergio Busquets after Aubameyang's treble. "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."

Champions League level

Such is the high-profile nature of the fixture that

United lost the final to Villarreal in Gdansk. Despite that disappointment, there were signs of progress for the Red Devils having finished second to Manchester City in the Premier League.

The enthusiasm generated by the signings of Cristiano Ronaldo, Raphael Varane and Jadon Sancho added to hope of a serious title challenge for the first time since Alex Ferguson retired as manager. Instead, the only player from that 2012/13 league win who is still a regular fixture in the team, has been the only one performing at a level worthy of champions.

'Loved and welcomed'

A return of one league title, one FA Cup and one League Cup is a paltry return of silverware for 11 years at a club that considers itself the biggest in the world. Yet, De Gea has shown no bitterness over what could have been for his career had a transfer to Real Madrid gone through just before they embarked on a run of three consecutive Champions League wins. After weeks of negotiations a deal was finally struck in the dying embers of deadline day in August 2015, but not in time to beat the clock.

Rather than wait for a move, De Gea has twice since extended his contract at United, becoming the highest paid goalkeeper in the world in the process when he penned his last deal in 2019. "Now I feel as if I'm from Manchester," De Gea told uefa.com this week. "Where you are loved and welcomed is your home. I've been here for many years and, obviously, anything can happen in life, in the world of football, but honestly I don't see myself away from Manchester United."

Stinging criticism from Spain that greeted De Gea's displays at the 2018 World Cup may have played a part in that reflection. The last of his 45 caps came over two years ago. But in a World Cup year the chance to shine in the Spanish capital is one he will relish. It would be no surprise if United's defending made sure he is busy.—AFP

after the Cagliari draw Spalletti spoke about teams being tired "after Champions League games". Napoli certainly looked weary on Monday, missing out on top spot in Serie A after a display which Spalletti admitted did not merit a draw, much less a win which would have moved them first on goal difference.

They were outplayed by a Cagliari team who took the lead through Gaston Pereiro in the 58th minute and were then kept from claiming a deserved win by a series of David Ospina saves. It was Ospina's fault that Napoli went behind as he somehow let Pereiro's tame shot slip through his fingers but the Colombian redeemed himself with some fine stops. The home fans could barely believe their eyes two minutes after Pereiro's opener when Ospina pulled off a great save to keep out Alessandro Deiola's close-range header before Daniele Baselli somehow fired over.

Ospina saved Napoli's skin again with four minutes remaining, tipping over Razvan Marin's dipping, curling shot from the edge of the area and seconds later Osimhen popped up to reward his goalkeeper's sterling work with the equalizer. Osimhen's strike was his second since coming back from face fractures last month and his return to form is a huge plus for a team which could be without a host of regulars.—AFP

West Asia Games

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Chairman of the Table Tennis Paralympic Committee and Chairman of Irada Disabled Sports Club Duajj Al-Hajiri has lauded the outstanding start of Kuwait athletes in the West Asia Games being held in Bahrain. Yaqoub Al-Khalifa, Malak Al-Enezi, Hussein Al-Bannai and Mohammad Al-Rashidi were able to win in the singles competition for both men and women in the first round, which will be concluded today. Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, UAE and Bahrain are participating in the Table Tennis competitions.



Duajj Al-Hajiri

Struggling Atletico look to reignite the fire against United

MADRID: If winning La Liga caused Atletico Madrid to soften their edge or lose their identity, a Champions League tie against Manchester United could be a chance for them to get it back. From the highs of winning their second league title in 25 years, have come the lows of humiliating defeats, unprecedented fragility in defense and introspection over style and application that has left even Diego Simeone's future in doubt.

And yet amid all the soul-searching and despair, there have been pockets of resistance, a handful of rare but uplifting performances dotted across a miserable season, each of them sparking hope that a corner was about to be turned. After losing away at Alaves, Atletico rallied against AC Milan at the San Siro, coming from a goal down to win 2-1, Luis Suarez scoring a penalty in the 96th minute.

