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**8** Queuing for hours 'just to be able to eat' in Cuba



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**14** Djokovic saga throws light on migrants' ordeal in Australia



# MoH updates protocols as COVID cases jump to 4,397

## 7-day home quarantine for vaccinated cases, 10 days if unvaccinated

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** The number of new coronavirus cases surged to 4,397 yesterday, with the infection rate climbing to a dangerous 11.7 percent, as government departments are due to cut staff and working hours from today. The ministry also reported one death, as the number of cases in intensive care units rose to 15 and patients in hospitals increased to 162. Based on official statistics, there are more than 24,600 active COVID-19 cases in the country.

The ministry of health also said it has changed protocols in dealing with COVID-19, stressing that unvaccinated

people who come in contact with infected cases must undergo home quarantine for 14 days. Kuwait has reported close to 25,000 coronavirus cases since the start of January, according to official figures released by the health ministry, the fastest rate of infection since the outbreak of the pandemic almost two years ago.

The ministry yesterday advised people who experience symptoms like runny nose, sneezing, coughing, sore throat or fever to avoid mixing with others, rest and take more liquids. According to the new health protocols, people who come in contact with a positive COVID-19 case for at least 15 minutes without cov-

ering their mouth and nose at a distance of less than two meters must undergo home quarantine for 14 days. Vaccinated people can end the quarantine after seven days after a negative PCR test result.

The ministry also said people who are infected must remain under home quarantine for seven days if vaccinated and 10 days if unvaccinated. According to the new protocols, people are considered immune if they have taken the third booster dose, along with those who took the second dose less than nine months ago.

Kuwait recorded under 2,500 cases in the three months between mid-September to mid-December, when cas-

es began to rise at an unprecedented rate. The ministry does not say if the new cases are of the new Omicron variant, which is sweeping the world. Based on decisions taken by the Cabinet which met remotely on Monday, various ministries and government departments announced they will start cutting staff and working hours from today.

A majority of ministries said they will cut the working staff by more than half, while working hours will be from 9.00 am to 1.00 pm. Ministries have resorted to offering their services to the public remotely, and in case physical presence is needed, prior appointments must be booked online. Local banks have said

they plan to reduce their working staff to the minimum level needed to perform services. The Cabinet on Monday also decided to cut passengers on public transport to 50 percent, while it barred unvaccinated people from attending games and going to barbershops, salons and health clubs.

Meanwhile, 10 MPs yesterday submitted a new motion calling to convene a special session tomorrow to debate civil rights for stateless people and compensating civil servants for unused annual leave. Another motion was submitted a few days ago to hold a session tomorrow to debate other issues. The government said it will attend the session.

## Half of Europe on track to catch Omicron

**COPENHAGEN:** More than half of people in Europe are projected to catch Omicron by March, the WHO said yesterday, as millions in China locked down again exactly two years after Beijing reported the first COVID-19 death. The highly-transmissible variant has ripped through countries at breakneck pace, forcing governments to impose fresh measures and scramble to roll out vaccine booster shots.

Europe is at the epicenter of alarming new outbreaks alongside mounting hospital admissions and deaths while the World

Health Organization said yesterday Omicron could infect half of all people in the region at current rates. "The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) forecasts that more than 50 percent of the population in the region will be infected with Omicron in the next six to eight weeks," said Hans Kluge, regional director for WHO's European office.

The WHO's European region covers 53 countries and territories including several in Central Asia, and Kluge said 50 of them had Omicron cases. Kluge confirmed that Omicron is more transmissible than previous variants, but stressed "approved vaccines do continue to provide good protection against severe disease and death - including for Omicron".

The warning came exactly two years after the announcement of the first person dying of a virus only later identified as

COVID - a 61-year-old man in Wuhan, China, where the illness was first detected. Since January 11, 2020, known fatalities in the pandemic have soared to nearly 5.5 million. China largely tamed its initial outbreak with a mix of lockdowns, border closures and mass testing, but flare-ups in some major cities are testing that zero COVID strategy just weeks before the Beijing Winter Olympics.

The city of Anyang in Henan province on Monday night told its five million residents not to leave their homes or drive cars on the roads, China's official Xinhua news agency said. Last week, the one million people in Yuzhou - also a city in Henan - were told to stay at home. Xi'an, home to 13 million people, is in its third week of lockdown. China reported 110 new local virus cases yesterday, a tiny

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**XI'AN, China:** Staff members wearing personal protective equipment spray disinfectant outside a shopping mall in this city in north China's Shaanxi province yesterday. — AFP

## UAE threatens jail for making fun of COVID measures

**DUBAI:** The United Arab Emirates has threatened to jail people who make fun of its anti-COVID measures after mocking photos and videos appeared online. Federal prosecutors said social media users could be punished under new laws which allow at least two years' jail and AED 200,000 (\$54,000) fines for sharing misleading information during a pandemic.

The UAE has introduced a number of measures to tackle a wave of Omicron variant cases that have pushed daily COVID numbers to the highest levels since last March. The warning followed "the recent circulation of photos and videos on social media... accompanied by comments and songs mocking the precautionary measures and calling on others to flout them", the Federal Emergency Crisis and Disasters Prosecution said in a statement.

"We, therefore, call upon members of the community to refrain from this behavior, which is punishable by the law," said the statement, which was released on Monday. Testing requirements have increased in recent weeks with many employers demanding regular negative PCR results, putting pressure on test centers.

Residents of the capital, Abu Dhabi, need a negative PCR result every fortnight and tests are also needed to enter government buildings. The UAE has also barred foreign travel for citizens who haven't had a vaccination booster shot. — AFP

## US surgeons implant pig heart in human

**WASHINGTON:** US surgeons have successfully implanted a heart from a genetically modified pig in a 57-year-old man, a medical first that could one day help solve the chronic shortage of organ donations. The "historic" procedure took place Friday, the University of Maryland Medical School said in a statement on Monday. While the patient's prognosis is far from certain, it represents a major milestone for ani-

mal to human transplantation.

The patient, David Bennett, had been deemed ineligible for human transplant - a decision that is often taken when the recipient has very poor underlying health. He is now recovering and being carefully monitored to determine how the new organ performs. "It was either die or do this transplant. I want to live. I know it's a shot in the dark, but it's my last choice," the Maryland resident said a day before the surgery.

Bennett, who has spent the last several months bedridden on a heart-lung bypass machine, added: "I look forward to getting out of bed after I recover."

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**BALTIMORE:** This handout photo released yesterday shows surgeons performing a transplant of a heart from a genetically modified pig to a patient on Jan 7, 2022. — AFP

## Lebanese join migrant flow to Europe

**TRIPOLI, Lebanon:** If he wasn't making good money smuggling irregular migrants to the European Union by sea, Ibrahim himself might have joined the growing exodus from crisis-hit Lebanon. "If I didn't work in this profession, I would have left, just like so many other people," said the 42-year-old trafficker, who asked to use a pseudonym when he spoke to AFP in the northern city of Tripoli.

"Maybe I would have turned to someone to smuggle me out," he said, his face hidden by an anti-COVID surgical mask and a hoodie.

Lebanon, in the throes of a brutal economic crisis, is no longer just a launchpad for Syrian refugees and other foreign migrants. Its own desperate citizens now also risk drowning in the Mediterranean in their quest for a better life. Ibrahim argues that, while having smuggled around 100 Lebanese nationals to Europe since 2019 makes him no angel, there is virtue in helping his compatriots. "I get them out of here, out of this beggar's life," he said. "At least if they are put in a camp, they can eat and drink with dignity."

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**TRIPOLI:** Lebanese would-be migrant Sarah wipes her tears as she listens to her husband talking about their failed trip to migrate to Europe on Dec 9, 2021. — AFP



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By Ben Garcia

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"This decision enables all Kuwaiti citizens to travel to Tajikistan without a prior visa as of January 1, 2022 to reside in the country for a maximum period of 30 days," the ambassador mentioned. In case visitors decide to stay longer than the indicated period, he said they can extend their visas by applying to relevant authorities. "Tajikistan's initiative on visa waiver for Kuwaiti brothers will contribute to the influx of tourists, visitors and investors from Kuwait to Tajikistan," Zubaydzoda said.

"Having announced this wise and important step, we look forward to the pivotal role of the authorities and departments in charge of business, trade, investment and tourism to take Tajikistan as a promising destination for them. We also look forward to positive steps and initia-



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tives from the airlines of the two countries to launch regular direct flights between the cities of the two countries. Tajikistan is an attractive tourism destination," the envoy said.

Zubaydzoda expressed his sincerest gratitude and appreciation to HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for their continuous support of relations between Tajikistan and Kuwait. The embassy also thanked the government and ministry of foreign affairs of Kuwait for providing all forms of support and for ensuring conducive conditions for the embassy to carry out its tasks in the best way for the benefit of

strengthening relations between the two brotherly countries.



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sports tourism. Tajikistan will become a promising destination for Arab visitors, especially Kuwait and Gulf tourists, because it is a Muslim country and shares many commonalities including but not limited to spiritual, cultural and civilizational values with Arabs," he said.

Tajikistan considers Kuwait an important partner at the international and regional levels, and is keen to strengthen cooperation with it at all levels, including economic, commercial, investment and tourism cooperation. In this context, Tajikistan will host the next session of the joint committee on trade, economic and technical issues in Dushanbe. On the sidelines of this session, a business forum will be held with the participation of investment, economic and

trade departments from both sides.

"We also have a plan to organize an exhibition of agricultural products of Tajikistan in Kuwait. Given the great interest by Kuwait to building a strong and competitive economy by improving the investment environment at home and abroad, as well as the developments witnessed by Tajikistan in terms of conducive climate to attract and encourage investments, Tajikistan looks forward to strengthening and revitalizing investment cooperation in the fields of industry and modern technologies, agriculture, energy, transport and tourism. Development and diversification of industries is one of the most important strategic goals of Tajikistan," Zubaydzoda said.

## ICESCO commends Kuwait's role in human capital investment

**KUWAIT:** Director-General of the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO) Dr Salim Al-Malik said yesterday the State of Kuwait has taken the lead in investing in the human capital. He made his remarks during his official three days visit to the country on an invitation from the chairman of the national Kuwaiti committee for education, science and culture in the education ministry. He added that Kuwait's policy and vision have provided training and rehabilitation services, opportunities for university education and scholarships, support talent, creativity and innovation, and encouraged young people to launch projects. He stressed that investing in human capital is one of the pillars of development and advancement and facing challenges, while failing in this field leads to extremism, sowing hatred and moral decay.

Malik pointed out that Kuwait attaches a special importance to the preservation and valorization of tangible and intangible heritage in the Islamic world, as a founding Member and supporter of the Organization. "ICESCO has made significant efforts to inscribe the largest number possible of historical sites and cultural elements on the Islamic World

Heritage List," he underscored. He indicated that during the past two years, the organization had developed its structures and procedural and legal regulations and made use of modern technologies in financial and administrative performance, as well as attracting distinguished and young competencies to look at a better future. He noted that Kuwait empowers women at all levels in the public and private sectors, especially that "Kuwaiti women are strongly present in the cultural, artistic, literary and other fields," pointing out that women in Arab countries have begun to take a leading position.

The meeting brought together several advisors and assistants of the Center's President, Dr Waleed Al-Seif, head of the Islamic World Heritage Committee, Dr Ahmed Said Bah, Advisor to ICESCO DG for Partnerships and International Cooperation, and Yousef Al-Najjar, Assistant Undersecretary of the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education for Financial Affairs. At the end of the meeting, the two parties agreed to cooperate in holding intellectual seminars and specialized meetings between researchers and experts in fields of common interest. The organization will provide historical and scientific materials on the archaeological



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### Closer cooperation

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NCCAL's achievements and effective role in creating a fertile cultural atmosphere in Kuwait, said NCCAL Assistant Secretary General and spokesman Issa Al-Ansari in a press statement.

Ansari added that Al-Malik lauded the NCCAL's role as an outstanding cultural mark locally and regionally. He pointed out Malik showed the organization's interest in listing heritage and archaeological sites in many Arab and Islamic regions through an integration agreement with the United Nations

Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). More than 366 heritage and archaeological sites have been listed in the Islamic world, hoping to add 1,000 more sites by 2025, he said. Ansari stated that Malik referred to working on establishing scientific research in many fields, especially the field of arts and literature, in cooperation with many international universities in Berlin, Argentina, France and Korea, in addition to promote ties with the NCCAL. — KUNA

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Local

# COVID health restrictions take effect today as new cases continue to soar

## Situation in schools reassuring; no current plans for lockdown

**KUWAIT:** The Kuwaiti Ministry of Health announced yesterday recording a new daily record of 4,397 new infections with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). With the new contamination cases, Kuwait's caseload climbed to 441,999. Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad, the MoH Spokesperson, said in a statement to the press that medical authorities recorded 626 new recovery cases, increasing the overall count of the cured to 414,867, noting that the proportion of the healed as compared to the total number of the cases reached 93.9 percent.

Dr Sanad also revealed that there was a single death due to the virus during the same period, thus the whole figure of deaths reached 2,473. As to the number of people receiving medical treatment at intensive care units, he said that there were 15 patients in these wards as of yesterday; up from 14 the previous day. The whole count of the cases with confirmed infection that continue to receive treatment has reached 24,659 and the number of people that are treated at the COVID-19 wards has stood at 162. Also in the same duration, medical staff conducted 37,540 PCR tests with the whole number of these examinations soaring to 6,273,509. Dr Sanad said, also noting that the proportion of the infection cases to the tests reached 11.7 percent.

### New restrictions

Several new health restrictions will be re-imposed as of today as per a government decision to curb the surge of coronavirus (COVID-19) after the infection rate in the country hit all-time highs in recent days. The decision was made during the weekly Cabinet meeting, held via video-conference under the chairmanship of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

Government Spokesman Tareq Al-Mezrem said after the Cabinet's meeting that health authorities keep a close watch on the cases of infection with COVID-19 at schools countrywide. "The health situation is generally satisfactory," he affirmed during a press conference. There is a constant coordination among the ministries of Health, Education and Higher Education, as well as the Secretariat of the University Council, Kuwait University, and the Public Authority of Applied Education and Training, regarding the next steps needed in the coming stage, he pointed out.

Mezrem recalled that the COVID-19 Ministerial Emergency Committee met last Thursday in the presence of Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education Dr Ali Al-Modhaf to explore ways for keeping the stability of the health situation at educational institutions.

Minister of Health Dr Khaled Al-Saeed had briefed the meeting on the latest developments of the health situation on the local, regional and international scales, said Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Ahmad Mansour Al-Sabah who doubles as acting foreign minister and minister of state for Cabinet affairs. The fast-spreading Omicron variant of coronavirus pushed the daily rates of infections and hospitalizations to record highs, putting strains on the country's health system, Saeed told the Cabinet members.

After mulling the latest recommendations of the COVID-19 Ministerial Emergency Committee, the Cabinet decided to bring down the attendance rate at government institutions to no more than 50 percent according to the requirements of each institution and in coordination with the Civil Service Commission. The Civil Service



beforehand is required via Meta Portal, Sahel App, and similar mediums provided abidance by health precautions.

### 50 percent

Furthermore, all means of mass transportation must limit the number passengers to 50 percent of their total respective occupancies while applying the health precautions, notably putting on facemasks. In the meantime, the Public Authority for Sport must make sure that spectators at sports events are fully vaccinated in keeping with the Cabinet Decree No 1058/2021. Finally, the government committee on following up the health precautions has to ensure that all staffers and clients of barbershops, salons and health spas are fully vaccinated against COVID-19. The Cabinet also went on urging all citizens and residents to fully adhere to the instructions and requirements issued by the health authorities, the most important of which is getting the booster dose of the anti-coronavirus vaccine, wearing a mask, and avoiding gatherings.

In response to the Cabinet decisions, Mezrem noted that public transportation, like buses, must abide by the 50 occupants' rule, noting at the same time that such decision does not apply to small vehicles or taxis. In the meantime, Mezrem called on the public not to pay attention to rumors and inaccurate news reports, noting that "so far, the option of a lockdown has not been discussed." —KUNA



## Fifteen patients in ICU; 162 hospitalized

Commission has to set out the necessary rules of work and the working hours in a flexible way. The decision will be reviewed regularly in the light of the pandemic situation. The private sector is required to bring down the attendance rate to the least possible percentage. The Cabinet also assigned the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to make sure that staffers of kindergartens and children clubs are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 and committed to the health precautions. Furthermore, meetings, conferences and internal courses can be only held via video link as of today. Also, state departments providing service to applicants have to do so online; otherwise, an appointment

## Minister gives priority to completing Khaitan roads' maintenance

**KUWAIT:** Minister of Public Works Ali Al-Mousa affirmed keenness to complete construction and maintenance of roads, as well as rain drainage sewers in Khaitan, pointing out that the project has a top priority to achieve security for the people. In a press statement yesterday, Mousa, also Minister of State for Youth Affairs, said that the roads' project is in its final stages of completion and coordination is underway with government agencies in preparation to hand over the project to them. This is one of the vital projects included in the plan of



the Public Authority for Roads and Transportation (PART) in developing the road network and infrastructure system in various areas of Kuwait, linking new residential areas to the public network of roads and bridges, in addition to raising traffic safety in accordance with certified specifications and standards. The project includes the development of a range of infrastructure services, including work on roads, rain drainage, manholes and rain drainage pipes. —KUNA



## GUST renews agreement with KTECH

**KUWAIT:** Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST) renewed its Articulation Agreement with Kuwait Technical College (KTECH) which aims to facilitate the equivalency process from KTECH to GUST while enhancing the credit transfer process in order to allow students to continue their bachelor's degree studies.

A delegation from GUST visited KTECH in order to complete the renewal of the articulation agreement, which included Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Nawaf Arhamah, the Acting President of Gulf University and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Professor Dr Bassam Alameddine, and Registrar, Muhammad Al-Mudhaf. They were greeted and welcomed by KTECH delegation which included Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Kuwait Technical College, Meshari Ayman Boodai, the Vice President for Student Affairs and Registration, Noura Ayman Boodai, the Vice President for Financial and Administrative Affairs, Abdulrahman Abdul Qader Al-Ajeel and Eman Al-Shatti, Head of the Student Career Services Department.



Acting President and Vice President for Academic Affairs at GUST, Professor Bassam Alameddine, said "We are happy at the renewal of this agreement between the two parties, which provides the opportunity for students from KTECH to complete their studies for a bachelor's degree at GUST, adding a diversified educational experience to their achievement. This will contribute to opening more job opportunities for them after their graduation and their transition to the labor market."

Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Kuwait Technical College, Meshari Ayman Boodai, said "the agreement comes within the framework of the two parties' endeavors to activate exchange and communication between them, which will positively reflect on both sides, enrich their experiences, and value the ties that unite them."

## Health club, salon workers breathe sigh of relief

By Ben Garcia

**KUWAIT:** Several workers of health clubs, salons and barbershops expressed gratitude over the Cabinet's decision to allow their operations to continue amidst the growing number of coronavirus cases in the country. Normally, those sectors are the first to be closed, as workers deal with customers directly. This time, however, they were spared. The Cabinet only advised that people visiting salons, barbershops and health clubs must be fully vaccinated.

"From January 1, I was really thinking about my next move if authorities closed our business again," said Bong, a manager of a health spa in Salmiya. "Our operations returned to normal after a long time. If they are disrupted again, I don't know what to do, because our company doesn't pay our salaries if we are not working. So now I can sleep well, thank God," he said.

Coronavirus cases have soared to record highs of over 4,000 cases a day, so the Cabinet imposed a series of restrictions including cutting public sector employees' attendance to a maximum of 50 percent and calling on the private sector to reduce staff in offices. Conferences, meetings and training courses can only be held online from today, according to the Cabinet. The Cabinet also decided that passengers on public transport must not exceed 50 percent, with strict implementation of health conditions, especially wearing facemasks.

Koring, who works at a salon in Salmiya, said relief is how she describes her feeling right now. "I am very happy. Honestly, I was not expecting a favorable decision from the Cabinet, because we are in a business where we work directly with customers. But to let us work is awesome. We need this job so we can sustain our loved ones," she said.

