



6 Millions hunker down as storm hits eastern US



8 10 richest men doubled wealth during COVID



12 Gaza studio produces Hamas response to Zionist hit shows



16 Nadal, Barty impress after Djokovic saga in Australia



Kuwait COVID cases jump above 5,000 for first time

Cabinet cuts quarantine for arrivals to 7 days • Justice minister tests positive

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The Cabinet yesterday decided to cut the duration of home quarantine for vaccinated passengers arriving in the country to seven days, which can be ended immediately after a negative PCR test, the Center for Government Communication said. The health ministry recently changed health protocols to deal with a new wave of the coronavirus pandemic, with the number of new cases reported yesterday crossing 5,000 for the first time.

Arriving passengers had been required to under-

go home quarantine for 10 days, but it could be terminated with a negative PCR test result three days after arrival. The new decision is effective from today. The ministry of justice said yesterday that Justice Minister Jamal Al-Jalawi tested positive for COVID-19 and has isolated himself. He is carrying out his duties remotely, the ministry said in a statement.

The health ministry has said people who contract COVID should isolate at home for seven days if fully vaccinated and 10 days if not, while people who come in contact with infected people should undergo home quarantine for 14 days. But vaccinated people

can end the quarantine after seven days with a negative PCR test result.

The ministry of health yesterday reported 5,147 new cases, a record high, with one death. The number of patients in intensive care units rose to 33, while the number of patients in hospitals dropped slightly to 266. The infection rate also jumped to 16.2 percent. The number of active cases rose to 43,356, but the number of recoveries also increased by almost 1,000 to 3,203 cases.

Kuwait has been reporting record numbers of coronavirus cases for the past three weeks. The gov-

ernment last week ordered a reduction in the number of staff in the public sector to a maximum of 50 percent and called on the private sector to also cut the number of employees in offices. It also cut the number of passengers on public transport to 50 percent.

The government also decided to ban conferences, meetings and social events in a bid to counter the spread of the pandemic. Authorities have urged people to defer travel plans unless necessary and banned people who had taken the second dose nine months ago from leaving the country before taking the third booster dose.

News in brief

Baby dies of COVID in Qatar

DOHA: A three-week-old baby has died as a result of severe infection from COVID-19 in Qatar, the health ministry said on Sunday. "The baby had no other known medical or hereditary conditions", and was the second child to have died in the country since the pandemic began, the ministry said in a statement. Child deaths from COVID-19 are infrequent but health authorities in several countries have registered a rise in childhood infections since the spread of the Omicron variant. — AFP

Iran diplomats back at OIC

TEHRAN: Iranian envoys have returned to the Saudi-based OIC, in the first such diplomatic move since the two countries cut ties in 2016, the foreign ministry announced yesterday. "The delegation is now in Jeddah to start its work at the Organization of Islamic Cooperation," Saeed Khatibzadeh said at his weekly news conference. He reiterated Iran's position that Tehran is "ready to open its embassy" but that depends on what "practical steps" Saudi Arabia takes. — AFP



"The Enigma", a 555.55 carat black diamond, is displayed at Sotheby's in Dubai. — AFP

Largest cut diamond on show

DUBAI: The world's largest known cut diamond went on public display for the first time yesterday ahead of its sale, when it is expected to reach five million dollars. The Enigma, the name of the rare black carbanado diamond, was put on display in Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates. One of the most difficult substances to cut, the 555.55-carat diamond has never been shown by its unnamed owner of the past 20 years, but experts turned it into a 55-face jewel. — AFP

12 killed in Afghan quake

HERAT: At least 12 people were killed after an earthquake hit western Afghanistan yesterday, an official said. The victims died when roofs of their residential houses collapsed in Qadis district in the western province of Badghis, district governor Mohammad Saleh Purdel told AFP. The shallow quake was magnitude 5.3, according to the US Geological Survey. — AFP

Houthi strike kills 3 in UAE; Kuwait condemns attack

ABU DHABI: A suspected drone attack killed three people in a fuel tank blast in Abu Dhabi yesterday, officials said, as Yemen's Houthi rebels announced a "military operation" in the United Arab Emirates. Two Indians and a Pakistani died as three petrol tanks exploded near the storage facility of oil giant ADNOC, while a fire also ignited in a construction area at Abu Dhabi airport.

Kuwait yesterday "strongly condemned" the attack by the Houthis, slamming the incident as an "act of cowardice". The attack is a "deliberate attempt" by the Houthis to violate the basic principles of international laws and conventions, said a foreign ministry statement. Kuwait "firmly stands alongside" the UAE and backs all measures the Gulf Arab state takes to protect its security and stability, the statement highlighted.

HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah extended his condolences yesterday to the victims of the attack.

Continued on Page 2



ABU DHABI: A picture shows a partial view of the Musaffah industrial district in the Emirati capital yesterday, where three people were killed in a suspected Houthi drone attack that set off a blast and fire. — AFP

Standoff over eviction in Jerusalem

JERUSALEM: Zionist police were in a standoff yesterday with a Palestinian man who carried a gas canister onto the roof of his home in a Jerusalem flash-point district as his family faced eviction. Zionist media reported that Mohammed Salhiya had threatened to set himself on fire if the eviction order from Sheikh Jarrah area of Zionist-annexed east Jerusalem was carried out.

Salhiya's family has been facing an eviction threat since 2017, when the land where his home sits was allocated for school construction. Police and the

Jerusalem municipality said in a joint statement delegates went to the home early yesterday to carry out an eviction order after the Salhiyas ignored "countless opportunities" to vacate the land as ordered.

"We've been in this home since the 1950s," said Salhiya family member Abdallah Ikerawi from the roof of the home. "We don't have anywhere to go," he said in quotes provided by the Sheikh Jarrah Committee organization, adding that the family was made up of 15 people, including children.

An 11-day Gaza war between the Zionist entity and the Palestinians erupted last year, fueled by anger in Sheikh Jarrah where families battled eviction orders. Police said their "negotiators" were at the Salhiya home after several residents of the house "began to fortify

Continued on Page 2



JERUSALEM: Palestinian men barricade themselves on the roof of a house as Zionist police prepare to evict a family from the building yesterday in Sheikh Jarrah district. — AFP

Pandemic still taking heavy toll on jobs: UN

GENEVA: The COVID-19 crisis is continuing to hit jobs hard around the world, the United Nations said yesterday, warning it could take years for employment levels to reach pre-pandemic levels. In a new study, the UN's International Labor Organization revised its previous forecast that the global employment market will

make a nearly full recovery from the virus this year.

Blaming the impacts of COVID variants like Delta and Omicron and uncertainty around how the pandemic will evolve, it now projects a significant deficit in working hours in 2022 compared to before COVID-19 emerged. "Global labor markets are recovering from the crisis much more slowly than we previously expected," ILO chief Guy Ryder told reporters, warning that the outlook "remains fragile". "We are already seeing potentially lasting damage to labor markets, along with concerning increases in poverty and inequality."

Yesterday's report predicted that global working hours would be two percent below the numbers seen

in 2019, leaving the world short of the equivalent of some 52 million jobs. Last May, the ILO predicted the working hour shortage would be just half that this year. At the same time, the global official unemployment rate remains significantly higher than before the pandemic hit.

This year, 5.9 percent of workers globally, or some 207 million people, are expected to be officially registered as jobless, which is better than in 2021 and especially 2020, but still up from 186 million in 2019. The ILO report said the global unemployment rate was projected to remain above the 5.4-percent rate seen before the crisis "until at least 2023".

Continued on Page 2

Local

News in brief

Amir sends condolences

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent cables of condolences to Japanese Emperor Naruhito and Prime Minister Fumio Kishida yesterday, over the death of former prime minister Toshiki Kaifu, remembering his prominent role in supporting Kuwait during the Iraqi Invasion. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah also sent similar cables to Emperor Naruhito and Prime Minister Kishida.

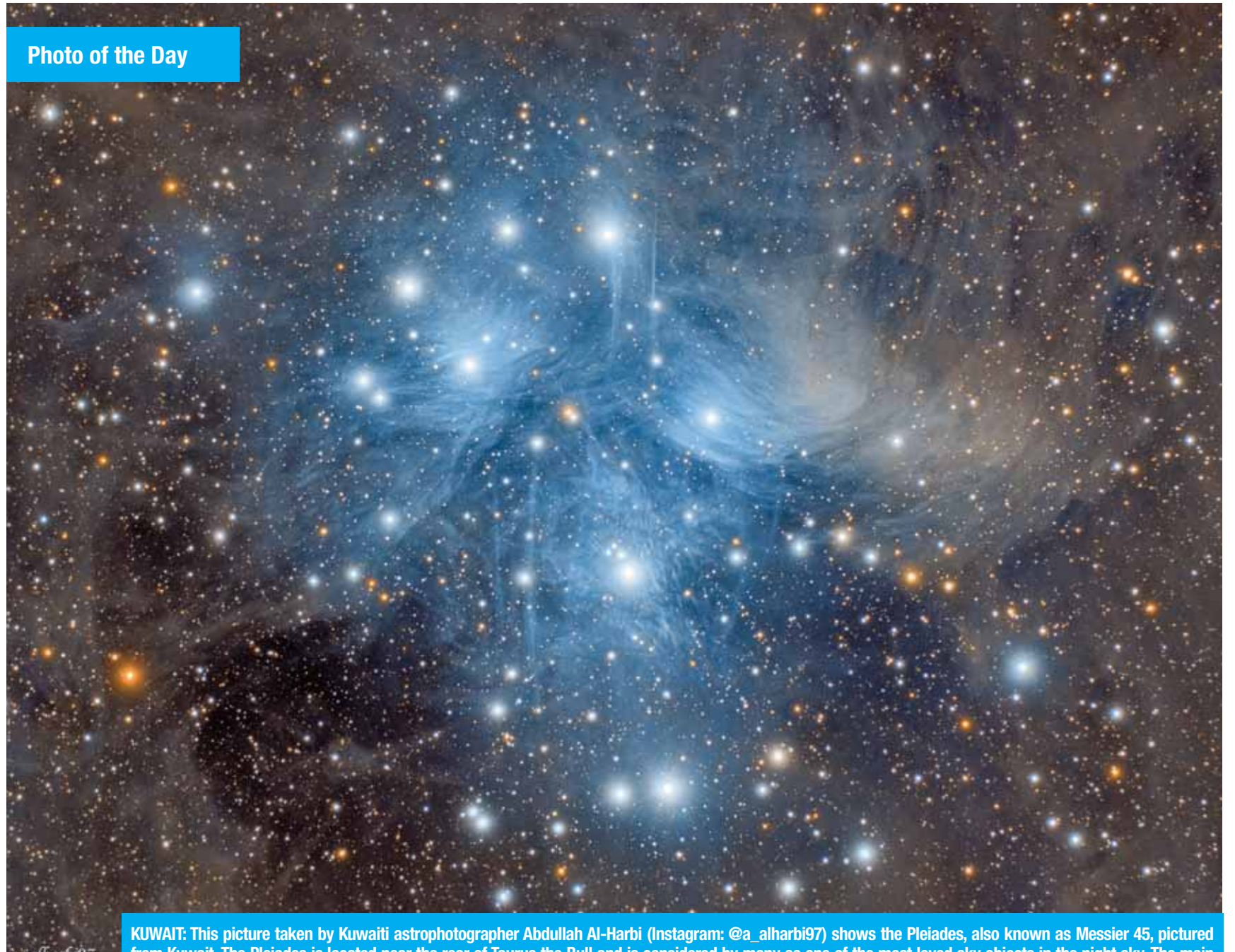
Crown Prince receives ministers

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Ahmad Mansour Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and Undersecretary of Ministry of Interior Sheikh Faisal Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. His Highness the Crown Prince also received Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Oil, and Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy Dr Mohammad Al-Fares.

Super Cup postponed

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Super Cup game that was scheduled between Al-Arabi SC and Kuwait SC yesterday was postponed as some players were infected with Covid-19, the Kuwait Football Association (KFA) said. The safety of players and the participants in organizing the game tops anything else, Salem Sadoun, KFA's member of board, said in a statement, adding that another date will be set later. Earlier, Al-Arabi announced on Twitter that 10 of its players, in addition to some technical and administrative officials, were infected with the COVID-19. Meanwhile, some sources at the Kuwait SC said that two players tested positive for coronavirus.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: This picture taken by Kuwaiti astrophotographer Abdullah Al-Harbi (Instagram: @a_alharbi97) shows the Pleiades, also known as Messier 45, pictured from Kuwait. The Pleiades is located near the rear of Taurus the Bull and is considered by many as one of the most loved sky objects in the night sky. The main stars' names are Alcyone, Asterope, Celaeno, Electra, Maia, Merope, and Taygeta, and they are veiled in misty nebulousity.

MPs poised to look into grilling motion against Defense Minister

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti National Assembly is set to convene a session today, mainly to consider an interpellation request lodged by MP Hamdan Al-Azmi against Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah. The session, which also continues tomorrow, will discuss many committee reports and the recent speech delivered by His Highness the Amir. The grilling against the defense minister is at the top of the agenda of the parliamentary debate. The query is primarily based on five aspects encompassing "enrollment of women in army", "ignoring State Audit Bureau's remarks on a Eurofighter deal", "failing to cooperate with regulatory agencies or replying parliamentary queries", "failing to safeguard state-owned lands", and "non-compliance with cabinet decrees on recruitments". MP Azmi submitted his interpellation request against the deputy prime minister and defense minister dur-

ing a parliament session held on January 4th. However, the defense minister, at the end of the parliament debate, defied that he was absolutely ready to refute all the aspects of the grilling motion.

National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said last week that he has received a query request from MP Hisham Al-Saleh against Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah. Article 100 of the Kuwaiti Constitution allows members of parliament to file an interrogation request against the prime minister and cabinet ministers about affairs related to their duties and responsibilities. MPs will then move to look into the Amiri Address given during the second ordinary session of the current legislative term, together with the government work plan over five years. They will also discuss a bevy of reports compiled by different parliament committees on draft laws, bills and overtures, which are primarily pertinent to the country's domestic affairs. — KUNA



KUWAIT: A general view of parliament members during a National Assembly session last week. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Houthi strike kills 3 in UAE; Kuwait...

Continued from Page 1

In a cable he sent to UAE President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al-Nayhan, HH the Amir underlined his country's unwavering support for all measures Abu Dhabi takes to protect its security and stability, slamming the attack believed to be caused by a Houthi drone as a "terrorist act" that contravenes humanitarian principles. HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables to the UAE president.

Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels announced a "military operation" in the UAE, a partner in Yemen's pro-government coalition, in what would be a major escalation in the seven-year war. Police said "small flying objects" were found at both places, suggesting the sort of deliberate attack that is almost unheard of in the wealthy UAE, a renowned safe haven in the volatile Middle East.

"Preliminary investigations indicate the detection of small flying objects, possibly belonging to drones, that fell in the two areas and may have caused the explosion and fire," police said in a statement, adding that the incidents were under

investigation. Although the UAE gave few details about the incidents or the alleged perpetrators, neighboring Saudi Arabia and Gulf ally Bahrain both labelled them "terrorist" attacks.

Houthi military spokesman Yahya Saree tweeted that the rebels' armed forces would "announce an important military operation in the UAE in the coming hours". And while there was no formal claim of responsibility, Abdul Ilah Hajar, adviser to the president of the Houthis' Supreme Political Council in Sanaa, said it was a warning shot from the rebels. "We sent them a clear warning message by hitting places that are not of great strategic importance," he told AFP. "But it is a warning if the UAE continues its hostility to Yemen, it will not be able in the future to withstand the coming strikes."

Drone attacks are a hallmark of the Houthis' assaults on Saudi Arabia, the UAE ally which is leading the coalition fighting for Yemen's government in a grinding civil war. The rebels have previously threatened to target Abu Dhabi and Dubai, the gleaming crown jewels of the UAE which last year opened its first nuclear power plant.

Saudi Arabia's foreign ministry condemned "in the strongest terms the cowardly terrorist attack" while Bahrain also slammed the "terrorist Houthi militia's launch of a number of booby-trapped drones". The incident follows a surge in fighting in Yemen and comes two weeks after the rebels seized a UAE-flagged ship, the Rwabee, and released footage purporting to show military equipment on board. —AFP

homes were legally purchased from Jordanian authorities who controlled east Jerusalem between 1948 and 1967. Seven Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah have taken their legal challenges against their eviction threats to the Zionist entity's Supreme Court. The Salhiyas are not in that group.

Jerusalem City councilor Laura Wharton, who was at the scene and due to meet the Salhiya family later yesterday, criticized the municipality's actions. "They could have built the schools in the same plot without moving the families. There is plenty of space," she said. "The sad thing is this is the municipality itself doing this, it's not some rightwing settlers."

The Zionist entity captured east Jerusalem in the 1967 Six-Day War and later annexed it, in a move not recognized by the international community. More than 200,000 Zionist settlers have since moved into the area, fueling tensions with Palestinians, who claim east Jerusalem as the capital of their future state. — AFP

Standoff over eviction in...

Continued from Page 1

themselves with a gas canister and other flammable material". Witnesses told AFP that clashes between security forces and locals erupted after the police arrived but later eased. Hundreds of Palestinians are facing evictions from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah and other east Jerusalem neighborhoods. Circumstances surrounding the evictions threatens vary. In some cases, Jewish Zionists have mounted legal challenges to claim the land they say was illegally taken during the war that coincided with the Zionist entity's founding in 1948.

Palestinians have rejected these claims, saying their

Moderna: COVID-flu joint booster jab possible by late 2023

GENEVA: Moderna aims to roll out a combined COVID-flu-RSV booster vaccine in late 2023, the US pharmaceutical firm said yesterday, hoping a joint jab would encourage people to get an annual shot. The single vaccine for COVID-19, influenza and respiratory syncytial virus - a common virus that causes the cold, but can be more serious for infants and elderly people - could appear on the market before 2024.

"Best-case scenario will be the fall of '23," Moderna chief executive Stéphane Bancel told a virtual World Economic Forum roundtable session. "I don't think it would happen in every country, but we believe it's possible to happen in some countries next year. Our goal is to be able to have a single annual booster so that we don't have compliance issues where people don't want to get

two to three shots a winter, but to get one dose."

Bancel said the RSV program was in Phase III trials - the final stage of human testing - while the flu program should be entering Phase III in the second quarter of this year. Moderna's experimental flu shot, targeting four major strains, is based on the same mRNA method used in its COVID-19 jabs. The technology provokes an immune response by delivering genetic molecules containing the code for key parts of a pathogen into human cells.

While Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine was based on the original strain of the virus, it was working on finishing an Omicron-specific jab within weeks, ahead of trials, said Bancel. "We're hoping in the March timeframe we should be able to have data to share with regulators to figure out the next step forward."

Beyond a vaccine specific to Omicron - which is rapidly becoming the world's dominant strain - laboratories are also pursuing a vaccine that works against all current and future COVID-19 mutations. "There's some private sector partners that are pursuing it," said Richard Hatchett, chief executive of the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, which funds vaccine research and development. — AFP

Pandemic still taking heavy...

Continued from Page 1

And it cautioned that the overall impact on employment is significantly greater than what these figures would imply, since many people have left the labor force altogether.