After losing at home to Mallorca, they prevailed in an all or nothing match against Porto in Lisbon, a fiery 3-1 win dragging them into the Champions League last 16. In the last month alone, as the knives have sharpened and pressure mounted, Atletico have come from two goals down to beat Valencia and 3-2 behind to beat Getafe, on both occasions by finding a winner in the last minute.

Every time, momentum has been fleeting. After every comeback, they lost at least one of their next two games. Whenever Atletico have looked close to rediscovering themselves, they have just as quickly drifted again off course. Before Simeone arrived in 2011 and lifted them into Europe's elite, there was an advert in Spain that became synonymous with the Atletico Madrid.

"Papa, why do we support Atleti?" a young boy asks from the back of the car, while in the front, his father tries to find the words. The silence lingers before an answer cuts across the screen beneath the Atletico badge: "It's difficult to explain. But it's something very, very special." Atletico Madrid have always revelled in a sense of inferiority, accepting and even promoting their status as underdogs, a club of community, in part as an antidote to the glamour and riches of Real Madrid.

"Proud not be like you," read the banner draped across the Calderon before the two sides met in the Champions League in 2017. Simeone has always enjoyed positioning Atletico as imposters to the Real Madrid-Barcelona duopoly. "Have you seen the team Barca has?" he said in October, when asked about Barca losing Lionel Messi. "Barca say 'Messi's gone, we lost 30 goals'. I say 'yeh you don't have 30 goals, well we never had them, we never had Messi'." The problem was that when Atletico won La Liga, they were no longer imposters but favourites, thrust to a place they were neither used to nor comfortable with.

It is a shift they have wrestled with all season not only psychologically but tactically too. With talented players, and ones keen to attack, Simeone has struggled to find a system and style that fits. "For a team like Atletico it's not easy to be champions; it's a club not used to being champions every year. Nothing you did before counts for anything. What counts is what lies ahead," Simeone said last month. "Last season, games started and we would bite," said Jose Gimenez. "This year, I think we've eased off."—AFP

Sports

Olympian faces punishment for wearing Chinese uniform

Taiwan's government denounces Olympic flagbearer

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. Su yesterday reiterated that a probe into Huang's conduct was underway. "Athletes on the national team... should maintain our national dignity and honor," the premier told reporters. "Her conduct was extremely improper and failed to meet public expectations." The 33-year-old was among four Taiwanese athletes competing at the Olympics over the last two weeks.

She drew more ire during the Games when she

said in an interview with Chinese media that she felt "at home" competing in Beijing. Huang defended herself on her Facebook page-which she has since deleted. "Let sports be sports. In sports, we do not distinguish nationalities," she had written. "We are all good friends in private." A lawmaker from Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party on Sunday said Huang had worn "the uniform of the enemy".

"Huang doesn't give a damn about Taiwan where she was born and raised-she embraces China," lawmaker Chiu Chih-wei said on Facebook. Hints also cropped up of Taiwan and China's political tussle in the lead-up to the Olympics. A Chinese spokeswoman referred to Taiwan's delegation as the "China, Taipei" team-a diplomatic departure from the more linguistically ambiguous "Chinese Taipei" used in the international arena to sidestep sovereignty disputes.

Taiwan reacted by calling on the International Olympic Committee to "prevent the interference of any political factors to suppress and belittle (Taiwan's) status". The island's relations with Beijing have been especially frosty since President Tsai Ing-wen came to power in 2016, as she rejects the stance that the island is part of a single China. Beijing has ramped up military, diplomatic and economic pressures in recent years-including with a spike in incursions of Chinese war planes into Taiwan's air defense zone in 2021. — AFP



BEIJING: Taiwan's Huang Yu-ting competes in the women's speed skating 1000m event during the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games at the National Speed Skating Oval in Beijing. — AFP