Meanwhile, several public transport commuters also expressed gratitude to the Cabinet. "We were all expecting that the government will stop public transport to curb the coronavirus. Thank God they did not. We still have public transport and I can still ride a bus to my work and back," said Melorey, a commuter who works at The Avenues mall and lives in Farwaniya. "Every day I go by bus: it's cheaper and I can save money. My company gives KD 30 for transport, but I don't use a taxi. I use the bus so I can save half of the amount given to me in transport allowance," she said.

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## Media, publishing laws, other topics on assembly's agenda

**KUWAIT:** The National Assembly will hold on today and tomorrow, January 12-13, sessions focusing on various topics of interest including the visual and audio media legislations in addition to publishing and distribution laws. Today, discussions on the further Kuwaitization of public posts and jobs, the issue of Bedoons (stateless individuals) and improving their status as well as amendments to the visual and audio media legislations in addition publishing and distribution laws will feature in the parliamentary session.

The parliamentary session on Thursday similar topics will be addressed in addition to issues pertaining to the development of education. Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem called on Monday for the scheduled sessions upon a request from MPs. The Cabinet expressed willingness to partake in tomorrow's session in line with its duty to cooperate with parliament. — KUNA

## Kuwait oil price down 29 cents to \$83.16 pb

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait oil price down 29 cents to \$83.16 per barrel Monday against \$83.45 pb last Friday, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. In the international markets, the price of the Brent crude oil went down by 88 cents to reach \$80.87 pb, the same occurred to the West Texas Intermediate crude, which fell by 67 cents, settling at \$78.23 pb. OPEC daily basket price went down 41 cents to reach \$81.75 a barrel on Monday, compared with \$82.16 pb on Friday, the cartel said yesterday. The annual average of the OPEC's basket price for 2021 was at \$69.89 pb. This signaled that the crudes' basket rate since the start of the year until last week had settled at 79.99 pb.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies, known as OPEC+, decided on January 4 to proceed with a production hike of 400,000 barrels per day (bpd) in February. They also agreed to continue regular follow-up on the global pandemic situation and change the output if warranted. OPEC+ countries are expected to continue changing the production until amending the current level of 5.8 million bpd. They will re-evaluate market conditions at the 25th ministerial meeting, to be held virtually on February 2. — KUNA

## Photo of the Day



**KUWAIT:** A picture taken yesterday from the Al-Hamra Tower shows a view of Kuwait City under heavy fog. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

# Cabinet reviews recommendations to develop Khaitan's infrastructure

## State departments instructed to speed up Terminal 2 project

**KUWAIT:** The Cabinet was briefed during its weekly meeting on Monday chaired by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah with the recommendation of the Public Services Committee on the results of the coordination meeting between the Public Corporation for Housing Welfare and government agencies regarding the development and modernization of the infrastructure of blocks 1 and 2 in Khaitan. Moreover, Kuwait Municipality, in coordination with the Ministry of Higher Education, the Public Authority for Agriculture Affairs and Fish Resources, the Public Authority for the Environment, the Public Corporation for Housing Welfare, and the authorities it deems appropriate, has also been assigned to take all necessary measures towards the following: Allocating South Qairouan for the benefit of the Public Institution for Housing Welfare, in accordance with the procedures in force in this regard.

The Cabinet further discussed the general service committee's recommendations on Kuwait International Airport's Terminal 2 (T2), and relevant projects and facilities. In the same context, the Cabinet was briefed on the report of the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development on the challenges facing the T2 project and relevant schemes and facilities. It was also apprised off the Ministry of Public Works' report on works of the T2 implemented until the end of September 2021. Moreover, the Cabinet tasked the Ministry of Public Works with continuing efforts, in collaboration and coordination with the Directorate General of Civil Aviation, the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning

and Development, and the relevant government agencies, to complete required executive measures in order to facilitate the implementation of the T2 and relevant projects and facilities.

### Cabinet supports minister

In addition, the Cabinet discussed National Assembly affairs and was briefed on a letter submitted by Speaker of the National Assembly on an interpellation against Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah dated on January 4, 2022 from MP Hamdan Salem Al-Azmi. The interpellation will be included on the agenda of the first upcoming session, in line with Article 135 of the National Assembly's bylaws. The Cabinet affirmed its full confidence in, and support to, the defense minister, extolling his positive role and responsibilities he us bearing amid these exceptional conditions facing the country and the whole world due to the COVID-19.

Regarding the government's attendance of the two special sessions of the National Assembly today and tomorrow, Government Spokesman Tareq Al-Mezrem affirmed on the government's readiness to "attend Thursday's session in order to enhance cooperation and in light of the prior coordination that took place between the two branches." During a press conference after the Cabinet's meeting, Mezrem praised the "distinguished cooperation" between the Ministry of Health and the National Assembly regarding the implementation of health guidelines and requirements, including conducting a PCR examination before each session in order to preserve the health of ministers, representatives and workers in

## Cabinet ready to attend parliament's session tomorrow



**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah chairs the Cabinet's virtual meeting on Monday. — KUNA

the General Secretariat of the National Assembly.

### Political affairs

The ministers focused on the political affairs in light of the reports relating to the current developments on Arab and international levels. The Cabinet expressed Kuwait's welcome of the UN announcement on facilitating dialogue amongst the Sudanese parties, with the aim of reaching an agreement to get out of the current crisis and establish a sustainable path towards democracy and peace that enhances peace and security as well as achieve Sudan's unity and stability. The ministers extolled the UN efforts made in this regard, mainly the integrated UN mission to support the transitional period in Sudan and hold political consultations amongst the parties. The Cabinet finally emphasized the State of Kuwait's backing to these good efforts and to Sudan in its endeavors aiming to meet aspirations of its people in security, stability and development. — KUNA

## Kuwaiti photographer displays wildlife photos at Expo 2020 Dubai



**DUBAI:** Photographer Omar Al-Sayed Omar at Expo 2020 Dubai. — KUNA

**DUBAI:** Photographer and member of the Board of Directors of the Kuwaiti Environmental Lens Team Omar Al-Sayed Omar showcased 18 local and international images of wildlife in the Kuwaiti pavilion participating in Expo 2020 Dubai. In a statement to the press, Omar said that his participation came at the invitation of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Literature (NCCAL) to share his talent in the field of photography and display his photos that were published in the most prominent international magazines including the National Geographic. Through his participation, he aims to highlight the rare and endangered



species, pointing out that the documentary photo shooting process took 10 years, at different locations all around the world. He stressed that this participation comes as a continuation of Kuwait's goals in achieving sustainability, preserving the environment and spreading awareness about the importance of environmental balance. The Kuwaiti Environment lenses team initiative aims to save endangered birds and protect environmental life and is supported by Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS), with supervision of the Environment Public Authority (EPA). — KUNA







Six killed in Philippine jail brawl

## Multi-millionaire killer Durst dead

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GENEVA: Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov (L) and Russian Ambassador Gennady Gatilov attend a press conference following talks with US counterpart on soaring tensions over Ukraine, in Geneva. —AFP

# US reassures allies after Russia talks

## Moscow says Russia-NATO talks are 'moment of truth'

**BRUSSELS:** The top US negotiator on the crisis between the West and Russia over Moscow's military build-up on Ukraine's border briefed NATO allies yesterday, after inconclusive talks with her Kremlin opposite number, US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman flew to the alliance's Brussels headquarters from Geneva, where on Monday she had held a meeting with Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov. Some European officials have complained that Washington is taking the lead in talks with Moscow.

They fear being excluded from moves to resolve tensions on the Ukraine border and to head off confrontation. But Sherman insisted that European allies are being kept in the loop, after meeting NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and ambassadors from the NATO member states.

"The United States is committed to working in lockstep with our allies and partners to urge de-escalation and respond to the security crisis caused by Russia," she

tweeted. With Stoltenberg, Sherman "affirmed a unified NATO approach toward Russia, balancing deterrence and dialogue, and stressed our unwavering support for Ukraine".

And, in a tweet addressed to Ukraine's deputy minister of foreign affairs Emine Dzhaparova, she assured Kiev that the allies "will not make decisions about Ukraine without Ukraine". After more than seven hours of negotiations in Geneva on Monday, the Russian and US officials both offered to keep talking, though there was no sign of a breakthrough.

The high-stakes meeting came as fears simmered of a Russian invasion of Ukraine. Moscow has demanded

wide-ranging security concessions from Washington and its NATO allies, which in turn have threatened severe economic sanctions if there is any Russian attack.

Moscow said that ties between Russia and NATO had reached a "moment of truth" over Ukraine and security demands from the Kremlin. Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko was speaking following Monday's US-Russia negotiations in Geneva that launched a week of diplomacy between Russia and the West amid fears of a Russian invasion of its pro-Western neighbour Ukraine. A meeting of the NATO-Russia Council will take place in Brussels today. "It's no

exaggeration to say that a moment of truth is coming in our relations with the alliance," Grushko was quoted as saying by Russian news agencies.

Moscow has demanded wide-ranging security guarantees from Washington and its NATO allies and insists it has been promised that NATO would not expand eastward. "Our expectations are entirely realistic and we hope that this will be a serious, deep conversation on key, fundamental problems of European security," Grushko said, referring to the talks in Brussels.

He said Russia would demand a comprehensive response from the alliance to its demands. "We will push for a concrete, substantive, article-by-article reaction to the Russian draft agreement on guarantees," he added.

In December, Russia unveiled proposals to contain the United States and NATO in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, saying that the US-led alliance should not admit Ukraine or Georgia as new members or establish bases in ex-Soviet countries. —AFP



### European allies are being kept in the loop

## Kazakh president fires rare criticism at predecessor

**ALMATY:** Kazakhstan's President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev issued rare criticism of his long-ruling predecessor yesterday, and said he expected Russian-led forces to leave the troubled Central Asian country in the next 10 days. The oil-rich country's descent into chaos has laid bare infighting at the very top of a government once utterly dominated by Tokayev's mentor, 81-year-old Nursultan Nazarbayev, who retains the constitutional status of "Leader of the Nation" despite stepping down from the presidency in 2019.

Addressing the government and parliament in a videoconference call broadcast live, the 68-year-old Tokayev fired an eyebrow-raising broadside at Nazarbayev as the post-Soviet country reels from unprecedented violence that began with peaceful protests over an energy price hike.

Tokayev said Nazarbayev's rule had created "a layer of wealthy people, even by international standards". "I believe that the time has come to pay tribute to the people of Kazakhstan and help them on a systematic and regular basis," Tokayev added, noting that "very profitable companies" would be asked to pay money into a state fund.

### Main CSTO mission 'completed'

Both Kazakhstan and Russia have framed last week's unrest that left dozens dead and has seen almost 10,000 people arrested as a coup attempt assisted by foreign "terrorists", but have provided little evidence to support the claim.

Following a request from Tokayev, the Moscow-led Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) deployed troops to bring about order and buttress the authorities. Yesterday, Tokayev announced that "a phased withdrawal" would begin in two days and take "no more than 10 days."

"The main mission of the CSTO peacekeeping forces has been successfully completed," he said. The CSTO mission of more than 2,000 troops was despatched at the peak of the crisis last week, after armed clashes between government opponents and security forces and a looting spree rendered parts of the largest city Almaty almost unrecognisable.

The decision was a first for the CSTO, often touted by Moscow as a NATO equivalent but previously reluctant to interfere in unrest in Central Asia, a region with long historical ties to Russia. Concern has mounted that Moscow could leverage the mission to shore up its influence in Kazakhstan.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken warned last week that "once Russians are in your house, it's sometimes very difficult to get them to leave". Tokayev appeared to further bolster his position by backing acting prime minister Alikhan Smailov to take on the job permanently yesterday—a nomination that won the unanimous support of lawmakers.

Former national security committee chief Karim Masimov—a key Nazarbayev ally viewed by many as perpetuating the retired president's influence over the government—was arrested on treason charges Saturday in connection with the unrest.

In another significant move, Tokayev announced yesterday plans to bring an end to a widely criticised private recycling monopoly linked to the former president's youngest daughter, Aliya Nazarbayeva, 41. "This should be done by a state organisation, as is the case in foreign countries," he said.

### 'A bad peace'

Many residents of Almaty credited the CSTO as a stabilis-



**NUR-SULTAN, Kazakhstan:** File photo shows Former Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbayev shakes hands with President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev during a congress of the ruling Nur Otan party in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan's President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev issued rare criticism of his long-ruling predecessor yesterday. —AFP

ing force that had helped Tokayev gain control over the situation after spending several days inside as gunfire echoed around the city. Roza Matayeva, a 45-year-old English teacher, got used to tuning into her radio during the five-day internet blackout in Kazakhstan's financial hub that ended briefly Monday morning before the city of 1.8 million went offline again at lunchtime.

News that the Moscow-led bloc had agreed to Tokayev's request to send a detachment "brought relief and hope that the situation will be decided for the best in the near future," she told AFP. "I welcome cooperation with Russia. I think there is no threat to our sovereignty." —AFP

## Biden to defy Republicans on voting reforms

**WASHINGTON:** President Joe Biden was set yesterday to defy Republicans and back a controversial Senate rule change to force through voting rights reforms that he says are crucial to saving US democracy. Coming off a powerful speech last week to mark the January 6 anniversary of an attempt by Donald Trump's supporters to overturn the 2020 presidential election, Biden will argue in the Georgia state capital Atlanta that Congress needs to pass laws protecting voter rights.

"The next few days, when these bills come to a vote, will mark a turning point in this nation," Biden will say, according to an excerpt of the speech distributed by the White House. "Will we choose democracy over autocracy, light over shadow, justice over injustice? I know where I stand."

Democrats accuse Republican state legislatures of enacting a spate of local laws restricting the voting rights of minorities and curtailing early voting and mail-in voting in an effort to suppress Democratic support. However, Republicans describe the Democratic push as an attempt to manipulate the election landscape by switching power to the federal authorities. They are

unanimous in opposing the two bills up for debate in the Senate.

Ordinarily, that opposition would ensure the bills' death. Democrats have only 50 votes in the evenly split Senate and under the filibuster rule, which requires a supermajority of 60 for many votes, they would need support from 10 Republicans.

Biden has been reluctant to mess with the filibuster, given warnings from Republicans that removing the supermajority requirement will push the Senate into all-out conflict, with no bipartisanship at all. Suspending the filibuster for a particular issue is possible, but happens so rarely it is dubbed the "nuclear option."

Biden, citing the extreme urgency of fixing the US electoral system, now appears ready to bow to powerful internal party demands and give his blessing. Lifting the filibuster would require unanimous Democratic support. If achieved, that would then allow the party to pass the two voting rights bills with simple majorities. Saying that "abuse" of the filibuster power has "injured" the Senate, Biden "supports... changing the Senate rules," a White House official told reporters on condition of anonymity.

### 'Belly of the beast'

The president is going to Georgia at a time when his approval ratings are stuck in the low 40s and Republicans are predicted to take over Congress in November midterm elections. The White House says Biden feels

it's time to go big on a key Democratic ambition.

"He believes the stakes should be raised. He wouldn't be going to Georgia... if he wasn't ready," White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said. Democrats say there's an existential need for reforms, following the unprecedented chaos of 2020.

According to Democrats, bills under consideration would prevent cheating, ranging from partisan drawing of election districts to the use of security measures as a way to dampen voter turnout in pro-Democrat districts.

The laws would also end the potential ability of state authorities to rig results under arcane existing rules. "We are going right to the belly of the beast, or ground zero, for voter suppression, voter subversion and obstruction," Cedric Richmond, White House senior adviser, told Politico.

The push is high risk for Biden, who is already struggling to get his party to pass a major social spending package. It's far from sure he can get all 50 of his senators to back overriding the filibuster and failure would not only doom the voting reforms but humiliate him personally.

### 'Renaissance' or 'power grab?'

Biden will be accompanied to Georgia—a crucible of US civil rights history—by Kamala Harris, the first Black vice president, Harris also the first woman and first person of South Asian origin to hold the office, spoke before Biden at his forceful January 6 speech.



US President Joe Biden

Biden's goal, Psaki said, is to "ensure that January 6 doesn't mark the end of democracy but the beginning of a renaissance." For Republicans, the picture is inverted. "They want to silence millions of Americans and take over the Senate so they can take over elections," Republican Senate leader Mitch McConnell said.

"A power grab," another senior Republican, Senator Lindsey Graham, said. As for breaking the filibuster, Graham warns that what goes around comes around, with Republicans then freed to suspend the super-majority rule as soon as they regain control of the Senate.

The result, he said, would be the end of bipartisanship, with "wild swings" between "extreme agendas of the left and the right." —AFP

## 20 years on, US must close 'ugly' Guantanamo chapter

**GUANTANAMO BAY:** Two decades after the first detainees arrived at Guantanamo Bay, a group of UN experts on Monday urged Washington to finally close the site of "unrelenting human rights violations". More than a dozen independent UN rights experts voiced outrage that the military prison in Cuba created after the September 2001 attacks to house detainees in the US "war on terror" was still operating.

They described the detention centre run by the US Navy, first opened to detainees on January 10, 2002, as a site of "unparalleled notoriety" and a "stain" on Washington's stated commitment to the rule of law. "Twenty years of practising arbitrary detention without trial accompanied by torture or ill treatment is simply unacceptable for any government, particularly a government which has a stated claim to protecting human rights," they said in a statement.

Two UN working groups, on enforced disappearance and arbitrary detention, and five independent rights experts called on the US government to close the site, return detainees home or to safe third countries, and to provide remedy and reparation for their torture and arbitrary detention. As a newly-appointed member of the UN Human Rights Council, it is particularly important for the United States to "close this ugly chapter of unrelenting human rights violations", said the experts, who are appointed by the council, but do not speak on behalf of the UN.

### 'Systematic use of torture'

Once holding nearly 800 people seized around the world and transported to the Cuba facility, today the Guantanamo jail holds 39 men, some of them from the very first months after it opened. Of them, 13 have been cleared for transfer—though finding a place to send them to, or making arrangements for their repatriation to their home countries, has proven a very slow process. Fourteen others are seeking to be released; 10 are in the process of standing trial or are waiting to stand trial; and two others have been convicted. A number of those remaining were subjected to torture by CIA interrogators in the first years of the post-9/11 detention program.

Pentagon Spokesman John Kirby said Monday that President Joe Biden wants to close the Guantanamo prison, though it remains a deeply contentious political issue. "I will tell you the administration remains dedicated to closing the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay," Kirby told reporters.

"We are in a review right now about the way forward," he said, a process that involves the White House, the US military, the Justice Department, the State Department and other agencies.

The UN experts however slammed the US judicial system for failing to protect human rights and uphold the rule of law, and thereby "enabling a legal black hole to thrive in Guantanamo." "Guantanamo Bay is a site of unparalleled notoriety, defined by the systematic use of torture, and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment against hundreds of men brought to the site and deprived of their most fundamental rights," they said. —AFP



## International

# French far-right candidate Zemmour struggling before vote

## 'Fewer and fewer mayors are agreeing to endorse candidates'

**PARIS:** Having entered France's presidential race full of sound and fury, far-right TV pundit Eric Zemmour risks seeing his campaign amount to nothing because of a widely contested clause of electoral law.

Like all candidates in the race, Zemmour needs to muster 500 endorsements from elected figures around the country by the middle of March in order to have his name on the ballot paper for the polls in April. His dramatic entrance into front-line politics after a career spent in the media sent waves through the French ruling class in September, making him briefly the most talked-about challenger to President Emmanuel Macron.

But the anti-Islam populist has admitted he risks being excluded unless more mayors and other elected figures agree to back him under a system he has denounced as discriminating against political outsiders. "The endorsement system is there to prevent far-fetched candidates from running," Zemmour said on Monday. "It's not there to enable established parties to monopolise the election and block rivals."

He said that he had secured only 300-350 pledges so far, but stressed that these are "at the moment only promises", suggesting some of them will not materialise. Securing 500 signatures from a pool of 42,000 elected French figures that includes mayors, MPs and local councillors sounds an easy task, but other veteran candidates are also reporting difficulties.

These include longstanding far-right leader Marine Le Pen, who has an established grassroots party unlike Zemmour, and hard-left leader and MP Jean-Luc Melenchon, who heads the France Unbowed movement.