In 2022, the global labor force participation rate is projected to remain 1.2 percentage points below the level three years ago, it said. That corresponds to a deficit of some 40 million workers worldwide, ILO said. Ryder warned that the pandemic had already "weakened the economic, financial and social fabric in almost every country, regardless of development status".

At the same time, the ILO pointed out that differences in vaccine access and in economic recovery measures meant the crisis was impacting groups of workers and countries in vastly different ways. Unsurprisingly perhaps, the report said labor markets in higher-income countries appeared to be recovering faster, although some were now beginning to face problems related to labor shortages, Ryder said.

Numerous factors appear to be driving the so-

called "Great Resignation" seen in some countries, Ryder said, adding that the crisis clearly "has led a significant number of people in the workforce to reconsider the employment that they have". Shifts in the way we work meanwhile seem to be deepening various forms of inequality, including exacerbating gender inequity, according to the report.

It has been clear from the start that the pandemic was disproportionately impacting women, who have taken on the lion's share of the additional care work, and also more often work in hard-hit sectors, like services and travel. But Ryder cautioned the impact could last well after the pandemic ends. "There are concerns that the long-COVID effect on gender at work would be a negative one," he said.

Changes like the move towards greater reliance on informal self-employment, the rise in remote work and shifting trends in temporary work, "all risk impairing the quality of working conditions", the report said. Ryder insisted that only a "broad-based labor market recovery" would allow the world to truly recover from the pandemic.

"To be sustainable, this recovery must be based on the principles of decent work - including health and safety, equity, social protection and social dialogue," he said. The ILO chief cautioned that "without concerted and effective international and domestic policies, it is likely that in many countries it will take years to repair this damage." — AFP

Local

Secret to fighting COVID is in food intake, exercise, says senior dietician

Proper food is key to avoid hospitalization: Dr Ayad



KUWAIT: These file photos show people jogging in parks in Kuwait. Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat and Fouad Al-Shaikh

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The secret to fighting any form of disease including the coronavirus is proper food and exercise, according to Dr Mohamed Essam El-Din Mohamed Ayad, a senior dietician at the health ministry. Speaking to Kuwait Times, the nutritionist and food sciences doctor said the path to good health is in proper food intake. "If you follow the food pyramid guidelines, you can surely avoid visiting hospitals or clinics. The problem now is that many of our foods are loaded with chemicals and additives, and these are the foods that people like the most," he said. "Any disease can be fought through proper diet and exercise (a combination of walking and stretching). We need to understand that proper food is the only key to avoid being hospitalized," he said.

Dr Ayad has been with the training department for nutrition and food administration at the ministry of health since 2014. He said people need to follow the hierarchy of food to make life easier. "I am a dietician by profession. I want people to be healthy. We need to properly manage the food supply to our bodies. We

have to make sure we have balanced nutrients, vitamins and minerals. We have to make sure that we do not have any deficiency of vitamins and minerals in our body. You will be sick if you have excess fat, salt, sugar, iron and minerals. You can suffer from heart ailments, diabetes, etc, so be mindful of your food. We have to fight COVID with a healthy body and proper food. Any disease can be fought with a good immune system," he said.

Dr Ayad designs diets and food programs for patients in hospitals with various health issues, including coronavirus patients. "It is sad that many died during the last two years of the virus, but the deaths were connected to other diseases. If people are able to manage their food, they'll not suffer from any diseases," he said.

As a former professor at King Saud University in Saudi Arabia where he taught theoretical and practical feeding applications, Dr Ayad said it is necessary for people to go back to basics, like following the suggested inverted pyramid of food and nutrition for a healthy lifestyle.

"Consume foods from all levels of the pyramid to get all the important nutrients our bodies need. Dairy products can help provide calcium to support bone health, and consuming enough fruits and vegetables will provide vitamin C to support a healthy immune system," he said. "We should avoid fast food - it is unhealthy and we do not advice people to consume it," he said. According to Dr Ayad, millions of people who contracted the coronavirus all over the world

survived because they are healthy. He said Kuwait has managed the pandemic excellently and properly. "The fact is no one in the world was ready to face the coronavirus - even the mightiest country on earth, the US, has suffered a lot. But Kuwait alhamdulillah managed it responsibly. It has the money to provide all the necessary needs and equipment. Authorities are conducting free PCR tests and the facilities are superb," he added.



Dr Mohamed Ayad

“ Kuwait managed pandemic excellently ”

Zain adapts its graduation program to ZTwentyTwo (Z22)

KUWAIT: Zain Group, a leading mobile telecom innovator in seven markets across the Middle East and Africa, announces the selection of five impressive Kuwaiti nationals to undertake the company's highly regarded graduate program cycle in 2022. The program now called 'ZTwentyTwo' (Z22), is an evolution of the CODE 7 initiative introduced by Zain in 2021, which focused on graduates from a computer science background with the view to them being developed to find roles in Zain's recently established Data Science division.

Z22 is geared towards cultivating internal entrepreneurs, innovators, and new thinkers who already possess the mindset, etiquette, and capacity to outperform and thus capable of supporting the strategic direction of Zain. Accordingly, the program in 2022 aims to build an especially strong talented team who will appeal to Zain's innovation-oriented business units including Technology, Digital, Strategy, Sustainability, D&I, Commercial, Communications, and others.

Zain's graduate program, which was initially introduced in 2016, enjoys an extremely high level of visibility and popularity in Kuwait, with the Z22 program attracting applications from a total of 187 candidates. Of these, 86 were invited for first-round interviews; 40 for second-round; and just 10 were shortlisted to undertake a week-long assessment. Ultimately, only five candidates were selected to participate in the year-long program.

Congratulating the five outstanding young Kuwaitis for their selection into the inaugural Z22 program, Bader Al-Kharafi, Vice-Chairman and Group CEO of Zain said, "The evolution to Z22 mirrors Zain's '4Sight' digital transformation strategy and the skillsets required to be successful now and into the future. We are extremely pleased to see how our graduation program has succeeded and evolved over the years to bring us to this point."

Kharafi continued, "The types of future-ready business leaders we are dedicated to nurturing and bringing to the fore need to possess that spark within themselves. Producing well-rounded candidates with a keen entrepreneurial sense and an understanding of technology, sustainability and commercial activity is the aim of this



program, and we are confident the Z22 participants will go on to make a significant impact on Zain and the wider industry."

Last year's CODE 7 similarly targeted five Kuwaiti graduates, who had majored in computer science-related subjects. Aligned to the reimagined graduate program, Zain established an in-house Data Science division that harnesses the talents of the graduate program participants given the company's focus on identifying future trends and developing skill sets to match those future requirements.

CODE 7 was extremely successful and included a six-month long course in collaboration with Texas University on Machine Learning, AI, Data Analytics, Data Science, and Behavioral Development; specifically, creativity, innovation, leadership, and business etiquette. Participants were also exposed to rotations to NXN, Zain's end-to-end smart digital services provider in Dubai; Tamman, Zain's fintech in Saudi Arabia; and Digital departments at Zain Group and operations.

Of the five participants in CODE 7 in 2021, two were recruited as full-time employees to Zain Tech as Machine Learning Developers and one was recruited to Investment and Digital Transformation. It is planned that all five Z22 participants, namely Dana Najem, Fahed Al-Shammari, Fajer Al-Sabah, Ghanima Al-Qudaibi, and Luluwa Al-Taherare recruited once the program is completed end of 2022.

Research from McKinsey & Company management consulting firm has identified 56 foundational skills that are essential for future employees to thrive in the new way of working. Zain has framed these as follows and is looking to use them as the foundational aspects of the Z22 program: Cognitive, Interpersonal, Self-Leadership, Digital, Sustainable Thinking.

On the occasion of the



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

For individuals only

Tel: 24833199 ext.: 163-325-353- 354 or 66500982



kuwaittimes.net



Kuwait police arrest man with 22 kg of narcotics



Gold retains high gains in new year: Expert

KUWAIT: Gold held its gains for the second consecutive week of the new year, as its prices reached the level of \$1,816 per ounce on the New York Stock Exchange, supported by the decline of the US Dollar and long-term US bonds, said an expert of precious metals.

In a press statement yesterday, CEO of Kuwait Sabayik Company Rajab Hamed said that gold prices recorded an increase in their levels during last week's trading, as they reached their highest levels at \$1,831 per ounce, affected by investors' strong demand for gold. He also pointed to the relationship that links gold with the global inflation rate, as investors buy gold during periods of inflation to fight it and maintain the levels of the yellow metal as a commodity of safe havens.

Moreover, he stated that the factors that contributed to the rise of gold prices at the beginning of the new year were also the emergence of a buying wave by central banks for portfolios' growing demands for investment in the metal. Locally, Hamed pointed to the recovery of gold during the last period, where the price of a gram of 24 carats reached KD 17.8 (about \$59). —KUNA

KUWAIT: Kuwait police arrested a man in possession of 22 kilograms of narcotics valued more than KD 250,000 (\$825,000), the Interior Ministry announced yesterday. The arrest came during an operation after authorities obtained a warrant to search the suspect's house, the ministry explained,

adding that police found one kilogram of crystal methamphetamine and a sensitive electronic scale during the search.

The suspect, an Arab resident, admitted that he worked for a drug dealer of his nationality who had been deported from the country. He also

revealed a large amount of narcotics, about 21 kg, hidden inside three fire extinguishers, the Interior Ministry said in a statement, noting that it has taken legal measures against the accused and referred him and the seized items to the proper authorities.

Motorist hurt in Seventh Ring Road accident

KUWAIT: A motorist miraculously survived a horrific accident reported on Seventh Ring Road yesterday. The victim became trapped inside his SUV after it hit a concrete barrier as firemen were called to free him and hand him over to paramedics. Hazardous material firemen were dispatched to the scene in response to an emergency call reporting the accident, Kuwait Fire Force said in a press statement. The driver was rushed to hospital for treatment, it added. An investigation was opened to reveal the cause of the accident.



Gulf Bank concludes sponsorship of Kuwait Arabian Horses Championship

KUWAIT: In keeping with its ongoing commitment to social sustainability, Gulf Bank is successfully wrapping up its diamond sponsorship of the Kuwait Arabian Horse Championship, which was held from January 12-15 at Bait Al-Arab headquarters in Sabhan, Kuwait under the patronage of the Minister of Information and Culture, Dr Hamad Rouh El-Din.

The competition encompassed the participation of about 45 horses, and was attended by both a local and international audience, including visitors from the Gulf region and Europe, who attended the competition over the course of its four days. Gulf Bank honored the first and second place winners in one of the categories. In total, the competition awarded 21 winners with various prizes across its categories.

On this occasion, the Assistant Director of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, Fahad Al-Sharrah, said that the

bank's sponsorship of the championship comes within the framework of its keenness to support all national events aimed at preserving the Arab and Kuwaiti heritage, especially with the rise of Arabian horse beauty championships among equestrian and horse enthusiasts locally, regionally and internationally.

Sharrah praised the organization of the tournament, its wide reach, and the accompanying family activities, which reflect both a wide community interest in this type of tournament, and a local love for horses, making 'Bait Al-Arab' a distinguished entertainment destination for all members of society.

He pointed out that Bait Al-Arab plays a wonderful role in supporting Kuwaiti breeders by organizing and hosting important national and international events in the equestrian world, supporting equestrians in honing their role of producing distinguished Arabian horses, and raising the bar on the

vocation locally, regionally and globally.

He pointed out that Gulf Bank was encouraged to support the championship and its organizers when the Kuwaiti horses were crowned in festivals and championships abroad, having placed our beloved Kuwait on the map by winning the gold, silver and bronze medals. Gulf Bank is proud to support the efforts of the equestrians in charge of this vocation and hopes that their support will assist in achieving even more successes to come.

Sharrah stressed the Bank's keenness to support sustainability at the societal, economic and environmental levels through prudently selected and strategically identified initiatives that benefit the community. He emphasized that social responsibility is one of the main pillars of Gulf Bank's strategy that aims to support the community, raise cultural awareness, and promote effective contribution in problem solving and encouraging high quality initiatives that create added value and enhance the values of our society.

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

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



Anthony Blinken



Ahmad Al-Sabah

Foreign minister receives call from US state secretary

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah yesterday received a tele-

phone call from the US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken. Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser and Secretary Blinken reviewed the Kuwait-US bilateral relations, the distinctive strategic relationship bonding the two friendly countries and means of cementing these links. They have also addressed latest developments on the regional and international arenas and issues of common concern. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Minister of Information and Culture, Dr Hamad Rouh El-Din (center) with Fahad Al-Sharrah and Hamza Al-Tulajji.



Assistant Director of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank Fahad Al-Sharrah honors one of the winners.



Kuwait's Muhammed Burbayea is crowned winner of the jet ski World Cup Pro Runabout GP.

Kuwaiti jet skier wins World Cup Pro Runabout GP

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Muhammed Burbayea clinched the 2021-22 Jet Ski World Cup Pro Runabout GP after finishing second at Thailand's Jomtien Beach resort on Sunday. Burbayea, 33, a member of Pro Rider Kuwait, was pipped to the title by Marcus Jorgensen of MJ Racing, trailing the Dane by 26 points after topping the points table in three previous rounds. His victory in the tournament comes

after points accumulated by the racers in Poland and the US. The Kuwaiti is a 15-time IJSBA champion - his last title won back in the 2012 Amateur Classic Runabout Limited event. Kuwait Sea Sports Club jet ski committee head Hussain Dashti praised the accomplishment, and the rider's preparation for the event, especially under such tough circumstances due to the global pandemic. - KUNA



Taliban stage show of strength with parade after protests

A year after arrest, Navalny says no 'regret' about return to Russia Page 6

Page 7

Tonga cut off by volcanic blast, fears grow for coastal towns

Phone lines still down, undersea Internet cable cut

SYDNEY: The Pacific Island nation of Tonga was virtually cut off from the rest of the world yesterday, after a massive volcanic blast that crippled communications and stalled emergency relief efforts. It is two days since the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai volcano exploded, cloaking Tonga in a film of ash, triggering a Pacific-wide tsunami and releasing shock waves that wrapped around the entire Earth.

But with phone lines still down and an undersea Internet cable cut-and not expected to be repaired for weeks-the true toll of the dual eruption-tsunami disaster is not yet known. Only fragments of information have filtered out via a handful of satellite phones on the islands, home to just over 100,000 people.

Tonga's worried neighbours are still scrambling to grasp the scale of the damage, which New Zealand's leader Jacinda Ardern said was believed to be "significant". Both Wellington and Canberra scrambled recon-

naissance planes yesterday in an attempt to get a sense of the damage from the air.

And both have put C-130 military transport aircraft on standby to drop emergency supplies or to land if runways are deemed operational and ash clouds allow. There are initial reports that areas of the west coast may have been badly hit.

Australia's international development minister, Zed Seselja, said a small contingent of Australian police stationed in Tonga had delivered a "pretty concerning" initial evaluation. They were "able to do an assessment of some of the Western beaches area and there was some pretty significant damage to things like roads and some houses," Seselja said.

"One of the good pieces of news is that I understand the airport has not suffered any significant damage," he added. "That will be very, very important as the ash cloud clears and we are able to have flights

coming into Tonga for humanitarian purposes."

Major aid agencies, who would usually rush in to provide emergency humanitarian relief, said they were stuck in a holding pattern, unable to contact local staff. "From what little updates we have, the scale of the devastation could be immense-especially for outlying islands," said Katie Greenwood, IFRC's Pacific Head of Delegation.

Even when relief efforts get under way, they may be complicated by COVID-19 entry restrictions. Tonga only recently reported its first-ever coronavirus case.

What is known is that Saturday's volcanic blast was one of the largest recorded in decades, erupting 30 kilometres into the air and depositing ash, gas and acid rain across a swathe of the Pacific. The eruption was recorded around the world and heard as far away as Alaska, triggering a tsunami that flooded Pacific coastlines from Japan to the United States. —AFP



AMBERLEY, Queensland: This handout photo released by the Royal Australian Air Force and the Australian Defence Force shows a Royal Australian Air Force P-8 Poseidon aircraft (C) preparing to depart from RAAF Base Amberley in the state of Queensland to assist the Tonga Government after the eruption of the Hunga-Tonga - Hunga-Haa'pai volcano. —AFP

Facing arrest, ex-leader returns to 'defend Ukraine'

KYIV: Ukraine's ex-president Petro Poroshenko returned to Kyiv from Poland yesterday despite the risk of arrest, vowing to help protect the ex-Soviet country from a possible Russian invasion. Poroshenko, who served as president from 2014 to 2019, was placed under investigation for high treason and left Ukraine in December.

His return comes with Ukraine facing its biggest crisis in years as Russia masses tens of thousands of troops on the border, raising fears of an invasion and prompting warnings from the West. Poroshenko is a staunch critic of President

Volodymyr Zelensky, who he accuses of failing to do enough to prevent Russian aggression.

Poroshenko returned to Kyiv early yesterday on a flight from Warsaw and passed through passport control amid chaotic scenes, saying later that border guards had tried to prevent him from entering the country.

After speaking to thousands of supporters who had gathered near the airport, Poroshenko appeared before a court in Kyiv that was to decide whether to place him in pre-trial detention. He told the crowd at the airport that he had returned to help Ukraine face the "growing threat of Russian invasion" and accused Zelensky of "betrayal" of the country.

'Unite and defend Ukraine'

Days of talks between Russia and the West last week have failed to reduce tensions, as Moscow demands wide-ranging concessions including a

ban on Ukraine ever joining NATO. On Friday, Washington accused Moscow of sending saboteurs trained in explosives to stage an incident that could be a pretext to invade the pro-Western neighbour.

Kyiv has also accused Russia of being behind a massive cyberattack on Friday that knocked out key government websites. "We are here to unite and defend Ukraine," Poroshenko told the crowd, which held up posters reading "We Need Democracy" and "Hands off Poroshenko".

He headed from the airport to the court, where hundreds of supporters chanted his name as he participated in the hearing with two lawyers. "We are determined to fight today. The truth is with us," he told the crowd during a break in the hearing.

"The authorities are confused, weak, and instead of fighting (Russian President Vladimir) Putin, they are trying to fight us," he said.

One of Ukraine's richest men

Poroshenko, 56, is one of the country's richest men. He was elected president after Russia annexed the peninsula of Crimea and as fighting escalated between Kyiv's troops and Moscow-backed separatists in the industrial east of the country.

In 2019, he was trounced in a presidential election by Zelensky, a comedian with no previous political experience.

Poroshenko is now a member of parliament and leader of an opposition party, European Solidarity.

By returning to Ukraine he was following in the footsteps of Georgia's former president Mikheil Saakashvili and Putin's top critic Alexei Navalny who both returned to their countries in defiance of the authorities and are now in jail. Navalny returned to Russia on the same day a year ago. —AFP

شكرًا على تعازي

Al-Qattan Family

extend their appreciation and gratitude to

His Highness the Amir of Kuwait

Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

His Highness the Crown Prince

Sheikh Mishaal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

His Excellency the Speaker of the National Assembly

Marzouq Ali Thuneyan Al-Ghanim

His Highness the Prime Minister

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah

And to the Royal Highnesses from the ruling family, the Cabinet ministers, members of the National Assembly and Municipality, ambassadors and members of the diplomatic corps,

and to everyone who sent their condolences from inside and outside Kuwait

over the passing away of

Abdul Hamid Ali Ahmad Al-Qattan

(Bo Ashraf)

may Almighty Allah have mercy on his soul

either in person or via phone or messages or by publishing in newspapers or on social media platforms.