Kuwait U14 Cup Tournament

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Tennis Association U14 Cup Tournament was concluded earlier in the week with Yarmouk Sports Club defeating Khaitan 2-1. Results of the final round were as follows: Yarmouk's Mohammad Jasem Al-Awadhi defeated Kheitan's Khalid Al-Mutairi 3-6, 6-0 in the first singles match, while in the second singles, Yarmouk's Abdelrahman Al-Abdallah defeated Kheitan's Omar Mahjoub 6-2, 5-7, 6-1. Khaitan's Abdallah Dehrab and Ahmad Al-Humaidan defeated Yarmouk's Mohammad Fumaisan and Mahdi Abbas 6-1, 6-3 in the final doubles match. The final standing of participating clubs is as follows: (First) Yarmouk; (Second) Khaitan; (Third) Kazma; (Fourth) Kuwait.



After Beijing Winter Olympics, China eyes World Cup goal

BEIJING: After staging both a Summer and now a Winter Olympics, there is one major international sports event left for China to host-the football World Cup. Football fan President Xi Jinping has said he wants China to stage and even win the men's World Cup one day, and the country has been building and renovating stadiums in apparent anticipation. But analysts say Xi's dream faces a number of obstacles, starting with the dismal performance of the national team.

The men's side have only ever qualified for the World Cup once, in 2002, when they failed to win a point or even score a goal. Their already failing 2022 Qatar World Cup hopes ended for good in a humiliating 3-1 defeat against Vietnam this month. As hosts they would automatically qualify for the World Cup, but the current Chinese side would be in real danger of humiliation.

"Many believe China doesn't want to host a World Cup until they can be more confident the national team can perform well enough so as not to embarrass the country," said Cameron Wilson, founder of the Wild East Football website, which specialises in Chinese football. Chinese football became famous a few years ago for splurging on

famous foreign coaches and players, but those days are now long gone.

No long-term vision

China has been naturalizing players, many of them Brazilian, but the national team remain stuck in 75th in the FIFA rankings. Qatar were also a footballing minnow in 2010 when they won the right to stage this year's World Cup. But they have improved since, going from 113th in the world to 52nd today. However, Wilson warned that the changes needed for China to follow in those footsteps and become a football power are "massive and fundamental".

"Currently, Chinese football is dying because it is controlled by political, not sporting forces," he told AFP. China needs to "reduce pressure on ordinary people so they are more willing to let their kids spend time on anything other than endless hours spent doing homework", he added. "They also need to replace their football management structure with something much less top-down which allows football people to make decisions about the sport, not politicians." Football has found itself in the crosshairs of the ruling Communist Party's purity drive in recent years, with players told to remove or cover tattoos and sometimes join military camps for drills and Marxist-style "thought education".

Mads Davidsen, ex-technical director of Chinese Super League side Shanghai Port, believes China has the "facilities and logistics to handle big events"-the Beijing 2008 Games and just-finished Winter Olympics in the capital were evidence of that. He expects China to make a bid for either the 2034 or

2038 World Cup. "When I was in China, I advised them to make a 8-10 year vision and plan and forget the next World Cup, but build a solid platform of a Chinese football vision and the demands of the modern game," he said. But there is a "lack of investment in the long term" and too much focus on immediate success, he said.

Politics in football

China managed to generate substantial interest in cold weather sports after winning the bid for the Beijing Winter Olympics, which ended on Sunday and saw the hosts come third in the medals table-easily their best performance at a Winter Games. Experts say that shows the country has the capacity to drive mass interest when needed. Despite doom descending on Chinese football after a number of clubs folded in debt, including the former CSL champions Jiangsu Suning, Philippe Troussier believes the national side are "improving year by year".

"Chinese football has evolved a lot" with many club academies which "now invest in the detection, selection and training of young players", said Troussier, who worked for several Chinese clubs and is now Vietnam U-20 coach. But the Frenchman warned there is still not yet enough infrastructure or coaches, and others warned having a competitive team alone is not enough for a successful World Cup bid. Bo Li, professor of sports management at Miami University, said football's world governing body FIFA is interested in awarding the competition to host countries who can share-something which seems unlikely in China's case. — AFP

US women's soccer reaches landmark \$24m settlement

WASHINGTON: The US national women's team has won a \$24 million payout and a promise of equal pay going forward in a landmark settlement with US Soccer, the two sides announced yesterday in a joint statement. "US Soccer has committed to providing an equal rate of pay going forward for the Women's and Men's National Teams in all friendlies and tournaments, including the World Cup," the terms of the deal, sent to AFP, said.