### 'Real problem'

A large part of the explanation is that, since a reform under former President Francois Hollande in 2016, endorsements are now made public.

This means many mayors are reluctant to back controversial and divisive figures such as Zemmour, who has two hate crime convictions, because they fear pushback from their local communities.

Others fret about backing someone from outside their party, which might cause them problems with their own political family—something they could avoid under the previously anonymised system.

Stephane Zumsteeg, a political analyst at the Ipsos polling firm, said that "creating suspense" about the endorsement system was an "old classic" in French politics, used repeatedly by Le Pen and her father Jean-Marie in the past.

"It keeps them in the public eye and enables them to present themselves as victims of the system," he told AFP. "That said, in the particular case of Eric Zemmour, there's a real problem, unless he is given help," he added. "Fewer and fewer mayors are agreeing to endorse

candidates."

Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin ruled out any change to the law yesterday, saying "you don't change the rules a few days before the match."

### Helping hand?

Le Pen, who has most to lose from a Zemmour candidacy, has said in private that she believes her 63-year-old rival will not go the full distance and compete in the two-round election which begins on April 10. Beyond the short-term challenge of gathering endorsements, surveys of voters currently put the best-selling author and commentator behind Macron, Le Pen and right-winger Valerie Pécresse in fourth, with about 13 percent.

He is also trending downwards, polls show, having been pictured giving the middle-finger to a



**PARIS:** French far-right party "Reconquete!" leader, media pundit and candidate for the 2022 French presidential election Eric Zemmour (C), next to Reconquete! electoral campaign director Guillaume Peltier (L) and French far-right politician Philippe de Villiers (R), reacts after he delivered his New Year's greetings to the French press. —AFP

protester in December and seeing his first major political rally overshadowed by a brawl involving a far-right gang.

His lack of momentum has made it difficult to lure big-name talent to his team, although the defection of the former number two in the mainstream right-wing Republicans party, Guillaume Peltier, represented a small victory at the weekend.

If he were to pull out, analysts wonder who would benefit most on the right: Pécresse from the Republicans, who is running a campaign focused on law and order, or Le Pen?

"It's difficult to say categorically," said Zumsteeg. "Roughly, you could imagine it splitting

with two-thirds of votes going to Le Pen and a third to Pécresse."

As a result, many observers suspect Pécresse's deep-rooted Republicans party might lend a helping hand to Zemmour behind the scenes to keep him in the race in order to draw votes away from Le Pen. Macron remains the favourite overall, polls show.

Zemmour sounded resolute and confident on Monday as he addressed a New Year's press conference—which consisted of a diatribe against the "politically correct" media which he said the public was "right to be angry at." "In exactly a year, I will invite you to the presidential palace and our relationship will not be the same," he said. —AFP

### News in brief

#### Rescue operation for F-16V fighter

**TAIPEI:** Taiwan's air force said it had launched a rescue operation to locate one of its most advanced F-16s after the fighter jet vanished from radar screens yesterday. The jet disappeared around half an hour after taking off for a routine training flight from a base in the southern city of Chiayi, the air force said in a statement. Taiwan's national rescue centre reported that people saw the F-16V "crashing into the sea," adding that two choppers and one coastguard vessel had been dispatched to find the jet. President Tsai Ing-wen has ordered an all-out rescue effort and asked for clarity around the cause of the incident, her office said. —AFP

#### S Korean Air Force pilot killed

**SEOUL:** A South Korean Air Force pilot was killed in a F-5 fighter jet crash yesterday, officials said, a week after the country grounded its fleet of F-35s. The jet crashed into a mountain in Hwaseong, about 50 kilometres south of the capital Seoul, according to military authorities. The single pilot on board failed to eject and was killed in the crash, the defence ministry said in a statement. The airforce said it was investigating the cause of the accident. The F-5E is an older generation fighter jet with a design that dates back to the 1960s. Last week, South Korea grounded its entire fleet of advanced F-35 fighter jets, after one of them was forced to make a dramatic emergency landing after a major systems malfunction. —AFP

#### 6.6-magnitude quake jolts Cyprus

**PAPHOS:** A 6.6-magnitude quake hit off the west coast of Cyprus early yesterday, the US Geological Survey said, but there were no reports of casualties or structural damage. The strong and relatively shallow quake at 0107 GMT was centred 48 kilometres (30 miles) west-northwest of the town of Polis on the Mediterranean island, the USGS said. The tremor was felt across Cyprus and around the region with reports from as far away as Turkey, Zionist entity and Lebanon, according to the USGS. It shook buildings in the capital Nicosia, 130 kilometres away, where some residents went out into the streets. "It was frightening. The whole building was shaking endlessly," one Nicosia resident told AFP. "I thought it would never end." Cyprus police told AFP there were no reports of injuries or serious structural damage from the quake, but it woke people across the island. —AFP

## Famed anti-Kremlin writer Shenderovich flees Russia

**MOSCOW:** A prominent Russian satirist who was branded a "foreign agent" by authorities announced yesterday that he had fled the country, saying he feared punitive criminal prosecution. Viktor Shenderovich, 63, is a writer and commentator most famous for depicting President Vladimir Putin as an

## UK's Johnson faces fresh scandal over lockdown breach

**LONDON:** British Prime Minister Boris Johnson was embroiled yesterday in another scandal over his government's alleged lockdown breaches, as police said they were investigating a Downing Street gathering to which over 100 people were invited.

In the latest in a string of such accusations, Johnson and others allegedly held a drinks party in the garden of his official residence in May 2020 when all in-person socialising was outlawed. An email leaked late Monday indicated that Martin Reynolds, a senior civil servant, invited more than 100 Downing Street colleagues to "bring your own booze" to the event, which Johnson and his wife Carrie allegedly attended.

The potentially highly damaging revelations follow a series of similar claims which emerged last month about Downing Street parties held during later lockdowns in the run-up to Christmas in 2020. They prompted Johnson to appoint another senior civil servant, Sue Gray, to investigate and she is now expected to expand her probe to cover the new allegations.

Meanwhile in a statement late Monday, London police said they were also making enquiries over potential breaches of the lockdown laws in relation to the May gathering. "The Metropolitan Police Service is

aware of widespread reporting relating to alleged breaches of the Health Protection Regulations at Downing Street on May 20, 2020 and is in contact with the Cabinet Office," the force said.

### 'Socially distanced drinks'

Johnson has previously denied knowledge that any rules were broken in Downing Street during the pandemic, as he faced weeks of excoriating headlines over the previous allegations before Christmas. But the latest accusations appear to directly contradict those claims.

In the May 2020 email sent by Reynolds, he wrote: "After what has been an incredibly busy period it would be nice to make the most of the lovely weather and have some socially distanced drinks in the No10 garden this evening."

Britain at the time was in the throes of its first lockdown, and outdoor social gatherings of any kind were banned. ITV News, which obtained the email, said around 40 staff ended up gathering in the garden that evening, eating picnic food and drinking.

BBC News said it had contemporaneous emails from some Downing Staff that questioned the wisdom of the invitation. "It's right that Sue Gray is looking into this matter independently," Health minister Ed Argar told Sky News yesterday during a round of broadcast interviews. "I'm not going to make comments that would prejudice or get in the way of that."

### 'Come clean'

However, the new claims drew a chorus of condem-



**LONDON:** File photo shows Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson (R) and Martin Reynolds, the Prime Minister's Principal Private Secretary (L), arrive back at Downing Street in London, after chairing the weekly cabinet meeting. —AFP

nation from political opponents and others, heaping fresh pressure on the embattled leader after a series of separate sleaze scandals. "Boris Johnson, your deflections and distractions are absurd," tweeted Keir Starmer, leader of the main opposition Labour party.

"Stop lying to the British public. It's time to finally come clean." Meanwhile Jonathan Evans, the head of the independent Committee on Standards in Public Life, which advises prime ministers on ethics, said the latest allegations showed "carelessness" over maintaining standards. —AFP

## Multi-millionaire killer Durst dead

**CALIFORNIA:** Real estate heir and convicted murderer Robert Durst, who was jailed for life for the killing of his best friend, died Monday in a California prison, his lawyer said. Multi-millionaire Durst was the subject of an explosive HBO documentary entitled "The Jinx," which ultimately led to his conviction over one of the three gruesome deaths for which he was believed to be responsible.

Attorney Chip Lewis said the 78-year-old succumbed to "natural causes associated with the litany of medical issues we had repeatedly reported to the court over the last couple of years." Durst was convicted last year of the December 2000 shooting of Susan Berman in her Beverly Hills home.

Crime writer Berman, the daughter of a Las Vegas mobster, had taken on the role of Durst's spokeswoman after he became a suspect in the disappearance of his wife, Kathleen, 18 years earlier. Prosecutors said he had murdered Berman to prevent her

from incriminating him in a renewed police investigation into the disappearance of Kathleen Durst.

Durst's wife, a medical student, was just 29 when she vanished as the couple's marriage was disintegrating. He told investigators in New York state she had boarded a train to Manhattan bound for the couple's apartment there — one of a number of homes they shared — but had never arrived.

A woman claiming to be Kathleen Durst called the medical school the next morning to say she was sick and would not be in class. Prosecutors said they believed that woman had been Berman. The investigation into Kathleen Durst's disappearance sputtered out, but was reignited in 2000, when, Durst said in "The Jinx," police got in touch with Berman.

On Christmas Eve of that year, Berman's bloodied body was found face-down in her home. Durst told his Los Angeles trial he had found Berman dead when he showed up for a visit. He later admitted that an anonymous note sent to police telling them about the body was his work, but maintained he had not killed his friend.

### Axe

In the following weeks, he fled California for Galveston, Texas. There he befriended Morris Black, whose severed body parts were later found floating in a bay. Bloodstains in Durst's rented apartment led the police to arrest and charge him for the death.

At the trial in Texas, he said he had come home to find Black in his apartment with a gun. He claimed Black died in the ensuing scuffle. He admitted using an axe and a saw to hack the body into pieces, but said he had done so because he did not feel anyone would believe his story of self-defense, because he was already a suspect in at least one other murder. "I did not kill my best friend," Durst testified. "I did dismember him." The jury acquitted him.

Despite public outrage at the time, the case eventually faded, but Durst came back to public attention in 2015 with "The Jinx." In its stunning finale, Durst is heard muttering to himself, "Killed them all, of course" — apparently unaware that a microphone he was wearing during the recording of that episode remained switched on while he was using the restroom.



**LOS ANGELES, California:** File photo shows real estate heir Robert Durst looks over during his murder trial in Los Angeles, California. —AFP

Durst was arrested over Berman's slaying in March 2015 in a New Orleans hotel room, hours before that dramatic episode aired. Durst was the grandson of the founder of a large Manhattan real estate firm. His share of the family fortune was estimated to be around \$100 million. —AFP

ugly dwarf in a show called "Puppets" that was popular in the 1990s.

The show was pulled off the air in 2000, soon after the Russian leader came to power, ushering in an era of tightening controls over free expression. Shenderovich—the latest in a string of critical public figures to leave Russia—said he left because of pressure from Yevgeny Prigozhin, a powerful Kremlin ally Washington has hit with sanctions, in part for meddling in US presidential elections in 2016.

In December, Prigozhin's company Concord said it would sue the satirist over allegedly defamatory comments he made on the liberal Echo of Moscow radio station. Before that a Russian court ordered the

author to pay Prigozhin 100,000 rubles (\$1,335) in moral damages.

In a Facebook post yesterday Shenderovich explained his decision to flee, saying: "We're talking about the prospect of imprisonment." He did not say where he had fled to. Prigozhin accused Shenderovich of "soiling his pants" out of fear and said he was "amazed at the cowardice of the pro-Western sectors of our society".

The Kremlin said the writer's departure was unrelated to his "foreign agent" status and said Shenderovich appeared to be evading court. Shenderovich was designated a "foreign agent" last month in a move he said was designed to push

him out of the country.

The status is reminiscent of the Soviet-era term "enemy of the people" and is meant to apply to people or groups that receive funding from abroad and are politically active. The past year has seen an unprecedented crackdown in Russia, including the jailing of anti-corruption campaigner Alexei Navalny.

His political organisations were shut last year, as well as Russia's most prominent rights group, Memorial. Opposition politician Dmitry Gudkov, who fled Russia last year, responded to Shenderovich's announcement along with the departure of other opposition figures, saying: "We are witnessing a catastrophe." —AFP



## International

# UN wants \$5bn aid for Afghanistan to avert humanitarian catastrophe

## Inflow of funds would help in functioning of the dilapidated banking system

GENEVA: The United Nations said yesterday it needed \$5 billion in aid for Afghanistan in 2022 to avert a humanitarian catastrophe and offer the ravaged country a future after 40 years of suffering. In its biggest-ever single-country appeal, the UN said \$4.4 billion (3.9 billion euros) was needed within Afghanistan, while a further \$623 million was required to support the millions of Afghans sheltering beyond its borders.

The UN said 22 million people inside Afghanistan and a further 5.7 million displaced Afghans in five neighbouring countries needed vital relief this year. "A full-blown humanitarian catastrophe looms. My message is urgent: Don't shut the door on the people of Afghanistan," said UN aid chief Martin Griffiths.

"Help us scale up and stave off wide-spread hunger, disease, malnutrition and ultimately death." Since the Taliban hardline Islamist movement seized control of Afghanistan in mid-August, the country has plunged into financial chaos, with inflation and unemployment surging. Washington has frozen billions of dollars of the country's assets, while aid supplies have been heavily disrupted. Afghanistan also suffered its worst drought in decades in 2021. Without the aid package, "there won't be a future", Griffiths told reporters in Geneva.

### '40 years of insecurity'

The Taliban authorities said the aid appeal for suffering Afghans was "very needed". "But at the same time I would like to say the need is for all this assistance approved in the past to be delivered during this harsh winter," senior Taliban leader and the group's designated UN representative, Suhail Shaheen, told AFP. He said the inflow of funds would also help in the functioning of the now dilapidated banking system, adding that any cash coming into the country will

help rein in the inflation.

"The banks are not working properly so there is also a need to control the inflation and that can be controlled when dollars ... hard currency come to Afghanistan," Shaheen said. Griffiths said the appeal, if funded, would help aid agencies ramp up the delivery of food and agriculture support, health services, malnutrition treatment, emergency shelters, access to water and sanitation, protection and education.

An estimated 4.7 million people will suffer from acute malnutrition in 2022, including 1.1 million children with severe acute malnutrition. Griffiths said that

“Don't shut the door on the people of Afghanistan”

without humanitarian aid, distress, deaths, hunger and further mass displacement would follow, "robbing the people of Afghanistan of the hope that their country will be their home and support, now and in the near term". However, if international donors come forward, "we will see the opportunity for an Afghanistan which may finally see the fruits of some kind of security."

### Fear of implosion

Griffiths said the security situation for humanitarian organisations in Afghanistan was probably better now than for many years, adding that the staff in the



GENEVA: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi (L) and UN Under-Secretary-General for humanitarian affairs and emergency relief coordinator Martin Griffiths speak together after a press conference on the launch of the 2022 humanitarian response plans for Afghanistan. —AFP

ministries in Kabul largely remained the same as before the Taliban takeover.

He said the UN Security Council's move in December to help humanitarian aid reach desperate Afghans, without violating international sanctions aimed at isolating the Taliban, had made the operating environment for donors and humanitarians on the ground much more comfortable.

The money will go to 160 NGOs plus UN agencies delivering aid. Some will be used to pay front-

line workers such as healthcare staff-but not via the Taliban administration. Around eight million children could miss out on their education because teachers largely have not been paid since August, Griffiths said.

UN refugees chief Filippo Grandi said the aid package's goal was to stabilise the situation within Afghanistan, including for internally displaced people, thereby preventing a further flood of migrants fleeing across the country's borders. —AFP

## Taiwan passes extra \$8.6bn defence budget

TAIPEI: Taiwan's parliament yesterday passed an extra spending bill of nearly \$8.6 billion in its latest bid to boost defence capabilities against an increasingly bellicose China. The government proposed a five-year special defence budget of around TW\$237.3 billion from 2022 as Chinese warplanes breached its air defence zone at unprecedented levels last year.

Democratic Taiwan lives under constant threat of an invasion by authoritarian China, which claims the self-ruled island as part of its territory to be seized one day-by force if necessary. Beijing's sabre-rattling towards the island has increased considerably since President Tsai Ing-wen came to power in 2016, as she regards the island as a sovereign nation and not part of "one China."

Last year, Taiwan recorded incursions by around 970 Chinese warplanes into its air defence zone, according to a database compiled by AFP, more than double the roughly 380 carried out in 2020. Yesterday, Taiwanese lawmakers agreed unanimously to pass the special budget, although cut it by TW\$310 million. The package comes on top of a record annual defence budget of TW\$471.7 billion set for 2022.

It aims to acquire various precision missiles and mass-manufacture high-efficiency naval ships "in the shortest period of time" to boost the island's sea and air capabilities, the government said. J Michael Cole, a Taipei-based political and military analyst, called the special bud-



KEELUNG, Taiwan: Taiwan's domestically produced corvette class vessel Ta Chiang fires off flares to demonstrate its combat readiness during a drill on the seas off the northern city of Keelung. —AFP

et "an encouraging and much-needed development" as Taiwan prioritises "asymmetrical" capabilities, such as unmanned vehicles, anti-ship missiles and air-to-ground cruise missiles.

"Many of those are 'counterforce' capabilities, with ranges that are long enough to hit targets along China's coastline" in line with the direction Taiwan's defence ministry has taken in recent years, said Cole, a senior fellow for Canadian think tank Macdonald-Laurier Institute.

"This move will also be welcomed by the United States, which often complains that Taiwan focuses too much on large conventional platforms at the detriment of smaller, more dispersible and less costly 'asymmetrical' capabilities."

Washington has remained a leading ally and arms supplier to Taipei despite switching

diplomatic recognition to Beijing in 1979. The budget includes a coastal anti-ship missiles system, a locally-developed Wan Chien (Ten Thousand Swords) cruise missile as well as an attack drone system and installation of combat systems on coastguard ships.

Cole also points out the benefit of ensuring quicker delivery as many of the armaments are produced domestically. "The latter is a crucial part, as Taiwan needs to make sure it has the capabilities to deter, and if needed to counter, a Chinese attack now, not five, ten years from now."

China has publicised multiple recent military drills simulating an invasion of the island. For decades, analysts largely concurred that invading Taiwan is a challenge China could not pull it off but Beijing has dramatically closed the gap in recent years. —AFP

## Wife of activist barred from leaving China dies after 15 years apart

BEIJING: The wife of a repeatedly detained Chinese human rights lawyer died of cancer on Monday in the United States after her husband's pleas to be allowed to leave China and reunite with her went ignored, rights activists said.

Zhang Qing fled to the United States with the couple's children in 2009 after her husband Yang Maodong highlighted local corruption in a Chinese village and was imprisoned. Zhang was diagnosed with late-stage colon cancer in January 2021 and died in hospital at the age of 55, the New York-based Human Rights Watch said in a statement Monday.

Yang had published an open letter to the Chinese government in January 2021 after learning of Zhang's diagnosis, begging authorities to "have empathy for ordinary people" and allow him to leave the country to visit his wife. In an interview with the South China Morning Post last month, Zhang said her life was coming to an end, and that multiple attempts by her husband to leave China and join her had been blocked.

Yang who also goes by his pen-name Guo Feixiong-is a writer and lawyer known for helping residents of a southern Chinese village organise themselves in 2006 against a local Communist Party boss whom they accused of illegally selling their land to enrich himself. Yang has been imprisoned repeatedly and faced police harassment and numerous beatings as a result of his advocacy.

His whereabouts are currently unknown. Zhang said in the interview that she had not been able to contact him for several months. Zhang and Yang had been unable to see each other since Yang's detention in 2006, with Yang being blocked by authorities from leaving the country even during his intermittent periods outside of detention, Human Rights Watch said. —AFP

## UN chief 'saddened' by reports of deadly strike in Tigray

NEW YORK: UN chief Antonio Guterres is "deeply concerned" over reports of a deadly airstrike in Ethiopia's Tigray region, his spokesman said Monday, in the international body's first comment on an attack which rebels said left 56 people dead. The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) last week claimed that dozens had been killed in a drone strike on a camp for civilians displaced by the war in northern Ethiopia, in an attack that prompted aid agencies to suspend operations in the region.