We supplicate to the Almighty Allah to protect you from all evil and harm.

"Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return".

Kuwait was saddened by the news of the passing away of

Abdul Hamid Ali Al-Qattan
(Bo Ashraf)



Kuwait was saddened by the news of the passing away of Abdul Hamid Ali Al-Qattan (Bo Ashraf) Thursday evening. He was 87 years old, and was known for his long journey in the world of business for a period of 73 years.

Bo Ashraf started from scratch and eventually became one of the top businessmen of Kuwait and a top economic figure in the region. His biography of humility, benevolence and generosity, as well as corporate personality and strong charisma is known throughout the country. Both the poor and the rich mourn his passing away.

The businessman Abdul Hamid Ali Al-Qattan was born in 1935 in Sharq. He grew up in a religiously committed family atmosphere, where his father was keen about raising him on noble Islamic morals and values.

The departure of his older brother, who was then the breadwinner of the family, had forced him to work during the day and complete his studies in the evening. This was how this self-made boy began his life's journey and made his way in the world of trade from scratch by relying on himself.

At a young age, Abdul Hamid Al-Qattan became involved in trade and was known for his seriousness and perseverance. He was not distracted from his toils by the pleasures of worldly life. He eventually became a distinguished merchant, characterized by his caution in all his commercial dealings, and avoiding usury at all cost in a bid to attain blessings and growth in his trade. This led him to become one of the renowned merchants of Kuwait.

Abdul Hamid Ali Al-Qattan (Bo Ashraf) established a wonderful commercial system in Kuwait. Its pillars and branches quickly expanded to include the commercial markets in all parts of Kuwait, and then extended to the regional countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain and Dubai at a time when Kuwait's ports were witnessing an accelerating economic boom.

His dealings were based on honesty, honor and credibility, and his name was recorded in the history of Kuwaiti trade progress as the first to import blankets and furniture in Kuwait and the Middle East.

He became famous as an agent for international brands known personally by his name in the chain of Donia Abdul Hamid Al-Qattan stores. This chain became one of the main suppliers of blankets and accessories to facilities locally and regionally. It was always on standby to serve during natural disasters, in response to the aid and humanitarian needs as per the international standards adopted and directed by the State of Kuwait in such difficult circumstances.

Kuwait Times mourns with Kuwait over the passing away of its righteous son Abdul Hamid Ali Al-Qattan (Bo Ashraf). We have been afflicted by the loss of a prominent self-taught man of Kuwait's trade and economy.

May Almighty Allah have mercy on his soul.
May He inspire the bereaved with patience and solace.

"Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return".

International

A year after arrest, Navalny says no 'regret' about return to Russia

Court turns down two appeals Navalny had brought against authorities

MOSCOW: The Kremlin's most prominent critic Alexei Navalny said yesterday he did not regret returning to Russia a year ago, despite his jailing and a historic crackdown on the opposition. Navalny was detained in a Moscow airport on his return to Russia from Germany on January 17 last year, ushering in a months-long crackdown that has seen his most prominent allies imprisoned or exiled.

"I don't regret it for a second," Navalny wrote in a post on Instagram from a penal colony outside Moscow. "Having served my first year in prison, I want to tell everyone exactly what I shouted to those gathered outside the court when a convoy led me to a police van: Don't be afraid of anything," Navalny added.

"This is our country and we have no other," Navalny's August 2020 poisoning with the Soviet-designed nerve agent Novichok and his subsequent arrest sparked widespread condemnation abroad as well as sanctions from Western capitals. Moscow has refused to open an investigation into the attempt on his life, claiming there is insufficient evidence to open a probe and blaming Berlin for not cooperating. On his return to Russia Navalny was jailed for more than two years on old fraud charges he says are politically motivated.

“

I don't regret it for a second

”

week added two of the opposition leader's closest aides to a list of "terrorists and extremists". Ivan Zhdanov, 33, led Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation, which produced hugely popular video probes accusing the authorities of systemic graft, while 41-year-old Leonid Volkov headed Navalny's network of regional offices.

Both of those organisations were banned by Russian courts and shuttered by staff fearing prosecution. Last month, investigators questioned several former regional Navalny coordinators, including Ksenia Fadeyeva, who is also a local lawmaker in the Siberian city of Tomsk.

Allies say she is facing up to 12 years in prison for working with an extremist organisation. Investigators last year launched a new extremism probe against Navalny that could see the opposition leader spend up to 10 more years in jail.

The European Parliament last year awarded Navalny the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought after he was nominated, but passed over, for the Nobel Peace Prize. Ramping up a historic crackdown on critical voices in Russia, authorities have designated dozens of rights groups, media outlets, journalists and anti-Kremlin figures "foreign agents".

In December, courts ordered the shutdown of the country's most prominent rights group, Memorial. The group chronicled Stalin-era purges and cam-



MOSCOW: File photo shows Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny standing inside a glass cell during a court hearing at the Babushkinsky district court in Moscow. Jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny appeared in court via videolink yesterday, on the day marking one year since he was taken into custody at a Moscow airport. —AFP

aigned for the rights of political prisoners, migrants and other disadvantaged groups.

A court yesterday turned down two appeals Navalny had brought against authorities over his treatment in the penal colony. Navalny appeared in court via video link, sitting behind bars in a prison

uniform before the Petushki district court in the Vladimir region where he is being held.

The cases heard yesterday concerned his prison salary and his designation as a flight risk, the independent Russian television channel Dozhd reported. —AFP

'Hotel Rwanda' hero boycotts court

KIGALI: The hero of "Hotel Rwanda" failed to appear in a Kigali court yesterday as state prosecutors sought to increase his sentence on terrorism charges from 25 years to life. A judge adjourned proceedings until today after Paul Rusesabagina, an outspoken government critic whose actions during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda inspired the Hollywood blockbuster film, refused to attend the hearing.

Rusesabagina, 67, and 20 co-defendants were convicted and sentenced in September for backing an armed rebel group in a trial that rights groups and his supporters had branded a sham. But prosecutors sought a life sentence and filed an appeal, considering the punishment too lenient for the former hotel manager, who used his international profile to rail against Rwandan President Paul Kagame.

His co-accused all appeared in court yesterday clad in the pink uniforms worn by Rwandan prisoners. One of their lawyers, Jean Rugeyo, argued that procedures had been incorrectly followed and the hearing should be adjourned for all the defendants.

"This is why we request that today's appeal hearing is suspended until Paul Rusesabagina is formally notified in a way that follows the law," he said.

But state prosecutor Bonaventure Ruberwa argued that Rusesabagina—who has been held behind bars since his arrest in August 2020 — had been lawfully summoned to appear in court.

"He intentionally refused to sign the letter and also refused to attend the hearing. This should not delay the hearing," he said. Judge Francois Regis Rukundakuvuga said a decision would be made today about whether to proceed with the appeal in Rusesabagina's absence.

'Not a legal process'

His family said last week that Rusesabagina would not participate "in a staged appeal of a political prisoner" and urged the international community to pressure Rwanda to free their father.

"It continues to show that this is not a legal process, but rather an ongoing political process to embarrass and defame a human rights critic of the regime," the family said in a statement on Friday.

Rusesabagina became the most famous Rwandan internationally after American actor Don Cheadle dramatised his deeds during the genocide in the 2004 hit film "Hotel Rwanda".

But he later used his fame to denounce rebel leader turned president Kagame as a dictator, and left Rwanda in 1996, living in Belgium and then the United States.

Both countries have both voiced concern that Rusesabagina had been denied a fair trial, and his family insists their ailing father has been mistreated in prison and denied proper legal services.

He was arrested when a plane he believed was bound for Burundi landed instead in Kigali in an incident his family has described as a kidnapping. —AFP

Pioneering Tuskegee Airman Charles McGee dies at 102

NEW YORK: US war pilot Charles McGee, who faced military segregation as he became a legendary member of the all-Black flying force known as the Tuskegee Airmen, died Sunday at age 102, officials said.

"Today, we lost an American hero," Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin—himself a barrier-breaker as the first African American to lead the Pentagon—said on Twitter about the aviator who was one of the last surviving members of the famed unit.

"While I am saddened by his loss, I'm also incredibly grateful for his sacrifice, his legacy, and his character," Austin added. "Rest in peace, General." McGee served in World War II as well as the conflicts in Korea and Vietnam, flying more than 400 missions in total.

During World War II, American units and training were segregated by race, as were military facilities. In 1941 Congress ordered the Army Air Corps to launch an all-Black combat unit, and the training of

Black men to become pilots and mechanics began at a new air base in Tuskegee, Alabama. McGee decades later expressed pride at the unit's achievements—and how it helped pave the way for full integration in the US military.

"Don't let circumstances be an excuse for not achieving," said on American History TV. "We could have bowed our heads and said 'They called me names, they don't like me, said I can't do something,' and gone off and not serve the country. But what would that have accomplished?"

The Tuskegee Airmen's performance, he said, "helped bring about a change to the country." McGee enlisted in the military the day after his wedding, according to US Vice President Kamala Harris, who said Sunday that she spoke by phone to the retired airman last month to mark his 102nd birthday and "to thank him for his service to our nation."

McGee was among the surviving members of the unit who were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal, the nation's highest civilian award, in 2007, recognizing their "unique military record that inspired revolutionary reform in the Armed Forces."

In 2020, then-president Donald Trump invited McGee to the State of the Union address where the airman received a standing ovation. Trump promoted McGee to the rank of brigadier general. —AFP



BETHESDA, Maryland: File photo of eighty-nine year-old Charles McGee, US Air Force Retired Colonel, one of the famed Tuskegee Airmen, sits with some of his US Air Force medals and duty ribbons at his home in Bethesda, Maryland. —AFP

Texas hostage-taker named as British citizen, 2 arrested

TEXAS: The man who held four people hostage at a Texas synagogue was identified by US authorities as a British citizen Sunday, while UK police later arrested two teens over an attack that President Joe Biden called an "act of terror." The captor, who died in the 10-hour siege in the small town of Colleyville on Saturday, was named by the FBI as 44-year-old Malik Faisal Akram. Hours later, Britain's counter-terrorism police arrested two people and were questioning them in connection with the incident.

"Two teenagers were detained in South Manchester this evening. They remain in custody," the Greater Manchester Police said in a statement. The FBI's field office in Dallas had earlier said there was "no indication" that anyone else was involved in the attack on the Congregation Beth Israel synagogue. The four hostages — including a respected local rabbi, Charlie Cytron-Walker — were all freed unharmed Saturday night, prompting relief in the United States, where the Jewish community and Biden renewed calls to fight anti-Semitism. "There is no question that this was a traumatic experience," Cytron-Walker said in a statement Sunday.

"We are resilient and we will recover," he added. A man identifying himself as Akram's brother Gulbar said in a Facebook post that the suspect had suffered from mental health problems. "We would like to say that we as a family do not condone any of his actions and would like to sincerely apologize wholeheartedly to all the victims involved in the unfortunate incident," Gulbar said in the post to a Muslim community



BLACKBURN, United Kingdom: Rows of terraced houses are pictured on a residential street in Blackburn, north west England yesterday. The man who held four people hostage at a Texas synagogue was identified by US authorities as a British citizen. —AFP

Facebook page in Blackburn, in northwest England — where British police said Akram was from.

Biden declined to speculate on the motive but appeared to confirm reports that the hostage-taker was seeking the release of convicted terrorist Aafia Siddiqui, a Pakistani neuroscientist known as "Lady Al-Qaeda." "This was an act of terror" committed by an assailant who apparently "insisted on the release of someone who's been in prison for over 10 years," Biden told reporters during a visit to a hunger relief organization in Philadelphia.

Britain's foreign minister Liz Truss likewise Sunday

condemned the hostage-taking as an "act of terrorism and anti-Semitism." Siddiqui, the first woman to be suspected by the United States of links to Al-Qaeda and a cause celebre in Pakistan and in South Asian jihadist circles, was detained in Afghanistan in 2008.

Two years later she was sentenced by a New York court to 86 years in prison for the attempted murder of US officers in Afghanistan. She is being held at a prison in Fort Worth, Texas — about 20 miles (32 kilometers) from the synagogue which Akram attacked. Siddiqui's lawyer has said she "has absolutely no involvement" in the hostage situation and condemned it. —AFP

Millions hunker down as storm hits eastern US

WASHINGTON: Millions of Americans hunkered down as a major winter storm hit the eastern United States with heavy snow and ice knocking power out for an estimated 190,000 customers as of early yesterday. The National Weather Service (NWS)

said the storm was bringing a miserable combination of heavy snow, freezing rain and high winds, impacting the southeast and coastal mid-Atlantic before moving up to New England and southern Canada.

A swath from the upper Ohio Valley north to the lower Great Lakes region could expect more than a foot (30 centimeters) of snow yesterday, it warned. "Heavy snow and ice accumulations are likely to produce hazardous travel, downed trees, and power outages through yesterday for portions of the eastern US," it said.

In all, more than 80 million people fell

under the winter weather alerts, US media reported. About 190,000 customers were without power early Monday, according to the website PowerOutage, US. The storm spawned damaging tornadoes in Florida and flooding in coastal areas, while in the Carolinas and up through the Appalachians icy conditions and blustery winds raised concerns.

Transport was seriously disrupted, with thousands of flights canceled, and a portion of busy interstate highway I-95 closed in North Carolina. More than 3,000 flights within, into or out of the United States were

canceled Sunday. Charlotte Douglas International Airport in North Carolina was the worst-affected with 1,200 flights, or more than 90 percent of its scheduled services, canceled, according to the FlightAware website. A further 1,200 flights nationwide had been canceled early yesterday.

State of emergency

Drivers were warned of hazardous road conditions and major travel headaches from Arkansas in the south all the way up to Maine, on the Canadian border. Georgia Governor Brian Kemp had declared a state

of emergency on Friday, and snowplows were at work before noon Sunday to clear the roads.

Virginia and North Carolina also declared states of emergency. More than 15 inches of snow had fallen in parts of North Carolina by late Sunday night, the NWS tweeted, with areas of Georgia and Tennessee also seeing 10-11 inches. Virginia State Police said on Twitter they had responded to almost 1,000 crashes and disabled vehicles on Sunday. "Mostly vehicle damage. No reported traffic deaths," the force said. —AFP

International

Taleban stage show of strength with parade after protests

Members of both ethnic groups killed in isolated clashes

MAYMANA, Afghanistan: Taleban fighters paraded through a northwest Afghan city in a show of strength at the weekend, days after reinforcements were sent to quell unrest over the detention of a popular commander.

Protests erupted last week in Maymana, capital of Faryab province, after an Uzbek Taleban commander was detained for alleged links to a kidnapping plot.

Dozens more heavily armed fighters in jungle camouflage rode on the back of pick-up trucks and armoured vehicles, seized from Afghan government and US forces during the Taleban's lightning-fast summer takeover.

Residents of Maymana lined the route, many stony-faced as they filmed the parade with their phone cameras. "Two days ago the situation was not good because of the demonstration, but now the situation is normal," said Rohullah, a 20-year-old shopkeeper.

"The only problem we have is that people don't have jobs... but they are very happy with the security." The show of force comes as Afghanistan's new rulers struggle to evolve from an insurgency to a governing power in a country on the brink of economic collapse, with the United Nations estimating more than half the population is facing acute hunger.

Discipline among the rank and file — particularly in remote areas — is becoming a problem, with local commanders ignoring edicts from Kabul or implementing orders to their own whim.

Promising a softer rule than their 1996-2001 regime, the Taleban have launched a commission to identify members flouting regulations — dismissing almost 3,000 people.

"We had a military parade in the city to assure the people that we will not let anyone interrupt security," said Jaweed, a Maymana commander who like many goes by only one name. — AFP



MAYMANA, Afghanistan: In this photograph taken on January 16, 2022, Taleban fighters in vehicles take part in a military street parade in Maymana, capital of Faryab province. — AFP

“ Only problem we have is that people don't have jobs ”

The unrest sparked fears of tensions between Uzbek and Pashtun civilians and Taleban fighters, with unconfirmed reports that members of both ethnic groups had been killed in isolated clashes.

"We deployed hundreds of forces from neighbouring provinces and the situation is under control now," Latifullah Hakimi, a senior defence ministry official, told AFP at the weekend. Sunday's parade included columns of masked fighters clad in matching white shalwar kameez tunics, khaki combat vests, and headscarves inscribed with the Muslim declaration of faith.

China virus cases highest in nearly two years

BEIJING: The number of COVID-19 cases in China reached its highest level since March 2020 yesterday, as Beijing races to smother outbreaks just three weeks before hosting the Winter Olympics. China, where the virus first emerged in late 2019, has stuck to a strict policy of targeting zero COVID cases even as the rest of the world has reopened.

But its approach has come under sustained pressure in recent weeks with multiple clusters across the country just as the Games are about to get under way in Beijing. Yesterday there were 223 more cases reported in China, including another 80 in the virus-hit port city of Tianjin, and nine more-including cases of the highly transmissible Omicron variant-in the southern manufacturing hub of Guangdong.

Athletes and officials have already started to land in the capital ahead of the Games, immediately entering a tightly controlled bubble separating them from the rest of the population. But after a local Omicron case was detected in Beijing over the weekend, authorities have

also tightened regulations for those arriving in the capital from elsewhere in China. The city is now demanding a negative test before travel and a follow-up test after entering the city, with residents urged not to leave the city for the upcoming Lunar New Year holiday. Some tourist sites in the capital have also been closed.

Strain on economy

The infected woman in Beijing had not travelled or had contact with infected people, authorities said, as they tested some 13,000 people living or working in the same area. Health official Pang Xinghuo told reporters yesterday the virus had been found on the surface of a letter the infected person had received from Canada, as well as inside the unopened letter.

Dozens of letters from the same batch were tested, and five showed positive traces of Covid-19, she said, including samples from inside unopened letters. The strain was different from Omicron cases in China, and similar to strains identified from North America last month, she said. "We come to the conclusion that the possibility of virus infection through inbound objects cannot be ruled out," she said. Beijing's theory the virus did not originate in China but was imported in frozen food was judged "possible" but very unlikely in a report from World Health Organization-appointed international experts last year. China has linked some virus clusters to products imported from overseas. — AFP



BATU CAVES, Malaysia: Hindu devotees perform a religious ritual ahead of the Thaipusam festival outside a temple in Batu Caves on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur yesterday. — AFP

Malaysian Hindus mark festival under strict COVID curbs

BATU CAVES, Malaysia: Malaysian Hindus carried offerings up hundreds of steps to a major temple yesterday to mark the annual Thaipusam festival in celebrations that were scaled back due to the coronavirus pandemic. The event sees Hindus, a sizeable minority in multi-ethnic Malaysia, show their devotion to the deity Lord Murugan. Hundreds headed to the Batu Caves temple complex outside Kuala Lumpur and walked barefoot up 272, multi-coloured steps to reach the site, carrying offerings such as milk pots.

But celebrations were muted compared with the years before the pandemic, when huge crowds would throng the site, with officials limiting numbers to cut the risk of COVID-19. Once a common sight at Thaipusam, "Kavadis"—ornate metal structures that

devotees affix to their bodies with sharp metal spikes—were also banned this year.