The question of World Cup prize money had formed a prominent part of the lawsuit filed by the US women's soccer team in 2019, which accused the federation of "stubbornly refusing" to pay its men and women's players equally. "I think we're going look back on this day and say this is the moment that, you know, US Soccer changed for the better," women's star Megan Rapinoe said in an interview with ABC after the deal was announced.

"Obviously we can't go back and undo the injustices that we faced but ... we know that something like this is never gonna happen again," she continued, adding she hopes that they can now "move forward" with "setting up the next generation so much better than we ever had it. So it's a great day." Her teammate Alex Morgan, also speaking on ABC, called the deal "a monumental step forward in feeling valued, feeling respected and just mending our relationship with US Soccer."

The agreement stipulates that \$22 million will be distributed to the players, while \$2 million will go into an account to benefit them "in their post-career goals and charitable efforts related to women's and girl's soccer". The settlement is contingent on a new collective bargaining agreement, which needs to be ratified before the deal can be finally approved by a court. A federal judge had rejected the claim of pay discrimination, but the US women then launched an appeal. The 2019 lawsuit cited the discrepancy in World Cup prize money payments paid to the two teams in 2014 and 2015. — AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

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

Clinics

Kaizen center 25716707

Kuwait Times
Stay Connected

- Read Kuwait Times now on your phone for **FREE**
- Send Subscribe to **+965 944 88888**
- Enjoy the first daily paper in Kuwait on your phone

P.O. Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait
Tel: 24833199 - 24833358 - 24835616 / 7 | Fax: 24835620 - 24835621
E: info@kuwaittimes.net

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Jijumon M, Indian National residing in Riggae, Kuwait (Passport number L1388559 issued in Cochin - Kerala) Ettiyappanvila Kizhakkethil, Mavelikara P O, Alappuzha (Dist), Kerala. Hereby declare that my daughter name shown as

JAANAKI JUJUMON in passport number 53691407 issued in Kuwait on 21/02/2018 and also in birth certificate. I further declare that I have to change my daughter name as JAANAKI (Given Name) JUJU (Surname). In future her name will be known as JAANAKI JUJU. (C 1424) 23-2-2022

For labor-related inquiries and complaints:
Call **MSALHOTLINE 128**

Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is **1889988**

EMERGENCY
112



ACAPULCO: Germany's Alexander Zverev hits a return against Jenson Brooksby of the US during their Mexico ATP Open 500 men's singles tennis match at the Arena GNP in Acapulco, Mexico. —AFP

Zverev wins in latest-ever finish

Djokovic triumphs to loud cheers in first match since Australia deportation

ACAPULCO: Alexander Zverev edged to victory over Jenson Brooksby in Acapulco early yesterday morning in the latest-ever finish to a professional tennis match. The Olympic champion saved two match points before completing a 3-6, 7-6 (12/10), 6-2 win at 4:54 am local time (1054 GMT). The first-round tie at the ATP event lasted three hours and 19 minutes, the third match of Monday's schedule to pass the three-hour mark. The previous latest finish was a 2008 Australian Open match between Lleyton Hewitt and Marcos Baghdatis that concluded at 4:34 am.

Zverev and Brooksby were still playing when a doubles match, scheduled for Tuesday, had already finished in Dubai, which is 10 hours ahead of Acapulco. "Right now, I'm happy that I won," said defending champion Zverev. "I don't know how Jenson feels, but it must be difficult. "I'm happy to be a part of history. It was an incredible battle, I think it was an incredible match, and hopefully (there are) many more to come from me this week." American Brooksby took the opening set but saw two match points come and go in the second-set tie-break.