Saturday's raid came only hours after the Ethiopian government had issued a call for "national reconciliation", and sparked renewed appeals from an alarmed international community for an end to the conflict. "The Secretary-General is deeply saddened by reports that more than 50 civilians have been killed and injured in an airstrike in northern Ethiopia at midnight on 7 January," Stéphane Dujarric, spokesman for the UN Secretary-General, said in a statement.

"The United Nations and its humanitarian partners are working with authorities to urgently mobilize emergency assistance in the area, despite continuing challenges due to severe shortages of fuel, cash and supplies across Tigray," he added. "The Secretary-General is deeply concerned about the impact the conflict continues to have on civilians in Ethiopia. He expresses his deepest condolences to the victims and their families." —AFP



MANILA: This photo received from the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology - National Capital Region (BJMP-NCR) yesterday shows members of the police Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team guarding the premises after a deadly brawl between rival gangs that killed six and wounded 33 at Caloocan City Jail, suburban Manila. —AFP

## Six killed in Philippine jail brawl

MANILA: Six inmates were killed and 33 wounded during a fight in an overcrowded jail in the Philippines, authorities said yesterday, in the second such incident in as many weeks. The deadly brawl happened Monday between rival gangs at Caloocan City Jail in the National Capital Region, Bureau of Jail Management and Penology spokesman Xavier Solda said.

An investigation was under way into the cause of the violence that Solda said started as a fight between two inmates before others joined the fray. It is not clear what weapons were used.

A ban on family visits since the start of the pandemic may have been a factor, Solda said. "It's been

almost two years that we don't have physical visitation in our facilities because of the COVID-19, so we can't set aside the angle that this could be one of the reasons why others joined in the fight between the two PDLs (persons deprived of liberty)," Solda told AFP.

Security has been beefed up to maintain order in the facility, he added. Violence is common in Philippine jails where inadequate infrastructure and a slow-moving and overburdened judicial system means cells are sometimes filled to five times their capacity.

About 1,900 inmates were squeezed into Caloocan City Jail that is designed for fewer than 200, Solda said. The latest incident comes after a fight at New Bilibid Prison in the capital on January 2 left three inmates dead and 14 wounded. Improvised guns and bladed weapons were used in the clash at the nation's biggest prison. —AFP

## UK police review Murdoch-linked kidnap murder

LONDON: London police said yesterday they were reviewing new information in the 1969 kidnap-murder of Muriel McKay, who was mistaken for media tycoon Rupert Murdoch's wife, and whose body had never been found.

The Metropolitan Police said McKay's family had contacted them with fresh details, which the Murdoch-owned The Times newspaper said included the location of the body. "The Met were contacted in December 2021 by the family of Muriel McKay regarding information they had obtained in relation to her murder," a spokeswoman told AFP.

The Times said the move came after the man convicted of the kidnapping, Nizamodeen Hosen, revealed where McKay's body was buried on a farm in Hertfordshire, north of London. "Officers from the Met's Specialist Crime Command have met with the family and are in the process of reviewing all the material," the police spokeswoman said, asking not to be named.

Hosen and his brother Arthur kidnapped McKay, then 55, in 1969 thinking that she was Murdoch's second wife Anna. The brothers had followed Murdoch's Rolls-Royce unaware he had lent it to his deputy Alick McKay, Muriel's husband.

Hosen recently revealed to the family that McKay had collapsed and died while watching a television news report about her kidnapping, The Times said. McKay's daughter Dianne, 81, told the newspaper she was relieved to hear that her mother had not been physically harmed. —AFP



# Business

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 12, 2022

## Global growth could slow sharply due to Omicron: World Bank

‘Labor shortages and supply chain snarls could become exacerbated’

WASHINGTON: Global growth will “decelerate markedly” this year, but the Omicron variant of COVID-19 that is spreading rapidly worldwide could make the situation worse and exacerbate labor shortages and supply chain snarls, the World Bank warned yesterday.

In its latest Global Economic Prospects report, the Washington-based development lender cut its forecast for world economic growth this year to 4.1 percent after the 5.5 percent rebound last year. The forecasts for growth last year and this year were both 0.2 percent lower than estimates released in June.

However, the bank warned, “Various downside risks cloud the outlook, including simultaneous Omicron-driven economic disruptions, further supply bottlenecks (and) a de-anchoring of inflation expectations,” the report said. That could further reduce global growth this year to as low as 3.4 percent, a drop of 0.7 percentage points.

World Bank President David Malpass worries about the “huge toll” the pandemic is inflicting on people in poor countries, which could have ramifications for the future. “We’re seeing troubling reversals in poverty, nutrition and health. The reversal and education or scope from schools closures will have a permanent impact,” he told reporters. “I’m very worried about the permanent scar on development.”

Ayhan Kose, head of bank’s forecast unit, told AFP the Omicron strain is causing fewer restrictions than the initial outbreak, which means the overall impact could be more benign. However, he cautioned, “If it stays around much longer, and cases remain elevated and continue pressuring health systems, under that scenario, the global growth will be lower.”

That would exacerbate ongoing struggles with

labor shortages and global production and transportation snarls that have fueled a wave of price increases. “The Omicron variant shows us once again, the pandemic is still with us and we need to learn how to live with the pandemic,” he said.

Faced with inflation at a 40-year high, the US Federal Reserve is expected to begin raising interest rates soon, and perhaps take more aggressive steps, which will raise borrowing costs for developing countries already burdened with record debt.

That, in turn, could erode business and household confidence, lowering consumption and trade flows, a key engine of global growth.

### US, China slowing

Kose stresses that vaccination remains crucial, since the threat of new, more transmissible or more virulent variants will persist until a substantial part of the world’s population is vaccinated. “The share of vaccinated population in many economies is expected to surpass 70 percent by mid-2022, but the prospects for vaccination progress remain uncertain in some countries,” especially in the poorest nations, the report said.

“At recent vaccination rates, only about a third of the LIC (low income countries) population will have received even one vaccine dose by the end of 2023.” The world’s biggest economic powers, the United States and China, have not been spared from the economic impact of Omicron.

In its report, the bank sharply lowered its forecast for US growth this year to 3.7 percent, 0.5 points lower than its previous estimate, following the country’s 5.6 percent expansion in 2021.

The World Bank notes that Washington’s 10-



NEW DELHI: A coconut vendor wearing facemask as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 coronavirus waits for customers at a market area in New Delhi yesterday. —AFP

year, \$1.2 trillion infrastructure spending plan signed in November should provide a “small boost” to the US economy in the near term, with more effects felt in later years. However, the American economy faces “tenacious inflation, and an even faster tightening of monetary policy could lead to weaker-than-expected growth.”

For China, growth is now expected to slow to 5.1

percent in 2022, a 0.3 point downgrade, from eight percent last year, but the country’s troubles extend beyond the pandemic. “The possibility of a marked and prolonged downturn in the highly leveraged property sector—and its potential effects on house prices, consumer spending and local government financing—is a notable downside risk to the outlook,” the report said. —AFP

## In Cuba, queuing for hours ‘just to be able to eat’

HAVANA: Cubans are no strangers to queuing for everything from bread to toothpaste, often standing for hours under a blazing sun with no access to a toilet or drinking water, and always with the fear of leaving empty-handed. It is a daily ordeal Cubans have endured for about 60 years of communist rule, now worsened by the coronavirus pandemic, a steep economic downturn and tightened US sanctions.

“I spent almost all night here just to buy something. It is not easy, it is a big sacrifice just to be able to eat,” shopper Edelvis Miranda, 47, told AFP at a market in Havana last week. The homemaker had taken her place in the queue at about 1:00 am, and finally left around 11 hours later, just before noon.

“It was worth it, because I found everything. Now some rest, and then back to the queue again,” she said on her way home with two liters of oil, two packets of chicken, some minced meat and detergent.

Cuba recorded an official inflation rate of 70 percent in 2021, when the economy recovered a modest two percent after an 11-percent drop in 2020, signaling the nation’s worst economic crisis in almost three decades. With government reserves dwindling, food imports—some \$2 billion worth per year before the pandemic struck—had to be drastically cut back in the country of 11.2 million. Last May, the government said imports, which normally cover 80 percent of the island’s needs, were at their lowest level since 2009.

### ‘Undignified’

The shortages affect everyone; even the well-heeled have to contend with long lines, though they often pay other people to hold their place. Those who can come armed with snacks, water, coffee or a



HAVANA, Cuba: Cubans queue to buy food outside a store in Havana. —AFP

wooden bench to sit on. Often, police are at hand to keep order in queues that stretch down several street blocks. At a market in the capital, an announcement comes an hour before opening time that there are five products available for the day—an unusual bounty that sends a ripple of excitement through a line of about 400 hopeful shoppers.

But then, the let-down. Only 250 of them can get in. “This is undignified,” grumbled Rolando Lopez, a 66-year-old pensioner who was not among the lucky ones. A few dozen among the luckless quickly form a queue for the next day’s shopping, designating night “guards” to ensure no one loses their place. “It is the daily struggle of the Cuban. What else can you do?” asked housewife Maria Rosabal, 55.

Some stores in Cuba nowadays accept only foreign currency. But US dollars are no longer legal tender and can only be obtained on the black market. These stores are better stocked than peso-based ones, but few Cubans can afford to frequent them. It is common for shops to have only two or three products at a given time, or none. Sometimes, people queue not knowing what, if any, product they will be able to buy that day. Specific products often disappear from the shelves completely for periods of time, as is the case now with milk. —AFP

## Indonesia claims graft in Garuda deal for French-Italian planes

JAKARTA: Indonesia provided prosecutors with proof of graft yesterday in flag-carrier Garuda’s deals to lease aircraft made by ATR, a joint venture between Airbus and Italy’s Leonardo, the country’s state-owned enterprises minister said. The irregularities in the procurement contract were unearthed during an audit of Garuda’s operations as the state-owned carrier struggles to keep flying after being battered by the pandemic.

“It’s not just accusations, but facts,” Erick Thohir said in a broadcast statement. Garuda has already returned other aircraft before their leases expired as revenue evaporated.

Early last year, it said it was returning 12 CRJ1000 aircraft manufactured by Canada’s Bombardier, leased to Garuda by Nordic Aviation Capital (NAC).

NAC, founded in Denmark, also owns 25 ATR 72-600s in Garuda’s fleet, which are the subject of

the graft investigation. Spokespersons for NAC were not immediately available for comment. The world’s largest leaser of so-called regional aircraft — smaller models that are suited to domestic or short-haul flights — said last year that it would seek to hold Garuda to its legal obligations in the earlier Bombardier aircraft procurement.

But that deal has already become a target of corruption investigations by the Canadian and Indonesian governments. Thohir said an audit of Garuda found it had too many aircraft unsuited to servicing the airline’s routes, and that costs were way out of line with industry norms.

“Today, it is ATR 72-600 that is being investigated,” Thohir said. “Will there be developments with other aircraft procurement processes? It’s possible because that’s what we want to finish transparently.”

Thohir said the investigation into Garuda’s procurement had mapped out which deals showed indications of corruption, “or merely have expensive leases — this is our own stupidity”. Garuda’s aircraft-leasing costs gobbled up 28 percent of revenues, Thohir told Kompas TV. The ATR deals were made in 2013, he said, during the reign of Garuda’s former chief Emirshah Satar. —AFP

## Indian govt takes stake in stricken Vodafone unit

NEW DELHI: The Indian government has agreed to forego \$2.1 billion in interest payments and instead become the largest shareholder in British telecoms giant Vodafone’s local unit Vi, the company said yesterday. Vodafone has been losing money in India since Asia’s richest man Mukesh Ambani kicked off a price war in the vast market when his conglomerate Reliance launched telecoms arm Jio in 2016.

With the British parent company refusing to inject more money, Vi—which September data shows is squashed under 1.94 trillion rupees (\$26 billion) of debt—found itself unable to pay some interest owed on spectrum fees and other dues. New Delhi agreed after protracted negotiations to allow Vi and other telecom companies to convert what they owed into equity, in addition to a four-year moratorium on payments.

Both Vi and telecom giant Bharti Airtel opted to delay payments by four years. Vi is the only opera-



NEW DELHI: Vehicles drive past an outlet of Vodafone Idea Limited in New Delhi yesterday. —AFP

tor converting its interest into government equity. Market leader Jio opted out of both options. “Following conversion (of 160 billion rupees), it is expected that the government will hold around 35.8 percent of the total outstanding shares of the company,” Vi, formerly known as Vodafone Idea, said in a statement. This will result in Britain’s Vodafone Group and India’s Aditya Birla Group diluting their stakes to 28.5 and 17.8 percent respectively, it added. Vi shares slumped 13 percent in Mumbai because of the dilution. —AFP

## Asian casinos giant Genting’s sub files for bankruptcy

WARNEMUNDE, Germany: Asian tourism and casinos giant Genting’s shipbuilding subsidiaries in Germany filed for bankruptcy Monday, which one union leader described as a “dark day” for the country’s dockyards. With travel still severely restricted during the coronavirus pandemic, particularly in Asia, the company has seen demand for huge cruise ships or luxury mega-yachts dwindle.

MV Werften on the Baltic Sea coast and Lloyd Werft in Bremerhaven on the North Sea coast declared themselves insolvent, local courts told AFP. The larger subsidiary MV Werften took the step after failing to secure funding for the completion of the “Global One” mega-liner, already 80 percent of the way through construction, according to the company.

Designed to carry close to 10,000 passengers, the huge ship had been due to leave the shipyard in 2021 — but the pandemic has knocked the company’s timetable off course and crimped its budget.

Around 600 million euros (\$680 million) is necessary to finance the completion of the vessel, for which the shipbuilder has been seeking support from the government. The decision to declare bankruptcy came after lengthy discussions with officials in which the two sides “clearly have not found common ground”, a spokesman for MV Werften said shortly before the filing was made.

The state asked MV Werften’s owners Genting to put forward 10 percent of the capital, government coordinator for the maritime economy Claudia Mueller said in a press conference. “On this issue

there was no agreement between Genting and the federal government,” Mueller said.

### ‘Dark day’

The “Global One” sits in Wismar, one of MV Werften’s three shipyards along the Baltic coast of former eastern state Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, where it employs around 2,000 people. The collapse of one of the biggest employers in the region poses an early challenge for Chancellor Olaf Scholz’s newly formed government. “It is very



WARNEMUNDE, Germany: A shipyard in Rostock-Warnemuende, northeastern Germany, that was later owned by the MV Werften shipbuilding company. German-based cruise ship builder MV Werften said it will file for bankruptcy as the coronavirus pandemic scuttled the subsidiary of Asian tourism and casino giant Genting. —AFP

important to us to keep the know-how where it is,” Mueller said, adding that the government saw “big potential” for the development of offshore energy.

In June, the state agreed to take a stake worth 60 million euros in the business and extended a loan worth 47 million euros to the company. —AFP



## Business

# Germany vows to speed up green energy projects in 'gigantic' effort

## Habeck unveils ambitious package to make Germany carbon neutral by 2045

FRANKFURT: Germany's Climate and Energy minister Robert Habeck yesterday pledged to drastically ramp up renewable energy projects in the coming years, saying the country faced a "gigantic" task to meet climate protection goals.

Germany needs to become "more efficient and faster" in the fight against climate change, Green party minister Habeck said, as he unveiled an ambitious package of measures to help make Europe's top economy carbon neutral by 2045. Among the most eye-catching proposals was the pledge to set aside two percent of Germany's land surface for wind energy projects, up from around 0.5 percent currently.

Habeck — who heads a "super ministry" of energy, climate protection and the economy in the new German government — promised to cut red tape to make it easier to get wind projects approved. He also called on citizens and regional authorities to show greater acceptance for wind turbines, after local objections often blocked such projects in the past.

"Everyone needs to cooperate," Habeck told reporters. As part of a "solar acceleration" plan, solar panels will be mandatory on new commercial buildings and become the norm on new-build homes, Habeck added. Germany's coalition government — which took over from Angela Merkel's cabinet last month and is made up of the Social Democrats, the Greens and the pro-business FDP — aims to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 65 percent by 2030 compared with 1990 levels.

Also by 2030, the country wants to exit coal and have renewables account for 80 percent of Germany's electricity mix. Habeck said the country was "significantly behind" in reaching those targets and faced a "task that is huge, gigantic" to get back on track.

The share of renewable energies currently hovers at just over 40 percent in Germany, in part because the country still relies heavily on coal as a result of Merkel's decision to phase out nuclear power by the end of 2022.

### 'Creating jobs'

Following a drop in carbon dioxide emissions in 2020 when the pandemic slowed economic activity, Germany's CO2 emissions actually jumped four percent in 2021, said Habeck, as demand rebounded and a lack of wind increased the use of fossil fuels. Turning to other sectors, Habeck said Germany would help fund investment in hydrogen and offer financial support for industrial companies making the switch to greener production processes.

To boost the use of electric cars, Habeck said Germany would need to install 100,000 charging points annually by 2030. Seeking to allay fears that a greener economy would upend Germany's traditional industries, Habeck said climate protection would spur innovation "in a way we haven't seen in this country in a long time". "We will renew our industries, and that means creating value and jobs," Habeck said he aimed for the necessary legislation for his proposals to be passed this year. —AFP



BERLIN: German Minister of Economics and Climate Protection Robert Habeck presents a chart on the development of greenhouse gas emissions in Germany during a press conference yesterday in Berlin. — AFP



## QNB reports a net profit of \$3.6bn for financial year 2021

DOHA: QNB, the largest financial institution in the Middle East and Africa (MEA) region, announced that the Board of Directors, during its meeting held yesterday has approved its results for the year ended 31 December 2021. Net profit for the 2021 financial year reached QAR13.2 billion (\$3.6 billion), an increase of 10 percent compared to last year. Operating Income increased by 11 percent to QAR28.3 billion (\$7.8 billion) driven by strong growth in top line performance. This reflects QNB Group's success in maintaining sustainable and strong growth across a number of revenue segments.

The board of directors has recommended to the general assembly the distribution of a cash dividend of 55 percent of the nominal share value (QAR0.55 per share). The financial results for 2021 along with the proposed profit distribution are subject to Qatar Central Bank (QCB) approval.

Total Assets reached QAR1,093 billion (\$300 billion), an increase of 7 percent from 31 December 2020, mainly driven by strong growth in Loans and advances by 6 percent to reach QAR764 billion (\$210 billion). Robust customer deposits generation helped to increase customer deposits by 6 percent

to reach QAR786 billion (\$216 billion) as at 31 December 2021.

QNB Group's strong asset liability management capabilities enabled QNB Group to improve its loans to deposits ratio from 98.0 percent to 97.2 percent as at 31 December 2021 reflecting the improvement in the Group's overall liquidity. The Group's drive for operational efficiency continues to result in cost-savings and strong revenue sources that has helped QNB Group to improve efficiency (cost to income) ratio from 24.3 percent to 22.2 percent, which is considered as one of the best ratios among large financial institutions in the MEA region.

The ratio of non-performing loans to gross loans remained stable at 2.3 percent as at 31 December 2021, one of the lowest amongst financial institutions in the MEA region, reflecting the high quality of the Group's loan book and the effective management of credit risk. Also during the year, QNB Group increased its loan loss provision charge by QAR7.1 billion (\$1.9 billion), as QNB Group remains cautious on the external environment with respect to potential risks that may arise from key markets where QNB Group operates. This helped the Group to increase its coverage ratio to 117 percent, which reflects the prudent approach adopted by the Group towards non-performing loans.

Group Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) as at 31 December 2021 amounted to 19.3 percent higher than the regulatory minimum requirements of the Qatar Central Bank and Basel Committee.

QNB Group supported by 27,000 staff resources operating from approximately 1,000 locations and 4,500 ATMs.

"The risk right now is that inflation rates stay elevated for longer than currently expected," Nagel said at an event to mark the handover from his inflation-wary predecessor Jens Weidmann. "In any case, monetary policy must be on its guard," said Nagel, who has spent 17 years at the Bundesbank, widely trusted in Germany for its commitment to economic stability.