Hindu devotee Krishnan Karuppan told AFP that he arrived at the temple before dawn. "Many people are afraid (to come)," he said. "My own children didn't come—they're all at home." Another worshipper at the temple, Ariyenthiran T. Somasundram, added that "to be on the safe side, it is better" to limit numbers.

But, he said, "I'm really sad... because the crowd of millions of people are not here". Local media reported that authorities were limiting attendance at the temple to several thousand over Thaipusam, which officially falls today. Malaysia faced a serious coronavirus outbreak last year, and has reported more than 2.8 million cases and 31,000 deaths, although infection rates have dropped in recent months. Most of Malaysia's roughly 32 million people are ethnic Malay Muslims but the country also has around two million ethnic Indians, many of whom are Hindu.

Most are descendants of labourers brought from ethnic Tamil areas of southern India by Malaysia's former British colonial rulers. Lord Murugan is particularly revered in southern India and among ethnic Tamil communities in Southeast Asia. — AFP

Hong Kong student jailed for stabbing police officer

HONG KONG: A Hong Kong judge sentenced a secondary school student yesterday to nearly eight years in prison for stabbing a police officer in the neck during the 2019 pro-democracy protests. Hui Tim-lik, then 19, jabbed a boxcutter into the neck of a police officer during a protest in October 2019 — at the peak of a pro-democracy movement rallying against China's authoritarian hold on the territory.

Now 21, Hui—who was immediately arrested and has been detained ever since—had initially been accused of attempted murder. But after he pleaded guilty last week, the serious charge was dropped, and high court judge Andrew Chan instead sentenced Hui yesterday to seven years and nine months in prison with intent to wound as an alternative charge.

Chan called the attack "one of the worst against police officers". "The level of force was high. The intention was clear. The defendant aimed at the most vulnerable part of the victim," the judge said.

"Whatever one's political belief is, the use of violence must be condemned." According to a medical report on the police officer's injuries, the box cutter missed a key artery by 1 centimetre, which if slashed could have been fatal.

The officer was hospitalised for a week and spent seven months in recovery. He resumed his duties on the force in June 2020. Hui's lawyer told the court last week the student suffered from autism spectrum disorder, making it easy for him to lose control. In an apology letter read out in court, Hui said he was affected by "stupidity and hatred" and now he has remorse. "I hope no more hatred will be brewed and the society won't be torn apart," Hui told the court last week. Massive, and at times violent, protests convulsed Hong Kong in 2019, triggered by a now-abandoned bill which would allow for criminal suspects to be extradited to mainland China. — AFP

Tear gas fired at thousands in Sudan against coup

KHARTOUM: Sudanese security forces fired tear gas yesterday at protesters opposed to last year's military coup, ahead of a visit by US diplomats to ramp up support for a civilian-led transition. The latest rallies came with US envoy to the Horn of Africa David Satterfield and Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Molly Phee expected in Khartoum this week to push a message of "justice" for the Sudanese.

Demonstrators carrying the Sudanese flag gathered in central Khartoum as well as in Wad Madani, a city to the south. Security officers who deployed in large numbers fired volleys of tear gas at the Khartoum protesters heading toward the presidential palace, an AFP correspondent said.

Several people were seen suffering breathing difficulties and others bleeding due to wounds by tear gas canisters, the correspondent said. Sawasn Salah, from the capital's twin city of Omdurman, said protesters burnt car tyres and carried photos of people killed during other demonstrations since the October 25 coup.

In Wad Madani, "around 2,000 people took to the streets as they called for civilian rule," said Emad Mohammed, a witness there. "The military back to the barracks," and "the rule is that of the people's", thousands of protesters chanted in North Khartoum, witnesses said.

Protesters—sometimes numbering in the tens of thousands—have regularly taken to the streets despite a deadly security clampdown and periodic cuts to communications since the putsch led by army general Abdel Fattah al-Burhan. — AFP



SEOUL: A woman walks past a television screen showing a news broadcast with file footage of a North Korean missile test, at a railway station in Seoul yesterday, after North Korea fired an unidentified projectile eastward in the country's fourth suspected weapons test this month. — AFP

N Korea fires more suspected missiles, flouts new sanctions

SEOUL: North Korea fired two suspected ballistic missiles yesterday, Seoul said, its fourth weapons test this month as Pyongyang flexes its military muscle while ignoring offers of talks from the United States.

Despite biting international sanctions, Pyongyang has conducted a string of weapons tests this year, including of hypersonic missiles, as leader Kim Jong Un pursues his avowed goal of further strengthening the military. Reeling economically from a self-imposed coronavirus blockade, impoverished North Korea has not responded to Washington's offers of talks, while doubling down on weapons tests and vowing a "stronger and certain" response to any attempts to rein it in.

The launches come at a delicate time in the region, with North Korea's sole major ally China set to host the Winter Olympics next month and South Korea gearing up for a presidential election in March. Two suspected "short-range ballistic missiles" were fired east from an airport in Pyongyang early yesterday, the South Korean military's Joint Chiefs of Staff said, with Japan also confirming the launch. Fired just before 9 am (0000 GMT), they flew 380 kilometres (about 240 miles) at an altitude of 42 km, the JCS added. The frequent and varied tests this year indicate North Korea "is trying to improve its technology and operational capability in terms of covert actions", Japanese Defence Minister Nobuo Kishi told reporters.

Pyongyang said it successfully tested hypersonic gliding missiles on January 5 and January 11, with the second launch personally supervised by Kim. In response, the United States last week imposed fresh sanctions on five North Koreans connected to the coun-

try's ballistic missile programmes, prompting an angry reaction from Pyongyang.

A North Korean foreign ministry spokesman described the move as a "provocation", according to state news agency KCNA. If "the US adopts such a confrontational stance, the DPRK will be forced to take stronger and certain reaction to it", the spokesman said hours before Pyongyang fired two train-launched missiles Friday.

Analysts said yesterday test also appeared to be an attempt to send the United States a message. "It is signalling that it will forge ahead with tests despite criticism," Hong Min of the Korea Institute for National Unification in Seoul told AFP.

Needs a win

Hypersonic missiles are a top priority in Pyongyang's new five-year defence development plan, unveiled in January 2021, which it has pursued while dialogue with the United States remained stalled. With the country battling major economic hardship domestically after years of COVID-induced isolation, Pyongyang may be looking to offer citizens a military victory ahead of key domestic anniversaries.

"It needs to present something to North Koreans," said Cheong Seong-chang of the Center for North Korea Studies at the Sejong Institute. "It now has become clear that it will be difficult for the North to score on the economic side." This weekend, a North Korean freight train crossed the Yalu River railroad bridge into China for the first time in over a year, according to the Yonhap news agency. The move could signal the prospect of resumed China-North Korea land trade, which has been suspended since the start of the pandemic in early 2020.

It is likely the missile launches will ease off ahead of the start of the Beijing Winter Olympics, said Yang Moon-jin of the University of North Korea Studies. "As stability on the peninsula is a prerequisite for the successful Beijing Olympics, the North will not cross a red line," Yang said. — AFP

Business

TUESDAY, JANUARY 18, 2022

China's pandemic-defying GDP growth slowed late last year

Beijing's CB cuts key rate amid worrying signal for global economy

BEIJING: China's pandemic-defying GDP growth slowed in the final months of 2021, official data showed yesterday in a worrying signal for the global economy as Beijing's central bank cut a key interest rate. The world's second-biggest economy also reported the lowest birth rate since the founding of Communist China in 1949, adding to a looming demographic crisis.

China's economy, a key driver of global growth, expanded 8.1 percent in 2021 on its strong virus recovery, National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) data showed, beating forecasts of 8.0 percent in an AFP poll. But much of that growth came in the first half of the year, with the economy shaken by a series of shocks towards the end of 2021.

China has been grappling with recent virus outbreaks, a cascading property market slump and a series of far-reaching regulatory crackdowns on some sectors.

Yesterday's figures showed growth in the fourth quarter was the slowest in over a year, at four percent, down from 4.9 percent in the third quarter. China's central bank also cut the rate on its one-year policy loans to 2.85 percent—the first drop since early 2020 at the height of the pandemic and a clear signal that the year's outlook remains uncertain.

NBS spokesman Ning Jizhe warned yesterday that "the domestic economy is under the triple pressures of demand contraction, supply shock and weakening expectations". The NBS also said the country's birth rate hit a record low at 7.52 births per 1,000 people, with analysts warning faster-than-expected ageing could deepen economic concerns.

Changes to the strict "one-child policy" since 2016 have failed to result in a hoped-for baby boom, as changing mindsets and soaring costs of property make many young couples reluctant to have more than one child.

Zero-COVID, pros and cons

China's "zero-COVID" policy has allowed life within its borders to largely return to normal.

Its factories mostly avoided shutdowns at a time of spiraling international demand as many major economies imposed painful lockdowns and work-from-home restrictions. But its recovery in recent months was hobbled partly by a series of outbreaks as officials reimposed strict and sweeping containment measures that hit consumer demand.

Beijing's drive to curb excessive debt and rampant consumer speculation also sent shock waves through a sector which had long been a key local driver for China. Growth was "dragged down by a slowdown in real estate... as well as renewed COVID outbreaks which raised restrictions in affected areas and heightened caution nationwide, which especially hurt the demand for services", said Tommy Wu of Oxford Economics.

Outbreaks have been surging in recent months, albeit in small numbers by global standards.

China reported its highest number of infections since March 2020 yesterday, with tens of millions of people hit by lockdowns, travel restrictions or mass testing. Beijing has been on high alert as it prepares to host the Winter Olympics in a firm "closed-loop", with new restrictions demanding a test both before and after travel to the capital.

The 13 million residents of Xi'an—an important tourism city—have been locked down for nearly a month. Outbreaks have also hit key port cities and manufacturing hubs.

Economic pressure

Key industrial areas also experienced power outages from an emissions-reduction drive, supply chain problems and surging energy costs in the second half of 2021. In December, industrial production grew more than expected at 4.3 percent, the NBS said. For the full year, industrial production grew 9.6



BEIJING: People buy fruits at a market in Beijing yesterday. —AFP

percent. But retail sales growth slowed sharply to 1.7 percent last month—down from 3.9 percent in November—as waves of COVID restrictions dampened consumer sentiment.

ING economist Iris Pang told AFP this was also due to a bottleneck in car production, a trend likely to continue as the chips needed for production remain in short supply.

The urban unemployment rate ticked up to 5.1

percent in December. "Economic growth is clearly under pressure, (and) recent Omicron outbreaks in China exacerbated the downside risk," said Zhiwei Zhang, chief economist at Pinpoint Asset Management. China also looks set to see another muted Lunar New Year—normally a key time for spending as hundreds of millions travel across the country—with many workers told not to travel due to COVID. —AFP

Credit Suisse chief quits over COVID rules breach

ZURICH: The chairman of Credit Suisse has resigned less than a year after taking the reins of the scandal-hit bank following reports that he had broken COVID quarantine rules.

Antonio Horta-Osorio's resignation was effective immediately, following an investigation commissioned by the board, Switzerland's second-biggest bank said in a statement yesterday. Axel Lehmann, from the board of directors, was appointed to take his place.

The resignation adds to the woes of the Swiss banking giant, which was rocked by its links to the multi-billion-dollar meltdowns at financial firms Greensill and Archegos last year. "I regret that a number of my personal actions have led to difficulties for the bank and compromised my ability to represent the bank internally and externally," Horta-Osorio said in the statement.

"I therefore believe that my resignation is in the interest of the bank and its stakeholders at this crucial time," Horta-Osorio was elected chairman in April 2021 with the bank mired in turmoil.

In March, Credit Suisse had been shaken by the collapse of the British finance firm Greensill, in which some \$10 billion had been committed via four funds, swiftly followed by the implosion of the US hedge fund Archegos, which cost the bank more than \$5 billion.

Crowned with a solid reputation after having successfully turned around the British bank Lloyds, Horta-Osorio promised to put better risk management at the heart of the bank's culture. But in December, his image was tarnished by revelations in the press.

Quarantine

Following a report by the Swiss newspaper Blick, Credit Suisse confirmed last month that Horta-Osorio had violated quarantine rules. The Portuguese banker apologized but other quarantine revelations followed and the board launched an investigation.

Switzerland imposed a 10-day quarantine rule on November 26 for people flying in from countries where the Omicron COVID-19 variant had been detected — a measure that chiefly affected Britain. Blick reported that Horta-Osorio had travelled back to Switzerland from Britain aboard a private jet, then asked if he could be released from quarantine, the tabloid said. —AFP

World's 10 richest men doubled wealth during COVID: Report

PARIS: The world's 10 wealthiest men doubled their fortunes during the first two years of the coronavirus pandemic as poverty and inequality soared, a report said yesterday. Oxfam said the men's wealth jumped from \$700 billion to \$1.5 trillion, at an average rate of \$1.3 billion per day, in a briefing published before a virtual mini-summit of world leaders being held under the auspices of the World Economic Forum.

A confederation of charities that focus on alleviating global poverty, Oxfam said the billionaires' wealth rose more during the pandemic more than it did the previous 14 years, when the world economy was suffering the worst recession since the Wall Street Crash of 1929. It called this inequality "economic violence" and said inequality is contributing to the death of 21,000 people every day due to a lack of access to healthcare, gender-based violence, hunger and climate change.

The pandemic has plunged 160 million people into poverty, the charity added, with non-white ethnic minorities and women bearing the brunt of the impact as inequality soared. The report follows a December 2021 study by the group which found that the share of global wealth of the world's richest people soared at a

Jazeera Airways upgraded to Boursa Kuwait's premier market

KUWAIT: Jazeera Airways' share was upgraded yesterday to the "Premier Market" of Boursa Kuwait, after exceeding the minimum requirements for liquidity and market capitalization in the two previous consecutive years. Jazeera is the only listed company to receive an upgrade.

Chairman Marwan Boodai said: "We are very pleased to see Jazeera Airways listed among the largest Kuwaiti companies at Boursa Kuwait. As the only company at Boursa Kuwait to offer investors access to the growing travel and aviation sector, the upgrade confirms the success of the Company's strategy and business model



Marwan Boodai



From left to right: Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, Tesla founder Elon Musk, Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates, and Facebook co-founder Mark Zuckerberg.

record pace during the pandemic.

Oxfam urged tax reforms to fund worldwide vaccine production as well as healthcare, climate adaptation and gender-based violence reduction to help save lives. The group said it based its wealth calculations on the most up-to-date and comprehensive data sources available, and used the 2021 Billionaires List compiled by the US business magazine Forbes.

Forbes listed the world's 10 richest men as: Tesla and SpaceX chief Elon Musk, Amazon's Jeff Bezos, Google founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin, Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg, former Microsoft CEOs Bill Gates and Steve Ballmer, former Oracle CEO Larry Ellison, US investor Warren Buffet and the head of the French luxury group LVMH, Bernard Arnault. —AFP

	Premier Market Requirement		Jazeera Airways	
	2020	2021	2020	2021
Liquidity	KD216.0 thousand	KD281.0 thousand	KD235.5 thousand	KD402.8 thousand
Market Cap	KD78 million	KD78 million	KD157.3 million	KD283.3 million

which positively contributes to the local economy."

Jazeera Airways has announced an ambitious growth plan to increase its fleet from 17 aircraft today to over 35 by 2025 to support its network expansion. At the end of 2021, the airline had completed an order with Airbus for 28 new aircraft: twenty A320neos and eight A321neos. The order is valued in excess of \$3.3bn at list prices.

Boodai added: "Jazeera's continued growth is without a doubt attributed to its team of experienced professionals who have been successful at overcoming regional and global challenges over the past years. As we continue to move forward, the Board and Executive Management remain focused at creating value investment opportunities that attract local and foreign investors."

In 2020, Jazeera's liquidity exceeded the minimum requirement of KD216.0 thousand by Boursa Kuwait, reaching KD 235.5 thousand. In 2021, the company's liquidity reached KD 402.8 thousand, exceeding the KD 281.0 thousand benchmark set by Boursa Kuwait for the year.

As for the market capitalization, Jazeera's market capitalization stood at KD 157.3 million in 2020, twice the minimum requirement of KD 78 million for

companies listed on the Premier Market at Boursa Kuwait. In 2021, the Company's market capitalization increased to KD 283.8 million, over four times the minimum requirement by Boursa Kuwait.

Jazeera Airways returned to profitability during the third quarter of 2021 following the two-year impact of the COVID-19 crisis that started in March of 2020. The Company achieved a net profit of KD 11.8 million during the quarter. Its operating revenue increased by 421.7 percent, reaching KD31.7 million, while its operating profit stood at KD 12.8 million, a 332.2 percent increase and the operating margin was 40.5 percent.

Jazeera Airways was established in 2004 by the Amiri Decree number 89 for the year 2004 as a Kuwaiti public shareholding company with a capital of KD 10 million. Its capital today stands at KD 22 million. Since its establishment, the company has flown over 17 million passengers, and distributed KD 84 million in cash dividends to shareholders between 2013 and 2018. Jazeera has also actively contributed to transporting stranded passengers without fees back to Kuwait from regions affected by crises and have founded an academy to training local professionals in the aviation sector.

Business

Indian states clamor for Tesla factory after Musk's tweet

Musk tweeted govt 'challenges' delaying his car company's India launch

MUMBAI: Indian politicians are clamoring for Elon Musk's attention on Twitter, chasing the coveted right to host a Tesla factory, after the billionaire said government "challenges" were delaying his electric car company's local launch.

Tesla's hopes to sell its vehicles in one of the world's biggest markets have been stalled by efforts to negotiate lower import duties, which can be as high as 100 percent. After being quizzed about a potential launch date last week, Musk tweeted that his California-based company was "still working through a lot of challenges with the government", without giving further details.

The comments have since prompted ministers from several Indian states to respond on Twitter with public

overtures to the world's wealthiest man-himself a prolific user of the social media platform. "Hey Elon, I am the Industry & Commerce Minister of Telangana state in India," KT Rama Rao tweeted in response to Musk on Friday. "Our state is a champion in sustainability initiatives & a top notch business destination."

Three other states put their own cases forward over the weekend. West Bengal's minority affairs minister said his corner of the country boasted the best infrastructure and "vision".

In Mumbai the development minister touted his state's "progressive" credentials. And in Punjab, lawmaker and retired international cricketer Navjot Singh Sidhu promised a commitment to green jobs and sustainable development.

Musk has tweeted numerous times since his "challenges" comment last week, but has so far not responded to any of his Indian entreaties. New Delhi has introduced incentives for foreign carmakers to manufacture their vehicles locally but Musk has said he wants to gauge demand with imports first.

India imposes a 100 percent tax on imported electric vehicles worth more than \$40,000, and Tesla fears the steep duties will price them out of the cost-sensitive Indian market. Electric cars accounted for only 1.3 percent of all vehicles sold in the country in 2020-21, according to research by digital consultancy Techarc. The government's target is for 30 percent of private cars to be electric by 2030 as part of a wider push to decarbonize the transport sector. — AFP



Elon Musk says government 'roadblock' is delaying launch of Tesla plant in India



BANGALORE: Farmers cut grass for feeding livestock in a field yesterday. —AFP

Ozone pollution costs Asia billions in lost crops

TOKYO: Persistently high levels of ozone pollution in Asia are costing China, Japan and South Korea an estimated \$63 billion annually in lost rice, wheat and maize crops, a new study says. While ozone forms a protective layer around the Earth in the upper atmosphere, it is a harmful pollutant at ground level.