Zverev eventually forced a decider on his fifth set point, winning a set that took 111 minutes. Despite appearing to suffer from a cramp, the German world

number three managed to find two breaks of serve in the third set. Zverev will face his compatriot Peter Gojowczyk in the last 16. Later yesterday, Rafael Nadal played for the first time since his record-breaking Australian Open triumph as he took on Denis Kudla. Daniil Medvedev, chasing Novak Djokovic's world number one spot, faced Benoit Paire.

Djokovic triumphs

In another development, Novak Djokovic made a successful return to the tour for the first time since his deportation from Australia, kicking off his 2022 campaign with a 6-3, 6-3 victory over Italian teenager Lorenzo Musetti in Dubai on Monday. The Serbian world No 1 was greeted by loud cheers from a packed Dubai Duty Free Tennis Stadium as he commenced his quest for a sixth title in the Emirates in style.

"I couldn't ask for a better reception. It's been a while since I played the last match, I couldn't pick a better place to kick-start the season," said Djokovic. "Best possible experience tonight, thanks very much for your support and welcoming me on court the way you did," added Djokovic on court as 'Nole, Nole' chants rang throughout the arena.

"All in all it's a straight-sets win. I have to be satisfied with my tennis, especially after not playing for

almost three months." The 34-year-old's hopes of winning a 10th Australian Open, and 21st Grand Slam, in Melbourne last month were shattered when he had his visa cancelled and was deported for not being vaccinated against COVID-19. Djokovic can play in Dubai as a coronavirus vaccine is not a requirement to enter the United Arab Emirates.

Djokovic's win over 19-year-old Musetti was his first competitive match since the Davis Cup Finals in Madrid last December. It was a rematch of their Roland Garros fourth round from last spring, where Musetti led Djokovic by two-sets-to-love before retiring in the decider. A break of serve in the fourth game of the contest saw Djokovic inch ahead and he had to stave off a trio of break points to consolidate his advantage and lead 4-1. The top seed needed just 36 minutes to take the opening set, sending the buoyant Dubai crowd to its feet.

Another early break gave Djokovic control of the second set but he became increasingly frustrated when he faced four break points en route to a 4-2 hold, roaring in anger towards his team in the stands. That only fired Djokovic up even more as he comfortably marched into the last 16 in 74 minutes. The 20-time major champion now awaits the winner of the first-round duel between Karen Khachanov and Alex de Minaur.

Murray warns of 'consequences'

Earlier, former world No 1 Andy Murray battled for nearly three hours against Australian qualifier Christopher O'Connell before advancing to the second round with a 6-7 (4/7), 6-3, 7-5 victory. Murray is now just one win shy of his goal of reaching 700 career match-wins and could check that item off his bucket list if he comes out victorious in his next clash against either Italian No.4 seed Jannik Sinner or Spain's Alejandro Davidovich Fokina. The three-time Grand Slam winner says he does not agree with Djokovic's stance against the vaccine but Murray believes the tour is better off when the world No.1 is able to compete.

"I think it would be a lot easier for him obviously if he was to get vaccinated," Murray said on Monday. "But I also didn't like seeing him in the situation that he was in Australia as someone that I respect, have known since I was a child. "There are consequences to the decisions he's made just now. He obviously has to accept that. But I don't think it's great for tennis if our best player is not competing in the major events." Rafael Nadal, who in Djokovic's absence won the Australian Open for a record-setting 21st Grand Slam title, offered long-distance support. —AFP

Indian 16-year-old stuns chess world champion Carlsen

NEW DELHI: Indian teenage chess grandmaster Rameshbabu Pragganandhaa won praise yesterday for a stunning victory over world number one Magnus Carlsen in an online championship. Pragganandhaa, 16, who in 2016 became the youngest international master in history at age 10, beat Carlsen late on Monday at the Airthings Masters rapid chess tournament. "It's about time to go to bed as I don't think I will have dinner at 2.30 in the morning," a visibly calm Pragganandhaa said after the 39-move victory playing black.