As a member of the European Central Bank's governing council, Nagel will be tasked with formulating the bank's response to soaring inflation in the eurozone, which stood at five percent in December, its highest-ever level and well above the ECB's two-percent target. At its last meeting in December, the 25-member policy-setting committee decided on a "step-by-step" reduction in the ECB's massive bond-buying programme, its main crisis-fighting tool.

But concern has grown that the fast pace of price rises could persist as supply bottlenecks that have driven inflation show no sign of easing and geopolitical conflicts threaten to push energy costs higher. "We have a playbook for how to react when inflation deviates from our target in both directions," ECB president Christine Lagarde said at the Bundesbank event.

Both based in Frankfurt, the ECB and the Bundesbank have often been at odds over the right course of action, with the German institution advocating a less accommodative response to recent crises. In the context of uncertainty, the ECB should "follow its primary target of price stability without compromise, and in particular without consideration for the financing costs of states," outgoing Bundesbank chief Weidmann said.

High levels of government indebtedness, which have only gone up during the pandemic, were a "big risk for monetary policy", Weidmann said. Nagel would follow the "Bundesbank's line up to this point" he said, stressing the need for the ECB's expansive monetary policy not to continue "for too long". —AFP

## New German CB chief warns ECB to watch inflation

FRANKFURT: Monetary policy in the eurozone needs to "be on its guard" in the face of record inflation, new Bundesbank President Joachim Nagel said yesterday, placing himself in the institution's hawkish tradition.



BERLIN: Incoming German Central Bank head Joachim Nagel poses with his certificate of appointment presented to him by German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier (not in picture) at the presidential Bellevue palace in Berlin. — AFP

## KIB now offers its corporate banking services at 4 branches

KUWAIT: Moving ahead with its strategic plans to expand services at its branches to reach the largest number of customer segments, Kuwait International Bank (KIB) recently announced it will be offering its corporate banking services at four of its branches located in key strategic areas across Kuwait. The bank will now be serving corporate clients at its Salmiya (in Laila Gallery Complex), Khaitan, and Al-Ahmadi branches - as well as its head office branch located in Kuwait City.

KIB currently offers a series of premier financial solutions to its corporate account clients, including Al-Tojjar Corporate Service Cards, which enable cardholders to deposit cash or inquire about their accounts online. The bank also offers corporate clients the ability to open a Call Account - a Sharia-compliant account designed only for legal entities, companies, and corporate customers, where they can simultaneously enjoy the advantages of a current and savings account in one for their business.

Moreover, business owners will be able to apply for services and financing solutions from KIB through these branches, including project financing services and cash financing for SMEs, as well as real estate financing with a suite of comprehensive services, including real estate appraisal, property management, and more.

Commenting on this latest branch service expansion, General Manager of the bank's Retail Banking Department, Othman Tawfeeq, said: "This step comes as part of our strategy to expand our reach in general and best serve all segments of our customers, in accordance with their rapidly changing financial needs and lifestyles. Striving to keep pace with recent developments, we focused our efforts to enhance the scope of our corporate services within branches to best cater to our corporate clients across Kuwait".

Tawfeeq also indicated that any service required for opening, updating, or reactivating a new company account can only go through the HQ corporate branch, whereas the same can be conducted for "Al-Amil" account members only at the Khaitan branch. That being said, according to Tawfeeq, all four corporate branches offer all additional basic corporate services. This includes issuance of cheque books, local and foreign telex transfer, letters of credit and guarantee (LC and LG), pay orders, balance confirmation, in addition to signature verification and cash transactions.

It is worth noting that KIB has more than 16 branches in Kuwait, distributed all across the country. Its head office, Salmiya, Ahmadi, and Khaitan branches were selected as hubs for corporate services due to their central locations and the ease of access they provide. As part of its strategy to enhance its network of branches, the Bank aims to continue developing its offering to its corporate customers across all its locations - to provide a bespoke and tailored banking experience to them across all touchpoints.

Othman Tawfeeq



## Cathay Pacific faces 'legal action' over HK virus outbreak

HONG KONG: Cathay Pacific is being investigated and faces possible legal action over an Omicron variant coronavirus outbreak in Hong Kong that began with the airline's employees, the city's leader said yesterday. The revelation came as chief executive Carrie Lam announced the suspension of all kindergarten and primary schools until after the Lunar New Year in early February.

Like China, Hong Kong maintains a strict zero-COVID strategy that has kept cases low but largely cut the international finance hub off from both the mainland and the rest of the world for the last two years. A recent outbreak traced to Cathay air crew who breached home quarantine has sparked a dramatic tightening of already strict social distancing controls and travel restrictions, causing renewed anger among residents and businesses.

Yesterday, Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam said authorities were investigating "whether this airline has complied with the regulations". "We will take the legal action once we have the full evidence of what wrong it has gone into," Lam said in English.

The revelation piles new pressure on Cathay Pacific, which has been decimated by the pandemic and has no domestic market to fall back on in a city that used to be a major Asian transport and logistics hub. Cargo flights, the one area where the airline made some cash, have been slashed recently because new quarantine rules imposed on crew has left managers struggling to find enough pilots.

Last month AFP reported that Cathay pilots were leaving in droves. Lam's government is facing growing anger over there being no end in sight to zero-COVID controls at a time when rival business hubs are learning to live with the virus. Her administration, which is also carrying out a crackdown on democracy activists and Beijing critics, has hewed to China's approach and says restarting travel with the mainland must come before the rest of the world. But the mainland is battling its own outbreak and appears to be in no rush to open to Hong Kong, leaving the city facing a double isolation. Lam's government has also failed to persuade enough people to get vaccinated during the zero-COVID controls, especially the elderly, with just 62 percent of the population inoculated despite ample supplies. That makes Hong Kong the third least vaccinated place in a list of the International Monetary Fund's 39 advanced economies, above only Latvia and Slovakia.

Among the over 80s—the demographic most at risk from severe COVID-19 illness—only 23 percent have taken a first vaccine dose. —AFP



## Business

# Facing questions on trading, Fed Vice Chair to leave early

## Powell to target inflation at confirmation, face trading scrutiny

WASHINGTON: Federal Reserve Vice Chair Richard Clarida announced Monday he will exit the US central bank early following questions over his equity trading activity early in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Clarida, whose term on the Board of Governors was set to expire on January 31, will instead resign on January 14. He gave no explanation for the accelerated departure, but said in a resignation letter he was "proud" to have helped steer "the economy away from depression." Clarida faced heightened scrutiny following reports last week that he undertook additional stock fund trades in February 2020 that appeared to contradict earlier explanations about his trading activities.

The latest questions came after amended financial disclosure forms were reported by The New York Times. Earlier Monday, Senator Elizabeth Warren, a Massachusetts Democrat, had called on Fed Chair Jerome Powell to "immediately release" all information relating to the trades.

"The revelations raise concerns that Clarida may have been trading on inside information related to planned policy moves, and that the Fed has failed to disclose the full scope of officials' trading practices to the public," Warren said.

A former economics professor at Columbia University, Clarida won senate confirmation for the vice chair position in September 2018. On Monday, Powell praised Clarida, saying "Rich's contributions to our monetary policy deliberations, and his leadership of the Fed's first-ever public review of our monetary policy framework, will leave a lasting

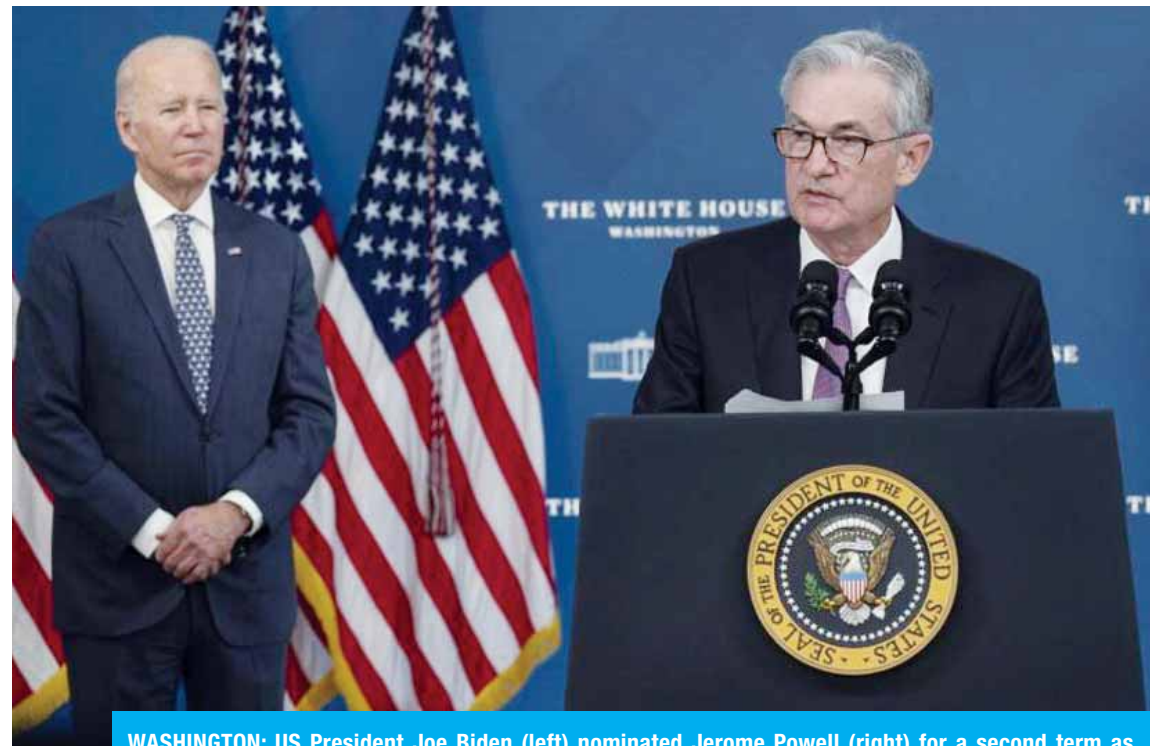
impact in the field of central banking."

Meanwhile, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell will highlight the central bank's efforts to fight inflation and stabilize the US economy at his confirmation hearing, according to testimony released Monday.

However, the Republican will likely also face questions about his ethics from a Democratic senator, after a media report raised further questions over whether a Fed official had traded securities to benefit from the upheaval caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Powell's testimony before the Senate Banking Committee comes after President Joe Biden nominated him for a second term leading the central bank as the US economy deals with a wave of record-high inflation that's prompted critics to accuse the Fed of complacency. "We know that high inflation exacts a toll, particularly for those less able to meet the higher costs of essentials like food, housing, and transportation," Powell will tell senators, according to the testimony. "We are strongly committed to achieving our statutory goals of maximum employment and price stability. We will use our tools to support the economy and a strong labor market and to prevent higher inflation from becoming entrenched."

The central bank intervened aggressively to stop a wider liquidity crisis and indices eclipsed their pre-pandemic level in the months that followed. In a letter sent Monday, Democratic Senator Elizabeth Warren, citing the Times' reporting, asked "that the Federal Reserve...



WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden (left) nominated Jerome Powell (right) for a second term as Federal Reserve chair amid a record-high wave of inflation in the US economy. —AFP

release all available information about the trades by Fed officials" by next Monday. The Fed in October announced stricter investment rules after

a controversy over the trading activities of Powell and two other senior officials, who ended up resigning. —AFP

## AUB continues services to people with special needs

KUWAIT: In continuation of its role in supporting the Be Aware ("Diraya") campaign initiated by the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK), Ahli United Bank would like to shed light on the services provided to our valued customers with special needs.

In this respect, Mohammed Al-Yaseen, Area Manager - retail banking at AUB said in a press release that it is a priority for banks to give to give special attention to customers of special needs. With this perspective in mind, AUB affirms that it provides the best banking services and technology that satisfy the aspirations of its customers with all types of disabilities through seven branches fully equipped to receive them: Mishref, Qadisiya, Farwaniya, Sabah Al-Salem, Al-Ahmady, Al-Ayoun and Al-Jahra, that seamlessly fit the requirements of this category of customers. Moreover, Al-Yaseen said that AUB has provided its deaf and dumb customers with visual recordings, to include all the necessary information and instructions to facilitate their transactions. The bank has also provided a number of employees trained in sign language, who are always ready to help the bank's deaf and dumb customers.

In its efforts to simplify transactions for its customers with visual disabilities, AUB has established an integrated system for issuing transactions in Braille, printing bank statements and credit cards and other forms in the same way, as well as including special features in ATMs, to be equipped with large fonts and a screen background with distinctive brightness of colors to facilitate reading data on the screen for customers with visual impairment. These ATMs are also updated and equipped with a Braille keyboard. AUB has also provided voice-activated ATMs. This feature starts once the headphone jack is inserted into the ATM, while hiding the settings of the ATM screen and relying on voice guidance only, in order to guarantee and preserve privacy and confidentiality of customers and their transactions.

Furthermore, AUB issued bank credit and debit cards that meet the needs of its customers with visual disabilities, by updating printing methods, so that the data is engraved on the bank card to be embossing, and the card is issued with a picture of its owner. In serving customers with mobility disabilities, AUB has equipped the branch entrances with ramps that make access for wheelchair users easier. It also placed ATMs at an appropriate height to enable them to conduct their transactions effortlessly. The bank also provided near parking spaces designated for people with special needs in the bank's selected branches, along with electronic elevators supported by Braille language, to provide convenience and comfort to and from the branch, in addition to providing suitable waiting areas for them and their companions. AUB has also conducted a full update of the online banking services to meet the needs of its blind and visually impaired customers by including features to enlarge the font for customers with low vision.



Mohammed Al-Yaseen

## KFH launches Foreign Currency Visa prepaid card with unique advantages

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has launched KFH Visa Foreign Currency prepaid cards which enable customers to easily charge and pay in different currencies during travel and online shopping.

The launch of the prepaid cards depicts KFH's keenness to give customers a unique banking experience to fulfill their ambitions and aspirations. Also, it represents the bank's strategy to develop its products and services and achieve an outstanding performance, expand its customer base, market share and its strong financial position in Kuwait and worldwide.

Acting Group Deputy General Manager Cards at KFH, Talal Al-Arbeed, said that the KFH Visa Foreign Currency prepaid card - the first Islamic Visa prepaid cards of their kind in the local market, help customers to manage their payments efficiently and pay directly in foreign currency without charging foreign currency exchange fees. He emphasized that the cards give travelers a smart and suitable method to carry their travel money. The cards are available in 5 main currencies: US Dollar, Pound Sterling, Euro, UAE Dirham and Saudi Riyal.

Al-Arbeed added that the cards provide unique advantages including avoiding fluctuations in exchange rate of the chosen currency, easy spending without exchanging the currency, protection of purchases and benefiting from continuous visa

offers. The card is safer than cash. Al-Arbeed indicated that the cards are very flexible in recharging through KFH application for smart phones KFHonline, KFH website www.kfh.com, KFH service "Aloo Baitak" in addition to KFH branches and KFH smart branches KFH Go.

He added that issuing the cards to the customer does not require the customer to have an account in KFH or make a salary transfer. The card does not require an annual commitment. He added that customers' need to be 18 years old and above.

Al-Arbeed emphasized that KFH shall continue its success in the banking cards market. KFH shall continue to update and develop its services and products to enhance its leading position in the banking field on both local and regional levels, using the highest standards of quality and innovation. He referred to the great success of various campaigns for cards, the last of which was the "Ready for Summer" campaign which KFH launched to the holders of KFH Visa cards, thus enabling them to win Sea Ray or Fliteboard boats for 13 of KFH customers on local and global purchases (including online purchases in foreign currency).

Al-Arbeed highlighted KFH leadership in digital transformation using the most modern payment methods. He referred to the "smart wallet" service through smart mobiles and watches, that provide



Talal Al-Arbeed



Ankush Devadason

the latest smart and highly secured payment methods in cooperation with "Garmin", "Fitbit" and "Samsung". The holders of all KFH cards are now able to enjoy the smart and easy payment methods by passing the device or the smart watch on the POS which are compatible with "NFC" locally and globally.

Visa Country Manager for Kuwait, Ankush Devadason said: "KFH Visa foreign currency prepaid cards are flexible and secure, not to mention convenient. They allow cardholders to pay in up to five different currencies, online or in-store, and can be used anywhere. Visa cards are accepted in Kuwait and at Visa's 70 million merchant partners worldwide. The KFH Visa foreign currency prepaid cards will enable consumers to fully enjoy the benefits of digital commerce and we are delighted to see KFH launch the first of their kind Islamic Visa foreign currency prepaid cards in Kuwait."

## Al-Tijari introduces SwatchPAY! Cool payment innovation

KUWAIT: In a press statement following the launch of SwatchPAY! for the first time in Kuwait, Al-Tijari said "No more searching in your pockets or purse for your phone or wallet! One flick of a wrist and fast, contactless, and safe payments can be made in shops, restaurants, drive-throughs, and many more places. Al-Tijari with the Swiss brand, "Swatch" loves to surprise, by introducing an Analog watch that will make people stop and stare! Because the payment function of SwatchPAY! is hidden; it has never been so easy to impress friends when it's time to pay for your purchases."

About how the SwatchPay works, Al-Tijari said, "Hidden inside each model with the SwatchPAY! feature is a Near Field Communication (NFC) chip that works in the same way as the ones in CBK bank cards to enable contactless payments. The added benefit is that the NFC chip doesn't drain the watch battery. Simply move the watch close to the payment terminal at the checkout counter, the terminal reader exchanges payment information with the chip, and that's all there is to it!"

Commenting on the launch of this new service for the

first time in Kuwait, Abdulaziz Malak, Assistant General Manager - Card Center said: "Launching the "SwatchPAY!" Payment Service in cooperation with Swatch Company comes as a valued addition to the Bank's constant endeavors to cater for its customers' need and providing them with state-of-the art digital banking services and solutions to meet their expectation through such payment solution that suit their daily requirements."

Malak continued, stressing that the Bank works on developing banking products and services to keep pace with the modern fast lifestyle by introducing ways that enable customers to easily and instantly perform their daily banking transactions. He explained that payment through Swatch watches- that don't need to be electrically charged- saves the customer the burden of carrying his/her plastic banking cards while going for sport exercises or other similar activities.

According to Malak, this new service is an easy and secure service, the "SwatchPAY!" service can be used in any outlet or store having a Point of Sale (POS) machine or any contactless payment method. Malak further added that in case the watch is lost, wearers do not have to panic as they can suspend or reactivate the payment function of the watch with a single tap on a smartphone or tablet using the SwatchPAY! app or the Bank app at any time, adding that, like all other Swatch models, watches with SwatchPAY! are water-resistant to a depth of 30 meters.

"Al-Tijari customers can download the SwatchPAY! App



Abdulaziz Malak

on their Android and IOS smartphones through the App Store or Google Play and then follow the instructions to add their banking cards. They can smoothly and easily make payments through their Swatch watches compatible with this service. Customers can obtain more information by visiting www.cbk.com/ar/SwatchPAY", added Malak

Malak concluded by emphasizing that Al-Tijari's launch of SwatchPAY! for the first time in Kuwait came to further demonstrate the Bank's endeavors to provide customers with an exceptional experience within the digital payment solutions that offer customers advanced and secure digital payment services. Al-Tijari has previously launched several services, including Fitbit Pay service, Garmin Pay and Al-Tijari wallet. This confirms the Bank's leadership in launching advanced digital banking services and providing its customers with innovative payment methods. SwatchPAY! is available in thirteen countries and counting. Swatch fans can choose from a variety of models in the Gent, New Gent and BIG BOLD product lines. Time is what you make of it, and SwatchPAY! allows people to spend more of theirs doing what they love.

## Al-Muzaini Exchange opens 120th branch in Al-Assima Mall

KUWAIT: Al-Muzaini Exchange, the leading exchange house in Kuwait celebrated its 80 years with opening of its 120th branch in Al-Assima Mall, Kuwait on 7th of January 2022 by Hugh Fernandes, the general manager and Al-Muzaini management.

Al-Muzaini was also thrilled to announce the super winners of its latest online promotion "Transfer and Win", cash and gold prizes and the mega prize a BMW X1 2022 during an event held in Al-Assima Mall. The event was hosted by Osama Fouda, Kuwait's favorite

talk show presenter which included instant winning prizes presented by Al-Muzaini. Al-Muzaini held a three months' promotion on transfer and win through any of its online platforms, cash prizes ranging to up to \$100,000 and 10G of gold running weekly and monthly with the final mega prize a BMW.