It is created by a chemical reaction when two pollutants, often emitted by cars or industry, combine in the presence of sunlight and it can interfere with plant photosynthesis and growth. The research published yesterday harnesses pollution monitoring data from the region and field experiments to show ozone affects Asia's crop yields more than previously thought.

The study's authors said the findings should push policymakers to reduce emissions that produce ozone. "Air pollution control in North America and Europe succeeded in lowering ozone levels," said Kazuhiko Kobayashi, a co-first author of the study and professor emeritus affiliated with the University of Tokyo. "We need to repeat that success across East and South Asia," he told AFP.

Previous estimates of ozone's effects on staple crops such as rice, wheat and maize have sometimes used varieties that are not prevalent in Asia, or tested plants grown in pots rather than fields. To get a more accurate picture, the researchers looked at varieties common in the region and did experiments with crops in pots but also in fields.

They exposed rice, wheat and maize to varying levels of ozone and used the resulting crop yields to model how different exposures affected plant

development. They also tested the model with a second experiment in which the crops were treated with a chemical that protects against the effects of ozone, to see if the yield increased in line with their estimations.

'Threat to food security'

To determine real-world effects, the researchers then applied ozone data from more than 3,000 monitoring sites in China, South Korea and Japan to their model. They found a mean of 33 percent of China's wheat crop is lost annually because of ozone pollution, with 28 percent lost in South Korea and 16 percent for Japan.

For rice, the mean figure in China was 23 percent, though the researchers found hybrid strains were significantly more vulnerable than inbred ones. In South Korea the figure was nearly 11 percent, while in Japan it was just over five percent. And maize crops in both China and South Korea were also affected at lower levels. The crop is not grown in Japan in significant quantities.

The researchers said their findings were limited by several factors, including that ozone monitors are mostly in urban areas and levels in rural areas are often higher. Surface ozone "poses a threat to food security" given its effects in a region that supplies 90 percent of the world's rice and 44 percent of its wheat, the authors wrote.

"It has been well known that ozone exerts large impacts on crop production," Kobayashi told AFP. "Nevertheless, the estimated yield loss in rice, particularly of hybrid type cultivars, may be a bit shocking for those who have learned about it for the first time."

In all, the study estimates \$63 billion in annual losses, and Kobayashi said he hoped the findings would "encourage people to take action". "We in Asia could repeat the success of air pollution control in North America and Europe, where ozone-induced crop yield loss has been declining." —AFP

would press on with a bid for the consumer health care unit owned by pharmaceutical groups GlaxoSmithKline and Pfizer after an offer of £50 billion (\$68 billion) was refused. GSK's share price shot to the top of London's benchmark FTSE 100 index in trading Monday, climbing 3.7 percent.

Unilever was the biggest FTSE faller, slumping 7.8 percent. Mainland China shares were given some support by news that the country's central bank had cut interest rates for the first time since the height of the pandemic last year as officials look to kickstart stuttering growth.

Data yesterday showed that China—the world's number-two economy—expanded by a decade-high 8.1 percent last year. However it slowed in the final quarter of 2021, hit by virus lockdowns around the country and weakness in the crucial property sector.

Elsewhere on the corporate front, shares in Renault were modestly higher in Paris after the French auto giant said its sales fell for a third year running owing to electronic chip shortages and the impact of its new commercial policy. Credit Suisse fell almost 1.8 percent after the Swiss bank's chairman resigned less than a year after taking the reins following reports he had broken COVID quarantine rules.

Antonio Horta-Osorio's immediate departure adds to the bank's troubles after it was last year rocked by links to the multi-billion-dollar melt-downs at financial firms Greensill and Arcehos. — AFP

NBK Economic Report

COVID, oil price volatility hit GCC markets in Q4 2021

KUWAIT: Global equity markets were mixed in 4Q21, with developed markets (US and Europe) ending the year on a high note, supported by solid earnings. The rally came despite a multitude of headwinds, including Delta/Omicron concerns, surging inflation, and ongoing supply chain disruptions, which continue to pose a risk to the economic outlook. Gains in GCC markets were more modest, affected by bouts of virus and oil market uncertainty, yet ended the year in the lead, thanks to elevated oil prices, solid investor confidence and recovery optimism. Meanwhile emerging markets underperformed, as virus concerns mounted in India and regulatory pressures weighed in China.

A tightening labor market and persistently high inflation prompted a more hawkish stance by the Fed recently, which dented sentiment and led to the S&P500 posting the weakest start to the year since 2016. Looking ahead, equity markets could continue to gain in 2022, but given the above headwinds in addition to the winding down of fiscal stimulus in the US, and tighter monetary policy, the exceptional momentum from the past several years may ease, as risks mount and the investment landscape becomes increasingly challenging to navigate.

Chart 1: Global equity markets

(rebased, 31 December 2019=100)



Source: Refinitiv DataStream, as of January 14

US equities

Developed market equities regained traction in 4Q21, reversing the losses of the previous quarter thanks in large part to strong earnings growth, which outweighed various risk factors over the quarter. The emergence of Omicron led to increased volatility at the end of November and December but investor concerns quickly eased as data pointed to lower mortality and hospitalization risks. The MSCI AC World index gained a solid 6.7 percent q/q, led by strong gains in the US, with the S&P500 and DJIA up 11 percent and 7 percent respectively, trailed by European markets (Euro Stoxx 50 +6 percent). Emerging markets underperformed significantly, with the MSCI EM down 1.3 percent q/q, weighed down mostly by China on continued regulatory pressures. However, looser policy by the People's Bank of China, with the possibility of further cuts to its reserve ratio requirement and loan prime rates in 2022, coupled with much lower valuations is supportive of Chinese equities this year. Looking forward, the direction of global stocks will continue to depend largely on Fed policy, inflation, pandemic uncertainty, and the pace of the economic recovery. The Fed faces the challenging task of curbing 40-year high inflation without hindering economic growth. Very recently, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell struck a slightly less hawkish stance (especially in terms of the balance sheet reduction) than what the Fed's December meeting minutes had indicated, which the market responded to positively. However, a

Croatians urged to bank cash ahead of euro switch

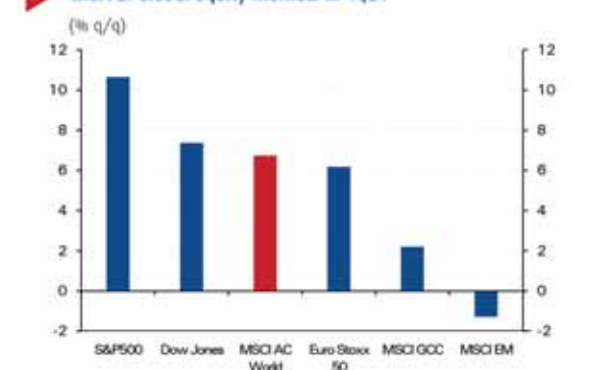
ZAGREB, Croatia: Croatia's prime minister urged people yesterday to put cash they keep at home into banks to facilitate the switch from the kuna to the euro, which the Balkan nation expects will happen in a year. Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said prices will be displayed in both kunas and euros from September ahead of the introduction of the single currency, which the government hopes will happen next January.

"We urge people who have cash at home to put it now in banks since the savings in kunas will be automatically converted into euros," he said. Croatia joined the European Union in July 2013, but like other new members from eastern Europe, has taken some time to

rapidly tightening labor market is a key downside risk, with the potential to lead to a typical wage/price inflationary spiral. This could result in a more aggressive policy action, potentially stalling the economic recovery and the equity rally.

On the other hand, should supply bottlenecks and Omicron risks prove short-lived, equity markets could continue to perform well in 2022, even as the Fed tightens policy. GCC markets underperformed their global counterparts in 4Q21, but were mostly positive, supported by elevated oil prices, easing virus fears, and an improving economic outlook. The MSCI GCC index gained a relatively modest 2.2 percent q/q, with Dubai

Chart 2: Global equity markets in 4Q21



Source: Refinitiv DataStream

and Abu Dhabi posting the largest quarterly gains of 12 percent and 10 percent, respectively, boosted by a surge in IPO activity and good sentiment, with Abu Dhabi ending the year up an exceptional 68 percent, its strongest performance in 16 years, significantly outperforming regional and global peers. In November, Dubai announced plans to list 10 state-backed companies, alongside creating an AED 2 billion (\$545 million) market maker fund aimed at boosting liquidity and competitiveness, moves that were received positively by investors.

In contrast, GCC quarterly performance was weighed down by the region's largest market Saudi Arabia, which lost 1.4 percent following a strong rally in 9M2021, adversely affected by Omicron concerns and some oil market uncertainty, a key regional catalyst, earlier in the quarter. Still, the market gained a solid 30 percent in 2021, buoyed by elevated oil prices, pre-Omicron waning virus fears, and an improving economic and fiscal outlook. Meanwhile the Kuwait All-Share index gained 2.6 percent q/q, pushing annual gains to 26 percent and ending the year near record highs. Gains in the All-Share were led by the main market (4.8 percent q/q) as investors continued to favor stocks with relatively lower valuations. Sector-wise, consumer services came out on top, gaining an exceptional 20 percent q/q, followed by financial services (8 percent) and insurance (6 percent). The higher prices pushed market capitalization to an elevated KD 41.2 billion, while turnover averaged KD 59 million per day over the quarter, the highest since 4Q20, reflecting strong investor interest.

Although most markets outside the US have started the year on a good note on recovery optimism and vaccine progress, near-to-medium term market prospects are subject to notable downside risks stemming from the pandemic, inflation, and tighter monetary policy. It is uncertain whether the upcoming Fed tightening will succeed in curbing inflation without hindering economic growth, especially with the potential for labor market tightness to add further impetus to inflation. Continued supply chain constraints, softer growth prospects, and the recent surge in Treasury bond yields, and steep US stock valuations are further sources of concern. These factors, coupled with a lower fiscal stimulus, have left investors in search of a fresh catalyst to justify a continued rally. Finally, GCC markets, in addition to their typical correlation with global markets, will continue to be driven by oil prices and the pace of structural reforms, which currently appear to be on a sound footing, auguring well for regional equities in 2022.

fulfill the economic conditions to adopt the single European currency.

The government wants the switch to be "simple and without costs for citizens," Plenkovic said while presenting a bill on adopting the euro. Due to lack a long-standing lack of trust in institutions and banks many Croatians keep their savings in cash at home.

Officials repeatedly stress the benefits of introducing the euro, in particular that it will lower borrowing costs and boost foreign investment into the country, as well as eliminate currency risks with its main trading partners. Around 80 percent of bank deposits are already in euros. But many Croatians fear that the introduction of the euro will lead to a hike in prices, in particular that businesses will round up prices when they convert into euros.

Finance Minister Zdravko Maric called it "one of the most important issues". He urged "everyone to make sure that there is no unjustified price increase ... no shady stuff". An Eurobarometer survey last year showed that 61 percent of Croatians support the switch to the euro.—AFP

European stocks rise tracking big corporate news

LONDON: European stock markets advanced yesterday, with traders focusing on slowing Chinese growth and a potential blockbuster takeover in the consumer healthcare sector.

Benchmark oil contract Brent North Sea briefly reached the highest level for more than three years at \$86.71 per barrel, adding to strong inflation concerns. The dollar was up against major rivals, while Wall Street was closed yesterday for a US public holiday.

While the fast-spreading Omicron coronavirus variant continues to cast a shadow across trading floors, the focus has been more on the US central bank's plans to raise interest rates to fight surging inflation.

"As we head into 2022, we believe that the post-pandemic bull market remains broadly intact," said Bank of Singapore analyst Eli Lee. "Historically, bull markets do not end at the beginning of rate hike cycles, and positive trends in global economic growth and earnings continue to be positive fundamental drivers for the market."

Consumer goods giant Unilever yesterday said it

Business

KFH recognized as top primary dealer in IILM sukuk issuance program in 2021

Al-Sumait: The rating reflects KFH's outstanding role as a market maker

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House was declared as the top primary dealer in the IILM sukuk program. Also, KFH achieved the top rank dealer in the secondary market in 2021. It is an unprecedented event that a financial institution occupies the top rank dealer for the IILM Sukuk Program in both primary and secondary markets.

KFH - Kuwait GM - Treasury, Ahmed Essa Al-Sumait emphasized that KFH has occupied the top rank in the IILM primary sukuk program, the size of which reached \$14.12 billion covering 36 sukuk. Standard Chartered came in second position while MayBank came in third position.

Al-Sumait added that KFH was also recognized as the first rank dealer in the IILM ratings for the secondary sukuk market with a total trading of \$1,514 billion in 2021 while First Abu Dhabi Bank came in second position and Standard Chartered bank came in third position among 10 primary dealers covering GCC and global banks.

Al-Sumait said that the IILM sukuk program is a short-term A-1 sukuk program as rated by Standard & Poor's and emphasized that the current IILM sukuk program amounts \$3.51 billion.

Al-Sumait expressed his honor, pleasure, and pride to accomplish this exceptional achievement, thus reiterating that KFH rank as the top primary dealer in both categories is deserved and reflects KFH outstanding role as a market maker and strengthens its pioneering role in activating and developing the sukuk market.

He added that this accomplishment would not

have been possible without the remarkable dedication of the capital markets unit at the Treasury Department with a 100 percent Kuwaiti professional management. He appreciated the extensive efforts which the team exerted during the year.

He said that KFH is honored to be counted on to distribute the IILM's 'A-1' rated sukuk program to a wide base of investors. He indicated that the IILM plays a critical role in addressing the liquidity needs of Institutions offering Islamic Financial Services ("IIFS"), as reflected by the fact that 27 percent of total global USD sukuk issuance in 2021 was supplied by the IILM, making the organization as one of the top USD sukuk issuers globally.

Al-Sumait reiterated that KFH will remain a dedicated strategic partner in fostering the development of the Islamic finance industry, via participation in the IILM's sukuk issuance program.

He indicated that the Group Treasury & FI sector shall continue its endeavor to expand investment and trading activities in the primary and secondary capital markets to enhance its position as the top active market maker. The sector has managed to achieve a widespread and remarkable progress as it



Ahmed Al-Sumait



New fleet order

Jazeera recently completed an order with Airbus at the Dubai Airshow for 28 new aircraft: twenty A320neos and eight A321neos. The order is valued in excess of \$3.3bn at list prices.

Burgan Bank launches freshly revamped 'Banki'

KUWAIT: As part of its aim to build a better, faster and more digitally enhanced customer experience, Burgan Bank announced the relaunch of the all-new revamped and enhanced Banki; the Bank's voice enabled Machine Learning chatbot. Featuring a series of updated features and upgraded capabilities, Banki offers customers a more personal and more responsive banking experience than ever before.



Khalil Majeed Al-Qattan

The revamped Banki is now able to understand customers' needs better in context as they interact more with it, in order to provide fast, reliable, safe, consistent, and accurate answers in a timely manner; allowing customers to conveniently avoid searching, browsing, clicking buttons or waiting on a call. Available around the clock on the Bank's mobile application, Burgan Online, and WhatsApp platform in the customer's preferred language, whether Arabic or English, Banki is able to help customers with all banking related question and inquiries.

"Burgan Bank is in a highly competitive environment, hence instead of offering a regular FAQ chatbot, the Bank incorporated Machine Learning to drive a personalized, remarkable client experience in line with our customers' needs. We understand that time is a commodity to our customers, so the sooner they can get the answer they want and go on about their day, the more satisfied they will be. In addition, it is our primary goal to empower our clients by investing in a conversational virtual assistant that can answer routine and personalized banking questions. It truly is more than just a chatbot, it's the most personal chatbot, a new virtual bank member," Khalil Majeed Al-Qattan, Head of Digital Transformation said.

Jazeera Airways launches flights to Chattogram

KUWAIT: Jazeera Airways, Kuwait's leading low-cost airline, operating regionally and internationally, yesterday announced the launch of a new service commencing January 23rd, between Kuwait and Bangladesh with three weekly direct flights to the coastal city of Chattogram, formerly known as Chittagong.

The service is the second for the airline to Bangladesh following the launch of Dhaka in October 2020, serving over 200,000 Bangladeshis

living in Kuwait and connecting to more across the GCC region.

Jazeera Airways CEO, Rohit Ramchandran, said: "Jazeera Airways continues to expand its footprint in the Asian continent with its second service to Bangladesh. Following the launch of flights to Dhaka in 2020 our new flights to Chattogram will serve the large community of Bangladeshis working in Kuwait and connecting with other Gulf countries, with very competitive fares, through our Terminal 5 in Kuwait."

Special launch fares starting from KD49 one way are available. Kuwait-Chattogram Flight Schedule starting January 23.

Passengers should review COVID-19 regulations before booking to ensure compliance with local regulations on vaccination and PCR test certificates.

Peugeot displays its newest model 3008 GT SUV in Marina Mall

KUWAIT: Kuwait Automotive Imports Company, the authorized distributor of Peugeot in Kuwait, is delighted to come even closer to its customers, with its most recent roadshow at Marina Mall. For two weeks, the customers will be able to experience the exciting 2022 Peugeot 3008 GT up close and personal and come in contact with the ultimate technology, style, and comfort. Enjoy the powerful lines that unite strength, elegance, dynamism, and smoothness in 3008 GT.

At Peugeot, we make our cars for those prepared to stand out and stand apart. Those who value style and live their lives with passion and conviction. Those who know who they are.

Stimulating and rewarding driving, a

sleek design, and uncompromising quality are the brand's commitment to its customers and contribute to the emotion that each Peugeot provides. Peugeot combines Design, Style, and Emotion in all areas, aiming to be the world's highest-end generalist brand.

Ashish Tandon, General Manager of KAICO (Kuwait Automotive Imports Co WLL - Alshaya & Alsagar) stated, "We at KAICO are thrilled to have the opportunity of displaying one of our newest model 3008 GT in Marina Mall".

Issa Abdallah, Marketing Manager of KAICO stated, "Peugeot being one of the oldest vehicles in the automotive industry, has high values and quality in addition to being luxurious and practical at the same time." Stefan Craita, Business Manager of Peugeot, stated, "The GT- line of the 3008 is one of our best performing models in the Peugeot passenger car line-up. Numerous customers have praised its smooth driving, premium comfort, and overall design. We are thrilled to have the opportunity to display the Peugeot model range, closer to our customers, in a very popular venue as Marina Mall".



Show leniency on EU fiscal rules: Senior German MP

BERLIN: The EU should continue to suspend strict fiscal rules to help debt-mired countries like Italy until the pandemic is over, the new chairman of the German parliament's powerful EU affairs committee told AFP yesterday.

Anton Hofreiter, a senior Green party MP, said Rome in particular deserved leniency as it finds its feet again after the blows leveled by COVID-19. That flexibility should also extend to countries making ambitious expenditures in climate protection, he added.

Asked how the EU should help struggling countries, Hofreiter replied, "by continuing to temporarily suspend the Stability Pact because we're really in a very special crisis". "We don't know how long the corona crisis will continue," he said, sounding a more conciliatory note than new chancellor Olaf Scholz of the centre-left Social Democrats.