Others have beaten Carlsen-including Indians Viswanathan Anand and Pentala Harikrishna-but Pragganandhaa is the youngest since the Norwegian became world champion in 2013. Anand, a five-time world champion and acclaimed as the greatest chess player India has produced, tweeted: "Always proud of

our talents! Very good day for @pragchess."

Indian cricket superstar Sachin Tendulkar also joined in the praise for Chennai-born Pragganandhaa, widely regarded as a future world title challenger. "What a wonderful feeling it must be for Pragg. All of 16, and to have beaten the experienced & decorated Magnus Carlsen, and that too while playing black, is magical!" Tendulkar wrote on Twitter. "Best wishes on a long & successful chess career ahead. You've made India proud!" Carlsen, 31, appeared to blunder in the Meltwater Champions Chess Tour event for a total prize pool of over \$1.5 million.

On Monday, Carlsen had said he was still feeling the after-effects of a recent coronavirus infection. "It was better today, but the first couple of days, I was feeling like I am okay but I don't have any energy and it was kind of hard to focus," Carlsen said. Carlsen won his fifth straight world chess title in December, overcoming Ian Nepomniachtchi in a contest that saw the Russian lose his nerve after losing an epic eight-hour game, the longest ever played at a world championships.

The teenager's victory follows an underwhelming performance in the tournament so far where his previous victory came in the eighth round over grand-

master Levon Aronian. "His results in the past six months has swung between extremes," Pragganandhaa's coach RB Ramesh was quoted as saying on ESPN. "The fluctuation can be worrying and needs to be stabilised. This win against Magnus is important. Beating one of the strongest players in chess history is a huge moment for him." —AFP

takes-all affair, and Ireland made a strong start, posting a challenging total of 165-7 after Oman won the toss and opted to field first. Openers Balbirnie and Paul Stirling, who had previously made three straight fifty partnerships, fell early to leave Ireland 19-2. But Gareth Delany struck 47 from 32 balls, before Andy McBrine added late impetus with a 21-ball 36. Oman, who had qualified for the last two T20 World Cups, never got going with the bat and were bowled out for 105, as Irish spinners Simi Singh (3-20) and McBrine (2-24) took five wickets between them.

"I think our determination got us there today, we knew at the start of the week we needed to win three games, and we've got better every match-and that's what you need to do in tournament cricket," said Ireland captain Balbirnie. "Our T20 cricket has been



CHENNAI: Indian chess prodigy Rameshbabu Pragganandhaa, poses for a photograph on his arrival at an airport in Chennai after becoming the world's second youngest chess grandmaster ever. —AFP

Bissegger wins UAE time trial as Pogacar settles for fourth

AJMAN: Switzerland's Stefan Bissegger won the third stage of the UAE Tour, a 9km time trial in Ajman yesterday, as Tour de France champion Tadej Pogacar finished fourth. EF Education rider Bissegger completed the course in nine minutes and 43 seconds, edging out world time trial champion Filippo Ganna by seven seconds.

Jumbo-Visma's Tom Dumoulin, racing for the first time this season, was seven seconds further back in third. Slovenian Pogacar, who recently recovered from a bout of COVID-19, showed strong form to put himself in a good position to defend his overall title. Bissegger now leads the general classification, with Pogacar lurking in fifth, 18secs back. Today's fourth stage is a 181km ride to Jebel Jais, ending with a summit finish. —AFP



AJMAN: Stefan Bissegger of EF Education celebrates on the podium after winning the third stage of the UAE cycling tour in Ajman yesterday. —AFP

Ireland, UAE qualify for T20 World Cup

MUSCAT: Ireland booked their spot at this year's T20 World Cup with a comfortable 56-run victory over hosts Oman in qualifying yesterday, as the United Arab Emirates also secured a ticket to Australia. The Irish will be making their seventh straight appearance in the showpiece, having only missed the inaugural edition in 2007.

Andy Balbirnie's side made a shaky start to the Global Qualifier A event, losing their first game last week to the UAE, but bounced back with successive wins to reach the semi-finals. With the two finalists to qualify, yesterday's last-four game was a winner-