Hugh Fernandes, General Manager of Al Muzaini Exchange said: "Today we are delighted to introduce our latest opening that brings Al-Muzaini near to our customers in Al-Assima Mall. We continually invest in our product to ensure a leading excellence of remittances and we know that customer expects fantastic service when it comes to money transfers and foreign exchanges. Our commitment is delivering a great customer experience every time and it is our number one priority. I would also like to congratulate all the winners and thanking them for their trust".







## Bob Saget's wife left 'completely shattered'

**T**he 'Full House' star was found dead in his hotel room in Florida on Sunday after performing in Jacksonville the previous night and Kelly Rizzo - who he wed in 2018 - is still in shock at the loss of her "absolute everything". She said in a statement: "My whole heart. Bob was my absolute everything. I am so completely shattered and in disbelief. I am so deeply touched by the outpouring of love and tribute from our friends, family, his fans and his peers." The 42-year-old presenter promised to say more about her late husband when the tragedy is less "raw". She said: "When the time is right and when this news is not as raw, I look forward to sharing more of Bob with the world. Sharing how

much he meant to me, all of those around him, and how much all of his fans and friends meant to him as well. Thank you for respecting my privacy at this time." Kelly's individual statement came after Bob's loved ones, including his wife and his three children, Aubrey, 34, Lara, 32, and 29-year-old Jennifer - who he had with ex-wife Sharri Kramer - released a joint message confirming his shock death at the age of 65. They said: "We are devastated to confirm that our beloved Bob passed away today. He was everything to us and we want you to know how much he loved his fans, performing live and bringing people from all walks of life together with laughter.

## Ellie Goulding sends touching birthday message to husband

**T**he 'Starry Eyed' hitmaker wished art dealer Caspar Jopling - whom she married in 2019 - a happy 30th birthday on Instagram, and took the opportunity to share how much she adores her man as she thanked him for his love. The 35-year-old musician shared a photo of them together in the ocean, and wrote:

"Happy 30th birthday to my extraordinary husband. You are the kindest, best person I know. Thank you for loving me." The 'Love Like Me Do' songstress wrote the message alongside a black and white slideshow of the couple together on her Instagram Stories. This comes after the 'Fitter. Calmer. Stronger' author shared

about the "crippling anxiety" she was experiencing after coming back to work after three weeks since giving birth to her first child, seven-month-old Arthur, and gave Caspar a shout-out as a source of support. Ellie said: "Happy New Year everyone... This past year has been the very best of my life. I became a mother, the greatest joy I've known. I've had time to sit down with great musicians and writers and made exciting new music that I hope will give people who hear it the same euphoric escape that I experienced when writing it. "I have released my first book, performed to the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, the President and Joni Mitchell (and I can't explain how grateful I am for that privilege). "I have a dog and a cat that love me, I have my friends that really love me, and I have a husband that adores and supports me every single day. But this year has also been the hardest of my life. I've struggled daily, nightly, hourly with a kind of panic I didn't even know existed."



## Lady Gaga: 'I come from a culture of plenty'

**T**he 35-year-old star plays Patrizia Reggiani in the big screen drama based around the real-life murder of fashion house businessman Maurizio Gucci and reveals her family were in awe when she told them she'd be working with Al Pacino on the project. She said: "I can assure you they've never heard such a bellowing sound out of my father. My Italian father went absolutely crazy. 'Pacino?! Pacino?! No! Stefani!' "He was so excited, my mother was excited, my sister was excited, everybody in my family was excited. ... It was such a great privilege. [They thought] 'we've made it!'" The 'Bad Romance' hitmaker explained that coming from a "culture of plenty" has allowed her to live the superstar life because her ancestors "worked so hard". She told Entertainment Tonight: "I come from a culture of plenty. The culture of plenty that I came from was because my ancestors worked so hard so that I could have a better life. "And, in that life, I get to work with Al Pacino. And he taught me so

## Crystal Hefner 'feels authentic than ever'

**T**he 35-year-old star - who was married to Playboy founder Hugh Hefner for five years until his death in September 2017 - has opened up on her decision to move away from her "scantily clad" days and embrace her true self. Taking to Instagram this week, she wrote: "Over five years, my account has shifted from not always safe for work posts to my REAL safe for work life. The real me. "I was living for other people before, to make others happy, suffering internally in the process. "As most of you know, I grew my following during my "Playboy" years. Certain photos grow followings fast. In short, sex sells. "I don't know whether I felt empowered by dressing scantily clad, showing cleavage, etc ...or if I just felt it was expected of me or what... but now I can confidently and 100% proudly say, modesty is what empowers me these days, and because it feels so much better internally, it will probably be this way for the rest of my life. (sic)" Crystal explained how she "removed everything fake from my body", and deleted old photos to help her feel like she belongs "more to [herself]". She continued: "As I made this transition, I always thought... "Will my account survive?" as I saw followers drop by the thousands every day... "I was in the red. Every day. I was watching the girls that had similar pages keep posting the same scantily clad stuff and growing exponentially while I tanked hard." However, that has changed and now Crystal has noticed her female following has grown. She added: "But now it has shifted. Now it's in the green. Most days the count is growing. Now my women followers are giving the men followers a run for their money.



much. For those who don't have the honor of knowing him, I'll tell you, he's everything that you want in your favorite actor to be. ... He's so talented, it's seeping out of his pores." Gaga then went on to list actors she would like to work with in the future, noting that Pacino was "always" one of them. She said: "My gosh, there are so many actors that I would love to work with. Pacino was certainly one of them. I'm very proud to call him my friend. I wanted to work with Jared [Leto]. I wanted to work with Adam [Driver]. I wanted to work with Jeremy Irons. I wanted to work with Salma [Hayek] "I have to say, one of my fellow Icon Award winners, Tom Hanks, I would love to work with Tom Hanks. I think he is one of the most brilliant actors of all time."

## Alia Shawkat admits Brad Pitt 'not aware' of dating rumors

**T**he 32-year-old actress and the 58-year-old star were seen hanging out together in 2019 and 2020, which led to speculation they were more than friends. Alia - who denied the rumors at the time - has now told The New Yorker: "[Brad] had no awareness of it at all. "Which is so funny... I was like, 'You know everyone thinks we're dating? And there's this whole thing, and I'm being followed.' "And he was, like, 'I'm sorry. It happens. If you hang out with me, it happens.' He had no awareness of it at all." The rumors even reached Alia's family, and she admitted her grandmother was delighted

by the stories in the media. She recalled: "She's been in this country for over thirty years and still barely speaks English. An Iraqi Muslim woman. "She's sitting there, watching her Turkish soap opera. And next to her is this old gossip magazine with Brad's face, and my face in a small circle. And it says, 'Brad's New Girl!'" And then on the inside it's old Instagram photos of me and friends at dinner. It was like, 'ALL ABOUT ALIA.' This whole made-up story about how we were healing each other by spending time together. "I looked at my grandmother, like, 'Why do you have this?' She's, like, 'It's you and this

movie star! And it's your face.' I was embarrassed by it. I told her she had to throw it away. And she laughed." While Alia didn't enjoy the attention she gained from her friendship with Brad, she was keen to point out she puts no blame on him for the confusion. She said: "There's something ironic about it. It has nothing to do with Brad as a person. "But of course, the idea of me being romantically involved with an older white guy is what gets me the most attention. Not a 20-year career. That's what gets me."

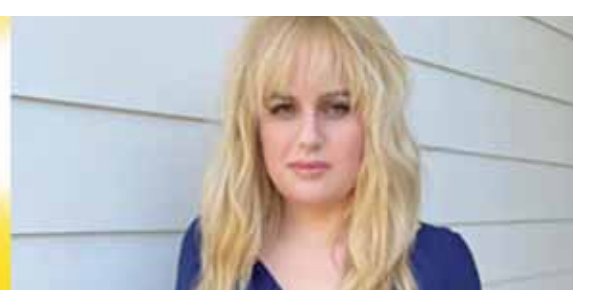


## Courtney Cox 'negotiate' with daughter over Instagram posts



**T**he 'Friends' star admitted to having to "negotiate" with her 17-year-old daughter when it comes to posting pictures of her on social media, but she thinks it's a good lesson for Coco's hopes of getting into acting. The 57-year-old actress - after being asked her Coco's interest in her own work in Hollywood - told Extra: "Oh for sure. Although she is tortured by me saying, 'Can we do something for Instagram...?' I have to negotiate. "I use her for Instagram and she knows it and she really rebels, since she's going to be in the business, I know... She's going to have to get used to eyes on her." Coco is keen to get into the family business, which seems a natural fit for her given her dad, David Arquette - as well as aunts Patricia, Rosanna, Alexis, grandfather Lewis and great grandfather Cliff - have also been part of that world. However, David - whom Courtney was married to from 1999 to 2010 - spilled about their daughter's indifference to watching her parents' movies, including 1996 horror classic 'Scream', which is where they met.

## Rebel Wilson experiences 'a rebirthing of sorts'



**T**he 41-year-old actress has reflected on a visit to an Austrian health retreat in the town of Altaussee in 2020, during which she underwent "the craziest treatment" to "restart" her body. She told Apple Fitness+: "Basically, you're in a pool just by yourself but with one Austrian lady. And you kind of have to just close your eyes and lean back and float in the water. "And she kind of drags you around the pool while singing Austrian folk songs, but you can half-hear because your head's mainly under water." She revealed the treatment last for 90 minutes and admitted you feel dis-

orientated afterwards. She explained: "You know logically you're in the same pool that you were in, but because you've been swirled around for 90 minutes in the water, you don't quite know. "It's supposed to symbolize some kind of rebirthing. And it was a very bizarre feeling, but it did feel like you're in the womb, and then at the end, you come out." And while the 'Pitch Perfect' star admitted the treatment wasn't "something I would've signed up for by myself", she found it "a pretty cool experience".





Comedie Francaise seamstresses work in Paris. A well-born bourgeois who became Louis XIV's favorite playwright, Moliere left no personal trace: no diary, no correspondence, or even notes that could shed light on the personality of the greatest Western comic author. — AFP photos



A man cycles past the Theater institution La Comedie-Francaise. La Comedie-Francaise is the oldest theatre company in the world. Called the 'house of Moliere' even though he never went there, the theatre has been haunted by Moliere for almost 400 years.

## Moliere: 400 years as master of the French stage

When the French refer to their native tongue, it is the "language of Moliere", and as he turns 400 this week he remains as central to their culture as Shakespeare in the English-speaking world. Here are a few pointers on the life and legacy of France's most illustrious playwright.

### A little-known star

Moliere, real name Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, left zero trace of his personal

life: no journal, correspondence or even notes on his work. The only of his four children to survive to adulthood, lost his manuscripts. We don't know the source of his stage-name - which refers to a quarry - nor his date of birth (we have only a baptism certificate, dated January 15, 1622, that was discovered two centuries later in 1820). As eldest son, he stood to inherit a comfortable living from his father as chief upholsterer and valet to the king, but gave it up to be an actor.

It caused his father much strife: he was forced to buy his son out of prison after his first company, The Illustrious Theatre, fell into debt. Moliere fled Paris at 23, spending the next 13 years with a travelling troupe. Success on the road won him a return to Paris and a successful audience for the young king, Louis XIV, that earned him a powerful patron even though he faced constant battles with censors. Despite the myth, he did not quite die on stage, but shortly after a performance - as the hypochondriac Argan no less - at home on the Rue de Richelieu on February 17, 1673.

### World's oldest company

La Comedie-Francaise was created by King Louis XIV in 1680, seven years after Moliere's death, as a merger between his troupe and another. The longest-running theatre company in the world, it is known as "La Maison de Moliere" and has performed his work every single year since its formation. Based since 1799 on the Rue de Richelieu, close to the Louvre, it now employs 400 people, including 60 actors, and has a costume department comprising 50,000 items.

### Memorable characters

Moliere created characters who often take their foibles to extremes, but allow us to laugh at our universal human failings in the process. Perhaps best-known is Tartuffe, from the play of the same name -



Comedie Francaise seamstresses work in Paris.

a fraud who disguises himself as a priest to convince a naive, wealthy aristocrat into handing him his fortune and daughter's hand in marriage, even as he chases after his wife. The play is seen as practically inventing the "comedy of manners" that satirises the moral hypocrisies of high society.

Though Moliere is not thought to have been particularly anti-religious himself, "Tartuffe" scandalized the Catholic Church and became a key text in the anti-clerical movement of the following centuries.

Among other key characters is the money-obsessed Harpagnon, from "The Miser", who exhorts his servants "not to rub the furniture too hard for fear of wearing it out". The hypochondriac Argan from "The Imaginary Invalid" is another eternal character that Moliere used to satirise quacks in the medical profession who exploited people's fear of death. — AFP



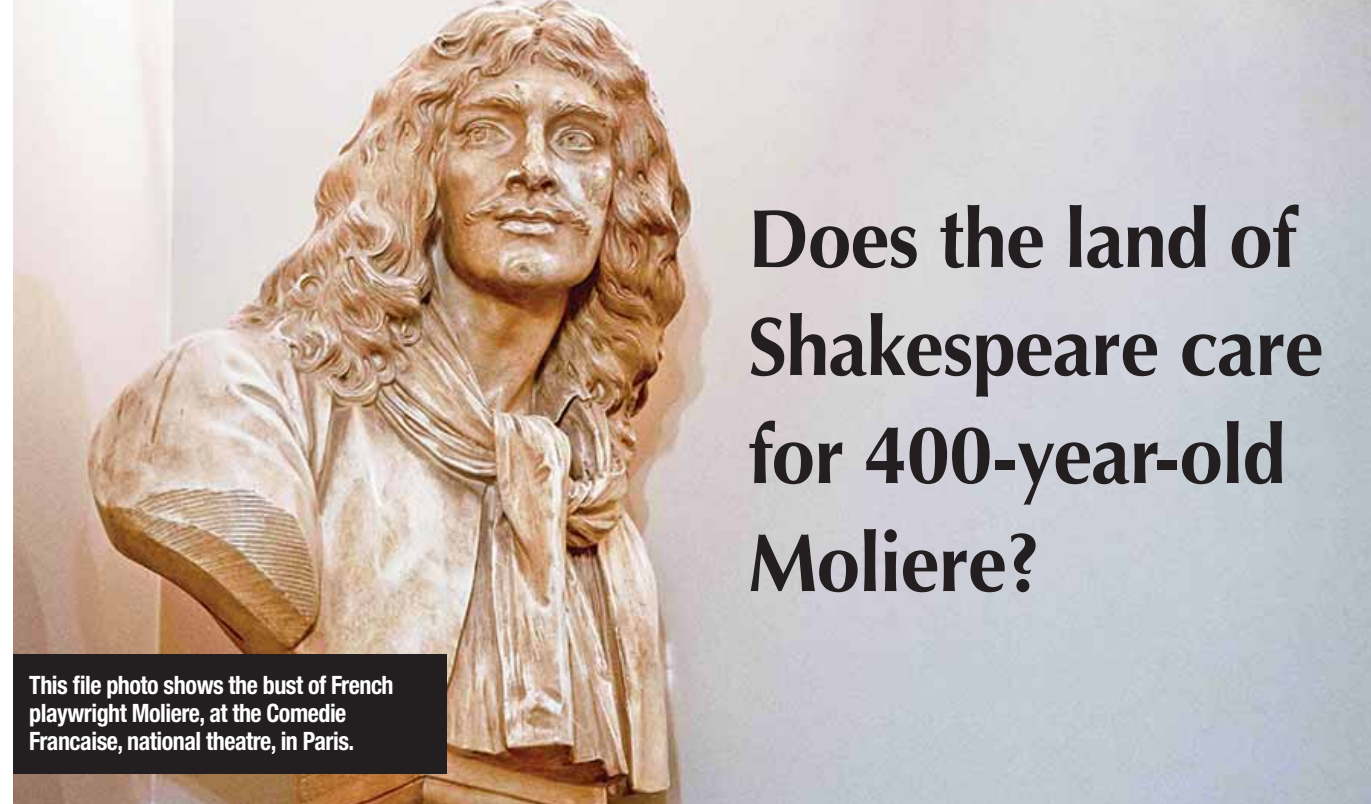
Costumes are seen at the Comedie Francaise national state theatre in Paris.

US actor Denis O'Hare could sense the ghost of Moliere smiling as he rode his co-star Olivia Williams like a horse on stage at London's National Theatre. Usually a rather cerebral place, the National's audience was in stitches as O'Hare's character Tartuffe, from the classic 17th-century French play, tried to disguise his adulterous antics as a bit of horseplay.

"The comedy translates across the centuries if you know what you're doing," O'Hare told AFP. "Some of the funny was based on language, and some of it on sheer idiocy... But there are also great moments of pathos and human emotion that make it all the richer." That hit production of "Tartuffe" in 2019 was a reminder that Moliere, France's most celebrated playwright who turns 400 this week, can resonate in the land of Shakespeare.

It was not always the case. "It used to be a box office manager's nightmare to have a Moliere production. You often had more people on stage than in the theatre," said Noel Peacock of the University of Glasgow, an expert on Moliere translations. In the 1980s, one Sunday Times critic even feared that Moliere was an obstacle to a united Europe: "How can you trade freely with a nation whose best comedy does not travel?"

But since those times, there has been a "complete turnaround," said Peacock. There have been dozens of British produc-



This file photo shows the bust of French playwright Moliere, at the Comedie Francaise, national theatre, in Paris.

tions in recent years - three major versions of Tartuffe in London alone between 2016 and 2019. He is attracting celebrities: Keira Knightley played in "The Misanthrope" in 2009 and David Tennant (of Doctor Who fame) in "Don Juan" in 2017.

### Falseness and liars

Peacock credits fresh translations that worried less about linguistic accuracy than capturing Moliere's spirit with helping to bring out the universal truths in his work. "Great plays last for a reason," agreed O'Hare. "Tartuffe is a rogue, a rascal, a hustler. But he's also a truth-teller in the great tradition of the French clown. He upends society's norms and conventions. That has made him highly adaptable to modern scenarios.

The Royal Shakespeare Company recently relocated "Tartuffe" to a British-Pakistani family in Birmingham, where the commentary on religious hypocrisy found fresh relevance. The Exchange Theatre, a French-English company based in London, has just released a documentary about its version of "The Misanthrope", which it set in a modern-day newsroom to highlight Moliere's focus on truth and lies. "The fact that he so vehemently criticised the falseness and liars in the world is one part of what makes his work survive so well," said David Furlong, the company's French-Mauritian director.

He highlighted the famous, sarcastic monologue about hypocrisy in "Don Juan" ("To act the part of a good man is the best part one can act") as the sort of speech

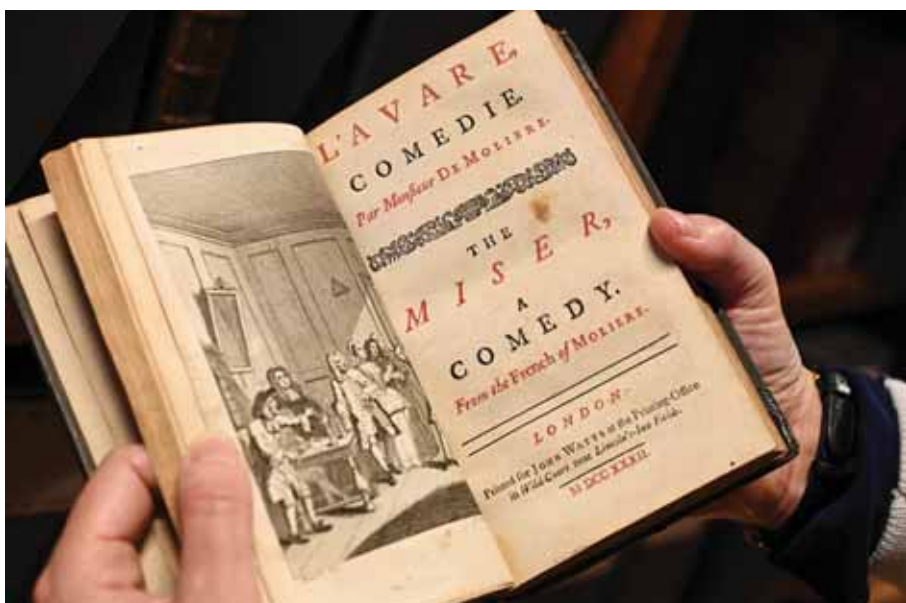
that will be eternal. "I've wondered in the past if it's just my French education that tells me Moliere is a genius," Furlong said. "But I don't think so. There are so many faces to Moliere, he's so rich and diverse,

does comedy as well as he does tragedy, silly farces as well as highly philosophical plays. He speaks to everybody."