'Smart proposal'

"Under (Prime Minister Mario) Draghi, Italy has done a lot of things well in recent months. No one has an interest in it sinking even deeper into an economic crisis." The European Union suspended its fiscal discipline rules in 2020, allowing eurozone members to boost their public spending in response to the pandemic. Italy's public debt soared to 155 percent of its GDP-more than double the EU's 60 percent ceiling-and Brussels has expressed concern that it is still budgeting to spend too much this year.

Hofreiter said his party, junior partners in Germany's ruling coalition along with the pro-business Free Democrats, said proposals for allowing greater investment in "green" projects were "very smart".

Nevertheless, he said, some of the planks of the bloc's Stability and Growth Pact, which dictates rules on debt and public deficits, "stand in the way of the Green Deal", which aims to make the EU climate neutral by 2050. French President Emmanuel Macron, whose country holds the rotating EU presidency, has joined forces with like-minded leaders such as Draghi to urge Brussels to reform its fiscal rules to allow greater investment spending while still managing debt levels.

Scholz, however, has tacked closer to Angela Merkel's previous course of enforcing at least long-term fiscal rectitude-a potential source of friction in the government's first 100 days.

'Geostrategically smart'

Hofreiter acknowledged other looming differences within the coalition, including the controversial Nord Stream 2 pipeline to carry Russian gas to Germany, as Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock embarks on a mission to Kyiv.

Scholz and his Social Democrats have maintained their support for Nord Stream 2 in the face of intense criticism from eastern European partners and Washington.

But the Greens are highly skeptical about what Hofreiter called a "problematic" project. Baerbock had said that the gas pipeline will not be allowed to operate if there were any new escalation in the Ukraine crisis. "I think we have got to make sure that (Russian President Vladimir) Putin cannot continue to use the pipeline to apply pressure," Hofreiter said.



BERLIN: Parliamentary group co-leader of Germany's Green party Anton Hofreiter with an umbrella in the colors of the EU as he takes part in a protest calling for a "Green Europe" in Berlin, in this file photo. —AFP

"We have got to be clear about our own interests, both in terms of the climate as well as geostrategically." Nord Stream 2 is set to double supplies of cheap natural gas from Russia to Germany, which the EU's top economy says is needed to help it transition away from coal and nuclear energy.

It was completed in September but Germany's

energy regulator Bundesnetzagentur has said the approval process is likely to drag into the second half of 2022. Hofreiter said it was "geostrategically smart" to leave the issue unresolved "as long as possible". "Beyond the climate issue, if we were to simply say we approve this, we would be giving away leverage against Putin," he said. "That would be unwise." —AFP



A French bulldog named Magnolia wears a Chanel pouch outside Spring Studios during New York Fashion Week. — AFP photos



An officer holds the 10-month-old French Bulldog that was taken from his owner during an armed robbery.

WHY THIEVES ARE SNATCHING FRENCH BULLDOGS ACROSS US

The two thieves who brutally robbed 27-year-old Marieke Bayens at gunpoint on a California street were not after her purse-or her. They wanted the little dog at the end of her leash: Merlyn, a French bulldog. From New York to Los Angeles, and from Miami to Chicago, thefts of the prized breed have been on the rise. Small and friendly-and thus easy to grab-French bulldogs are hugely popular, selling for thousands of dollars on the black market. They have the added draw of being a "dog of the stars."

The most famous victim so far has been Lady Gaga. Armed men last year stole her pet bulldogs Koji and Gustav, even opening fire on an employee who was walking them (he was wounded but survived). The superstar singer offered a \$500,000 reward for their return and eventually got the dogs back. Police made five arrests in the case. Bayens survived a similarly traumatic attack in November while walking Merlyn, a friend's dog, in the California city of Oakland. The brazen attack occurred in broad daylight.

"I was waiting for Merlyn to go about his business when I saw two people coming," she told AFP. "Before I knew it, one was in front of me pointing a gun at my face and said, 'Give me the dog.' The other had already grabbed Merlyn off the ground, and when I didn't respond to the one pointing the gun, the other pulled the rest of Merlyn's leash out from my hand. They ran away towards their car and sped away

down a street," going the wrong way on a one-way street, she said.

Bulldog thefts elsewhere in the country have been carried out with similar cold-blooded tactics. Last year, people in San Francisco heard the distressing story of 30-

a tempting target for thieves? Two key reasons: their high resale value - \$3,500 to \$5,000 or more-and their relative rarity, Brandi Hunter Munden, vice president of the American Kennel Club said. "This is not a breed that has large litters... and it can

door that allows it to leave home unescorted; keep its identity papers in a safe place; use a GPS-equipped collar; and be wary of strangers who come knocking.

But the most crucial recommendation-and the one probably least observed-

Madonna, Snoop Dogg, Michael Phelps and Hilary Duff.

So it's not surprising that Hollywood has become a hotspot of French-bulldog thievery. In late December, one resident nearly lost his life in an incident near Sunset



In this file photo, super lightweight fighter Montana Love (left) holds his dog Pappi, a six-month-old Merle French Bulldog as he poses with Carlos Diaz during an official weigh-in at MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas, Nevada.

something Sarah Vorhaus, who was stopped by three armed men-and brutally beaten by one-before they made off with her five-month-old French bulldog Chloe. Pictures on social media showed the young woman with a badly swollen face.

Tempting target

So why are French bulldogs quite such

take a while to get one," she said. "Their rise in popularity has led to an increase in thefts. "The use of violence, however, is new and alarming."

In the face of the spate of "dognappings," experts offer a list of precautions for owners: have a computer chip implanted in the pet to allow tracing; always keep it on a leash when outdoors (and seal any dog



A French Bulldog is seen in the benching area in New York during the first day of competition at the Westminster Kennel Club 140th Annual Dog Show.

involves social media: owners are strongly urged to resist the temptation of posting cute photos or videos of their pets, which may allow thieves to locate them. Countless celebrities-actors, athletes, musicians, models and influencers-have ignored that rule. They include stars like Reese Witherspoon, Hugh Jackman, Chrissy Teigen, Leonardo DiCaprio,

Boulevard. Robert Marinelli was walking Luca, his eight-year-old bulldog, when he was attacked. Two thieves beat him brutally, and when his shirt was caught in their car door, he was dragged briefly on the ground. He suffered extensive injuries and was hospitalized. — AFP



A staff member takes photos of her puppy Jefferson on a podium before a press conference by Senator Rand Paul's FDA Modernization Act on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC.



In this file photo, a woman wearing a protective mask carries flowers while walking a French Bulldog with a pacifier in its mouth during the coronavirus pandemic in New York City.



In this file photo, actors Neve Campbell, Courteney Cox, and David Arquette arrive at the premiere of The Weinstein Company's 'Scream 4' held at Grauman's Chinese Theatre in Hollywood, California. — AFP

Scream reigns, ousting Spider-Man in box office

New Paramount release "Scream" leapt to the top of the North American box office this weekend, showing the continuing lure of horror films while finally toppling "Spider-Man," industry watcher Exhibitor Relations reported Sunday. The latest reimagining of the

"Scream" franchise earned \$30.6 million for the Friday-through-Sunday period en route to an expected \$35 million for the full four-day Martin Luther King Jr holiday - more positive news for an industry still struggling with COVID-19.

David A Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research called it a strong opening for the slasher film, even if the latest "Scream" sequel didn't scare up numbers like "Halloween 12," which opened to \$49.4 million last October. Still, Paramount has already managed to recoup its relatively modest \$25 million budget. As in the original "Scream" from 1996, Neve Campbell, Courteney Cox and David Arquette star. Sony's "Spider-Man: No Way Home" slipped to second place, taking in a still-healthy \$20.8 million (\$26 million for the four-day weekend) as its monthlong box office reign

came to an end. It has now earned Sony \$704 million domestically and \$926 million internationally.

In third was Universal's family-friendly "Sing 2," at \$8.3 million (\$10 million for four days). The voice cast of the animated musical includes Reese Witherspoon, Scarlett Johansson, Matthew McConaughey, Bobby Cannavale, Pharrell Williams and Bono. Fourth spot went to another Universal film, spy thriller "The 355," at \$2.3 million (\$3 million). It stars Jessica Chastain, Penelope Cruz and Lupita Nyong'o. And in fifth was "The King's Man" from 20th Century, at \$2.3 million (\$3 million). Ralph Fiennes, Gemma Arterton, Rhys Ifans and Matthew Goode star in the spy action comedy. — AFP

Dimming Sun's rays should be off-limits



People walk their dogs in the early morning sun on a winter's day in Richmond Park, south west London yesterday. — AFP photos

Planetary-scale engineering schemes designed to cool Earth's surface and lessen the impact of global heating are potentially dangerous and should be blocked by governments, more than 60 policy experts and scientists said yesterday. Even if injecting billions of sulphur particles into the middle atmosphere—the most hotly debated plan for so-called solar radiation modification (SRM) — turned back a critical fraction of the Sun's rays as intended, the consequences could outweigh any benefits, they argued in an open letter.

"Solar geoengineering deployment cannot be governed globally in a fair, inclusive and effective manner," said the letter, supported by a commentary in the journal WIREs Climate Change. "We therefore call for immediate political action from governments, the United Nations and other actors to prevent the

normalisation of solar geoengineering as a climate policy option." An increase of 1.1 degrees Celsius above mid-19th century levels has already boosted the intensity, frequency and duration of deadly heat waves, droughts and megastorms.

The world's nations have committed to capping the rise in Earth's surface temperature to 1.5C above mid-19th century levels, but UN-backed scientists have said that threshold will be breached, possibly within a decade. The failure to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that drive global heating has led some policy makers to embrace solar geoengineering—widely dismissed not long ago as more science fiction than science—in order to buy time for a more durable solution. It has long been known that injecting a large quantity of reflective particles into the upper atmosphere could cool the planet.

Nature sometimes does the same: debris from the 1991 eruption of Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines lowered Earth's average surface temperature for more than a year. But the open letter said there are several reasons to reject such a course of action. Artificially dimming the Sun's radiative force is likely to disrupt monsoon rains in South Asia and western Africa, and could ravage the rain-fed crops upon which hundreds of millions depend for nourishment, several studies have shown.

Unintended consequences

"Stratospheric sulfate injection weakens the African and Asian summer monsoons and causes drying in the Amazon," the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) said in its most recent scientific assessment. Other regions, however, could benefit: a study last year

concluded that SRM could sharply curtail the risk of drought in southern Africa. Scientists also worry about so-called termination shock if seeding the atmosphere with Sun-blocking particles were to suddenly stop. If SRM "were terminated for any reason, there is high confidence that surface temperatures would increase rapidly," the IPCC said.

In addition, the technology would do nothing to stop the continuing buildup of atmospheric CO₂, which is literally changing the chemistry of the ocean. The open letter also cautions that raising hopes about a quick fix for climate "can disincentivise governments, businesses and societies to do their utmost to achieve decarbonization or carbon neutrality as soon as possible". Finally, there is currently no global governance system to monitor or implement solar geoengineering schemes, which could be set in

motion today by a single country, or even a billionaire with rockets.

The open letter calls for an "international non-use agreement" that would block national funding, bad outdoor experiments and refuse to grant patent rights for SRM technologies. Such an agreement "would not prohibit atmospheric or climate research as such," the letter said. Signatories include Frank Biermann, a professor of global sustainability governance at Utrecht University; Aarti Gupta, a professor of global environmental governance at Wageningen University in The Netherlands; Professor Melissa Leach, director of the Institute of Development Studies in Sussex, England; and Dirk Messner, president of the German Environment Agency. — AFP



The sun is seen above buildings in Hong Kong's Sheung Wan area.



The sun sets over a bed of fog and clouds covering the city of Heidelberg, as seen from the peak of the Konigstuhl Mountain in Heidelberg, Germany.

Gaza studio produces Hamas response to Zionist hit shows

In a Gaza TV studio of the ruling Islamist armed movement Hamas, a set features Zionist flags, Hebrew documents and a portrait of Theodor Herzl, the father of modern Zionism. The make-believe office of enemy state Zionist security service is being used to shoot a "pro-resistance" television series on the conflict. It is Hamas' answer to Zionist hit shows such as the special forces drama "Fauda" that have gained millions of viewers on platforms such as Netflix, HBO and Apple TV+.

"Fauda", which in Arabic means chaos, portrays a military unit led by commander Doron Kavillio that launches raids inside Palestinian territories. Admitting to having watched "Fauda", though, is not a good idea in Gaza, the Palestinian coastal enclave blockaded, said local director Mohammed Soraya. To watch any Zionist TV series means supporting the "normalization" of relations with the Jewish state, argued Soraya, who is directing Hamas's own TV series on the conflict. He charged that such shows "support the Zionist occupation" because their plots "criminalize the Palestinian people", speaking with AFP in the Gaza City studio.

"We want to flip the equation, to show

the Palestinian point of view, to broadcast a drama about the spirit of our resistance." Hamas is considered a terrorist organization by Zionists, United States and the European Union. The Islamist group controls the Gaza Strip, an impoverished territory of 2.3 million people. It also runs the Al-Aqsa channel, and has been investing in series inspired by Hollywood, and by Turkish soap operas that are popular across the Middle East.

'Fist of the Free'

The series now in production, "Qabdat al-Ahrar" (Fist of the Free), revisits a 2018 Zionist operation in the Gaza Strip that resulted in the deaths of seven Hamas fighters and Zionist officer. The protagonists are the fighters of Hamas, which has fought four wars against the Jewish state since 2008.

Budgets are meagre, actors' salaries are low, sets are basic and deadlines are tight, with the production team expected to deliver some 30 episodes by April, in time for the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. While Zionist series often feature actors from the country's Arab minority, productions in Gaza do not use any Zionist actors. This forces studios to

recruit local actors to play Zionists—a job that, the performers say, can expose them to real-world hostility and danger.

One of them is Jawad Harouda, aged in his early sixties and with a husky voice, who portrays the head of Shin Bet domestic security service in the new TV series. To get into character, Harouda said he "soaked up the script", but added that being too convincing can lead to trouble. "Some women look at me and pray that I die," he said, leaning back in his boss's chair in the fake Shin Bet office. "I'm happy when people insult me. It means I've succeeded ... The actor is a chameleon, he must be able to act out all colors."

'No love'

In Gaza productions, Zionist characters speak in Arabic. And, at the request of the Hamas mufti, or Islamic jurist, women wear their headscarves even if they play Jewish characters. "In one series, I played a Jewish woman," said one actress, Kamila Fadel, who added that she may have been just a little too convincing for her own good. "After the series was broadcast, a woman tried to strangle me," she recounted.

"She told me: 'I hate you, you are hurting us so much'. On another day a 13-year-old boy threw a stone at my head thinking I was Jewish... This means I played my part well." Not everyone is a fan of the Hamas productions, which are firmly focused on the conflict. "There is no love" in the dramas, argued Palestinian director and critic Jamal Abu Alqumsan, who expressed regret that the rare local productions served primarily as a "tool of resistance". Abu Alqumsan said the potential for such productions to tell Palestinians' stories was huge, but the challenges were many.

"In Gaza, we live under a blockade, it's a unique situation in the world," he said, speaking in his art gallery, which he hopes to turn into a small film library. "So we need producers to invest in quality series and tell the rest of the world our story. We have good actors, they just need good directors and means." For now, Abu Alqumsan said he was unsure of the impact such shows would have. "TV dramas are a weapon, but in the face of Zionists, local productions are of a low level," he said. — AFP



In this file photo, Greek contemporary artist Alekos Fassianos poses outside his house in Athens. — AFP

'Greek Picasso' Alekos Fassianos dies at 86

Greek artist Alekos Fassianos, whose work drew on his country's mythology and folklore, died Sunday at the age of 86, his daughter Viktoria said. Described by some admirers as a modern-day Matisse and by others as the Greek Picasso, his works, which included paintings, lithographs, ceramics and tapestries, have been shown around the world. While he resisted comparison with Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso, he admired both artists, but insisted he had drawn on many different influences. Fassianos, who had been bedridden at his home in the suburbs of Athens for several months, died in his sleep, Viktoria Fassianou said.

His health had forced the artist to put down his paintbrushes in 2019. "All the work of Fassianos, the colours that filled his canvases, the multidimensional forms that dominated his paintings, exude Greece," said Culture Minister Lina Mendoni in a statement. Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis paid tribute to Fassianos as a painter who "always balanced between realism and abstraction". Fassianos, he added, "leaves us a precious heritage".

'Greekness always his inspiration'

The artist split his time between Greece and France, where he studied lithography at the National School of Fine Arts in Paris. The website devoted to his work says his style was forged in the 1960s and that his main themes have always been man, nature and the environment.

From Paris to Munich, Tokyo to Sao Paulo, Fassianos's works were shown around the world. Examples of his work can be found in the Museum of Modern Art in Paris and in the Pinacothèque in Athens. "Greekness has always been his inspiration, from mythology to contemporary Greece," the artist's wife, Mariza Fassianou, told AFP during a visit to his home last year. "He has always believed that an artist should create with what they know." Her husband would work on the floor or even scratch the corner of a table, she said. — AFP



Palestinian actors and crew shoot the scenes of the series by local Al-Aqsa TV 'Qabdat Al-Ahrar', meaning 'Fist of the Free' in Arabic, in Gaza city. — AFP photos





(From right) US actor Kyle MacLachlan, British actors Louis Partridge and Thomas Brodie-Sangster, and models present creations for Prada's Men's Fall/Winter 2022/2023 fashion collection in Milan. — AFP photos

A model presents a creation for Prada's Men's Fall/Winter 2022/2023 fashion collection.

Paris fashion gets physical despite Omicron

The city may still be deep in the throes of the Omicron surge and adapting to the latest COVID restrictions, but Paris Fashion Week will nevertheless launch today. The industry is determined to get back on the catwalks after nearly two years during which most brands were forced to retreat online.

menswear calendar-including big names like Dior, Hermes and Rick Owens-will be back on the catwalk, up from just six last summer. And nearly 30 others are opting for other types of in-person event-inviting journalists, buyers and other taste-makers to less formal gatherings around the French capital.

through glass ceilings for black designers, that Louis Vuitton is presenting the show twice on Thursday. Many are also excited to see what streetwear veteran Nigo does as the new artistic director of Kenzo.

And there is hype, too, around French label Egonlab, launched two years ago with a series of arty videos and now making its first foray in the official calendar. "To present your work alongside the big houses that greatly influenced us-it does something to you," said co-founder Florentin Glemarec. Nonetheless, like many fashion newcomers, Egonlab is embracing both the live and online worlds, with a line of NFTs and Metaverse digital clothing that it is developing in partnership with footwear brand Crocs.

'Caught in the crossfire'

Haute couture designers are also returning to the catwalk, with 18 of 29 houses planning live shows-albeit with the now-common caveat that the virus might throw a last-minute spanner in the works. Some changes have already been announced: the Sidaction charity evening to raise money for AIDS research, that traditionally marks the end of the haute couture week, has been postponed until July. Giorgio Armani cancelled his menswear show in Milan and haute couture show in Paris over the latest surge in Covid cases.

That decision sparked a sense of deja-vu as it was the 87-year-old Italian maestro who was first to cancel his catwalk shows in the early days of the pandemic in February 2020. "It's their choice," said Pascal Morand, head of France's Federation for Haute Couture and Fashion. He said the federation makes several recommendations including the use of FFP2 masks, but he was happy to see brands returning to the live sphere.



British actor Thomas Brodie-Sangster (right) presents a creation for Prada's Men's Fall/Winter 2022/2023 fashion collection in Milan.

Despite the complications caused by the pandemic, the fashion community is stepping out regardless. Most fashion houses are returning to live shows as the menswear week kicks off, followed immediately by haute couture shows. Some 17 of the 76 brands of the official Paris

There will be a bittersweet taste to the first week, however, as Louis Vuitton presents the final collection from US designer Virgil Abloh, who died in November at the age of 41 after a private battle with cancer. Such is the interest around Abloh, a close partner of Kanye West who helped break

"We have learned to live with the virus," he told AFP. "Digital enriches the physical, but it can't replace the emotion and sensory side of the runway shows." Some still feel uneasy about returning to in-person events. "I feel caught in the crossfire," said Jean Paul Cauvin, director of haute couture brand Julien Fournie, who has had to

deal with the disruption of positive tests among models and workshop workers. "We would be frustrated not to be on the catwalk, but I hope we don't create an haute couture cluster," he said. — AFP



Jeff Goldblum takes to catwalk for Prada

Miuccia Prada looked to Hollywood for inspiration as the Italian luxury label unveiled its Autumn-Winter 2022-23 collection on Sunday using 10 actors including Hollywood A-lister Jeff Goldblum to model the classical chic

menswear, all the while bending some rules. Among them were David Lynch favourite Kyle MacLachlan ("Twin Peaks"), Jeff Goldblum ("The Fly", "Jurassic Park"), Asa Butterfield ("Sex Education") and Thomas Brodie-Sangster ("Bright Star").

Some seemed out of their element, despite their wealth of experience as actors. Prada said it wanted to use "real men, recognized figures... who offer a new facet of reality" as actors. The collection mixes and matches sober coats and blazers in grey, black and blue with work outfits in fluorescent colors cut from leather or luxury cotton. "Through these clothes, we stress that everything that a human being

does is important," said 72-year-old Miuccia Prada, who heads the group her grandfather founded in 1913.

"Every aspect of reality can be elegant and dignified." Raf Simons, Prada's co-designer who joined the house in 2020 after creating for Jil Sander, Dior and Calvin Klein, noted: "The fundamentals of the men's wardrobe are associated with industrial forms," melding "sartorial style" and "streetwear". The men's fashion week, which runs through Tuesday, was blindsided by the emergence of the highly contagious Omicron variant of COVID, with many houses pulling out.

Giorgio Armani cancelled his show in

Milan as well as his haute couture show in Paris, leading an exodus that saw the number of in-person events shrink from 23 to 16. Eighteen brands opted for a purely virtual presence, while others presented their collections by appointment. "We have learned to live with the virus," Pascal Morand, head of France's Federation for Haute Couture and Fashion said. "Digital enriches the physical, but it can't replace the emotion and sensory side of the runway shows." — AFP

Sports

Real Madrid grab Spanish Super Cup; Modric and Benzema shine

Real Madrid blank Athletic Bilbao 2-0

MADRID: Real Madrid won the Spanish Super Cup by beating Athletic Bilbao 2-0 on Sunday as Luka Modric and a Karim Benzema penalty secured a comfortable victory in Saudi Arabia. Modric's curling finish towards the end of the first half and Benzema's strike early in the second sealed the win for Madrid, who claimed their first trophy in Carlo Ancelotti's second spell as coach.

Athletic had beaten La Liga champions Atletico Madrid to reach the final but were well beaten at the King Fahd Stadium by a slick, organized Real Madrid side, that have now lost only once in 20 matches. They had brief hope in the 87th minute when they were awarded a penalty and Eder Militao was sent off, but Raul Garcia missed and Madrid's win was safe.

Ancelotti's side face Elche tomorrow in the quar-

ter-finals of the Copa del Rey and Paris Saint-Germain next month in the last 16 of the Champions League. In La Liga, they are five points clear at the top of the table. "It's an impulse, an impulse to keep going," said Ancelotti. "We don't have much time to think because another competition is coming." Modric continued his brilliant form by scoring the opener, a goal that makes him the oldest goalscorer in Spanish Super Cup history at 36.

The 33-year-old Marcelo, meanwhile, came on for the last few minutes, before lifting his 23rd trophy at Real Madrid, equalling the haul of Paco Gento as the most successful player in the club's history. "He's one of the greats, a legend of this club," said Madrid president Florentino Perez. Ancelotti now has five trophies as Real Madrid coach, adding a Spanish Super Cup to the Copa del Rey, Champions League,

UEFA Super Cup and Club World Cup he won during his first spell.

The Spanish Super Cup stayed in Spain in 2021 because of the pandemic but has returned to Saudi Arabia as part of an agreement until 2029 that will earn the Spanish football federation around 30 million euros a year. Objections from players and coaches have been noticeably muted but Athletic Bilbao's Raul Garcia spoke out last week. He said moving a Spanish tournament 7,000 kilometers away was symptomatic of the authorities "forgetting the basics of football".

Criticism has been more forthright from human rights groups like Amnesty International, who have accused the federation of failing to support "harassed and persecuted women in Saudi Arabia" and of collaborating in Saudi "image-washing". Athletic's Inaki Williams and Oihan Sancet looked dangerous early on, with Williams wanting a penalty when the ball struck the sliding David Alaba on the hand but referee Cesar Soto was not interested. Despite Vinicius Junior's imperious form in recent weeks, Madrid's greatest threat came down the opposite side, through Rodrigo.

The first warning came when Kroos pinged the ball out to the Brazilian, who dropped it inside for Benzema and the striker's curling shot flew just wide of Unai Simon's far post. The opener took a similar route, even if it started with Thibaut Courtois, who played out to Toni Kroos. Under pressure, Kroos found Casemiro and the ball shuffled along, through Modric and out right. Rodrigo drove past two Athletic defenders afraid to challenge in the box and by the time Dani Garcia slid to block, it was too late. Rodrigo toeing the ball inside to Modric, who whipped the ball first time into the corner.

Seven minutes into the second half, it was two, as Yeray Alvarez leapt to block Benzema's shot, stopping the ball with his outstretched right arm. The referee checked the monitor and gave the penalty, which Benzema fired left and in. Hope for Athletic came late, and briefly, in the 87th minute, when Militao was sent off for blocking another Raul Garcia header towards goal and Athletic were awarded a penalty. But Raul Garcia missed, his drive down the middle met by the left foot of Courtois.—AFP



RIYADH: Real Madrid players celebrate winning the Spanish Super Cup final football match between Athletic Bilbao and Real Madrid on January 16, 2022, at the King Fahd International stadium in the Saudi capital. — AFP

Australia's Ashes dominance papers over some cracks

HOBART: Australia's 4-0 Ashes win was a huge morale boost but drubbing a desperately poor England also papered over cracks that must be addressed before they can be the world's best Test side. Australia steamrolled England to win the fifth and final Test by 146 runs in Hobart on Sunday, adding to their big wins in Brisbane, Adelaide and Melbourne. However, battering a subdued England is a very different proposition to taking on the current top Test nation, India, who dealt a blow to the Australians' pride at their last meeting by beating them at home. And if the Aussies want to reclaim their position at the top of the Test rankings, this Ashes series has exposed a number of questions that need to be answered.

Bowling

England's fragile batting had no answers to the relentless and hostile Australian attack. Australia have relied on a three-man pace battery of Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood for the last two years. But when Hazlewood suffered a side strain in the first Test and missed the rest of the series, Australian selectors were forced to bring in replacements. Michael Neser, Jhye Richardson and Scott Boland were brought in at various stages and performed impressively, particularly Boland, who took incredible figures of 6-7 in the second innings of the Boxing Day Test in Melbourne.

The issue for Australia going forward is who to leave out - a nice problem to have. More troubling is the question of who is the next spinner in line after Nathan Lyon. With their next Tests scheduled for Pakistan in March, as well as Tests away to Sri Lanka and India later in the year, Australia may need to play two spinners on the sub-continent. Leg-spinner Mitchell Swepson was in the Ashes squad and has been named in six Test squads since 2017. But the 28-year-old is still to make his Test debut.

Batting

Australia's batting remains strong although there appear to be some concerns at the top of the order. Numbers three and four, Marnus Labuschagne and Steve Smith, are two of the best batsmen in the world - and Travis Head came into his own, scoring two slashing centuries in Brisbane and Hobart on his way to being named man of the series. Australia have also been rewarded for their patience with Cameron Green. After a slow start against India last year, the towering all-rounder averaged 15.77 with the ball and 32.57 with the bat. But there are issues lying in wait. Mercurial opener David Warner is now 35 and his powers appear to be waning.

Despite scoring 94 in Brisbane and 95 in Adelaide, Warner's form tailed off and he averaged just 34.13 for the series, finishing with a pair in Hobart. His opening partner for the first four Tests, Marcus Harris, was dropped after Sydney for another 35-year-old, Usman Khawaja. Khawaja scored twin centuries in Sydney at number five, but failed as an opener in Hobart with zero and 11. Captain Cummins admitted before the fifth Test that succession planning needed to be in place at the top of the order, but with Will Pucovski battling concussion-related health issues, there are no obvious candidates.—AFP

Ireland defeat 'sad' Windies to claim ODI series

KINGSTON: Andy McBrine claimed four wickets and hit a half-century as Ireland edged West Indies by two wickets to win their One-Day International series 2-1 on Sunday with home skipper Kieron Pollard describing the defeat as "a sad day" for his struggling team. McBrine took his total of wickets in the three matches to 10 as the West Indies were all out for 212 in 44.4 overs at Sabina Park. He then showed off his all-round talents by hitting a top score of 59 off 100 balls with six boundaries and a six. Harry Tector also played his part in what was Ireland's first away ODI series triumph against a fellow Test nation. The 24-year-old finished with 52, his third successive half-century and seventh in his last 10 matches. "It's a sad day for us and West Indies cricket," admitted Pollard. "We take responsibility and me too for the performance on the field. It's a bitter pill to swallow."

He added: "We just haven't been up to standard. Now we need a holistic approach to go forward, not just on the field. "It won't happen tonight. We have to get together and decide where we want to take West Indies cricket."

When McBrine departed in the 31st over, the 28-year-old all-rounder had taken Ireland to 152-3, helping his team recover from losing opener William Porterfield to the first ball of the innings to Alzarri Joseph. McBrine's second career half-century ended with a lazy swipe to Odean Smith which was gobbled up by Shai Hope behind the stumps.

However, Ireland, who were missing several players including regular captain Andy Balbirnie because of Covid, still had to endure a nervy finish, quickly slipping from 190-4 to 208-8 before Craig Young steered the winning boundary with 31 balls to spare. It was a memorable series for McBrine—he also suffered concussion after being hit on the head in the first game. After West Indies were put in, he claimed 4-28 from his 10 overs of off-spin. The home side were 119-7 at one stage before former skipper Jason Holder (44) and Akeal Hosein (23) repaired some of the damage.

Hope top-scored with 53 off 39 balls, hitting nine fours and one six as he dominated an opening stand of 72 in 11 overs with Justin Greaves. McBrine particularly shone when he removed Nicholas Pooran, Shamrah Brooks and skipper Kieron Pollard in quick succession to put Ireland within touch of a famous series victory. "It means a lot as the last three, four weeks have not been easy," said McBrine. "But we have show great spirit." West Indies won the first game by 24 runs before Ireland leveled the series with a five-wicket victory. The matches form part of the qualifying path for the 2023 World Cup.—AFP



Serbia's Novak Djokovic

Djokovic could be barred from French Open over vaccine

PARIS: Novak Djokovic could be barred from playing in the French Open under current rules after the sports ministry said yesterday that elite sportspeople would need to be vaccinated to perform in France. The ministry said a new vaccine pass, approved by the French parliament on Sunday, "applies to everyone, to volunteers and to elite sportspeople, including those coming from abroad, until further notice." The unvaccinated Djokovic was deported from Australia on Sunday before the Australian Open - the first Grand Slam tournament of the year - after failing in a court battle to have the cancellation of his visa overturned.

The French move appears to contradict Sports

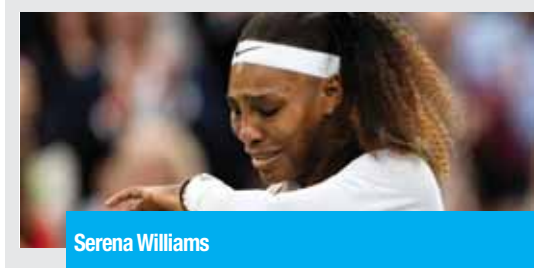
Minister Roxana Maracineanu's assertion last week that certain events like the French Open had a special exemption which could allow Djokovic to play in the tournament without being vaccinated against coronavirus. Major events like the French Open previously permitted unvaccinated athletes to compete as they operated a health bubble around the tournament. If no exemption is possible, the measure would dash the 34-year-old Serb's hopes of defending his French Open title and potentially winning an unprecedented 21st Grand Slam singles crown.

Djokovic's hopes of a Grand Slam success in 2022 would then rest on Wimbledon as New York vaccination rules, as they stand now, would rule him out of the US Open. France's vaccine pass law will require people to carry vaccination certificates to enter public places such as restaurants, cafes, cinemas and intercity trains. The first major international sports event to be directly affected would be the upcoming Six Nations rugby championship when France will host Italy on February 6, Ireland on February 12 and England on March 19.—AFP

News in brief

Serena drops out of top 50

PARIS: Serena Williams has dropped out of the world's top 50 for the first time since 2006, the US tennis great sitting 59th in the WTA rankings released yesterday. The 40-year-old played just six tournaments in 2021 and none since her tearful Wimbledon first-round exit with a leg injury ended the 23-time Grand Slam champion's latest bid to equal Margaret Court's all-time record. Williams has dropped 12 places in the rankings which are led by Ashleigh Barty ahead of the Australian Open in Melbourne. Sydney winner Paula Badosa moves up to a career-high sixth following a blistering 2021 season in which she reached the French Open quarter-finals, the 24-year-old Spaniard having started last year ranked 67th. American Madison Keys, a former world number seven, has jumped 36 places to 51st after her Adelaide victory, claiming a WTA title more than two and a half years after her last tournament win in Cincinnati.—AFP



Serena Williams

Al Hilal to face Istiklol

KUALA LUMPUR: Defending champions Al Hilal were yesterday drawn against Tajikistan's Istiklol, which scored a shock victory against the Saudi giants last year, for the start of their Asian Champions League campaign. The Saudi side are aiming for a fifth continental title, after triumphing in Asia's premier club competition last year with victory over South Korea's Pohang Steelers in the final. Al Hilal's Group A clashes with Istiklol will be closely watched as the Tajik club beat the Saudis 4-1 during one of the teams' encounters in the group stages last year. Al Rayyan of Qatar were also drawn in the same group. In the east zone, two-time winners Urawa Red Diamonds from Japan will face Chinese Super League champions Shandong Taishan after both sides were drawn in Group F. In Group I, Japan's Kawasaki Frontale, who last year won the J-League for the fourth time in five seasons, will meet eight-time Chinese Super League champions Guangzhou FC—which is fighting for its future because of a debt crisis at owners China Evergrande.—AFP



Badra Ali Sangare

Sangare hit by tragedy

DOUALA: Ivory Coast goalkeeper Badra Ali Sangare learned of the death of his father yesterday, only a few hours after making headlines for a disastrous gaffe in his team's Africa Cup of Nations game against Sierra Leone. "It is with great sadness that the Ivorian national team learned of the death in the night of January 16-17 of the father of goalkeeper Badra Ali Sangare," said the Ivorian Football Federation in a statement. The news comes after team-mate Max-Alain Gradel lost his father on the eve of the tournament. Gradel appeared to be in tears after scoring in the Ivory Coast's opening 1-0 win against Equatorial Guinea. Sangare has taken over the gloves for the Elephants at this tournament because first-choice goalkeeper Sylvain Gbohouo is serving a doping ban. The Ivorians were leading 2-1 in the third minute of injury time in Sunday's game against Sierra Leone when Sangare went to catch a ball headed back to him by a teammate in an attempt to prevent a corner.—AFP

Leinster thrash Montpellier

PARIS: Montpellier crashed to the worst defeat ever suffered by a French side in European Champions Cup history on Sunday when they were thrashed 89-7 by Irish province Leinster. French pride was salvaged in part by teenage full-back Louis Bille-Biarrey who scored a hat-trick in Bordeaux-Begles' 45-10 win over Welsh side Scarlets while former France scrum-half Morgan Parra came off the bench to secure Clermont's 25-19 win at home to Sale. The Irish had further cause for celebration when Ulster booked their place in the last 16 with a 24-20 win at Northampton. Four-time winners Leinster scored 13 tries - Montpellier's sole try scorer Masivesi Dakuwaqa was sent off in the second-half - against a side which had to field academy players due to the number of COVID-19 cases in the first team squad. "It's not a rugby score, it's a basketball score," said Montpellier coach Philippe Saint-Andre. "We were struggling from the first to the last minute. I coached for a long, long time. I never lost by this score. There is not so much to say."—AFP

Sports

Holders Algeria shocked at Cup of Nations; Tunisia thrash Mauritania

Astonishing goalkeeping blunder cost Ivory Coast victory

DOUALA: Equatorial Guinea inflicted a first defeat in 36 games on Algeria on Sunday to leave the reigning champions in serious danger of a group-stage exit from the Africa Cup of Nations after an astonishing goalkeeping blunder cost the Ivory Coast victory against Sierra Leone. Esteban Obiang, one of a host of Equatorial Guinea players who were born in Spain, scored the 70th-minute goal that gave his side a 1-0 win in Douala as Algeria lost for the first time since October 2018. That unbeaten run ends just two matches shy of Italy's recently established record of 37 without defeat and Algeria now need to beat the Ivory Coast in their final Group E outing on Thursday if they are to make the last 16.

Djamel Belmadi's side could only draw 0-0 with Sierra Leone in their opening game in Cameroon and if they do not succeed against the Ivorians it will be the fifth time in six Cups of Nations that the holders have failed to go beyond the group stage of the finals. The only exception in that time came in 2019, when reigning champions Cameroon lost in the last 16. "Everyone was talking about our unbeaten run but now we need to focus on something else, go out and secure qualification," said Belmadi.

An Equatorial Guinea side ranked 114th in the world and 28th in Africa are now well placed to reach the knockout stage for the third time. The two previous occasions came when they were hosting the tournament, in 2012 and in 2015, but this time many of the fans in the crowd of almost 12,000 in Douala were supporting the 'National Thunder'.

Equatoguinean capital Malabo, on the island of Bioko, is a short hop over the Gulf of Guinea from Cameroon's economic capital. "We feel very proud to beat the best team in Africa," said their coach, Juan Micha.

It was a dramatic day at the Japoma Stadium, where Badra Ali Sangare's incredible injury-time error gifted Sierra Leone a point in a 2-2 draw with the Ivory Coast. With the Elephants leading 2-1, Sangare went to catch a ball headed back to him by a teammate in the third added minute in an attempt to prevent a corner, only to drop it into the path of Steven Caulker who squared for substitute Alhaji Kamara to score. That remarkable moment prevented the Ivory Coast from wrapping up qualification for the last 16.