### Beyond Britain

It's not just the English-speaking world that has embraced Moliere of late: translations have proved popular in Germany, Russia, Japan and beyond. A recent French book about Moliere in the Arabic world found he had been performed in the region since at least 1847 and had become the "godfather of theatre" in many countries. "Moliere's plays have been extremely important internationally. He even provided the foundation for some national theatres who adapted his plays to their local languages and cultures," said Agathe Sanjuan, conservator of the Comedie-Francaise in Paris.

It was always a tougher sell in England, of course, where he had to compete with the Bard, though adaptations of Moliere were appearing there as early as the 1660s, according to Peacock. However, he found more success in Scotland, Peacock added, which had a "Shakespeare-sized hole to fill" and where Moliere's "biggest advantage was that he wasn't English." — AFP



This file photo shows a page from a 1732 bilingual anthology of plays by French playwright Moliere, at the Comedie Francaise library in Paris.



Costumes workshop manager of the Comedie Francaise Sylvie Lombart, poses in Paris.



Lifestyle | Features



Men exercise with kettlebells and dumbbells at a gymnasium in Kabul. — AFP photos

Poet and activist Maya Angelou has become the first Black woman to appear on the US quarter, in a new version of the coin unveiled by the US Mint on Monday. Angelou, author of "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," will also be the first figure commemorated through the American Women Quarters Program, which was signed into law in January 2021. The US Mint "has begun shipping the first coins" with Angelou's likeness on the American quarter, a 25-cent piece, according to a press release from the agency.

"It is my honor to present our nation's first circulating coins dedicated to celebrating American women and their contributions to American history," said Mint Deputy Director Ventris Gibson. "Each 2022 quarter is designed to reflect the



The United States Mint shows the reverse (tails) quarter honoring Maya Angelou, designed by United States Mint Artistic Infusion Program (AIP) Artist Emily Damstra and sculpted by United States Mint Medallist Artist Craig A Campbell. — AFP

breadth and depth of accomplishments being celebrated throughout this historic coin program. Maya Angelou, featured on the reverse of this first coin in the series, used words to inspire and uplift." The program directs the US Mint to issue quarters each year between 2022 and 2025 featuring five different female trailblazers who have contributed to the country.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said she was "proud that these coins celebrate the contributions of some of America's most remarkable women." "Each time we redesign our currency, we have the chance to say something about our country - what we value, and how we've progressed as a society," she said in a statement. The quarter has for the last 90

years shown the nation's first president, George Washington, on one side and an eagle on the other. The new quarters - which have been minted in Philadelphia and Denver - show Washington on one side and Angelou on the other.

The other figures set to appear on the coin in 2022 are: Sally Ride, the first American woman in space, Wilma Mankiller, the first female principal chief of the Cherokee Nation, Nina Otero-Warren, a New Mexico suffrage leader and Anna May Wong, a Chinese American film star. Angelou, who was born in Missouri in 1928, was an essayist and poet who worked with Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X during the Civil Rights Movement. Angelou, who delivered the

poem at former President Bill Clinton's first inauguration, died in 2014.

Treasury Secretary Yellen has also signaled support for recognizing former slave and abolitionist Harriet Tubman on US currency. Former president Barack Obama launched a project to put Tubman's face on the \$20 bill but it stalled under the administration of Donald Trump. Putting Tubman, a Black woman who escaped slavery and became a leader of the pre-Civil War abolitionist movement, on the bill would be an "honor" but designing banknotes takes time, Yellen said in September. — AFP

'Avoid Chinese meat,' say Germans ahead of Beijing Games

The German Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) sent a strong message on Monday to athletes heading to Beijing for next month's Winter Olympics not to eat Chinese meat for fear of falling foul of doping regulations. NADA fears that athletes may risk ingesting clenbuterol, a steroid that is used to fatten pigs and calves before they are sent to slaughter. "The consumption of meat should therefore, if possible, be avoided, and the alternatives should be discussed with the nutritionist," said NADA in its newsletter on Monday.

The risk of clenbuterol contamination in meat produced in China has long been mentioned by anti-doping agencies, although no recent cases have been reported. Clenbuterol made headlines in the past when cycling champion Alberto Contador tested positive on the 2010 Tour de France. The Spaniard has always maintained that he was contaminated by eating a steak bought in Spain. Contador, however, was suspended and stripped of several titles including the 2010 Tour de France and the 2011 Giro d'Italia. — AFP



## Sports

# Djokovic trains as Australian Open dream hangs in balance

## Tennis superstar targets a record 21st Grand Slam

MELBOURNE: Tennis superstar Novak Djokovic trained at the Australian Open venue yesterday for his attempt to win a record 21st Grand Slam but his dream hung in the balance as the government pondered cancelling his visa, again. The world number one had scored a surprise courtroom victory the day before, overturning the Australian government's decision to cancel his visa on COVID-19 vaccination grounds.

But the immigration minister said he may annul Djokovic's visa once more. The unvaccinated 34-year-old Serbian ace says he is now determined to stay in Melbourne and compete in the Australian Open, which starts in six days. "I flew here to play at one of the most important events we have in front of the amazing fans," Djokovic said on Instagram Monday. Wearing a t-shirt and shorts, he limbered up in a gym yesterday accompanied by coach Goran Ivanisevic before heading to centre court, AFP journalists saw. Television cameras filmed him from helicopters as he played.

Djokovic, a nine-time Australian Open champion, jetted into the country six days ago carrying a medical exemption from vaccination due to a positive coronavirus test on December 16 last year. After overnight questioning at Melbourne airport, border officials decided the exemption was not valid, cancelled his visa and transferred him to a detention centre pending deportation. "I am not vaccinated," Djokovic had told the border official, according to a transcript released by the court.

### 'Biggest victory'

He expressed bewilderment that his exemption, approved by two medical panels in Australia, was not accepted. The limited number of foreigners

allowed into Australia must be fully vaccinated or have a medical exemption. The government insists that a recent infection does not count as an exemption. Federal circuit court judge Anthony Kelly dramatically reversed the visa decision Monday, ordering the cancellation be "quashed", that the player be released immediately and that the government pay his legal costs.

The government had surrendered after conceding that Djokovic's airport interview was "unreasonable" because the player had not been given the promised time to respond. It was "the biggest victory in his career, bigger than all his Grand Slams", his mother Dijana said at a press conference in Belgrade. "Truth and justice came to the light. I would like to thank the justice system of Australia," said his brother Djordje.

Much of Australia's media said yesterday doubts had emerged over the accuracy of Djokovic's travel declaration, reportedly filled out before he flew in from Spain. A copy of his declaration showed a tick in the box to confirm he had not and would not travel in the 14 days before landing in Australia on January 5. But the player had reportedly been in Serbia before Spain. A spokesman for Immigration Minister Alex Hawke said he was "considering whether to cancel Mr. Djokovic's visa" by using his ministerial powers. But he would not comment further for legal reasons.

### 'Free Novak'

As Djokovic practiced in Melbourne Park, some fans said he should be allowed to play. "I can imagine some people will be pretty angry about it," said 22-year-old fan Harrison Denicolo. "All I know is he came here, and then we turned him back when he got here. So, it's kind of unfair." Ofek Dvir Ovadia,



### Govt ponders cancelling his visa, again



MELBOURNE: Serbia's Novak Djokovic takes part in a training session in Melbourne ahead of the Australian Open tennis tournament yesterday, a day after a court overturned the Australian government's decision to cancel his visa on COVID-19 vaccination grounds. — AFP

22, said he was excited to see Djokovic play in the Australian Open. "He will cop a fair bit of abuse, I reckon, when he plays just from the fans in general, but I hope a few people get behind him," he said. Until Monday, Djokovic had been held at the former Park Hotel, a five-storey detention facility, which holds about 32 migrants trapped in Australia's hard-line immigration system - some for many years.

Hundreds of Djokovic fans, anti-vaccination protesters and migration rights activists had rallied outside the centre during his stay. Yesterday morning, there were just two television reporters outside and no protesters. A lone cardboard sign read:

"Free Novak and all the refugees". The ATP, which runs the men's tennis tour, said the affair leading up to the court case had been "damaging on all fronts, including for Novak's well-being and preparation for the Australian Open".

Rafael Nadal, one of Djokovic's main rivals for the title, said "it is the fairest thing" for the Serbian to play in the Australian Open. Tennis great Martina Navratilova said on social media: "Though I disagree with not getting vaccinated: at the end of the day it seems Novak did play by the rules as they were for the exemption and was burned. Let him play." — AFP

## Djokovic's saga throws light on migrants' ordeal

MELBOURNE: It was the most unlikely Australian residence for the world's number one tennis player, Novak Djokovic: a grim, five-storey former hotel with no check-out allowed. For four nights, Melbourne's infamous "alternative place of detention" for migrants became his abode: no tennis courts, no swimming pool and no leaving. Dozens of journalists and scores of fans, anti-vaccination mandate protesters and migrant rights activists rallied outside daily.

But the 34-year-old ace reportedly was not seen by his fellow residents: about 32 people held under Australia's stringent immigration policy, some of them for years. And a day after the Serbian superstar left the detention centre as celebrating fans sang and danced, his cancelled visa restored by a court, the media glare left with him.

Yesterday morning, there were only two television reporters outside and no protesters. A lonely cardboard sign read: "Free Novak and all the refugees". Chalk scrawled on the front of the hotel said: "#gameover free the refugees". Days earlier, people had been scrawling graffiti on the walls, hanging pro-refugee banners from the building, singing and dancing. Among the mix of demonstrators were at least 20 activists trying to highlight the situation of people caught up in Australia's strict migration system.

### 'They won't eat it'

On Djokovic's first day in detention, activist Kim Matousek pointedly remarked on the interest being shown in the tennis ace's brief stay. "Well I find it kind of interesting that they're protesting for Djokovic, he's only been in detention for less than a day," she said. "As for our friends, they've been in detention for what was it 3,099 days now?"

Above Matousek, men at the facility had put up signs at the windows reading: "Nine years too long" and "Aren't we human beings like you?" The food served inside is of poor quality, she said. "The coleslaw smells like alcohol because it's rotten, they won't eat it." The facility, formerly the Park Hotel, gained notoriety last December when a fire broke out in the building. One person was hospitalized for smoke inhalation. There were no fatalities.

A week later, asylum seekers posted images to social media of food they said they were served, which contained maggots and mouldy bread. Deviani Segal, a 54-year-old piano teacher, was also demonstrating to remind people about those inside. "I would rather the message be that no one should be locked in this hellhole," he said. Refugee Action Collective spokesman David Glanz said Djokovic's detention shone a light on the centre. But for the refugees, he said, "it is not a game". "We fear that long after Djokovic is back on the lucrative global tennis circuit, those men will still be in detention - many of them in their ninth year of being held by the Australian government," he said on the weekend. — AFP

## Burgan Bank continues sponsorship of World Fencing Champion

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank is continuing its support of professional Kuwaiti athletes, once again renewing its sponsorship of World Wheelchair Fencing Champion Tareq Al Qallaf. Now in its eighth year, the Bank's support of Al Qallaf comes as part of its efforts to elevate the sports sector in Kuwait and help Kuwaiti athletes compete across all arenas.

Throughout his career, Al Qallaf has won many titles on the local and international levels, garnering almost 380 medals to date, as well as the 'sword of honor' award as the world's best player and the gold medal as World Champion of the sport. He has become an icon of the sport and a role model for Kuwaiti athletes who have been able to overcome disabilities to achieve great success in their fields.

With the support from Burgan Bank throughout the 2022 season, Al Qallaf is set to compete in several notable global championships and training camps. These include: the San Jose, California Championship, the Pennsylvania Championship, and the Richmond

Championship. He will also be taking part in the 'Kuwait Challenge', which will be held in December 2022.

On this occasion, Hessa Hussain Al-Najadah, Manager Public Relations at Burgan Bank, said: "We are proud of this partnership which is now entering its eighth year. At Burgan Bank, we remain committed to sponsoring and supporting Kuwaiti athletes; offering them all the needed support to enable them to compete under Kuwait's flag in local arenas, and as far as the United States as well. We have also always been firm believers in Al Qallaf and his abilities to continue beating all obstacles and consistently ranking on top of his sport."

From his side, Tareq Al Qallaf said: "Kuwait's accomplishments in the sport of wheelchair fencing continue, on the heels of my participation in tournaments in the United States, supported by Burgan Bank. For eight years now, Burgan has continued to offer its complete support to me, and they have also been a major source of support for Kuwaiti athletes of all types over the past few years. I would personally like to express my gratitude to the Bank for offering Kuwaiti athletes this opportunity and embracing us this in this expansive way, with the aim of elevating the state of the sports sector in Kuwait."

Burgan Bank's support of this initiative falls under its dynamic full-fledged community program entitled 'ENGAGE' - Together to be the change. This program



sheds light on important aspects affecting every segment of the society by promoting social welfare through educational, cultural and health driven initiatives. Burgan Bank's approach to 'ENGAGE' begins with a vital principle that as a leading Kuwaiti financial institution, its conduct and policies should be aligned with the needs and interests of the community.

## Tearful Sabalenka melts down; Open warm-up in tatters

ADELAIDE: World number two Aryna Sabalenka's Australian Open preparations were in tatters yesterday when she self-destructed for the second week in a row and was almost unable to serve at an Adelaide warm-up event. A week after her delivery deserted her at the first of two Adelaide lead-in tournaments, Sabalenka suffered the same fate as she was stunned in three sets by world number 93 Rebecca Peterson 5-7, 6-1, 7-5.

Sabalenka dished up 21 double faults and was reduced to serving underarm in the second and third sets in a desperate effort to get the ball into play. She took so much pace off her first serves that at one stage they were barely clearing the net. The 23-year-old Belarusian became distressed in the third set and, after being asked by the umpire whether she was all right, broke down in tears during her next service game. Her only consolation was that

she was still hitting her groundstrokes with power and placement, but it was no surprise when she bowed out at the first hurdle.

"That was definitely the weirdest match I've ever played," Swedish qualifier Peterson said. "It was tough staying focused. I know she was struggling a lot. I just had to stay in my own world - it was really difficult." American teenage sensation Coco Gauff blasted her way to the second round with an impressive 6-1, 6-2 win over Czech player Katerina Siniakova. The 17-year-old Gauff took just over an hour to dispose of Siniakova and set up a second round clash with fellow teenager Marta Kostyuk of Ukraine. Fourth-seeded Slovenian Tamara Zidansek progressed when she saw off British qualifier Heather Watson 2-6, 6-2, 7-6 (7/4).

Seventh seed Jill Teichmann fell to US qualifier Lauren Davis 1-6, 7-6 (7/3), 6-4. Australian wildcard Maddison Inglis



Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka

beat Montenegro's Danka Kovinic 6-4, 1-6, 6-2, while other winners were American Madison Brengle, who downed Russia's Anastasia Potapova 7-5, 4-6, 6-1 and Czech player Tereza Martincova, a 6-4, 3-6, 6-3 winner over Ukraine's Dayana Yastremska. In the

men's draw, fifth-seeded South African Lloyd Harris was ousted by South Korean Kwon Soon-woo 5-7, 7-5, 6-4, while Australian wildcard Thanasi Kokkinakis continued his recent good form with a 6-4, 6-0 win over Frenchman Benoit Paire. — AFP

## Dolphins, Bears, Vikings fire their head coaches

LOS ANGELES: The Miami Dolphins, Chicago Bears and Minnesota Vikings all fired their head coaches on Monday just one day after the close of the 2021-22 NFL regular season. The Dolphins sacked Brian Flores, the Vikings let Mike Zimmer go, and the Bears fired Matt Nagy with both teams looking for new direction after missing the playoffs.

"I made a decision today to part ways with Brian Flores," Dolphins owner Stephen Ross said Monday. "After evaluating where we are as an organization and what we need going forward to improve, I determined that key dynamics of our football organization weren't functioning at a level I want it to be and felt that this decision was in the best interest of the Miami Dolphins."

"I believe we have a talented young roster in place and have the opportunity to be much better in 2022. I want to thank Brian for his hard work and wish him nothing but the best in his future." In three seasons, Flores had 24 wins and posted a 9-8 record in 2021 but the former New England Patriots defensive coordinator never made the playoffs. He

had no prior experience as a head coach before joining the Dolphins. Nagy's fate was sealed as the Bears struggled through a 6-11 season that ended with a loss at Minnesota on Sunday. Bears general manager Ryan Pace is also stepping down.

The Bears have not won in the postseason since the 2010 team advanced to the NFC championship game. The Vikings fired coach Mike Zimmer and general manager Rick Spielman after eight seasons, making the moves after a season-ending 31-17 win over the Bears. The Vikings finished with an 8-9 record and missed the playoffs for a second straight season. The Detroit Lions also fired offensive coordinator Anthony Lynn. Detroit was one of the worst teams in the NFL with a 3-13-1 record. — AFP



Sports

# US Open champion suffers humiliating loss in Sydney

## Raducanu thrashed 6-0, 6-1 by Rybakina

SYDNEY: US Open champion Emma Raducanu's Australian Open warm-up tournament lasted just 55 minutes after she was thrashed 6-0, 6-1 by Elena Rybakina at the Sydney International yesterday. The 19-year-old Raducanu took the tennis world by storm in September when she won the US Open as a qualifier. She opted not to play last week's Melbourne Summer Set tournament after recovering from COVID-19, meaning her last chance for some match practice ahead of the Open was at this week's Sydney Tennis Classic.

But she was blown off court by the powerful Rybakina, who finished runner-up to Ashleigh Barty at last week's Adelaide International. The 1.80-metre tall Rybakina was superior in every department and had far too much firepower for Raducanu. Rybakina raced through the first set in 24 minutes without dropping a game and won the first three games of the second set before her opponent at last held serve. But that was simply a temporary reprieve, with Rybakina winning the next three games to underline her total dominance.