Injury-time error gifts Sierra Leone a point

Tunisia cruise

Sangare, who has taken over the gloves at this tournament because first-choice Sylvain Gbohouo

was handed a doping ban, then went off injured, leaving right-back Serge Aurier to see out the match between the posts. Before the late drama the 2015 champions appeared to have a second win in as many games sewn up thanks to Nicolas Pepe's second-half strike.

"Honestly I can't explain that goal. You could have Jurgen Klopp or Pep Guardiola in charge and they wouldn't be able to prepare for that," said Ivory Coast coach Patrice Beaumelle. Franck Kessie had an early penalty for the Elephants saved but Ajax star Sebastien Haller put them ahead and Musa Kamara made it 1-1 before Pepe struck.



DOUALA: Equatorial Guinea's goalkeeper Jesus Owono (left) dives to catch the ball during the Group E Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) 2021 football match between Algeria and Equatorial Guinea on January 16, 2022. —AFP

Elsewhere, Wahbi Khazri scored twice as Tunisia recovered from a controversial loss to Mali by hammering Mauritania 4-0 in the coastal town of Limbe to register their first points in Group F.

Saint-Etienne forward Khazri's brace came after Hamza Mathlouthi's early opener. Khazri then created the final goal of the afternoon for Seifeddine Jaziri, while Youssef Msakni missed a late penalty for

Tunisia. Mali and tournament debutants Gambia both sit a point above Tunisia on four points after they drew 1-1 at the same venue, Musa Barrow converting a 90th-minute penalty for Gambia to cancel out Ibrahima Kone's 79th-minute spot-kick at the other end. The final round of group games began yesterday when hosts Cameroon played Cape Verde and Burkina Faso faced Ethiopia in Group A. —AFP

Atalanta hold Inter Milan to give title hopefuls a boost

MILAN: Atalanta gave Inter Milan's Serie A title rivals a boost on Sunday with a goalless draw which ends the champions' eight-match winning run and offers AC Milan the chance to claim top spot. A keenly-fought contest in Bergamo finished with a blank scoresheet despite each side creating a handful of golden scoring opportunities, with goalkeepers Juan Musso and Samir Handanovic excelling between their respective sticks.

Simone Inzaghi's Inter stay top but Milan, who are two points behind their local rivals in second, can take the summit with a win over Spezia at the San Siro. "For how the match went a point is good... We had good chances but they could also have scored, so I think that it was the right result," Handanovic told DAZN.

Atalanta stay eight points back in fourth but can take huge credit from their display with a clutch of key players unavailable injured or with COVID-19 infections. They are a point behind third-placed Napoli

ahead of their match at Bologna - hoping to gain some ground on Inter, who like Atalanta will have played a game fewer come the end of this round of fixtures. "If anything we did a bit more than them: Inter sat very deep and waited for us to make a mistake," said Atalanta coach Gian Piero Gasperini. "Overall I think we deserved something more from the game."

Chances wasted

Edin Dzeko nodded wide the first clear chance of the night with a quarter of an hour gone, and 10 minutes later Musso kept the scores level with an outstanding save from Alexis Sanchez's close range effort. It was Handanovic's turn to save his team four minutes after the break when he charged out to stop Matteo Pessina giving the hosts the lead from point-blank range. From that scare Inter then tried to push on for the win, but Inzaghi - who lost his voice during the match - could hardly believe his eyes when Giuseppe Pezzella stopped Matteo Darmian



BERGAMO: Atalanta's Colombian forward Luis Muriel (left) and Inter Milan's Italian midfielder Nicolò Barella go for the ball during the Italian Serie A football match between Atalanta and Inter on January 16, 2022. —AFP

from scoring with a full stretch clearance, and then Dzeko somehow headed over when Denzel Dumfries served him with a great opportunity to open the scoring.

Handanovic again kept the scores level with 10 minutes remaining when he got down superbly to save from Luis Muriel,

who had turned on the turbo to burst away from Alessandro Bastoni and Milan Skriniar. And once Mario Pasalic and Danilo D'Ambrosio both wasted great chances to snatch the win for each side in the space of two minutes, an eventful match petered out into a draw. —AFP

Rennes thrash sorry Bordeaux; pressure mounts on Petkovic

PARIS: Rennes ended a run of three successive Ligue 1 defeats by crushing 10-man Bordeaux 6-0 on Sunday to plunge Vladimir Petkovic's struggling side into the relegation zone. Bordeaux have won just three times in 21 league games under Petkovic, who left his job as Switzerland boss after leading the country to the Euro 2020 quarter-finals. "I take

full responsibility. I wasn't able to sufficiently push the players and help them shake this fear. When you're afraid, you can't play football," said Petkovic, who sidestepped questions over his future. "I'm a fighter, my star sign is Leo. I don't give up. It's up to me now to be able to transmit this energy to the team. "We're in a battle for survival. We must approach matches in a more combative way, with the desire to win at all costs." Bordeaux have been hit badly by COVID-19 cases, while captain Laurent Koscielny is expected to leave this month after it was decided he was no longer in the club's plans.

Hosts Rennes took the lead on 33 minutes through Martin Terrier before Benjamin Bourigeaud curled home a free-kick. Issouf Sissokho was sent off early in the second half for Bordeaux and Rennes piled on the misery with goals from

Gaetan Laborde and Adrien Truffert before a late double by Serhou Guirassy. Rennes moved back up to fourth, while Bordeaux dropped to second last as Lorient and Metz climbed above the six-time French champions.

Philippe Clement earned his first win as Monaco coach with a 4-0 victory over Clermont. Wissam Ben Yedder came off the bench and scored twice, adding to Sofiane Diop's opener, before Caio Henrique bagged a fourth. Lyon snapped a five-game winless run courtesy of Moussa Dembele's first-half penalty in a 1-0 victory away to Troyes. Strasbourg came from behind to beat Montpellier 3-1, while Lorient and Angers drew 0-0. Marseille missed the chance to go level on points with second-placed Nice when they were held to a 1-1 draw by Lille in Sunday's late game. —AFP

US teen Pepi impresses as Augsburg held by Frankfurt

BERLIN: American teenager Ricardo Pepi impressed on his first Bundesliga start with Augsburg on Sunday despite seeing a goal disallowed in a 1-1 draw at home to Eintracht Frankfurt. Pepi, who turned 19 last Sunday, joined Augsburg from MLS side FC Dallas earlier this month when the Bundesliga side paid a club record 17.5 million euros (\$20 million) for the full US international.

The American created several chances on his first home start having made his league debut last weekend with 30 minutes off the bench in the defeat at Hoffenheim. "We had some chances we could have put away," Pepi told DAZN. "I felt good, but there is a lot to work on. You have a lot less space and time," he said comparing the Bundesliga to the MLS, "but it's about adapting."

Japan midfielder Daichi Kamada gave visitors Frankfurt an early lead as he held off a defender and showed great finishing to slot home after getting in behind the defense. Pepi hit the net with 34 minutes gone, but the goal was ruled out due to a foul in the build-up just before his Augsburg team-mate Michael Gregoritsch chipped in the equalizer from a tight angle. The result leaves Frankfurt eighth in the table, while Augsburg climbed out of the bottom three. Bayern Munich remain on course for a tenth straight Bundesliga title.

The Bavarian giants restored their six-point lead at the top of the table on Saturday when Robert Lewandowski chalked up his 300th goal in Germany's top flight by completing his hat-trick in a 4-0 romp at Cologne. Later Sunday, ex-Germany winger Gonzalo Castro, 34, came off the bench to smash in an equalizer for hosts Arminia Bielefeld in their 2-2 draw at home to bottom side Greuther Fuerth. Japanese striker Masaya Okugawa gave Bielefeld an early lead with a superb low shot from a tight angle only for Fuerth to draw level through Jamie Leweling's first-half equaliser. —AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000	Kaizen center	25716707
Amiri Hospital	22450005	Rawda	22517733
Maternity Hospital	24843100	Adaliya	22517144
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700	Khaldiya	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

This is to inform in general public that I, Mohammad Rizwan Khan, S/o Abdul Rahman Khan, R/o H.No.89, Ward-6, Nr Masjid, Nanus, Valpoi, Sattari, Goa, hereby changed my name from Mohammad Rizwan to Mohammad Rizwan Khan & I further state that I have changed my father name from Abdul Rahaman to Abdul Rahaman Khan in my passport. Hence after in all my dealings & documents I will be known as Mohammad Rizwan Khan. (C 1406)

I have changed my old name Kutbuddin to my new name as Kutbuddin Panwala Vide Gazette No.P-2143485 Dated 21/Dec/2021. (C 1405) 18-1-2022

I Jafar Ali Syeed S/o Syeed Abdulla holder of Indian passport No.U0197067 issued at Kuwait on 06/10/2020 & civil ID No. 278091202586 has changed my name from Jafar Ali Syeed to Shaik Mohammed Rafi in all my dealings and documents, I will be known by name of Mohammed Rafi (given name) and Shaik (surname) (C 1404) 16-1-2022

EMERGENCY ☎ 112

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

P.O. Box 1301 (Safat, 13014 Kuwait)
Tel: 24833199 - 24833556 - 24835618 / 7 | Fax: 24835620 - 24835621
E: info@kuwaittimes.net

Nadal, Barty make devastating starts

Djokovic looms over Australian Open



MELBOURNE: Spain's Rafael Nadal hits a return against Marcos Giron of the US during their men's singles match on day one of the Australian Open tennis tournament yesterday. — AFP

MELBOURNE: Rafael Nadal and Ashleigh Barty made devastating starts to their Australian Open title campaigns yesterday as the Grand Slam attempted to move on from the Novak Djokovic visa saga. Naomi Osaka launched the defense of her women's crown with victory but Coco Gauff was an early big-name casualty, the American 17-year-old dumped out in straight sets by Wang Qiang, who is ranked outside the top 100.

The only Australian Open champion in the men's draw after nine-time winner Djokovic's deportation, Nadal started his quest to become the first male to win 21 Grand Slams by sweeping aside 66th-ranked Marcos Giron, 6-1, 6-4, 6-2. The draw has opened up for the Spanish great with defending champion Djokovic out of the picture and the other member of the "Big Three", Roger Federer, not at Melbourne Park because of injury.

But the 35-year-old Nadal said he was just relieved to be playing tennis after Djokovic's refusal to get vaccinated against COVID overshadowed the

first Grand Slam of the year right up until the last moment. Although Djokovic's absence is good news for Nadal's tilt at men's tennis history, he said he would rather the world number one from Serbia was playing. "The ideal situation in the world of sport is that the best players are on court," said Nadal, who plays Germany's Yannick Hanfmann in the second round. He may not be there, but Djokovic still looms over the tournament.

Nadal was all guns blazing at Rod Laver Arena, showing no apparent ill effects from a foot injury he suffered last year and then being "very sick" with COVID in December. "Today is one victory in the first Grand Slam. Happy for that. One month ago situation had been different-looks very ugly in some way," he said. Other winners in the men's draw on day one of the so-called "Happy Slam", where crowds have been capped at 50 percent because of the pandemic, included seventh seed Matteo Berrettini.

The Italian defeated American Brandon

Nakashima in four sets despite tummy trouble. Also through was third seed Alexander Zverev in the night match, but 12th-seeded Briton Cameron Norrie lost in three sets to Sebastian Korda, the son of 1998 Australian Open champion Petr Korda. There was to be no fairytale run for "lucky loser" Salvatore Caruso. The Italian had earned a place in the main draw when Djokovic was deported but he fell at the first hurdle.

Barty cruises, Gauff departs

In the women's draw, top seed and world number one Barty made a real statement of intent, crushing qualifier Lesia Tsurenko in 54 minutes, 6-0, 6-1. The 25-year-old faces Lucia Bronzetti of Italy next as the pre-tournament favorite and home hope chases a maiden Australian Open title. "There's always something special about playing on a Monday night in the Australian Open," said Barty, who will need to deal with high expectations from the home fans. Japan's former world number one Osaka, the reign-

ing champion, was also largely untroubled with a 6-3, 6-3 win against Colombia's Camila Osorio.

Seeded 13 after a disrupted 2021 in which she said she had suffered "long bouts of depression", Osaka cruised through in 68 minutes. "I would say I feel more comfortable in my skin, if that makes sense," said the 24-year-old, who won the title at Melbourne Park in 2019 and 2021. She will play American Madison Brengle next. Also through are French Open champion Barbora Krejčíková, Greek fifth seed Maria Sakkari and reigning Olympic champion Belinda Bencic.

But there was heartbreak for Tunisian ninth seed Ons Jabeur, who did not even make it onto court and withdrew because of injury before her match. Also out was the 18th-seeded prodigy Gauff, surprisingly losing 6-4, 6-2 to China's Wang. "I think just everything disappointed me about today," said Gauff. "I feel like in the pre-season, I worked really hard, and I felt like I was ready to have a good run here. "Today I just didn't perform well." — AFP

NBA-best Suns roll over Pistons, Gobert sparks Jazz in return

LOS ANGELES: Devin Booker poured in a game-high 30 points before sitting out the final quarter as the NBA-leading Phoenix Suns routed the last place Detroit Pistons 135-108 on Sunday. Booker played 30 minutes, making 11 of 18 field goal attempts while teammates Cameron Payne and JaVale McGee each finished with 20 points in front of a crowd of 18,100 at Detroit's Little Caesars Arena. "I was just hitting shots and the guys were getting me the ball in good places," said Michigan native Booker.

"I never got to see the Pistons play in person very often - I grew up about two hours west of here - so I love coming here to play what was my favourite team growing up." Booker invited 40-50 family and friends to the game on Sunday. "Because of the pandemic, I didn't get to have normal interaction with my family," Booker said. "But at least I got to see them and I got to wave to a lot of friends."

Landry Shamet added 11 points and Chris Paul chipped in 10 points with six rebounds and six assists for the Suns, who improved to 33-9 and have won six of their last seven contests. Mikal Bridges also scored 10 points in the win. The Suns are also an NBA-best 16-4 on the road. "We had two 39-point quarters, so we were obviously hitting shots," Suns coach Monty Williams said. "Detroit wears teams out by getting into the paint and getting to the line, and we were able to stay away from a lot of that."

Pistons first overall draft pick Cade Cunningham was ejected after being slapped with two technicals during the third quarter. The second was ruled "taunting" after he pointed at a Suns player after

making a dunk. Cunningham finished with 21 points in 25 minutes of action. Canadian Cory Joseph also had 21 points and added seven assists and Trey Lyles tallied 18 points and six rebounds.

Booker exploded for 21 points on nine-of-11 shooting in the first half as the Suns seized a 64-54 halftime lead. He scored 15 points in the opening quarter before Phoenix blew the game open with a 10-4 run in the final three minutes of the second. In Denver, Donovan Mitchell scored 31 points, Rudy Gobert returned to the lineup with 18 points and 19 rebounds as the Utah Jazz beat the Denver Nuggets 125-102.

Bojan Bogdanovic scored 21 points, Jordan Clarkson had 16, Royce O'Neale finished with 11 and Eric Paschall scored 10 for Utah, who won for the first time in five games. Gobert missed the last five games because of COVID-19 measures. "I felt pretty good. Every time you play in Denver you're going to get tired at some point," Gobert said. "I got tired in the first and third quarter but I felt great, better than I usually do in Denver. Just grateful to be back."

Warriors hurting

Elsewhere, Karl-Anthony Towns finished with 26 points and 11 rebounds to lead the Minnesota Timberwolves to a 119-99 victory over the Golden State Warriors, who were missing injured star Stephen Curry. Jaylen Nowell scored 17 points and Malik Beasley nailed five second-half three-pointers in the win.

Jordan Poole scored 20 points and Jonathan Kuminga had 19 points for the Warriors, who finished a four-game road trip. Not only were they missing Curry with an injured right hand, but they also played without Draymond Green. In Sacramento, Christian Wood posted his 20th double-double of the season as the Houston Rockets beat the host Sacramento Kings 118-112. Wood had 23 points and 14 rebounds while Kevin Porter added 23 points and seven assists for the Rockets. — AFP

Brady leads Bucs in Eagles rout; 49ers stun Cowboys

LOS ANGELES: Tom Brady and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers outclassed the Philadelphia Eagles as the San Francisco 49ers upset the Dallas Cowboys in NFL playoff action on Sunday. Seven-time Super Bowl champion Brady delivered a clinical performance as the defending NFL champions romped past the Eagles 31-15 at the Raymond James Stadium. Brady threw for 271 yards, with two touchdowns and no interceptions, making 29 completions from 37 attempts. "We did some good things," Brady said. "I think we're just going to have to keep doing what we did today. It only gets tougher from here."

The second-seeded Buccaneers, who will face either the Los Angeles Rams or Arizona Cardinals at home in next weekend's divisional round, dominated the Eagles throughout. Although Philadelphia finally got on the board with two fourth quarter touchdowns from Boston Scott and Kenneth Gainwell, the final scoreline flattered the Eagles, who were outplayed and trailed 31-0 heading into fourth quarter. Running backs Giovani Bernard and Ke'Shawn Vaughn scored Tampa Bay's opening two touchdowns in the first quarter before a Ryan Succop made it 17-0 at halftime.

Brady then found long-time offensive partner Rob Gronkowski to make it 24-0, the 105th time the duo have combined for a touchdown. A superb interception by Bucs linebacker Shaq Barrett then handed Brady prime field position once again, and the 44-year-old arrowed a 36-yard touchdown pass to receiver Mike Evans to make it 31-0. The only blemish for Bucs coach Bruce Arians came in the form of the two late Eagles touchdowns. "When you have a

chance to shut someone out you don't relax." Arians said. "But for three quarters they were fantastic."

In the other NFC wild card game on Sunday, San Francisco produced another gutsy victory on the road to stun Dallas 23-17 in Arlington. The 49ers, who squeezed into the playoffs with a nerve-jangling win over the Rams in Los Angeles last week, dug deep once again to prevail at the AT&T Stadium. Elijah Mitchell's first quarter touchdown and three Robbie Gould field goals - two from over 50 yards - had helped San Francisco into a 16-7 halftime lead with Amari Cooper's touchdown catch the only score for Dallas.

Wide receiver Deebo Samuel then weaved over for a superb 26-yard rushing touchdown to break the game open for San Francisco at 23-7 heading into the fourth quarter. Injuries to San Francisco defensive stars Nick Bosa and Fred Warner gave Dallas a lifeline however, with Dak Prescott scoring a touchdown in a Cowboys rally to close the gap to 23-17.

But Dallas failed to score in either of two late possessions, and the game finished on a comical note when Prescott rushed up the middle of the field - rather than attempt a pass into the end zone - and ran out of time before managing to stop the clock. "It was a dogfight, hell of an atmosphere and the fans were nuts," said 49ers quarterback Jimmy Garoppolo, who finished with 172 yards from 16-of-25 attempts. "It was everything we thought it was going to be. It was fun. Guys were just stepping up in big key situations, that's what it was all day. "We've got some dogs on our defense man. It's fun."

In Sunday's other playoff game, the Kansas City Chiefs swatted aside the Pittsburgh Steelers 42-21 at Arrowhead Stadium. Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger - all but certain to retire at the end of the season - could only look on as the Chiefs erupted with 35 unanswered points in just 10 minutes either side of half-time. Patrick Mahomes tossed five touchdowns and finished with 404 passing yards. Tight end Travis Kelce also threw for a touchdown after a late trick play. — AFP