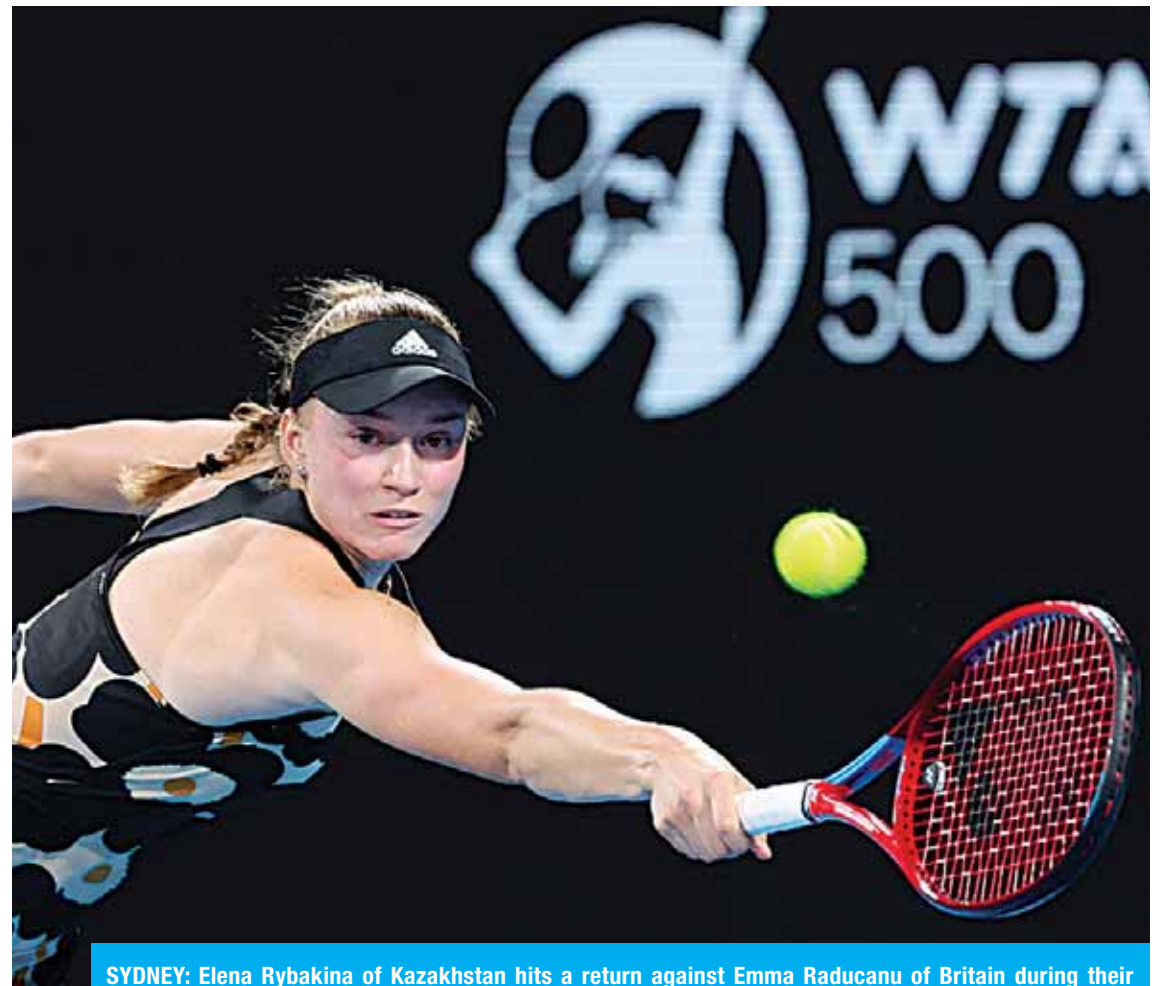
Earlier, Tokyo Olympics gold medalist Belinda Bencic said she felt "a little bit wobbly" in her first match after COVID as she began her warm-up for the Australian Open with a low-key win. The 24-year-old Swiss cruised into the second round with a 6-3, 6-2 victory over Brazilian qualifier Beatriz Haddad Maia. But Bencic, who contracted COVID in mid-December after competing at an Abu Dhabi exhibition, admitted she had not been at her best, with the first Grand Slam of the year starting on Monday.

"I was struggling a little bit, getting to practice after COVID because the pulse was getting up and the fatigue was still there," said Bencic, a former world number four but now ranked 23rd. "I think I still have room to feel better and my fitness has to get better. I still feel a little bit wobbly and so I think there is still potential, but I'm happy that I can play this tournament." She will now take on Oceane Dodin of France in the next round. Dodin, a lucky loser from qualifying, beat Mexican doubles specialist Giuliana Olmos 6-4, 6-1. World number 20 Elise Mertens also moved through the first round with a comfortable 6-2, 7-6 (7/5) win over France's Fiona Ferro.

### Bencic falls 'a little bit wobbly'

The Belgian will take on Daria Kasatkina of Russia in the second round. But Jessica Pegula, ranked two places below Mertens at 22 in the world, was beaten by France's Caroline Garcia 6-4, 7-6 (7/3). In the men's draw, former world number one Andy Murray demolished Norwegian qualifier Viktor Durasovic 6-3, 6-1 in just 71 minutes. Murray, who was given a wildcard this week after his first-round loss in Melbourne last week, was far too strong for the erratic Durasovic, who hit 23 unforced errors to Murray's seven.

The Scotsman, now ranked 135 in the world following a run of debilitating injuries going back to 2018, has also been given a wildcard to next week's Australian Open, where he has been runner-up five times. He said the form he showed against Durasovic gave him confidence for the Open. "I believe I can have a good run there and who knows, if I can find a bit of form and the draw



SYDNEY: Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan hits a return against Emma Raducanu of Britain during their women's singles match at the Sydney Classic tennis tournament yesterday. —AFP

opens up?" the 34-year-old asked. Earlier, sixth seed Dusan Lajovic of Serbia was too strong for

Spaniard Alejandro Davidovich Fokina, winning 7-6 (7/5), 6-4. —AFP

## Al-Attiyah closes in on Dakar crown

WADI AD-DAWASIR: South African Giniel de Villiers won the Dakar Rally ninth stage yesterday as Nasser Al-Attiyah moved closer to clinching his fourth title. The 51-year-old Qatari had seen Sebastien Loeb nibble away at his extensive lead over the past couple of days. But with Friday's finish in Riyadh looming France's serial world rally champion has a 39min 05sec deficit to make up on Al-Attiyah. Saudi driver Yazeed Al-Rahji is almost an hour adrift after this 287 kilometer stage around Wadi ad-Dawasir. De Villiers nipped

home nine seconds clear on the day from his fellow South African Henk Lategan to take his total of stage wins in the Dakar to 18.

The 49-year-old 2009 champion said it is a mystery to him how he and his car traditionally gets better as the event progresses. "I must say, the first week was not ideal," he said. "It was very stressful and mentally very, very tiring. Definitely something I would not like to go through again, but that's behind us now. I don't know why we often win at the end. It would be nice to win at the beginning as well, but we seem to do well the longer the rally goes on, so maybe the rally needs to be three weeks!" In the bike category Austrian Matthias Walkner deposed British 2017 champion Sam Sunderland as overall leader after a stage won by Jose Comejo Florimo. With only three days to go Red Bull

KTM rider Walkner moved 2min12sec clear of Sunderland in what is shaping up to be a tense run-in for the two-wheeled title.

Less than five minutes splits the top four riders. "One mistake can change everything," noted Walkner. "It's going to be a really, really close fight," he added. "I've worked for this, to be on the top...If it's enough for a podium or a victory, then I'm super pumped and happy and if not, well, I cannot change it." Sunderland came in 14th, over eight minutes behind Florimo. "It was quite difficult to open the stage, especially in the dunes because the sunlight was quite bad and you couldn't really see where the drops were," he reported. "The days are counting down and it's coming towards the finish. In the end, I can only do my best and give it my all. We'll see how we end up." —AFP

## Brekalo fires Torino to 4-goal win over fancied Fiorentina

MILAN: Josip Brekalo scored his first Serie A double on Monday as Torino strolled to a surprise 4-0 hammering of Fiorentina. Croatia winger Brekalo rounded off a fine team move in the 23rd minute to put the hosts two ahead following Wilfried Singo's headed opener shortly before.

The 23-year-old made it three eight minutes later when he intercepted a dreadful pass from Jose Callejon before skipping past Pietro Terraccina and slotting home. Antonio Sanabria rounded off the scoring just before the hour mark to make it a resounding win for Torino, who move up to ninth in Italy's top flight on 28 points.

Fiorentina are four points ahead in sixth, nine away from the Champions League positions but still well in the fight for a spot in Europe next year.

The Viola have made an impression this season, with highly-rated Dusan Vlahovic starring up front, but were comprehensively beaten on an off-night for Vincenzo Italiano's attack-minded side. Both sides have a game in hand after their matches on Thursday were not played due to a surge in coronavirus cases across the league. —AFP

## Iveco team Petronas De Rooy competes in Dakar Rally 2022

KUWAIT: Rally Dakar, the world's most extreme rally raid, takes place for the third time in Saudi Arabia in 2022. Iveco team Petronas de Rooy will compete in the new edition of the Dakar Rally with two IVECO Powerstar trucks, which will be driven by Janus van Kasterenjr and Hans Stacey and an IVECO Trakker with Mitchel van den Brink behind the wheel. The 2022 edition will mark the milestone of the 10th Dakar Rally race for the collaboration between IVECO, PETRONAS, and Team De Rooy.

### Al Qusaima

Recently, all the three leaders of Team De Rooy Iveco have all finished in the top ten. Janus van Kasteren did good business with sixth place. Martin van den Brink finished ninth and just trumped teammate Vick Versteijnen. The stage from Ha'il to Al Qaisumah had a lot of sand and dunes in store for the riders. The Petronas Team De Rooy Iveco pilots



are satisfied with the results so far. Janus van Kasteren, Marcel Snijders, and DarekRodewald are in the sixth position after the second stage in the standings. The gap to leader Dmitry Sotnikov is considerable (45 minutes and 37 seconds). The dif-

ferences with the teams in places four and five are not that big. Shibalov is fourth with 22.43 behind the number one, and Ales Loprais is number five at 31.11 behind the Kamaz leader. "A lot can still happen" Janus says.

# Classifieds

## Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000	Kaizen center	25716707
Amiri Hospital	22450005	Rawda	22517733
Maternity Hospital	24843100	Adaliya	22517144
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700	Khalidiya	24848075
Chest Hospital	24849400	Kaifan	24849807
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010	Shamiya	24848913
Adan Hospital	23940620	Shuwaikh	24814507
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300	Abdullah Salem	22549134
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000	Nuzha	22526804
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9	Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
		Qadsiya	22515088
		Dasmah	22532265
		Bneid Al-Gar	22531908

### Clinics

### CHANGE OF NAME

I Shaik Shahida Banu W/o Shaik Reddy Gafoor (old name), R/o D No. 4-10, Rayavaram (V & Post), T.Sundupal (Mdl), Y.S.R. District, A.P, have changed my name as Shaik Shahidun W/o Shaik Reddy Gafoor.

I Shaik Abdul Gaffaar S/o Shaik Dastageer (old name), R/o. D.No. 4-10, Rayavaram (V&Post), T.Sundupal (Mdl), Y.S.R.

District, A.P, have changed my name as Shaik Reddy Gafoor S/o Shaik Dastageer (new name) (C 1404) 12-1-2022

I, Satvinder Singh s/o Gurcharan Singh R/o st. no. 1-A, Near Poly Technical College W.No.08, New Gobind Nagar Hoshiarpur Punjab have changed my name from Satvinder Singh to Satwinder Singh. Concerned Note. (C 1403) 10-1-2022

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## Nigeria overpower Egypt 1-0

Boufal strikes late as Morocco edge Ghana in clash of titans



**GAROUA:** Egypt's defender Mahmoud 'El Wensh' Hamdy (left) and Nigeria's forward Taiwo Awoniyi (right) jump for the ball during the Group D Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) 2021 football match between Nigeria and Egypt yesterday. — AFP

**GAROUA:** Leicester City forward Kelechi Iheanacho scored as Nigeria put a troubled build-up to the Africa Cup of Nations in Cameroon behind them yesterday to beat disappointing Egypt 1-0 in Garoua. Iheanacho struck after 30 minutes to take the Super Eagles to the top of the table after the opening match in Group D, which includes Guinea-Bissau and Sudan.

Nigeria fired German coach Gernot Rohr in December after an unimpressive World Cup qualifying campaign and put former national star Augustin Eguavoen in temporary charge. Eguavoen's squad was without forwards Victor Osimhen, Emmanuel Dennis and Odion Ighalo for a variety of reasons, but his team did him proud against Mohamed Salah-captained Egypt. Prolific Liverpool scorer Salah hardly touched the ball and had only one chance, late in the second half, to equalize.

A cagey opening half controlled by Nigeria sprang to life on 26 minutes when winger Moses Simon got behind the Egypt defence and fired into the side netting from a difficult angle. Simon played a major role when the Super Eagles took the lead four minutes later at the 30,000-capacity Stade Roudme Adjia in the north-western city of Garoua. His cross was only

partially cleared by Ahmed Hegazy and Nigerian Joseph Aribon nodded the ball into the path of Iheanacho who hammered a half-volley past goalkeeper Mohamed Elshenawy.

### More energetic

A far more energetic Nigerian side deserved to be in front against lethargic opponents with Salah starved of possession in 30 degrees Celsius heat. Iheanacho almost set up a second goal for Nigeria before half-time, but his pass to Taiwo Awoniyi was just too strong and Elshenawy dashed off his line to gather the ball.

Egypt nearly fell further behind a couple of minutes into the second half when Elshenawy got his hands to an Awoniyi header and the ball came back into play off the underside of the crossbar. Simon's speed was a constant threat on the left, while Nigeria goalkeeper Maduka Okoye was a mere spectator with Egypt unable to mount pressure. Salah, sporting a shorter hair style, finally got a scoring chance as the match entered the final quarter, but his close-range prod was blocked by Okoye's foot and cleared.

Meanwhile, in the first of three matches yesterday, defending champions Algeria

were surprisingly held to a 0-0 Group E draw by minnows Sierra Leone in the Atlantic port city of Douala. Yacine Brahimi missed the holders' best chance early in the second half when he found himself with just the goalkeeper to beat, only for Mohamed Kamara to hold his shot at the second attempt. The third day of group fixtures will be completed when Guinea-Bissau face Sudan in a clash of Group D outsiders in Garoua at 2000 local time.

### Morocco edge Ghana

Meanwhile, Sofiane Boufal scored on 83 minutes to earn Morocco a 1-0 win over Ghana in Yaounde on Monday after the first clash of titans in the Africa Cup of Nations. The 28-year-old former Southampton midfielder, now with French top-flight club Angers, turned in the goalmouth and fired a loose ball past goalkeeper Joseph Wollacott. It was the first meeting of two top 10 nations in a championship that began on Sunday after twice being postponed last year due to the coronavirus pandemic. Morocco are ranked second and Ghana eighth in Africa and both former champions are considered potential winners of the 24-team tournament.

It is 46 years since Morocco won the Cup of Nations for the only time and the latest campaign began without their best known player, Chelsea midfielder Hakim Ziyech. He was dumped from the national squad last year after coach Vahid Halilhodzic labelled the Netherlands-born star a "disruptive influence". Morocco started against Ghana with three Premier League players-captain Romain Saiss from Wolves and Watford duo Adam Masina and Imran Louza.

Ghana have won the symbol of African national team supremacy four times, but the last success came 40 years ago in Libya, where teenager Abedi 'Pele' Ayew sprang to international prominence. Coach Milovan Rajevac chose six England-based starters, including Daniel Amartey, Jordan Ayew and Thomas Partey from Premier League clubs. This was the fourth clash between the Atlas Lions and the Black Stars in the Cup of Nations with each country winning one and the other drawn.

### Foul-riddled

After a cagey, foul-riddled start at a 42,500-seat stadium named after former Cameroon president Ahmadou Ahidjo, Partey came close on 32 minutes with his

angled free-kick going just over the crossbar. This close shave was a signal for both teams to show more urgency in front of a small crowd and Saiss got his head to a free-kick in a crowded goalmouth only to see it fly over the target.

Ghanaian hearts pumped faster just before half-time when a solo run by Joseph Paintsil offered hope of an opening goal, but his finish was embarrassing, sending his shot well wide. Paintsil threatened again early in the second half with a lengthy dribble only to pass poorly on the edge of the box and Morocco breathed a sigh of relief. Andre Ayew, elder brother of Jordan and son of Abedi, attempted a volley off a free-kick but instead of a spectacular goal the ball flew wide.

Having let the Black Stars down twice, Paintsil thought he had made amends by firing goalwards with 18 minutes remaining only to be denied by a brilliant one-handed save from Yassine Bounou. In Group B, Guinea edged Malawi 1-0 through a 35th-minute goal from Issiaga Sylla in the western city of Bafoussam and share first place with Senegal. Left-back Sylla scored from close range after a long cross-field pass found Jose Kante, who pushed the ball into the six-yard box. — AFP

## Fairytale end; Taylor seals NZ win over Bangladesh

**CHRISTCHURCH:** New Zealand wrapped up the second Test against Bangladesh by an innings and 117 runs in Christchurch yesterday to draw the series, with veteran batsman Ross Taylor taking the final wicket in a fairytale finish to his Test career. Bangladesh, forced to follow on 385 runs behind, were dismissed in their second innings for 278 after Liton Das had cracked a gallant 102 off 111 deliveries. But the day belonged to 37-year-old Taylor, New Zealand's elder statesman playing his 112th and final Test, who had a rare bowl with his part-time offspin at the end and needed just three balls to take the last wicket of Ebadot Hossain, caught by Tom Latham for four.

It was a fitting farewell for Taylor, who bowed out of red-ball cricket with a New Zealand record 7,683 runs, putting him 37th in the all-time list of the sport's most prolific run-getters. "I wanted to finish with a win and the guys definitely gave that to me," Taylor said. "The way we came out and bowled and put them under pressure after putting up a very good total put us in good stead. It was an emotional game for me, my family and friends and it was good to get the win."

Captain Tom Latham summed up New Zealand's victory as "close to the perfect performance. After losing the toss and getting put in, to get a significant score on the board and then for the bowlers to do their thing on a wicket that was flattening out was outstanding." The Bangladesh top order put up gritty resistance in reaching 123 for three, while Liton shared a century partnership for the sixth wicket with Nurul Hasan. But there was no fight in the tail as New



**CHRISTCHURCH:** New Zealand's Ross Taylor poses with his wife Victoria, daughters Adelaide (center), Makenzie (centre top) and son Jonty (front left) after his last Test match following day three of the second cricket Test match between New Zealand and Bangladesh yesterday. — AFP

Zealand, the reigning world Test champions, completed a much-needed win after being comprehensively beaten by eight wickets in the first Test.

Rather than be disappointed in the result, Bangladesh captain Mominul Haque said winning one Test and sharing the two-match series was "a very big achievement for us". "So we have to take this challenge and continue our momentum," he added. Bangladesh were sunk in their second innings by the bounce of Neil Wagner, who took three for 77, while Kyle Jamieson finished with four for 82. But the foundations for New Zealand's victory were laid by captain Latham with his epic 252 setting up a mammoth first innings 521 for six declared. The Bangladesh bowlers failed to capitalize on the green wicket after winning the toss and asking New Zealand to bat. — AFP

## Embiid helps Sixers win 7th straight as Hornets sting Bucks

**LOS ANGELES:** Joel Embiid had 31 points and eight rebounds as the Philadelphia 76ers won their seventh straight game with a 111-91 victory over the Houston Rockets on Monday night. Embiid recorded his seventh straight 30-point game. He also had six assists and made all 13 of his free throws in front of a crowd of 13,600 at Toyota Center arena in Houston.

Embiid is the second NBA player in history to score exactly 31 points in four straight games. Bob McAdoo did it for the Buffalo Braves in 1973. Embiid entered Monday's contest as the sixth highest scorer in the league, averaging 26.8 points per game. Philadelphia has the longest winning streak in the Eastern Conference and the second-longest one in the league behind the Memphis Grizzlies who have won nine straight.

Elsewhere, LaMelo Ball scored 23 points as the Charlotte Hornets swept back-to-back games against the defending NBA champion Milwaukee Bucks with a 103-99 win. Ball capped his performance with the eventual winning basket on a floater with 15 seconds left in the fourth for the Hornets, who also beat the Bucks 114-106 on Saturday. Giannis Antetokounmpo finished with 26 points and 13 rebounds for the struggling Bucks, who have lost four of their last five games.

Milwaukee committed their 20th turnover after Ball's go-ahead basket. On the next possession Miles Bridges sank a pair of game-clinching free throws. Ball scooted to his left, shooting across his body as he was falling away to break the tie. "That is a highly difficult shot, but he makes it look effortless," Hornets coach James Borrego said. "Melo has that uncanny ability to be going 100 mph, get off-balance and still be poised



**HOUSTON:** Joel Embiid #21 of the Philadelphia 76ers shoots the ball during the game against the Houston Rockets on January 10, 2022. — AFP

when he raises up. "That's tough to do for a player who has been in the league 15 years, let alone a guy who has been in the league two years."

Terry Rozier delivered 27 points, Bridges finished with 17 points and 11 rebounds and Gordon Hayward tallied 14 points as the Hornets won despite shooting just 13-of-44 shooting from three-point range. Khris Middleton helped pace the Bucks offense with 27 points and a game-high 11 assists. Jordan Nwora added 18 points and Wesley Matthews had 13 points. "You are definitely concerned anytime you lose four out of five," Middleton said. "And you never want to lose two in a row."

"You understand what the circumstances are (with players being out) and you never want to use that as an excuse. We understand what we're going through and everybody is going through. But we still have to go out there and compete." — AFP